



The Prince's  
Responsible  
Business Network



A Town Deal for Businesses Guide

# WHAT'S THE TOWN DEAL?

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# FOREWORD

When the Government published its Towns Fund Prospectus in November 2019, it outlined the difficulties facing many UK towns: ageing populations; a lack of economic opportunity; limited investment; poor transport and digital connectivity; retail decline; the closure of leisure facilities; and low levels of social mobility.

Now, as the unprecedented impact of a global pandemic weighs disproportionately on these same towns, the Towns Fund presents an increasingly critical opportunity to, first, cement some of the significant and rapid changes to the ways communities collaborate (that we have witnessed during the emergency response to COVID-19) and second, aid long-term recovery and prosperity.

Business in the Community (BITC) is the oldest and largest business-led membership organisation dedicated to responsible business. We have a long history of working with business and the wider community to build thriving places for people to live and work.

BITC's [Place Leadership Team](#) brings together business, civic leadership and the third sector to make a long-term, transformative impact on communities. We bring business skills to bear on challenges and opportunities within

neighbourhoods, working with community concerns and aspirations. In our pilot places, we facilitate and contribute to a deliverable vision which lifts ambition and develops confidence in that vision by working with partners to deliver it.

Having worked with business leaders and communities over the last three decades on a wide range of place-based activity – from retail-led regeneration and collaboration of the Prince's Charities in Burnley, to our Business Connector and Healthy High Streets programmes – we believe that business involvement in Town Deals is crucial to their success.

Learnings from our three established (Blackpool, Wisbech and Lowestoft) and two emerging (Bradford and Rochdale) place pilots, as well as our work with both business and Lead Councils on Town Deals to date, are distilled here to assist businesses wishing to engage with Town Deals.

**Lord Bassam, Co-Director, Place**  
**Baroness Valentine, Co-Director, Place**



# INTRODUCTION

## Purpose of Guidance

Drawing on the experience of BITC's Place programme, this document will provide guidance to businesses on how to engage with Town Deals. It will give an introductory overview of Town Deals and provide practical guidance on how and where a business should seek involvement, the factors that should be driving this and the requirements of business.

For further information, please see the Government's [Towns Fund Prospectus](#) (which sets broader practical advice), and [The Towns Fund Guidance](#) (which provides additional information on developing an Investment Plan and the nature of projects in scope for funding).

This document sits alongside a separate guide that we have produced for Lead Councils on how to bring together an effective Town Deal Board.

## What is a Town Deal?

In 2019, the Government launched a [£3.6bn Towns Fund](#), whereby 101 towns have been given the opportunity to work towards a Town Deal, of the order of £25m per town. A key component of the Government's 'levelling-up' agenda, the initiative aims to boost economic growth and regeneration in towns which have not typically benefitted from the growth seen in cities, leading to a feeling of these towns being 'left-behind.'

Each of the 101 towns is expected to form a Town Deal Board, through which a vision and strategy for the town will be defined. Key to this will be the development of a town investment plan, which the Board is expected to develop. Proposals should drive long-term economic and

productivity growth through urban regeneration, skills and enterprise infrastructure, and connectivity. To do this successfully, it will be essential to draw on the insight, leadership, and expertise of business to understand local challenges and develop the proposals. Town Deal Boards are expected to be chaired by a private sector representative and include representation from large employers and SMEs.

As we look beyond the current COVID-19 crisis, Town Deals can form an integral part of the social and economic recovery. With the most deprived communities in the UK the hardest hit by coronavirus, it is crucial that cross-sector collaboration continues to be at the centre of recovery, ensuring that the renewed energy for clean, inclusive growth reaches the communities that need it the most.

## Which Town Deal should your business support?

It is important to consider which of the 101 Town Deal locations is right for your business to support. Town Deals are inherently local, with each community facing a complex web of social, economic, and environmental challenges. Understanding these unique challenges, as well as the opportunities in the town, is crucial.

