



HM Government



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

# **OUR LONG-TERM PLAN FOR TOWNS**

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OCTOBER 2023



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October 2023

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## Foreword by the Prime Minister



Whenever I visit one of Britain's many great towns, I am inspired by the passion with which local people talk about the places they call home. But I also share their anger and frustration at high streets lined with empty shops and neighbourhoods scarred by crime and anti-social behaviour.

It has made me more determined than ever to change the direction of this country.

In part, this is about priorities. Towns are the place most of us call home and where most of us go to work. But politicians have focused on cities and always taken towns for granted. Businesses have not had the incentives to invest. Generations of young people have grown up thinking that the only way to get on, is to get out. As a result, since the financial crisis, jobs growth in towns has been half of that in cities, and a quarter of that in London.

But the change we need is deeper and more profound. On the occasions over the years when governments have tried to help towns, the story has always been the same. Short-term funding pots, often put in the control of councils that are already failing, with little or no consultation with the people that really matter – local people. It's time to invest directly in the places that need it most, not politicians that squander the most.

So today we are not just investing £1.1 billion into 55 of our great towns – we are fundamentally changing the way politics works to support them. Each town will have a Long-Term Plan drawn up by a new Towns Board, made up of local community leaders and employers – putting local people, not politicians, in charge of their own town's future. And each town will have a £20 million endowment-style fund to invest over the next decade, empowering them to develop a plan for the long-term, not a plan to the end of the financial year.

I am also establishing a new Towns Taskforce, reporting directly to me, which will support towns on their Long-Term Plans and help them unlock investment and public support. As part of this, we will also make it easier for towns to repurpose empty high street shops by reforming licensing rules and supporting more housing in town centres.

Change will not happen overnight. The problems facing our towns are long-term and our approach must be too. But by changing the way we do politics and focusing on what matters to communities, not to Westminster, we will actually achieve our goal of levelling up.

That is the right thing for our towns, and the right thing for our country.

**Rishi Sunak**

## Introduction



Towns matter. Their streets expose our shared history, from Roman ruins and dominating castles to the smoke-blackened bricks of the industrial revolution and the piers and ballrooms of the more recent past. They are engines of our economy, exporting goods to all corners of the world. And town halls and neighbourhoods are fundamental to our politics – the heart of our communities.

We are proud of our towns. But in the last thirty years, too often the focus has been on growing cities without setting out how towns can grow and flourish alongside. This narrow focus has often failed, or simply led to short-term policies that fail to address the headwinds that towns face. It has left too many behind in an economy characterised by deep economic imbalances.

The result is visible in towns across the United Kingdom – diminished high streets, run-down town centres, anti-social behaviour, and a lack of good jobs. Unsurprisingly, many people living in towns can feel like they are forgotten by Westminster, sometimes businesses do not want to invest, and young people grow up feeling that they have to leave their hometown to get on in life.

The Government has taken a series of actions in recent years to support towns, but we also recognise that there is more to be done. We need a new plan for towns to level up and deliver growth, as part of our wider ambitions to change the economic geography of the UK.

The Government has developed bold interventions to grow our cities: devolving greater funding and empowering strong local leadership; investing in science and enterprise; creating virtuous cycles of investment and development through new transport infrastructure and funding for brownfield and affordable housing. Now, to change the economic geography of the UK we need to apply the same ambition to towns.

This prospectus sets out a new plan to put local people at the centre of their town's success and give them the long-term funding to change its future. We have identified 55 towns to benefit from Long-Term Plans, backed by £1.1 billion overall, to drive ambitious plans to regenerate local towns across the UK over the next decade. Each town will:

- Develop a Long-Term Plan to invest in and regenerate their town, based on the priorities of local people, and put to local people for consultation.
- Receive £20 million in endowment-style funding and support over ten years to support the Town Plan, to be spent on issues that matter to local people, including regenerating high streets and securing public safety. This plan will be put to local people.
- Establish a Town Board to bring together community leaders, employers, local authorities, and the local MP to oversee and deliver the Long-Term Plan.
- Use a toolkit of powers, from tackling anti-social behaviour to auctioning empty high street shops, reforming licensing rules on shops and restaurants and supporting more housing in town centres.

To ensure towns achieve their potential, we are establishing a Towns Taskforce, reporting directly to the Prime Minister and Levelling Up Secretary. Working with the Levelling Up Inter-Ministerial Group, the Taskforce will help Town Boards to develop their Town Plans, and advise them on how best to take advantage of government policies, unlock private and philanthropic investment and engage their communities.

### Why towns matter

Towns are home to 56% of our people<sup>1</sup> and 52% of our jobs,<sup>2</sup> making a sizeable contribution to economic and civic life. Towns contain 65% of high-technology manufacturing and keep up with cities in producing knowledge intensive market services (46% compared to 44% for cities),<sup>3</sup> showing the contribution towns are making to driving growth in high-tech sectors.

In Barrow-on-Furness, for example, BAE systems is building the next generation of submarines for the Royal Navy, rejuvenating manufacturing, and creating an additional 6,000 jobs in the town,<sup>4</sup> while over £100 million of philanthropic investment in Bishop Auckland by Jonathan Ruffer has supported new attractions and facilities, complementing public sector investment in the town.<sup>5</sup>

Towns are part of the tapestry of our lives, and people across the country are rightly proud of the towns to which they belong, heavily influenced by the economic prosperity and cultural vibrancy of their past. There are often strong levels of pride in the heritage of a place and specifically 'industrial heritage'. For example, 29% of people in the North East named 'industrial heritage' as one of the top three things that helps foster pride in their local area compared to 13% nationwide.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ONS. [Understanding towns in England and Wales: an introduction](#). 2019.

<sup>2</sup> ONS. [Employment trends outside cities and towns, England and Wales: 2009 to 2021](#). 2023.

<sup>3</sup> ONS. [Understanding towns: industry analysis](#). 2021.

<sup>4</sup> [Westmorland & Furness Council. Top civil servants in Barrow to discuss vision for town's transformation](#). 2023.

<sup>5</sup> The Times. [Investing in Bishop Auckland](#). 2023.

