



**Report**

**Our Town Dewsbury consultation  
Supporting Dewsbury's Town  
Investment Plan**

11 December 2020

## Our Town Dewsbury consultation – Stakeholder engagement activities report December 2020

Dewsbury has been chosen as one of 101 towns to receive funding of up to £25million through the Towns Fund, which aims to transform the economic growth prospect of towns with a focus on improved transport, broadband connectivity, skills and higher value jobs.

The purpose of this plan is to establish a stakeholder engagement strategy to communicate with key stakeholders across Dewsbury communities to determine how they can be involved in the development of the Town Improvement Plan.

This plan was prepared to inform the consultation activities that took place between November and December 2020.

Following a stakeholder mapping exercise, the following groups were identified a priority and with a strong interest in the town. Our approach to engaging with these groups is also outlined.

Stakeholder group	Role/Interest	Actions
Voluntary/Third sector	Active members of the community with detailed knowledge of specialist areas	Carried out online focus group discussion, phone interviews and direct email contact to encourage interested parties to take part in our online survey
Training providers/education	Key to developing skills for jobs market. Wish to see young people's needs reflected in plans	Direct email contact to encourage interested parties to take part in our online survey with offer of follow up online and/or telephone discussions.
Health	Making sure interventions feed into public health priorities	Direct email contact to encourage interested parties to take part in our online survey
Young people	Over 30 per cent of Dewsbury is made up of people under the age of 24. They have a keen interest in their town centre	Three online focus groups carried out with schools and colleges
Local MPs/politicians	They have strong local knowledge and would be keen to see that local priorities are addressed through the funding	Direct email contact to all local politicians. Some councillors actively promoted the consultation. An interview was conducted with the town's MP, Mark Eastwood.

Local business	Key stakeholders driving the local economy who will have a strong interest in the outcome of the consultation, as it could be critical to their livelihoods	Direct email contact to local businesses and telephone interviews with local business consultants and Dewsbury Chamber of Trade
Leisure/culture	Key stakeholders in both areas and arts and culture is a Towns Fund intervention theme	Two online focus groups carried out with leisure groups and a local culture group of young people
Housing & local community groups	As housing providers, they have strong local knowledge and an understanding of community needs, which they will be keen to see reflected in the TIP	Direct email contact to encourage interested parties to take part in our online survey. Also, phone interviews with local housing providers.
Regional & sub-regional stakeholders	Strong strategic interest in how funding can support wider regional plans to develop the economy.	Direct email contact to encourage key regional stakeholders to take part in our online survey.
Faith groups	Very established part of the community and provide a lot of emotional and social support to the town.	Several telephone interviews carried out with local faith leaders

## Engagement principles and methodology

All stakeholders were asked for their ideas and given the opportunity to set a vision for Dewsbury and share views on project ideas that are well developed. The aim was to ensure plans are made with the communities they affect, to ensure they are genuine partnership arrangements and have the greatest chance of success.

In normal circumstances, consultation activities would have taken place in the form of public meetings, street stalls etc. Under Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, however, this has not been possible, and we have had to pivot our consultation approach to a digital and telephone-based approach. We are confident this approach has not reduced our ability to engage with hard to reach groups and, as a result of working with Dewsbury networks, we have been able to target a comprehensive cross section of the community and ensure the voices of key stakeholders have been strongly represented.

A 2-sided A5 leaflet was sent to over 23,000 households across the geographical area covering the Dewsbury Towns Fund (leaflet in Appendix 3). These were hand delivered from the first week of the consultation and included information about the Towns Fund, the website and included a freepost address for written responses. The leaflet included translation to Urdu and Punjabi, which was designed to increase participation amongst communities in Dewsbury which may not have English as a first or most confident language.

We prepared two press releases (see appendix 1 and 2) that were distributed to local media outlets by Kirklees Council. The press releases explained the opportunities presented to Dewsbury by the Towns Fund and urged local people to have their say and shape the Town Improvement Plan that the Council would be submitting to Government. The first press release was issued at the start of the consultation and the second, a 'last chance to have your say' release was issued on the final week. This was accompanied by a social media strategy that encouraged influencers to share this content and drive people towards our online survey (examples of coverage on social media in appendix 4).