Town Deals are a strategic, long-term approach to transformation, which requires a commitment over a number of years. From the outset, it is important for a business to consider what it wants to achieve and whether a smaller-scale, tactical approach could be more appropriate.

Based on the experience of BITC's Place Leadership Team, we have developed a set of factors that are likely to determine which Town Deal your business engages with. This list is not definitive, but a starting point for thinking about

where your business might be best placed to make a difference.

### What factors are likely to determine the town you choose?

- Location of current or future operations
- Clustering of employees
- Clustering of customers/clients
- Opportunities to develop a current or future talent pipeline
- Opportunities for business development
- The place with the greatest need

#### ANGLIAN WATER: WISBECH

In 2013, Anglian Water launched a place-based regeneration project in Wisbech.

Wisbech sits in the bottom 10% nationally for four of the top eight deprivation indicators. The challenges Wisbech faces were an important factor in Anglian Water choosing it as their 'place.'

However, this was not the only factor. Wisbech is at the heart of their operating area, meaning they had people and resources available nearby. If it had been too far from their key operational centres, Anglian Water acknowledges that it would have been much harder to implement the same changes.

### Why should your business get involved?

This section looks at the reasons why your business should seek to join or chair a Town Deal Board. The benefits of business involvement in Town Deals is two-fold: both to the local community and to the business, which are inextricably linked.

### Benefits to the Local Community

The resources, experience, leadership capabilities and local understanding that a business can bring to a Town Deal Board is crucial in understanding the challenges and opportunities in an area, helping to ensure it creates long-term change that truly benefits the community. Furthermore, whilst the £25m towns receive is non-competitive, it will only be received if the town investment plans meet Government standards. Therefore, business insight is crucial. Examples of the community benefits of business involvement include:

- **Access to employee, customer, and market insights**, providing a unique understanding of the needs and opportunities within a community.
- **Sector specific expertise** that can be brought to bear on the issues most important to the local community.
- **Knowledge and experience of transformational change** that will ensure that the Town Deal is ambitious and transformational in its approach.
- **A unique perspective on how to attract further investment**, particularly in how to sell the area to a business audience and networks, driving further growth and investment in the area.

### Benefits to the business

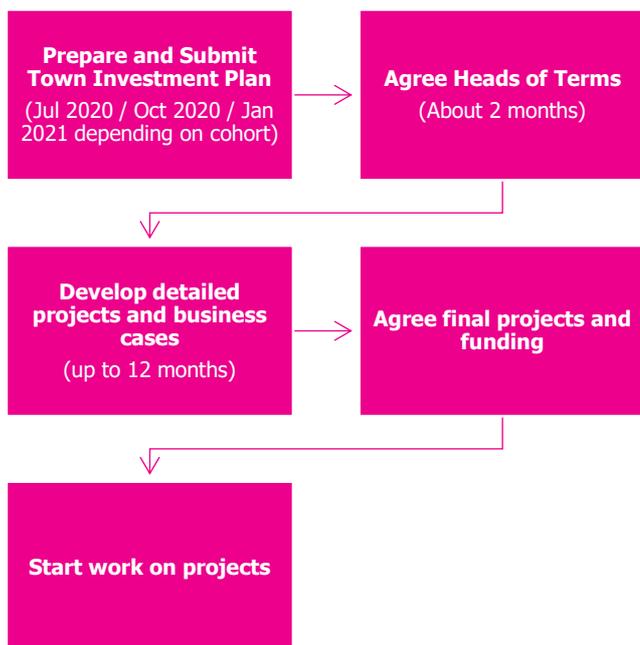
There are also several business benefits that joining a Town Deal Board can bring:

- Opportunity to upskill the local workforce.
- Networking opportunities with key local stakeholders.
- Increase insights into your employees, customers and supply chains.

- Enhance the reputation and profile of your business in the local area.
- Increase employee engagement and loyalty.
- Provide opportunities to develop new or enhance existing products, services and operational processes.
- Drive economic growth and investment in the area which will in turn benefit your business.