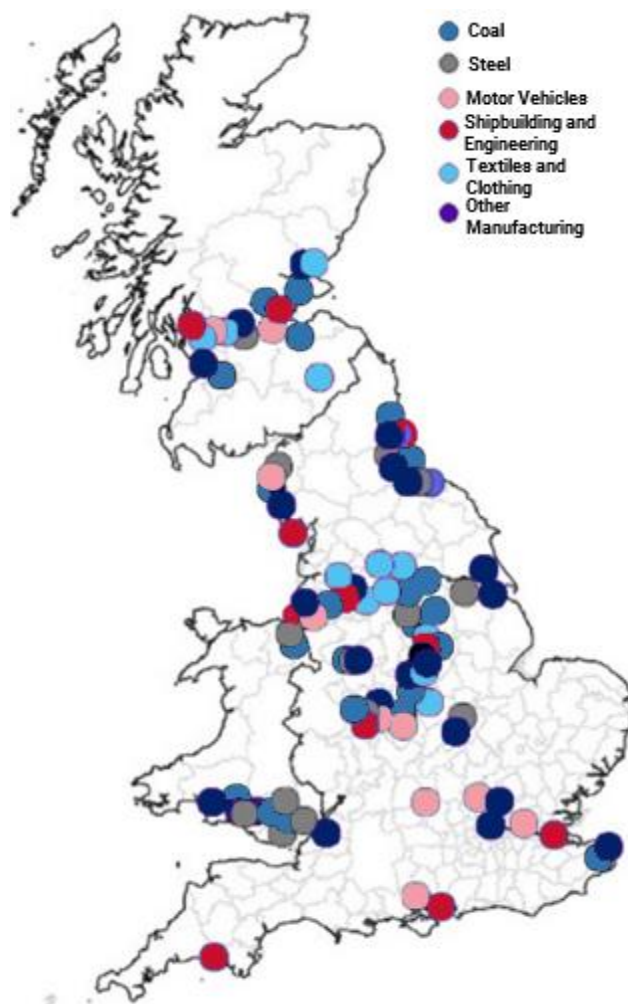
<sup>6</sup> PublicFirst. [Heritage and civic pride: voices from levelling up country](#). 2022.



We are proud of the successes of our towns, but we should be open eyed about their challenges too.

Since the 1970s, the UK has seen a fast and broad deindustrialisation compared to other developed countries, with a lasting impact in the North, Yorkshire and the Humber, and the Midlands in particular.<sup>7</sup> Globalisation has played a role in offshoring activities to other parts of the world, with evolving consumption patterns changing consumer demand for goods. And in coastal towns and others reliant on tourism, the fall in the cost of air travel and rises in living standards have led to an increase in consumers looking abroad for their next holiday destination.<sup>8</sup> Figure 1 illustrates the geography of industrial job loss, highlighting the most significant losses in places where major industries have been reduced to a fraction of their former size or disappeared entirely.

**Figure 1: Major industrial job losses<sup>9</sup> across Britain since the early 1980s.<sup>10</sup>**



Source: Sheffield Hallam University

<sup>7</sup> Stansbury, A., Turner, D. and Balls, E.. [Tackling the UK's regional economic inequality: Binding constraints and avenues for policy intervention](#). 2023.

<sup>8</sup> HM Government. [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#). 2022.

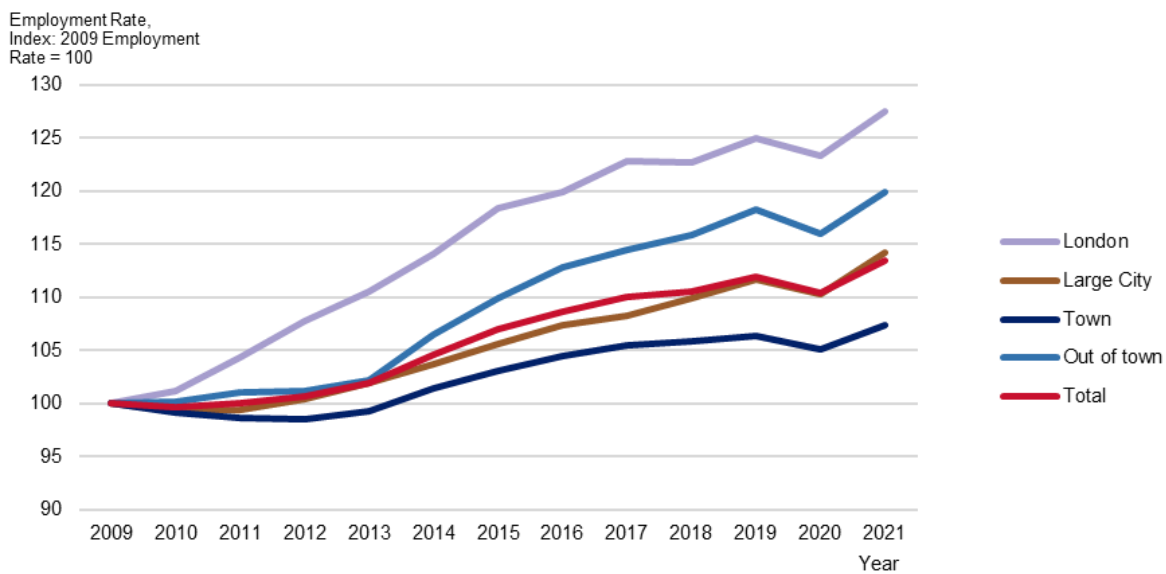
<sup>9</sup> Figure 1 illustrates the geography of job losses. It flags the biggest or most significant job losses, where major companies or industries have shrunk to a fraction of their former scale or disappeared entirely.

<sup>10</sup> Beatty, C. and Fothergill, S.. [The impact on welfare and public finances of job loss in industrial Britain](#). 2017.

These changes have had a profound effect on many towns, leading some to stagnate and fall behind more prosperous places.

Since the 2008 Financial Crisis, employment growth in towns has been much slower than elsewhere. Between 2009 and 2021, employment in towns grew by 7%, half the rate of cities outside of London (14%) and around a third of that of out-of-town areas (20%) (Figure 2).<sup>11</sup> While most industries grew slower than the England and Wales average, employment declined most notably in manufacturing, retail and the arts and entertainment industries.<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 2: Employment growth has been lower in towns than other area types<sup>13</sup>**  
**Employment growth rate, area types, England and Wales, 2009 = 100**



Source: ONS

This has led to a reduction in the economic opportunities in our towns, with the economic impact amplified depending on how well connected a town is to other economic centres like nearby cities.

And as Figure 3 shows, younger people in small towns or villages are also more likely to be workless because they are unwell (3.4%), compared to younger workers in core cities such as Cardiff, Glasgow, or Liverpool (2%).<sup>14</sup> Towns also tend to be less attractive prospects to many graduates, who made up 26% of young people in core cities in 2020-2022, compared to less than one-in-six (15%) young people in small towns and villages.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> ONS. [Employment trends outside cities and towns, England and Wales: 2009 to 2021](#). 2023.

<sup>12</sup> ONS. [Employment trends outside cities and towns, England and Wales: 2009 to 2021](#). 2023.

<sup>13</sup> ONS. [Employment trends outside cities and towns, England and Wales: 2009 to 2021](#). 2023.

