



Bridgwater Re-Energised
Town Investment Plan- Summary
February 2021

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Foreword

It is a huge privilege for us to present our ambition to breathe new life into Bridgwater as set out in our Town Investment Plan. Bridgwater has a long and proud industrial heritage including ship building, brick and tile production and its role as a port. Today, it is again at the heart of the local, regional and national growth agenda. Showing the same pioneering spirit of old, the area is at the forefront of delivering clean, inclusive and sustainable growth demonstrated by the new nuclear investment at nearby Hinkley Point C – the first to be built in the UK for over 20 years – and our bold plans for the 600 acre Gravity – A Smart Campus – both of which are catalysts for growth, innovation and skills for the future. Indeed, in planning for growth, we are also tackling the needs of local communities through investment in skills and training supported by our flagship College driving unique industry collaborations, our established Employment & Skills matching centre – ‘Under-Construction’ - and delivery of the National College for Nuclear and the Energy Skills Centre.



Dr Fiona McMillan

Chair
Bridgwater Town Deal
Board



Cllr Duncan McGinty

Leader
Sedgemoor District
Council

Of course, not everyone has seen the full benefit of our growth achievements to date and we are acutely aware of the fact that we have areas of serious deprivation within our town. These challenges are made even more pronounced as we recover from the pandemic and face a severe Country-wide recession.

This is why we present a significant ray of hope to **Re-Energise Bridgwater** through prioritised investment which we will use to build back better in terms of our community’s potential, access and our cultural and historic assets. We are proposing select investment that will unlock future growth by protecting the whole area from tidal flooding and resolve traffic congestion on the outskirts of town. But the real focus of our plan is geared towards future-proofing the social, cultural and economic recovery of our town centre. It is a plan that will broaden and diversify what the town has to offer, making the town centre more family friendly and walkable. It will galvanise our cultural programme and historic venues, making it exciting and inspiring for residents and visitors and support our local businesses to recover. Our plan does not just stop there. We aim to continue to work with our communities, local stakeholder groups, private partners and landowners to pave the way for further development in the future so that we can respond quickly as market confidence returns.

This is a bold plan and much hard work remains to realise our ambitions. It is a plan that has been nurtured through collaboration and involvement of a wide range of local residents and businesses, community leaders and stakeholder groups supported by representatives on the Town Deal Board and with commitment from all tiers of local government. We are proud of our progress and look forward, with enthusiasm, to realise a strong future for Bridgwater.

Introduction

What is a Town Investment Plan?

In September 2019 the government launched the **Town’s Fund**, a £3.6 billion funding package aiming to regenerate and level up towns across the UK. Bridgwater was one of **101 towns** invited to apply for £25 million of funding offered to each town. The funding is intended to boost the economic growth of towns with a focus on regeneration, improved transport, better broadband connectivity, and enhancement of skills and culture.

Sedgemoor District Council (SDC) accepted the offer to respond to the call for funding. In February 2020 a **Town Deal Board** was formed, an independent body in charge of delivering the town investment plan, chaired by Dr Fiona McMillan and consisting of representatives from local organisations including local authorities (see page 20 for full membership).

To be allocated funding, the Town Deal Board were required to develop a **Town Investment Plan (TIP)**, a comprehensive and place specific document which clearly articulates:

- ✓ The challenges and opportunities for Bridgwater.
- ✓ A vision and strategy for the future.
- ✓ A coherent set of project proposals responding to challenges and vision.
- ✓ A robust plan for delivery and stakeholder engagement.

The Bridgwater Town Investment Plan was submitted to government in January 2021.

Why Bridgwater?

Despite significant investment and growth over the last decade, there is recognition that the core urban area of Bridgwater has not been fully included in its growth story and, as a result, risks being left behind. The purpose of the TIP is to address this fundamental challenge, to level up Bridgwater to the prosperity of the wider district and make the town centre the destination of choice for residents and businesses in the area.

Preparation of the TIP provides an opportunity to reflect and focus on the core urban area, with the Town Fund providing a catalyst to re-position and re-energise Bridgwater in response to the economic shock from the Covid-19 pandemic and to properly connect the town centre with the economic potential of the wider area.