## What is required from your business?

When considering whether to join or chair a Town Deal Board, it is important to think about what you are trying to achieve, what role you want to play and what role you can play. Figure 1 details the process and time scales put forward by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government that the Board will oversee.



This section will detail the type of person that is most suited to join a Town Deal Board, either as a Chair, or a non-executive member.

## Person Descriptions

Broadly, a **Town Deal Chair** should:

- **Lead the group** in achieving its objectives, keep an overview of activity, champion and support partnership working.
- Have relevant experience of a **senior or influential** position demonstrating strategic **leadership**
- Act as an **ambassador** for the project with key stakeholders.

- Have **influence** over resources and to direct issues back into their own company.
- Possess **sensitivity** to local need and drive **understanding** of local issues.
- Be acutely **aware** of the variation in cultures and motivations within the collaboration.
- Expertly navigate differences in opinion, **achieving consensus** between members.
- Recognise opportunities, whilst **enthusing and empowering** others to bring them to life.
- Be a champion for **transparency**, declare conflicts of interest and act in accordance with the Nolan principles.

## TOWN DEAL CHAIR: PAUL SMITH, BLACKPOOL

"My background is private rather than public sector, having been a commercial lawyer for over 30 years. I was the Global Chairman of law firm Eversheds Sutherland, which has 69 offices in 34 countries, so I have a lot of experience in chairing meetings.

"I have been working in Blackpool for nearly four years and have built up strong relationships with local business, investors, the Town Council and community groups. I helped guide the make up of the Towns Fund Board to ensure that all the main stakeholders were included.

"A strong understanding of the place, its problems and opportunities, and the key players involved are needed. A lot of time is



spent joining the dots to get everyone on the same page.

“The commitment is to chair monthly meetings and individual one-to-one meetings with Board members to ensure that everyone is fully engaged. I also work closely with Blackpool Council and their consultants to prepare the detailed Investment Plan which contains the detail of the Towns Fund Board bid.”

### Town Deal Board Member

The type of businessperson who is well-placed to become a board member is someone who:

- **Cares about the town** – this could be someone local, someone with local commercial interests, or someone born locally.
- Has **influence over the resources** within their own company – this could be the Chief Executive of a medium-sized local business, or a functional lead for a national business.
- Has a **relevant, specialist skillset**, such as digital understanding or marketing.
- Can take a **strategic view** on what is best for the town, aside from narrow commercial interests.

### BOARD MEMBER BIO: KATE SHANE, BLACKPOOL

Kate is Head of Cluster Attractions in Blackpool at Merlin Entertainments Group. These include Blackpool Tower, Circus and Ballroom, Madame Tussauds, Sea Life and the Dungeons. The Cluster employs up to 350 local people.

Kate is also actively involved in other tourism sector roles: she is the lead for Tourism on the Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Board; is on the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions Advisory Board as well as sitting on the Blackpool Pride of Place board.



Kate is a passionate advocate of Blackpool and is personally committed to creating a better future and opportunities for those who live, work and visit the resort.

### How can your business get involved?

This final section provides information on the practical steps that need to be taken to join a Town Deal Board. Whilst preliminary boards may have been put together in some areas, BITC's experience suggests that there is still a lot of opportunity to join and chair boards. Interested business leaders can:

- Write to appropriate Council Chief Executive.
- CC any appropriate local officers or political leaders.
- Detail any relevant experience that you have, drawing on the person experiences listed above.

### How can BITC help?

- Our Place team has experience of brokering and building relationships with Councils and we can assist in making initial connections where necessary.
- We can provide advice on the choice of Town Deal based on both our insight and your business' strategic aims and needs.

- We can provide advice on the right person within your organisation to join the Board.
- Over the next year, BITC will be running a series of webinars and virtual discussion groups, providing an opportunity for further learning from our experience and network.