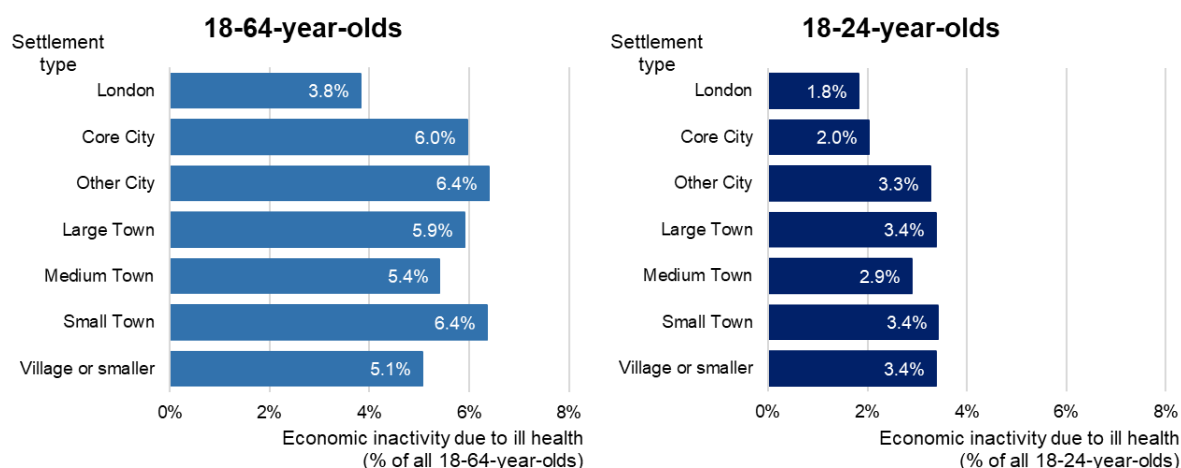
<sup>14</sup> Murphy, L., Resolution Foundation. [Left behind](#). 2023.

<sup>15</sup> Murphy, L., Resolution Foundation. [Left behind](#). 2023.



**Figure 3:** Small and large towns tend to have a higher proportion of young people who are economically inactive due to ill health.<sup>16</sup>

**Proportion of 18-64-year-olds (left-hand panel) and 18-24-year-olds (right-hand panel) who are economically inactive due to ill health, by settlement type, GB, 2020-2022.**



Source: Resolution Foundation

In terms of connectivity, smaller towns are less likely to be well connected to denser population centres,<sup>17</sup> preventing towns from contributing to larger economic centres and receiving agglomeration benefits.<sup>18</sup> The opportunity for new local businesses or thriving existing businesses to locate within towns is often more limited,<sup>19</sup> either due to a smaller pool of workers who have the necessary skills and incomes to sustain business supply and demand,<sup>20</sup> respectively, or because of limited transport links to wider economic centres.<sup>21</sup> Poor local connectivity can make towns feel cut off, and can make it harder to get into, and around the town centre.<sup>22</sup>

These economic factors are compounded by wider social problems that, whilst affecting all places, are disproportionately felt in towns.

High street vacancy tends to be much higher in towns than cities: in Rotherham, nearly a third of shops are empty. In Bolton, Grimsby and Stoke, more than one in seven has been empty for three years.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, coastal towns typically suffer disproportionately from crime – which is 12% higher on the coast<sup>24</sup> – and public health challenges.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Murphy, L., Resolution Foundation. [Left behind](#). 2023.

<sup>17</sup> NIC. [Transport Connectivity Discussion Paper](#). 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Centre for Cities. [Does 'trickle out' work?](#) 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Centre for Cities. [At the frontier: The geography of the UK's new economy](#). 2022

<sup>20</sup> Swinney, P. Centre for Cities. [Talk of the Town](#). 2018

<sup>21</sup> Centre for Cities. [Does 'trickle out' work?](#) 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Left Behind Neighbourhoods APPG. [Connecting communities: improving transport to get 'left behind' neighbourhoods back on track](#). 2021

<sup>23</sup> Onward. [Street Bids](#). 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Onward. [Troubled waters: tackling the crisis on England's coast](#). 2023.

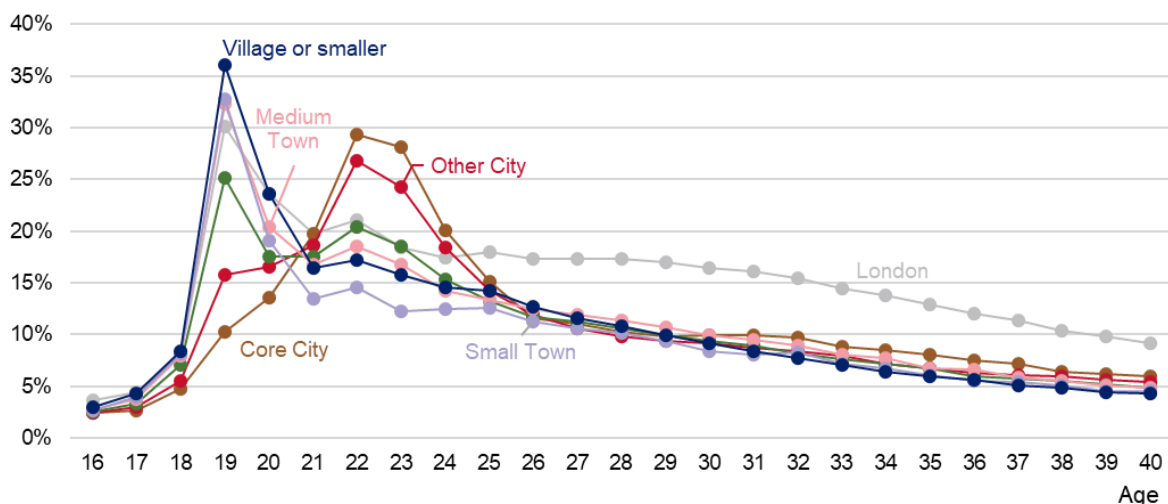
<sup>25</sup> DHSC. [Chief Medical Officer's annual report 2021: health in coastal communities](#). 2021.