There is already a strong policy framework detailing the economic and community potential of Bridgwater and the wider area. The original Bridgwater Vision prepared in 2009 established a clear community-owned prospectus for the future which, alongside the Bridgwater Vision Review & Refresh in 2015, provides the basis for the TIP to follow in the next phase of economic recovery and growth.



Challenges and Opportunities

What is the growth potential of Bridgwater?

Bridgwater is a growth town in Sedgemoor district, located at the heart of Somerset and strategically located on the M5 corridor between Bristol and Exeter.

A proud industrial town, Bridgwater is steeped in history as a centre of manufacturing excellence and innovation. The area has continued to evolve by taking advantage of its position within nationally significant transport corridors, embracing the canals, mainline rail and strategic motorway network. Today it continues to move forward and is now at the forefront of clean and inclusive growth opportunities, emerging as a hub of innovative high value, technology-based businesses supported by world-class logistics infrastructure.

The growth potential of the area is underpinned by a number of key characteristics.

- **Strategically positioned on the M5 transport corridor.** Bridgwater's strategic location on the M5 is key to its inward investment offer, providing access to major employment markets of Bristol and Exeter and offering a strong transport network for logistics and distribution sector within the Heart of the South West (HotSW) LEP area. Beyond this, the area is connected to wider strategic economic partnerships, including the Great South West and the Western Gateway.

- **Strong industrial heritage.** Bridgwater is an industrial town with long standing strengths in the manufacturing sector. Whilst this has begun to change over recent years with increasing transition to the logistics and distribution sector, the industrial heritage is a tangible feature of the town and important to Bridgwater's identity and distinctiveness.

- **Home to pioneering low-carbon energy production.** Bridgwater is in close proximity to Hinkley Point C (HPC), the first nuclear power station to be built in the UK in over 20 years. The project is a key driver of the clean growth and energy sector in the district, creating 25,000 employment opportunities and up to 1,000 apprenticeships through construction and operation. HPC is supported by a range of other specialist assets, including the National College for Nuclear and Energy Skills Centre.

- **A unique cultural identity.** Bridgwater is home to the Bridgwater Carnival, the largest illuminated carnival in Europe. This generates its own inspirational energy for community cohesion and is a shining light among a host of creative, cultural experiences.

- **Good natural environment.** Bridgwater and the wider Sedgemoor district have a wealth of diverse natural capital, embracing waterways, wetlands and countryside including nearby Quantock Hills, the first area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB) to be designated in England in 1956. This offers a clean and sustainable environment for residents and visitors, providing walking and cycling opportunities and promotion of active lifestyles.

The town investment plan aims to utilise and capitalise on the growth potential of Bridgwater to maximise the social and economic benefits for local residents and businesses.

What are the challenges in Bridgwater that need to be addressed?

Following extensive data analysis and community engagement, four key challenges were identified for the Bridgwater Town Investment Plan to address. The vision and project proposals have been developed in direct response to these challenges, to ensure the Town Investment Plan is meeting and responding to the needs and requirements of the town.

Challenge 1: The need to “level up” the town.

The Town Investment Plan (TIP) intends to meet its objectives by putting local people at the forefront and enabling them to make the most of their potential, skills and opportunities. Despite recent growth, not all Bridgwater residents are benefiting, with higher rates of unemployment, lower incomes and people more likely to be living in areas of deprivation. A need for intervention to tackle unemployment and deprivation challenges was identified, as was encouraging skilled residents to stay in the town and maximise their potential locally.

Challenge 2: Creating a vibrant and welcoming Town Centre

Another focus of the plan is to re-energise the town centre by encouraging new enterprise, cultural and business activity and more diversity. Elements of poor-quality environment, separation of primary and secondary shopping areas and localised traffic congestion are among the factors letting it down currently. The aim is to address these public realm challenges to help increase visitor numbers and the time they spend in the town centre, whilst also diversifying the town centre offer and improving our arts, heritage and cultural assets.

