

# Town Deal Board Meeting

8th September 2020

Via Teams

## 1) Welcome/introduction/apologies

### In attendance

- Fiona McMillian
- Cllr Gill Slocombe
- Ian Liddell-Granger
- Nathaniel Lucas
- Katherine Schollar
- Jaycee Ellis
- Keith Thomas
- Patrick Gulliver
- Alex Quattrone
- David Mears
- Adam Bradley
- Andy Berry,
- Paul Moore,
- Peter Elliot,
- Ruth Lambert
- Justin Sargent

### Apologies

- Doug Bamsey,
- Mick Lerry,
- David Ralph,
- Paul Edwards

## 3) Bridgwater in Context – What are the critical challenges?

Data analysis of Bridgwater in context of District, County, LEP and England.

### Headline Findings:

- Strong justification for levelling up
- Number of sectors have room for growth in employment:
  - Hospitality, leisure and recreation
  - IT, Media and Creative
  - Financial and Professional
- Town centre not currently attractive to invest.
  - Commercial values of retail/office space lower than national average
- Challenges in attracting residents, workers and visitors
  - Houses prices in Bridgwater below Sedgemoor Average
  - Majority of town centre properties don't have access to ultrafast broadband
  - Town centre not accessible by public transport for rural Sedgemoor residents

## 4) Reflection on Strengths Weakness Opportunities & Threats

### What Makes Bridgwater Distinctive?

- Successful in attracting growth and investment – major employment activity.
- Bridgwater a Gateway to the South West – often punches above its weight.
- History of Trade & Manufacturing in Bridgwater – blended with clean growth potential
- The College – one of strongest in the country and respected by DFE – is seen as a “go to” place nationally for specialist/applied education (and growing).
- Expanding sectors for local economy – nuclear skills welding excellence centre.
- Carnival – including Carnival Theatre at the College - Tourism potential – plus skills and making experience.

### What has to change?

- External perspective – Bridgwater is where we drive through when M5 blocked?
- Traffic congestion and road works.
- Public Transport – Bus & Rail improvement – London have to go to Taunton first (South West Rail review underway).
- Broadband availability & Speed gravitates to more affluent areas – speed in more.
- deprived areas – not good enough to apply for a job let alone work from home?
- Disconnect with excellence of skills training being delivered and the actual skills in the town – how do we ensure access to all?
- No clear destination/attraction in Bridgwater creating a reason to visit.

### What should we take advantage of?

- Advantage of catchment area (and strategic location) – 80,000 in surrounding villages.
- Social mobility & partnering with SDC to attract business investment.
- Social cohesion and wellbeing – strong sports facilities and community support.
- Not having major retailers is advantage – not got larger vacant units.
- Is Covid an opportunity for small independent retailers.
- Docks & Quays magnificent – can build on the quality there.
- Blake museum – not promoted strongly enough.
- Is Covid an opportunity for small independent shops – service quality / distinctive offer.
- Revitalise the town centre with independence offer – distinctive character – production not consumption.
- Heritage character buildings – stimulate new value retail experiences.
- Barrage – create stronger visual benefit and value for the town.
- What about rural connection – farmers market/produce – Auction Centre J24.
- Out of town activity has been successful – do we focus on that?

### What is our ambition?

- Need to change the perception of Bridgwater – place to stop look enjoy
- Need to raise local ambition (adults and young people) – grasp potential through education / training
- Ensure young people see Bridgwater as place to stay/locate
- Stimulate the Town Centre – fresh perspective as centre of Production not just consumption.
- Town centre embrace Arts / Crafts & Festival Movement – Makers Guild?
- Bridgwater not ONE place – create distinctive character areas within Bridgwater.

### What / Where should we focus attention?

- Re-imagine the town centre – reconnect with the achievements in the wider area and future potential (Gravity) to be part of that whole experience
- Prepare the town for post-Covid economy / improvement – enhance footfall.
- Tackle prominent eyesores within the town – improve key gateways
- Employment drive within the town centre – flexible workspace/hubs
- Tackle measures of deprivation – raise aspiration confidence and skill capacity

### 7) Next Steps – Member Consideration & Support

- Stakeholder Audit
- Consultation on Vision – on-line engagement
- Member input to shaping/informing projects
- Develop Intervention Framework & “Theory of Change”
- Project assessment & prioritisation against Aims & Objectives
- Towns Fund Delivery Partner (Arup) – “Check & Challenge”

### 8) AOB

- Suggestion to move to the 3<sup>rd</sup> cohort giving a January deadline – agreed by board