## Online survey

Our online survey was run over a period of four weeks and widely publicised through local media, key stakeholder networks, the Council's website and social media channels. We received 502 responses and a breakdown of findings can be seen below.

### Participant Analysis

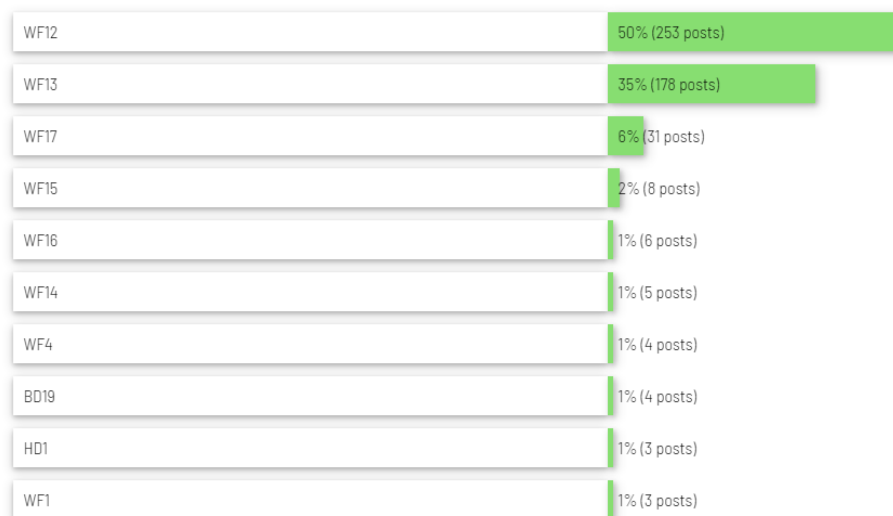
The 'Our Town Dewsbury' survey received a total 502 responses. As demonstrated in the graphs below, the bulk of these were sourced from across Dewsbury, with 80% of responses coming from across the three town wards. Participant responses were fairly even across Dewsbury town which indicates residents from different areas in Dewsbury engaged with the consultation.

The breadth of participation is further evident, with the representation of ten postcodes, and the bulk of responses coming from Dewsbury town postcodes. However, the surveys wide representation reaches beyond the town area, successfully reaching other nearby towns and communities.

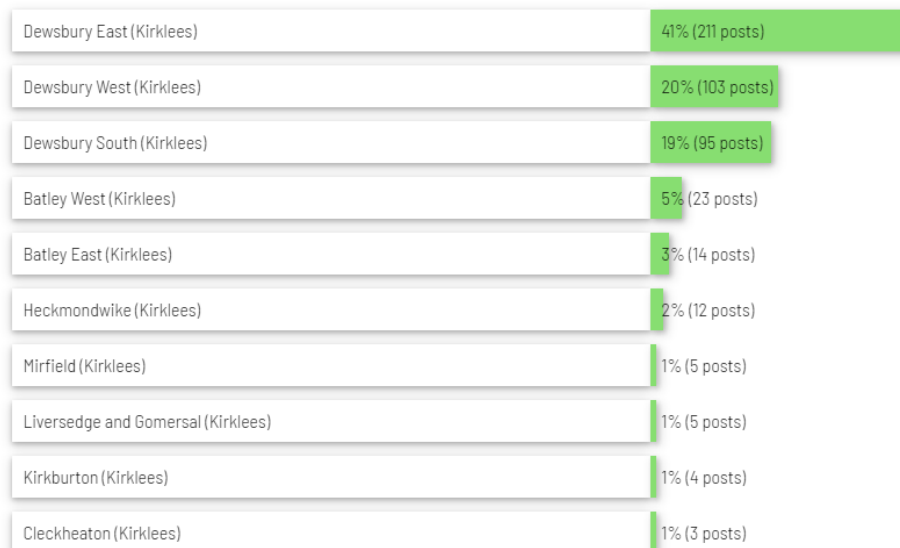
A significant majority of people accessed the consultation website via Facebook, with a strong number also visiting directly from Google. These statistics reinforce the successful stakeholder engagement which occurred via community social media groups.