Challenge 3: Creating a well-connected town centre and urban area

There is an ambition to make more of Bridgwater as a key centre for the District’s wider population by improving the connectivity between employment sites, housing and the town centre. There are shortcomings in local and regional public transport provision and poor integration between different transport modes, leading to a dominance of car travel and congestion. This is driven by a large proportion of short distance car trips into the town centre during peak times. The TIP highlights the ambition to deliver sustainable travel to improve accessibility as well as improved digital connectivity.

Challenge 4: Addressing strategic barriers to growth

Among the restrictions to the town’s growth currently is its dependence on the strategic road network due to its rural setting and the limitations of its rail network. There is a need to upgrade its road and rail networks while seeking to find more sustainable solutions. The town’s flood risk also poses a significant obstacle which when removed would release new areas of land for residential and commercial use.

The majority of survey respondents (76%) believe “Re-energising the town centre, providing more diversity and encouraging new enterprise and business activity” is a top 3 opportunity Bridgwater should maximise.

Survey Respondent, 2020





Bridgwater Vision

What is our vision for Bridgwater?

Our vision for Bridgwater is a town **RE-ENERGISED**, drawing maximum socio-economic benefit from existing and future investment in clean energy and inclusive growth; in particular from the proximity of catalytic projects such as Hinkley Point C and the 600 acres of Gravity – a Smart Campus.

Bridgwater Re-energised will be a town recognised as a place of education, enterprise and innovation. A town that is socially conscious and culturally rich; maximising its unique tapestry of cultural events, spearheaded by its award winning illuminated Carnival.

The largest proportion (62%) of survey respondents voted for the Bridgwater Carnival as one of “3 key strengths that make Bridgwater distinctive”.

Survey Respondent, 2020



“Regenerate River, docks and canal and maximise history to improve tourism. Make Bridgwater a destination for holidays in Somerset”.

Survey Respondent, 2020

The Bridgwater Town Investment Plan establishes our shared vision for the town over the next 30 years. Our shared vision provides an integrated and strategic response to the opportunities and challenges presented by Bridgwater.

From this vision, there are a number of strategic aims and objectives that will help us reach this.

Sustainable Growth



Inclusive Growth



Maximise our Community Potential



- ✓ Increase skills, confidence and participation of residents
- ✓ Enable residents to start local businesses

Re-energise Our Town Centre



- ✓ Diversify the town centre offer and function
- ✓ Stimulate footfall and dwell time
- ✓ Improve perception of place and sense of belonging
- ✓ Strengthen heritage and cultural assets

Sustainable Access and Movement



- ✓ Better connect people and places through sustainable travel
- ✓ Improve transport linkages and capacity to wider region
- ✓ Unlock strategic growth opportunities



Project Proposals

What are our project proposals?

To deliver our vision for Bridgwater, the investment programme is seeking **£25 million** of investment from the Towns Fund. This unlocks a total programme of **£161.8 million** of direct capital investment in Bridgwater, providing a leverage rate of 6.5 times. This includes **£24 million** of private sector match-funding making virtual parity with the Town Fund investment.

The following **11** projects have been prioritised for the Town Investment Plan and together provide a comprehensive package of investment. These are centered around the three investment themes below.

<p>1. Tidal Barrier</p> <p>Nationally significant project protecting Bridgwater town centre; unlocking housing & employment growth.</p>	<p>2. Dunball Junction</p> <p>Regional infrastructure project to resolve congestion and unlock housing and employment land for development.</p>	<p>3. Walking and Cycling</p> <p>Local cycling links connecting key employment areas & complementing investment by EDF into safer routes.</p>	<p>4. Celebration Mile</p> <p>Opening new Covid safe places and spaces in the town. Events management and promotion for Covid recovery.</p>
<p>5. Restoration of Docks</p> <p>Exciting restoration of historic docks quarter creating a new leisure and tourism destination.</p>	<p>6. Arts Centre</p> <p>Creating essential flexibility for Covid safe environment supporting local artists and cultural events.</p>	<p>7. Town Hall Theatre</p> <p>Transformed cultural facility for post-Covid future, inclusive access with office and meeting space for community and social enterprises.</p>	<p>8. Engine Room 2.0</p> <p>Increased capacity for community media centre engaging people with digital art and media – enhancing skills.</p>
<p>9. Bridgwater “Step Up”</p> <p>Flexible business and enterprise hub including creative “pop-up” and “taster-event” space and support.</p>	<p>10. Bridgwater Carnival</p> <p>Development of carnival production space to future-proof and enhance Carnival events for post-Covid recovery.</p>	<p>11. Town wardens / event Ambassadors</p> <p>Visible community support presence to help reduce anti-social behaviour and build confidence for visitors .</p>	