The result is a widening economic and social gap between towns and the rest of the country, particularly cities. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, average wages in London in 2019 were 60% higher than those in Scarborough and Grimsby – with the top 10% of earners in London earning nearly twice as much per hour. Half of working-age adults in London and Brighton have university degrees compared with less than a fifth in places such as Doncaster or Mansfield.<sup>26</sup>

While smaller towns and villages have better educational outcomes than those achieved in larger towns and cities (excluding London), this diminishes for older students,<sup>27</sup> as access to higher and further education becomes more challenging in smaller towns. The dearth of local higher and further education opportunities encourages those aged 18-20 to migrate to larger towns and cities,<sup>28</sup> with Figure 4 showing an outward migration rate of over 30% for 19-year-olds from small and medium sized towns.<sup>29</sup> There are also worse health outcomes in more deprived towns, regardless of the location or wider geography of the town.<sup>30</sup>

**Figure 4:** Young people from towns and villages are most likely to move place, with similar migration rates from settlement types outside London for those aged 26-40.<sup>31</sup>

**Average outward migration rate from local authorities, by settlement type and single year of age, England, 2019**



Source: Resolution Foundation

But we do not believe that these challenges are immutable. In recent decades, we have seen various towns around the UK transform their fortunes through a long-term plan and locally-driven change. Prominent examples include Salford Quays, beginning in the 1980s with the Manchester Metrolink and continuing to Media City today, and Stevenage, whose 20-year regeneration plan leverages public funding to draw in private investment to transform the town centre. In the last few years, the Government has taken a series of actions to support towns, but we also recognise that more must

<sup>26</sup> Overman, G. and Xu, X., IFS. [Spatial disparities across labour markets](#). 2022.  
<sup>27</sup> ONS. [Why do children and young people in smaller towns do better academically than those in larger towns?](#). 2023.  
<sup>28</sup> Swinney, P, and Williams, M. [Centre for Cities](#). 2016.  
<sup>29</sup> Resolution Foundation. [Left behind](#). 2023.  
<sup>30</sup> Bennett Institute for Public Policy. [Townscapes 4. England's health inequalities](#). 2020.  
<sup>31</sup> Resolution Foundation. [Left behind](#). 2023.

be done. We need a Long-Term Plan for towns to level up growth and support our wider mission of changing the economic geography of the UK.

### What we have done so far

The UK Government has supported towns in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland through a series of targeted investments and taskforces over recent years:

- The **£3.2 billion Towns Fund** supported 101 English towns to drive economic and productivity growth. £1 billion of this funding went to the Future High Streets Fund, supporting 72 places to create thriving high streets in the future.
- The **Levelling Up Fund** has allocated £3.8 billion during two rounds to support over 200 places across the UK, many of them towns, with their regeneration, town centre improvements, transport, and culture projects. Funding has been provided across the UK for a range of projects including a new transport hub in Porth and the creation of new cultural and creative destinations in Wakefield.
- The **UK Shared Prosperity Fund** has delivered **£2.6 billion** between local authorities across the UK, with funding to increase pay and productivity, skills and feelings of community, pride and empowerment.
- **Levelling Up Partnerships** are targeting **£400 million** at towns and places most in need of coordinated government and local support in England. This builds on deep dives in Blackpool, Grimsby and Blyth – with targeted investments such as £18 million to repurpose run-down and empty homes in Blyth to boost a regeneration project for 40,000 residents.
- The **Community Ownership Fund** has invested **£150 million** to support community organisations to save local assets, at risk of closure, across the UK. This year, it has been expanded to allow Town Councils to apply and increased the cap to £2 million to allow more applications for community ownership of assets in towns and on high streets.
- Building on the Future High Streets Fund, the **High Streets Task Force** has so far visited over 130 local places in England, providing guidance, tools and skills to local authorities to help plug gaps in local capacity.
- Running from 2012-2022, the **Coastal Communities Fund** committed £188 million to projects targeted at creating jobs and wider economic regeneration in coastal areas in England.
- We have established eight **Freeports** in England, and this year announced a further two in Wales and two Green Freeports in Scotland. Freeports unlock much-needed investment into port towns and communities through a combination of tax reliefs on new economic activity, a special streamlined customs procedure, an ambitious programme of public investment, and wide-ranging support from the UK Government to help businesses trade, invest, and innovate.

***Case Study: Lincoln Town Deal- Lincoln, England***

Lincoln was awarded £19 million through the Towns Fund to deliver a range of skills, regeneration and connectivity projects.

Three of Lincoln's 13 projects have already completed and are making a significant impact; including the HEAT Institute (Hospitality, Events, Arts and Tourism) which has seen the creation of a new 'working restaurant' facility at Lincoln's Old Bakery, and a refurbished Sessions House at Lincoln college campus, both are being used for student training. In addition, the renovation and rebranding of the Drill Hall as a cultural event venue has allowed students to benefit through end of year performances and work experience, the first cohort of Performing Arts students based at the Drill are expected to start in September 2023.

## Our Long-Term Plan for Towns



We will now go further to demonstrate an enduring commitment to our towns. Drawing from our experiences delivering the Levelling Up Fund, Towns Fund and Levelling Up Partnerships, and listening to the feedback from local authorities and delivery partners, we will put local people at the centre of their towns' development, with long-term, flexible funding to respond to the priorities of local people.

Our Long-Term Plan for Towns will bring together community leaders, businesspeople, and local bodies to forge their town's future together, alongside the funding needed to deliver for their communities in the long-term. We want towns with proud histories and rich heritage to have the tools and the funding to seize a brighter future for themselves, rather than have to wait for decisions made in Westminster. This aligns with the recommendation of the National Infrastructure Commission, who found that "infrastructure strategies and wider place-based town plans need to be developed locally, by people who understand the needs and strengths of the area and the individual towns. They should look to build on the existing strengths of towns, which will give them the best chance of supporting economic growth".<sup>32</sup>

Through our existing programmes and the experience of other countries, we have learnt what works well: longer-term funding certainty; building local partnerships; having a clear plan for delivery; joint working between central and local government; and involving people and communities from the outset. Successful towns cannot be built on government funding and intervention alone. We want to harness local communities and crowd-in investment of both time and money to support long-lasting change.

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<sup>32</sup> NIC. [Infrastructure, Towns and Regeneration](#). 2021.

Our Long-Term Plan for Towns, backed by £1.1 billion overall, will drive ambitious plans to regenerate 55 towns around the United Kingdom over the long-term through Town Plans.

Each town will receive a ten-year **endowment-style fund, with £20 million of funding and support** to give towns long term certainty to deliver projects over multiple years and the flexibility to invest in interventions based on evolving local needs and priorities. This will ensure a focus on long-term strategic transformation as well as shorter-term improvements. The funding will be focused on the issues that matter most to local people, including high streets, heritage and regeneration, and public safety and security.

A new Town Board will be established in each town in England, bringing together community leaders, employers, local authorities, and the local MP to develop a shared vision for their town and oversee the funding together. Working with local authorities, these boards will be encouraged to use the full suite of powers and flexibilities the Government has granted places to turn their high streets and towns around and be backed by the funding needed to do so. Learning from Town Deal Boards, to ensure that local people, not just politicians, drive change, we expect these boards to be chaired by a local business or community leader.