# CONCLUSION

With 101 communities set to benefit from the Towns Fund, we are presented with an important opportunity to formally embed some of the incredible collaborative efforts of businesses, the public sector and the community that we have witnessed during the pandemic, aiding future economic health and resilience.

This guidance has provided advice to businesses on how to join a Town Deal Board. Over the course of the year, BITC's Place team will be delivering a series of virtual events. These will explore what an effective Town Deal looks like, increase understanding of what it takes to transform a place, and share insight from national and local government representatives, as well as Town Deal chairs and board members.

Please contact our team for further advice or support, and for details of the above events:

**Beth Nightingale** – [beth.nightingale@bitc.org.uk](mailto:beth.nightingale@bitc.org.uk)

**Evie Park** – [evie.park@bitc.org.uk](mailto:evie.park@bitc.org.uk)

## TOWN DEAL CHAIR JOB DESCRIPTION

### Role Purpose

The role of the Chair will be pivotal in terms of galvanising Board members and their wider stakeholders, to realise [place]'s potential and ensure that a Deal is delivered with central government. There is funding to bid for, however engagement with the private sector and investors will be required to leverage further funds and deliver a legacy for the Town Board.



### Responsibilities

- Lead the group in achieving its objectives, maintain an overview of activity, and champion and support partnership working. The Chair will need to provide leadership for the Board, to inspire, lead and direct the stakeholders to support delivery.
- Act as an ambassador with key stakeholders, local and central government, business and community groups; support all stakeholders to 'join the dots'.
- Oversee the preparation of an investment plan, setting out the strategy and defining projects with measurable objectives.
- Help set the agenda for meetings, drive forward activity, and take decisions.
- The Chair will also have to build strong links with partners across sectors to ensure the Board is maximising activity within the area.

### Person Specification

- Proven ability to think strategically.
- Relevant experience of a senior or influential position demonstrating strategic leadership and effectiveness over a significant period.

- Experience of providing effective direction and leadership, including developing, improving, and monitoring corporate business strategies.
- Ability to apply interpersonal, influence and networking skills to build commitment and drive consensus within a wide constituency of business, community, voluntary and political stakeholders and to deliver agreed outcomes.

## GRIMSBY TOWN DEAL – A CASE IN POINT

As a place for a new experiment in the regeneration of English towns, Grimsby is a good place to start. High levels of deprivation, lower levels of educational attainment and a coastal community at the end of the line shows a town needing to find a new purpose. What Grimsby also has is a strong sense of community pride and local people very committed to renewing the town and bringing new opportunities for the future.

It was this desire for change that persuaded the local council to seek a new way of working with Government and to secure a town deal. The Greater Grimsby Town Deal was launched in 2018 and was considered the way to develop a modern industrial strategy designed to regenerate the town away from its former reliance on the Port of Grimsby for jobs and employment.

The original deal signed by Ministers, the Council's leadership and the project board had four themes:

- Drive Economic Growth
- Accelerate Housing Delivery
- Transform Grimsby' historic Waterfront; and
- Improve Skills and Educational attainment

It was designed to bring together over £67m of Government and local investment to accelerate the delivery of North East Lincolnshire Council's local plan which set out to create 8,000 new jobs and nearly 10,000 new homes.

Rob Walsh CEO says that the key is ambition not for the council, but for the 'place' and that by building relationships you create credibility and confidence. He also argues that by respecting the towns heritage you can embrace the future. Grimsby is confident because the town board has a committed and influential membership with routes into Government and a clear plan for the future which is shared with the community.

Getting businesses of scale with a national imprint to play a role and the support of the LEP have been key to being taken seriously by Government and trusted to deliver by the various funding departments. The former Chair of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Lord Chris Haskins played a role too ensuring that LEP funding is in place for the investment programme.

The key messages from Grimsby's Town Deal are:

- Business, council, LEP and Government partnership is critical
- Establish the right mix on the town board
- Ensure the board is well led by a business champion
- Produce an innovative prospectus with ambition
- Create confidence among partners and the community
- Focus on tackling problems through well channelled investment



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