The majority of responses were by residents but 13% of survey participants were business owners. This is in addition to the rich conversations which were had directly with businesses in this consultation.

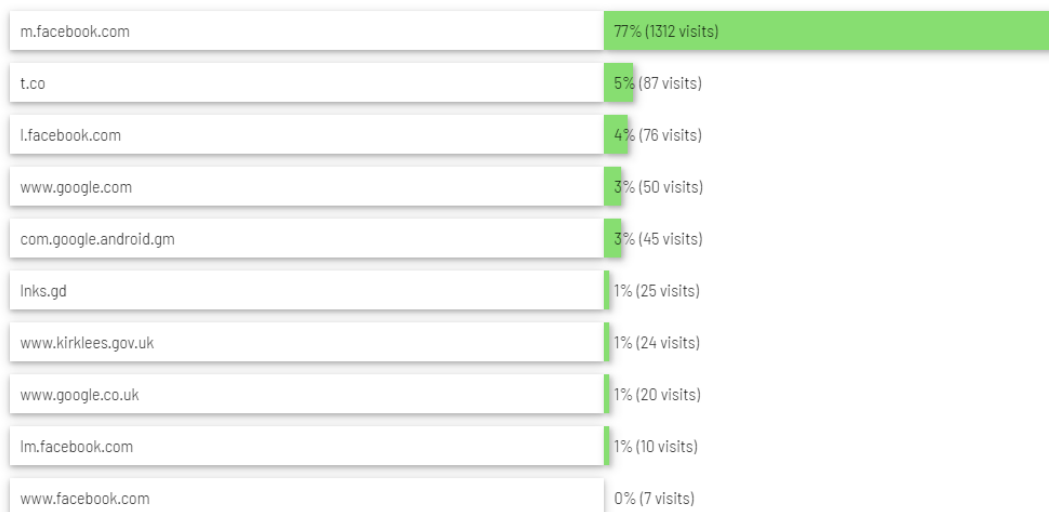
## Top Postcode Zones



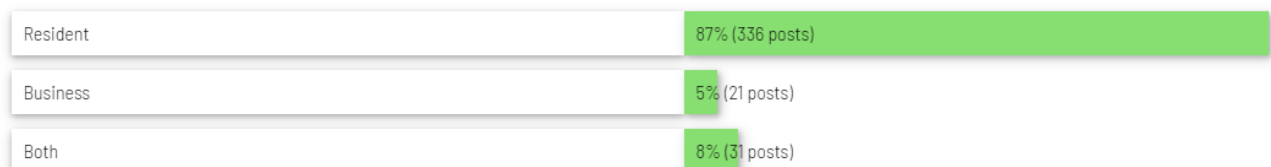
## Top ward or electoral division locations