In exchange for long-term, flexible funding, each town in England will be required to develop a ten-year **Long-Term Plan for their town**, setting out the town's vision and priorities for investment and regeneration, aligned to themes of safety and security, high streets, heritage and regeneration, and transport and connectivity. Towns will be required to demonstrate how they have developed plans in consultation with local people. As part of this plan, areas will be expected to bring something to the table, whether that's the time and resource of key people, local match-funding or properties to include in regeneration projects.

Government will not only provide funding and powers to towns to develop the long-term plans, but also additional and much needed capacity support. This will be mirrored by a new high-powered **Towns Taskforce** at the heart of government, reporting directly to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, and working closely with the Levelling Up Directorate and Inter-Ministerial Group, to ensure the voices of these towns will be heard loud and clear across Government.

In Scotland and Wales we will also work with local partners, including local authorities and the devolved administrations, to make sure funding and support aligns with other programmes to have the best possible impact. In Northern Ireland, we look forward to working with a restored Executive to determine the approach to providing support there.

Alongside providing towns with the scope to deliver a range of interventions that reflect local priorities and ensure a long-term focus, this approach will facilitate improvements that will have a range of social and economic benefits, as well as boosting local people's pride in their town.

This new approach builds on our work levelling up the UK since 2019. By taking endowment principles to maximise the flexibility and impact of funding, and combining

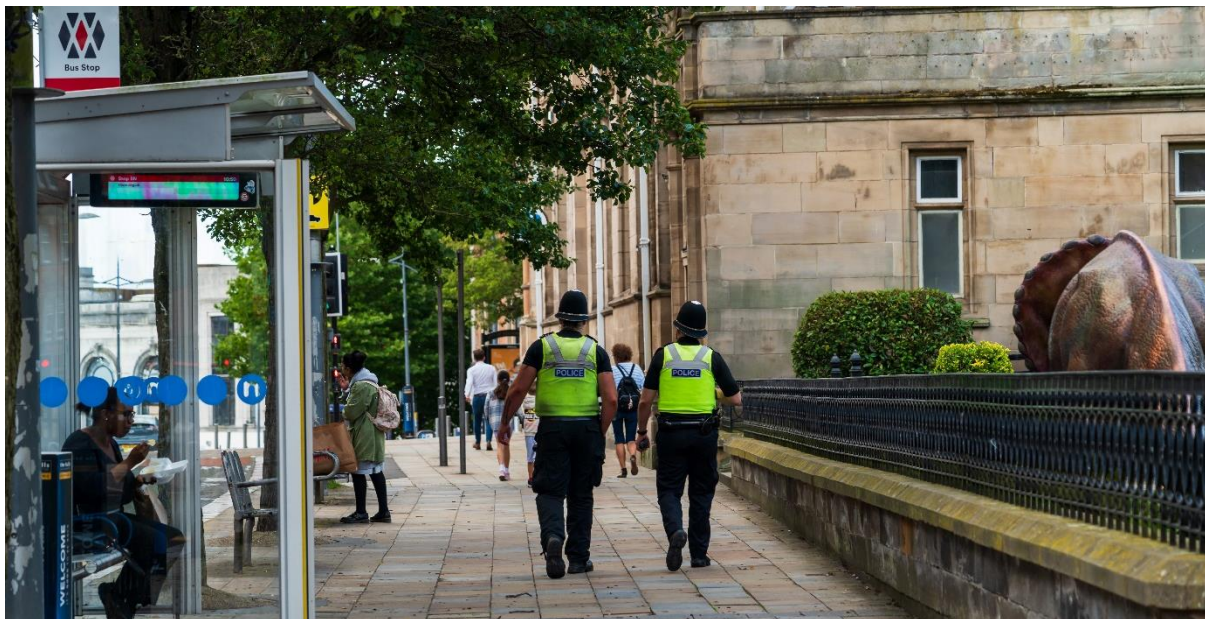


this with targeted support, we hope to help towns build on existing interventions from our most intensive Levelling Up Partnerships and the wider funding programmes available to towns, cities and rural areas across the UK. The ingenuity of local leaders has been critical to our successes so far, and through this plan a new, more flexible, approach to funding and powers can have an even greater impact when put in the hands of local people.

Our new Long-Term Plan for Towns forms part of an ambitious and much wider programme of reform and investment to level up the UK, which puts powers and funding in the hands of individuals in every corner of our isles. From announcing a new Community Wealth Fund – putting millions of pounds of dormant assets directly in the hands of neighbourhoods and small local communities – to agreeing new trailblazing devolution deals with some of our largest and most ambitious cities. And from investing in key sources of local growth and pride through the Levelling Up Fund and Community Ownership Fund, to granting funding and flexibilities to places themselves with Investment Zones in cities and Innovation Accelerators.

Our Long-Term Plan for Towns is one piece of this wider puzzle, but it is a vital step towards giving local people control of the place they call home and ensuring that towns no longer feel they are forgotten by Westminster.

### Investing in what works



Our £1.1 billion Long-Term Plan for Towns will support 55 towns over the next ten years to provide longer-term certainty and scale to drive improvements based on local knowledge and the priorities of local people drawing on our lessons from the ongoing Levelling Up Partnerships programme.

We want to see towns make use of the additional powers they have been granted across a range of areas, including responding to anti-social behaviour and diversifying high streets, to facilitate real improvements in a short timeframe that will stand the test of time.



We also expect that through their Long-Term Plan, towns will be involved in identifying the measures that matter most to local people. We are providing significant flexibility to make a range of improvements under three broad investment themes, and are open to being driven by the needs and wishes of local communities. These themes are:

### **Safety and Security:**

- It is impossible to level up a town if people don't feel safe to go into the town centre and businesses are unable to trade because of crime and anti-social behaviour. Towns that feel or are unsafe repel consumers, deter investors, and undermine the norms and behaviour that underpin a thriving society.
- The increase in shop vacancy rate<sup>33</sup> and decrease in high street footfall<sup>34</sup> has left high streets as prime locations for anti-social behaviour. Increases in anti-social behaviour make people feel unsafe<sup>35</sup> and drive reluctance to use local facilities, further decreasing footfall on local high streets and diminishing pride in place.<sup>36</sup>
- Following the launch of the Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Action Plan this year in England and Wales, towns will now be able to use this funding to reduce crime and improve safety in their local area.
- Interventions could include new and improved security infrastructure, such as CCTV and street lighting; providing additional hotspot policing and local authority wardens; as well as diversionary activity through ASB awareness courses and support for community outreach facilities.

#### *Case Study: SMART Tottenham Project, Haringey, London – England*

£500,000 from Haringey's Future High Streets Fund award focuses on reducing crime and supporting retail on Tottenham High Road. Funding an increased level of CCTV in the high street, it aims to generate behavioural change and discourage antisocial behaviour, tackling crime and making the area safer.