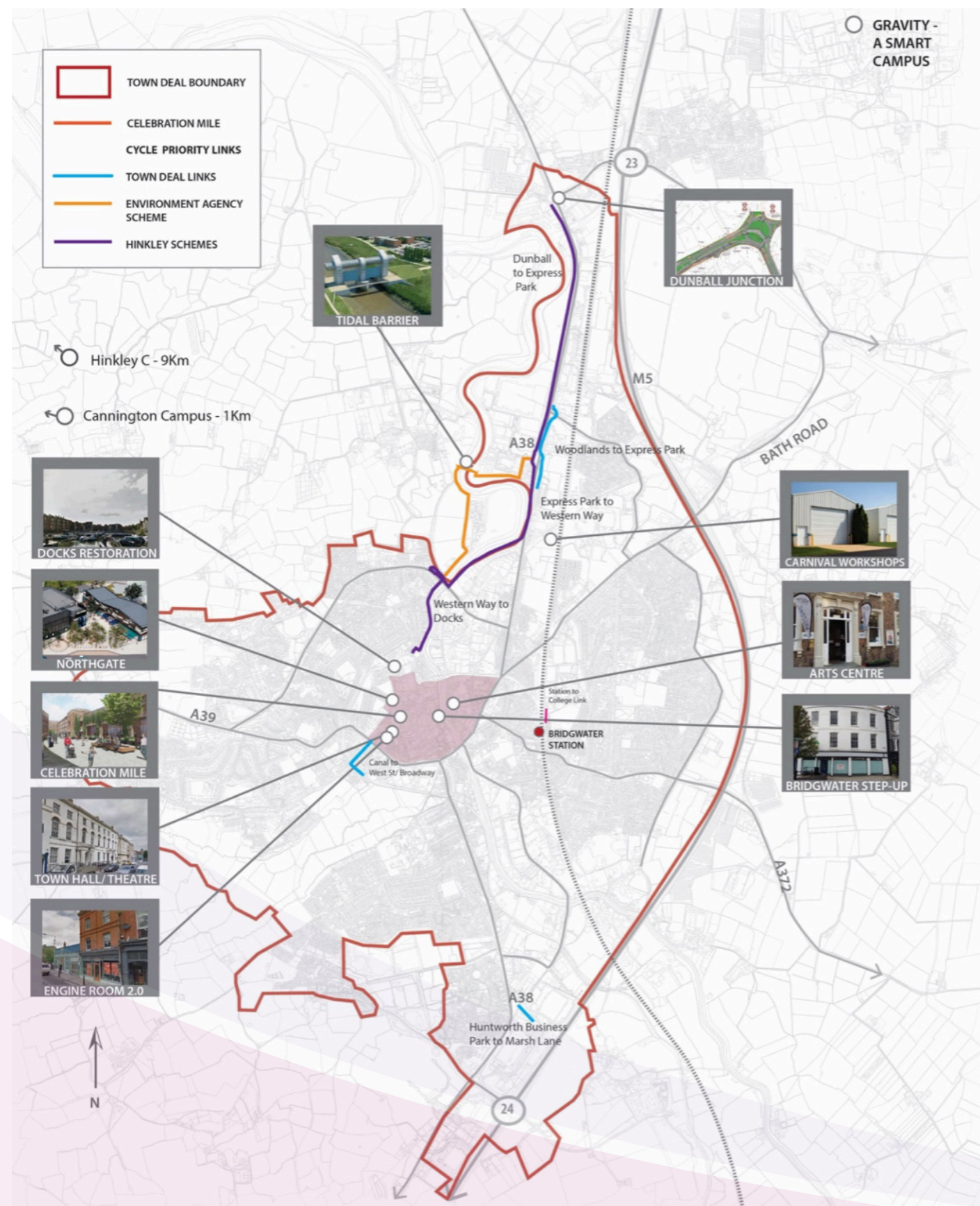
Unlocking growth

Places and Spaces

Diversifying Town Centre Offer & Instilling Civic Pride



Where are the projects in the town?