### **High Streets, Heritage and Regeneration:**

- High streets have been centred on retail since the 1960s.<sup>37</sup> As domestic and retail needs have increasingly been met online and in out-of-town retail centres, the challenge for high streets has been whether they are able to adapt.<sup>38</sup> It has been estimated that there is an oversupply of retail of up to 40%.<sup>39</sup> The slow decline in traditional high streets has led to a 17% decrease in employment between 2009 and 2021.<sup>40</sup>
- The hollowing out of high streets and town centres can affect the liveability of a place, making it less attractive for, and harder to retain, more highly skilled workers. The skilled workers of the future leave towns, which provide only limited education and employment opportunities, and do not return to the same towns in the same

<sup>33</sup> BRC. [Britain loses 6,000 storefronts in five years](#). 2023.

<sup>34</sup> High Streets Task Force. [Review of High Street Footfall in England](#). Jan-Dec 2022.

<sup>35</sup> YouGov. [YouGov/DLUHC – Anti-Social Behaviour – 230113](#). 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Gov.UK. [Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan](#). 2023.

<sup>37</sup> Local Government Association. [Creating resilient and revitalised high streets in the 'new normal'](#). 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Local Government Association. [Creating resilient and revitalised high streets in the 'new normal'](#). 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Power to Change. [Community Powered High Streets](#). 2023.

<sup>40</sup> ONS. [Employment trends outside cities and towns, England and Wales: 2009 to 2021](#). 2023.

numbers.<sup>41</sup> This leaves towns and villages with an older population, living alongside a working-age population with fewer qualifications to provide an economic environment to meet individual and community needs.

- Towns would be able to use this funding to enhance their town centres, making them and their buildings more attractive and accessible to residents, businesses, and visitors in a post Covid environment.
- Interventions could include remediating and repurposing vacant department stores – including converting these to high quality housing; preserving and improving heritage sites in the town; creating and maintaining parks and green spaces; supporting high street cleaning projects; new markets/high street days; establishing Business Improvement Districts; running high street rental auctions; supporting skills and community development so local people can take up opportunities that emerge from business-led regeneration.

*Case Study: Barrow-in-Furness Town Centre, England*

This £16 million Levelling Up Fund project will be transformative for the town by fully revamping its market hall, making it a modern, desirable place to be with a great food and drink offering. The project will also boost connectivity including by improving walking links through the town and creating a pocket park, making the town centre a greener place where people want to spend time and visit local businesses.

### **Transport and Connectivity:**

- The ease with which town residents can access high streets, jobs and local shopping centres is critical if towns are going to thrive into the future. This means offering sustainable transport options, linking different parts of the town with new infrastructure, safe ways in which people can walk or cycle into the centre, as well as ensuring public transport options are viable and attractive.
- Transport connectivity alone will not turn around the economic fortunes of a place. As the National Infrastructure Commission has noted: “there is no guarantee that more or better transport infrastructure will lead to improvements in economic growth and quality of life outcomes. Unless infrastructure constraints are demonstrably impacting these outcomes – for example, through substantial levels of congestion – it is unlikely to be the primary policy lever to turn around a town’s fortunes.”<sup>44</sup>
- Investment will need to be used alongside other themes, particularly safety and security, to ensure that transport options are seen as attractive and safe. But used well, this funding could make towns more connected - increasing footfall and viability – to high streets and local shopping centres, and accessibility to local employment opportunities. The National Infrastructure Commission, for example, has highlighted how Stevenage is planning a new pedestrian walkway to link the town centre and its business parks, while Grimsby’s Town Deal built on the town’s heritage to link the town and its historic waterfront.

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<sup>41</sup> IFS. [The impact of living costs on the returns to higher education](#). 2021.

- Interventions could include new infrastructure schemes; road improvements; new programmes to encourage cycling; and making the town centre more walkable and accessible.

*Case Study: Porth Transport Hub- Rhondda, Wales*

£3.5m from the Levelling Up Fund for the Porth Transport Hub in Rhondda has completed the main interchange building of the transport hub. This was opened earlier this year and is addressing transport inadequacies, providing seven operational bus bays, two lay over spaces, electric vehicle charging capabilities and new roads in and out. It is facilitating better connectivity into the town centre, and boosting footfall and local economic opportunities in the town.

A new approach



Our Long-Term Plan for Towns means a new approach to funding, with endowment-style funding over ten years designed to give flexibility to towns to invest in local priorities to a timeline that works for local people, not just for Westminster.

Towns will receive funding and support of £20 million (25% Resource, 75% Capital split) to provide a range of interventions across the investment themes and will have ten years to deliver these, providing long-term certainty to deliver significant improvements in their towns.

Towns will have freedom to develop plans that meet local priorities across the investment themes. They will not be subject to onerous reporting requirements; instead, the Towns Taskforce will engage towns to monitor progress and help address problems that arise. Towns will be able to roll over funding into future years if best to deliver priority interventions to a high standard and will remain responsible for ensuring good use of public funds.

The flexibility within this funding will mean towns are more able to capitalise on private and philanthropic investment, aligning timings with businesses and investors to maximise the benefits for local people. This could include working with Business Improvement Districts to join up investments, using existing local authority assets or land to make funding go further, and working with the Towns Taskforce to identify philanthropic investment opportunities.

### Putting local people in the driving seat

Town Boards will drive the priorities for investment, convene powers and responsibilities for making change, and steer the long-term vision for their town hand-in-hand with local people.

The Boards will comprise a group of local organisations, including:

- Community partners. Such as community groups, faith groups and local charities, the neighbourhood forum, the local Council for Voluntary Service (CVS).
- Local businesses and social enterprises. Such as the chair or board members for the Business Improvement District (BID), key local employers or investors in the town.
- Key cultural, arts, heritage and sporting organisations.
- Public sector agencies such as representatives from schools or police subject to local priorities.
- The local MP, relevant local authorities, including the parish or town council, where one exists, and a representative of the Mayoral, Combined or Upper Tier Authority where relevant.

We will encourage Town Boards to be chaired by a businessperson or a local community leader, to ensure that the board fully reflects the priorities of the town. Where the town already has a Town Deal Board in place, they will be able to repurpose the Board. In doing so, they should use the opportunity to make sure that they have the right members round the table to drive forward their priorities, including community partners, public sector agencies and cultural organisations.

Once established Town Boards will be responsible for:

- Identifying the issues and priorities to focus on for the Long-Term Plan, including supporting a process of ongoing community engagement
- Working with the local authority to develop the Long-Term Plan for their town, setting out how local partners will use their knowledge, powers, assets and new funding to deliver for their communities
- Identifying opportunities for Board members to utilise specific powers, such as neighbourhood planning, to drive forward their Long-Term Plan
- Identifying opportunities to bring in additional philanthropic or private investment to support the Long-Term Plan for their town
- Overseeing the delivery of projects set out in their Long-Term Plan

Boards will make sure the priorities within the Plan are underpinned by a shared vision with local people. A process of meaningful engagement should help Boards define the key issues to tackle, identify strengths and resources within the community and test potential projects. This might include engaging local people through events, community workshops, online consultations, and surveys. Board members will draw on relationships with other community leaders and community groups to make sure the engagement is diverse and representative of the whole community.

Boards might choose to establish subcommittees to focus on particular investment strategies or projects, or to drive forward particular themes, such as community engagement.

### Using new powers and flexibilities

Town Boards, through their constituent members, have access to a range of levers and flexibilities to drive improvement and unlock barriers to regeneration and development. We will expect Long-Term Plans to demonstrate that they are convening the full range of powers available to them to achieve the best possible outcomes for their places in line with their investment priorities.

We will develop a toolkit, building on the powers identified below, in partnership with local authorities, including identifying opportunities for extending and strengthening powers in the future and helping local authorities to make full use of new powers shortly coming into force. We will also look at where local authorities can be granted more flexibility over exercising these powers without requiring central government approvals.

We will publish a full toolkit, guiding towns through the range of powers and levers available to them, in due course, including specific information for Long-Term Plans for towns in Scotland and Wales. Investment plans will demonstrate that places have used the toolkit to identify the powers that will help them achieve their desired priorities. We will expect towns to consider the full range of levers at their disposal. In England, these powers will include:

- Auctioning empty high street shops using new powers from the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.
- Reforming licensing rules on shops and restaurants for example, enabling more high-street businesses to benefit from the al-fresco dining rules introduced in the pandemic.
- Making it easier for commercial buildings to quickly change use for example, allowing an empty shop to change into a café, nursery or gym without needing to fill out needless red tape.
- Supporting more housing in town centres by giving the automatic right for empty commercial buildings to be converted into homes for local people.
- On-the-spot fines of up to £1,000 for fly tipping offenders and £500 for litter and graffiti offenders.
- Enforcing against persistent anti-social behaviour in public spaces like local parks and high streets – and fining those who breach these rules up to £500.

To support this, through updated guidance we will make sure that Town Boards can contribute to neighbourhood plans and new Neighbourhood Priorities Statements,

including helping to identify potential development locations and aligning priorities as part of their town's Long-Term Plan. And we will help towns to maximise the long-term opportunities for investment by encouraging Local Planning Authorities and Town Councils to work with them to define spending priorities for the Community Infrastructure Levy, and the Infrastructure Levy when this is implemented.

## **A new toolkit for towns in England**

Town Boards, through the local authority, can use **Public Spaces Protection Orders** to make sure that people are able to enjoy their parks and socialise in their town centres free from anti-social behaviour (ASB). They could maximise the impact of ASB powers held by the council and the police by using funding for **additional wardens to work with communities to keep towns safe places to live and work**.

Community groups can nominate the buildings and spaces that really matter to them as **Assets of Community Value**, and local authorities can also create **local heritage lists**, helping to protect these treasured assets for generations to come.

Parish and town councils and neighbourhood forums can use **neighbourhood planning** to give communities a greater say on the future of the places where they live and work, producing plans that have real influence over where new homes shops and offices should be built and what these buildings should look like.

A **national permitted development right** provides for such uses to change to residential, bringing new residents into our town centres. Town Boards can encourage the use of this right, to support more diverse and viable high streets and town centres.

To bring forward quality residential development, Town Boards can work with the Local Planning Authority to deliver **Local Development Orders** and promote the potential for owners to use permitted development rights to promote the regeneration of commercial sites.

Town Boards can consult with local partners on exercising existing powers to **track, manage and improve dilapidated building stock** and areas with particular issues of deprivation or crime. Taking these steps can directly tackle some of the underlying causes of social problems and visibly improve the safety and aesthetic of streets that otherwise can become “no-go” areas within towns.

Town Boards can help curate vibrant and resilient town centres by helping to set up a **Business Improvement District** (or working with them where they are already established) to coordinate activity and funding to boost local entrepreneurship and drive footfall from local people and visitors alike. They can also improve the look and feel of high streets by encouraging businesses to set up alfresco dining through **pavement licences**.

Through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill we are introducing new **High Street Rental Auction** (HSRA) powers which will allow local authorities to auction a lease of a property that has been standing vacant. Town Boards will be able to work with local authorities to identify opportunities to use HSRA and take action on vacant shops and buildings that blight the high street and bring down economic potential.

We are also introducing the **locally-led Urban Development Corporation** (LUDC) model, a localised form of the existing UDC model. The provisions allow local authorities to request to designate the urban development area and create an urban development corporation. Town Boards could work with local authorities to identify opportunities for creating an LUDC to drive forward their regeneration plans

We are clarifying **Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs)** to give local authorities more confidence to acquire derelict buildings that are holding back regeneration plans. New powers will also shortly be in force, which will enable Town Boards and other local authorities to provide more targeted support to **clean up and remove the blight of very poor quality supported housing** units, which are designed to help vulnerable people but have been shown to be exploited by criminal and rogue landlords.



## With the full backing of government

Levelling Up Partnerships have shown the value of local and national government joining forces to tackle entrenched issues and seize transformative opportunities.

In Grimsby, when local concerns were raised about import tariffs on the town's fish processing sector, we coordinated a cross-government effort to agree the necessary tariff exemption. In Blackpool, when the location of the court was holding back regeneration in the city centre, we worked across government and with local partners to move it, and in doing so unlock £100 million of regeneration plans.

Now, learning from this experience, Long-Term Plans for Towns will ensure the full, collective weight of central government levers are brought to bear to support local priorities across these 55 towns into the future.

A new Towns Taskforce will therefore be established in the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, reporting directly to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Levelling Up. The Taskforce will ensure the issues and opportunities of these towns are heard and acted on within the UK Government.

Alongside working with towns to understand their unique challenges and opportunities, the Taskforce would look to attract private and philanthropic investment into the 55 towns, championing the investment opportunities to building on the endowment-style funding granted.

As part of this we will extend the current High Streets Task Force, to provide each selected town with bespoke, hands-on support from place-making experts. It will work flexibly and collaboratively with Town Boards, delivering tangible outputs and outcomes on their behalf. Town Boards will be able to draw on support across a variety of issues, which could include helping to develop a masterplan for their area or understanding how to best use the powers and flexibilities that are available to them and set out in the Toolkit.

## Preparing for a Long-Term Plan for your town



This document sets out a Long-Term Plan for Towns, with long-term, flexible non-competitive funding put in the hands of local leaders to deliver lasting improvements. The UK Government has granted new powers in England and funding to places across the UK, and through this new approach, will provide additional targeted support to the 55 towns set out below.