What will our projects deliver?

The project proposals outlined above form part of a vision for Bridgwater that stretches beyond the five-year term of the Towns Fund. The package of investments set out in this Town Investment Plan will complement existing investments, help tackle our most immediate challenges and position the town for long-term inclusive and sustainable growth.

The diagram below shows how the funding achieved from the Town Deal will provide a catalyst for change, by using funding to deliver projects which will in turn deliver tangible outputs, outcomes and impacts for the town.



The TIP has the potential to deliver a set of transformational, long term impacts that will **Re-energise Bridgwater** and position the town centre to capitalise on the benefits of growth. The project proposals have the potential to deliver significant economic benefit, including the following impacts:

1. An enhanced connection between residents and the town centre
2. Greater participation from residents in town centre activities
3. Greater diversity of uses in the town with start-up businesses in the centre
4. Improved perception and visitor appeal
5. Unlocking growth opportunities.



Approach to Delivery

What are the next steps?

The town investment plan has been submitted to the Government. We hope to hear during Spring 2021 whether or not our bid has been successful and how much money the town will be granted from the national town fund pot.

A **Stakeholder Engagement Plan** has been developed to direct and manage the future involvement of local communities and organisations to support delivery of the Towns Fund. This summarises the key activities undertaken to date and findings. It also puts forward proposals to maintain and strengthen engagement going forward.

The key features of our stakeholder engagement plan include:

- Publication of this Summary TIP.
- Maintain our local web presence and social media communication keeping people informed of progress in our conversation with government and work to inform intervention projects.
- Early consultation on design proposals for the Celebration Mile – to pave the way for potential planning and delivery in advance of funding award.
- We are especially keen to hear from local businesses, market traders, youth groups, College students and local schools on ideas to animate places and spaces in the town centre.

The Town Deal Board recognise preparation of the TIP is just the start of the journey and are committed to continue to listen to and involve all members of our community to shape and refine project plans going forward.

The **Bridgwater Town Deal** Board will continue to play a critical role taking overall ownership for co-ordinated project delivery and strategic direction of the Town Investment Plan. Individual members will have their part to play to champion the ambition for Bridgwater, drive community engagement and maximise linkage and benefits from each project.

Acknowledgements

Bridgwater Town Deal Board thanks its members, stakeholders and the local community for contributions to the Town Investment Plan and acknowledge the following for permission to use photographs and images:

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Report prepared on behalf of Bridgwater Town Deal Board by:



Bridgwater Town Deal Board Members

Member	Organisation
Independent Chair Fiona McMillan	Former principal of Bridgwater & Taunton College Deputy Chair of HotSW LEP
Doug Bamsey	Deputy Chief Executive- SDC
Councillor Gill Slocombe	Portfolio Holder Regeneration & Growth SDC
Ian Liddell-Grainger	Member of Parliament
Councillor Mick Lerry	Bridgwater Town Council
Councillor David Hall	Somerset County Council
David Ralph	HotSW LEP Chief Executive
Ruth Lambert	Federation of Small Businesses
Paul Moore	Bridgwater Chamber of Commerce
Andy Berry	Bridgwater & Taunton College Principal
Peter Elliot	Chief Executive Bridgwater College Trust
Andrew Cockcroft	EDF – Hinkley Point C
David Northey	Network Rail
Paul Edwards	KMW Commercial Properties
Justin Sargent	Somerset Community Foundation
Martin Hodgson	Chief Executive YMCA Dulverton Group
Adam Bradley	Business in the Community



Foreword/
Introduction

Challenges and
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