We are announcing the development of 11 Long-Term Plans for Towns in Scotland and Wales. We know this is a shared priority, and we will work with the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales to consider how best we apply this approach to towns in Scotland and Wales. In Northern Ireland, we look forward to working with a restored Executive to determine the approach to supporting towns there.

| <b>ITL1/2 Region</b> | <b>Local Authority</b> | <b>Town/Place</b>    |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| East Midlands        | Mansfield              | Mansfield            |
| East Midlands        | Boston                 | Boston               |
| East Midlands        | Bassetlaw              | Worksop              |
| East Midlands        | East Lindsey           | Skegness             |
| East Midlands        | Newark and Sherwood    | Newark-on-Trent      |
| East Midlands        | Chesterfield           | Chesterfield         |
| East Midlands        | Nottingham             | Clifton (Nottingham) |
| East Midlands        | South Holland          | Spalding             |
| East Midlands        | Ashfield               | Kirkby-in-Ashfield   |
| East of England      | Tendring               | Clacton-on-Sea       |
| East of England      | Great Yarmouth         | Great Yarmouth       |
| North East           | Redcar and Cleveland   | Eston                |
| North East           | South Tyneside         | Jarrow               |

|                            |                         |                           |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| North East                 | Sunderland              | Washington                |
| North East                 | Northumberland          | Blyth (Northumberland)    |
| North East                 | Hartlepool              | Hartlepool                |
| North East                 | County Durham           | Spennymoor                |
| North West                 | Blackburn with Darwen   | Darwen                    |
| North West                 | Oldham                  | Chadderton                |
| North West                 | Rochdale                | Heywood                   |
| North West                 | Tameside                | Ashton-under-Lyne         |
| North West                 | Hyndburn                | Accrington                |
| North West                 | Wigan                   | Leigh (Wigan)             |
| North West                 | Bolton                  | Farnworth                 |
| North West                 | Pendle                  | Nelson (Pendle)           |
| North West                 | Knowsley                | Kirkby                    |
| North West                 | Burnley                 | Burnley                   |
| South East                 | Hastings                | Hastings                  |
| South East                 | Rother                  | Bexhill-on-Sea            |
| South East                 | Isle of Wight           | Ryde                      |
| South West                 | Torbay                  | Torquay                   |
| West Midlands              | Sandwell                | Smethwick                 |
| West Midlands              | Walsall                 | Darlaston                 |
| West Midlands              | Wolverhampton           | Bilston (Wolverhampton)   |
| West Midlands              | Dudley                  | Dudley (Dudley)           |
| Yorkshire and The Humber   | North East Lincolnshire | Grimsby                   |
| Yorkshire and The Humber   | Wakefield               | Castleford                |
| Yorkshire and The Humber   | Doncaster               | Doncaster                 |
| Yorkshire and The Humber   | Rotherham               | Rotherham                 |
| Yorkshire and The Humber   | Barnsley                | Barnsley                  |
| Yorkshire and The Humber   | North Lincolnshire      | Scunthorpe                |
| Yorkshire and The Humber   | Bradford                | Keighley                  |
| Yorkshire and The Humber   | Kirklees                | Dewsbury                  |
| Yorkshire and The Humber   | Scarborough             | Scarborough               |
| West Wales and The Valleys | Merthyr Tydfil          | Merthyr Tydfil            |
| West Wales and The Valleys | Torfaen                 | Cwmbrân                   |
| East Wales                 | Wrexham                 | Wrexham                   |
| East Wales                 | Vale of Glamorgan       | Barry (Vale of Glamorgan) |
| West Central Scotland      | Inverclyde              | Greenock                  |
| Southern Scotland          | North Ayrshire          | Irvine                    |
| Southern Scotland          | East Ayrshire           | Kilmarnock                |
| West Central Scotland      | North Lanarkshire       | Coatbridge                |
| West Central Scotland      | West Dunbartonshire     | Clydebank                 |
| Southern Scotland          | Dumfries and Galloway   | Dumfries                  |
| Highlands & Islands        | Moray                   | Elgin                     |

In England the local authority named above will be the accountable body for funding and will be responsible for ensuring good use of public funds via existing Section 151 officer duties, according to the priorities set out by the Town Board in each town's Long-Term Plan. In Scotland and Wales we are minded to use the Financial Assistance power under Section 50 of the UKIM Act to fund towns directly while working with the Scottish and Welsh Governments to determine the most appropriate delivery structures.

In these 55 places, the UK Government will provide capacity funding in 2024/25 for local stakeholder working with relevant local authorities to establish a new Town Board, or to expand and adapt an existing Town Board. The capacity funding will support the ongoing running of the board and the development of their town's Long-Term Plan, including community engagement activities. This funding forms part of the overall funding package each town's Long-Term Plan is able to receive. This capacity funding will be accompanied by central engagement support in its delivery.

Capacity funding will be available from Spring 2024. We would encourage local authorities to start bringing together partners who will form part of their Town Boards in advance of this, and to begin to set out a vision, formulate investment priorities and engage with local communities.

Where an existing Town Deal Board already exists, we will work with towns to expand and adapt the board to ensure it is prepared to develop a Long-Term Plan for their town.

Once Board structures are in place, capacity funding will be made available from Spring 2024 for Boards to build on their vision and priorities to write their Town Plan. Each town's Long-Term Plan should be produced no later than Summer 2024. We will expect these Long-Term Plans to include:

- A clear articulation, evidenced by local engagement, of the priorities of town residents;
- A plan for how the £20 million endowment-style funding and support will be deployed in line with investment themes to support these priorities;
- How local authorities, community groups and businesses are using their existing assets and resources to support these priorities;
- How the Town Board intends to attract additional private and philanthropic investment to support these priorities; and
- How members of the Town Board are using their existing powers and flexibilities – including but not limited to those in the Toolkit – to support these priorities.

From Summer 2024, we will provide the first year of funding to support the interventions set out in the Long-Term Plan. This will be subject to assessment of the Plan by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). We will work with selected towns to discuss the details of this assessment and full expectations of Long-Term Plans. The allocation of funding will be non-competitive, and we expect to work collaboratively with places through the Towns Taskforce and existing local relationships to develop Plans.

Further details on next steps will follow in engagement with selected towns. Expected timelines are outlined below:

- By April 2024 – local authorities to bring local partners together to form Town Boards, or expand existing Town Deal Boards where these exist, and start the process of setting out a long-term vision based on local priorities.
- Spring 2024 – Once a Town Board has been set up, capacity funding will be released to support the development of investment plans, including additional community engagement activities. Ongoing engagement will be available from the Towns Taskforce.
- From Summer 2024 – Submission of Long-Term Plans and release of year one funding.

We will be in touch with the local authorities in these 55 towns to provide further guidance and discuss next steps.