## How the consultation was accessed



## Are you a resident, business or both?

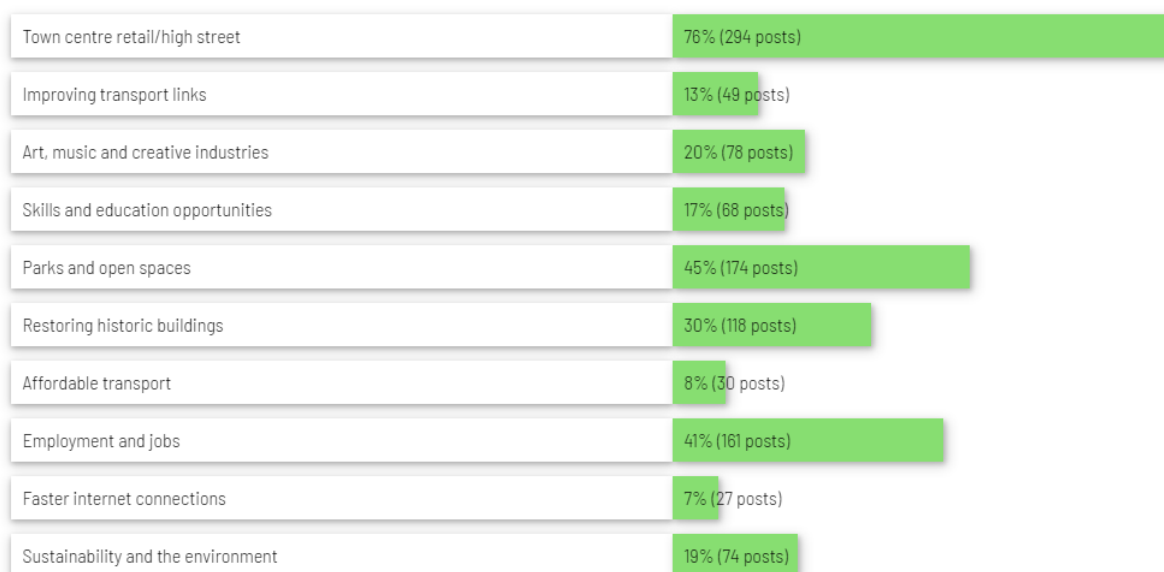


## Survey Responses

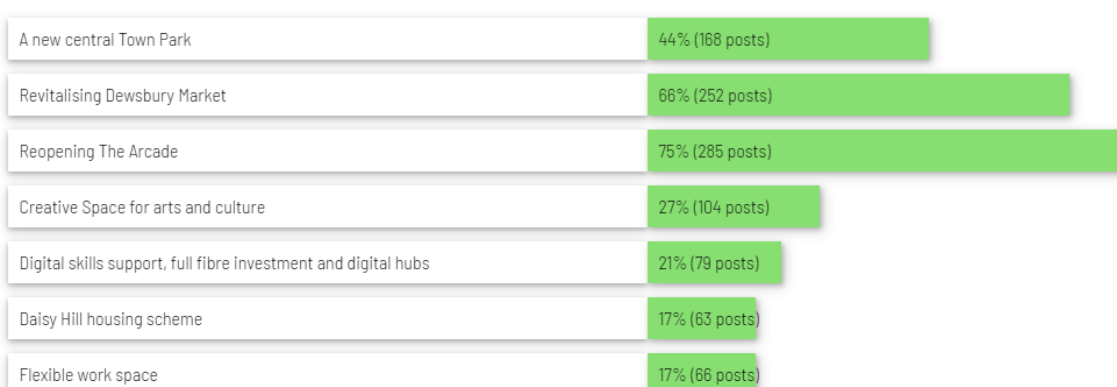
Participants overwhelmingly believe that the Town Fund should prioritise town centre retail and the high street (76%). Other clear priorities include parks and open spaces as well as employment and jobs. These key themes relate to the importance of improving the town centre offer in terms of retail for both job creation and increased offer for residents. The 45% of participants prioritising parks and open spaces reflects the wider survey and focus group feedback which mentioned the importance of safe green spaces in the town which have become all more important during the COVID context.

Question 2 is more specific about which projects participants believe should receive investment. The responses largely mirror the priorities raised in question 1, with The Arcade (75%), Dewsbury Market (66%) and a new Town Park (44%) being the clear top three. However, all of the options presented received support with between 63 and 104 votes cast in favour. It can therefore be reasonably suggested that each of the projects command a level of public support via this consultation, but clearly further engagement will be required with residents.

### 1) Which areas should the Dewsbury Towns Fund application prioritise? (select 3)



### 2) Which projects would you most like to see receive investment? (select 3)



### 3) Are there any other projects missing from this list that are needed to help Dewsbury's economy grow or any other comments you would like to make?

The third question was open ended and invited broader feedback. Contributors therefore raised a plethora of views, concerns and opportunities for Dewsbury. Below are the key areas which were raised with a series of key quotes.

#### Health + open space

*"The parks need some investment. Earlsheaton park for example has a lot of potential but the facilities are extremely poor- look at green head park or Clifton park which have a lot of facilities and generate income. Dewsbury park play area is also very poor .....grasshoppers at tong garden centre is another vivid example of outdoor play which is essential for the wellbeing of young children".*

*“The park [Crow’s Nest] is really well maintained and an asset to the area. It would be great to see the cafe, toilets and museum restored because without these facilities it is inaccessible to many residents and visitors”.*

A theme of the survey and interactive map responses is the importance of green space and local parks including Crow’s Nest, Overthorpe, Earsheaton and the Country Park.

These spaces are clearly valued, perhaps more-so during COVID times, and several suggestions included creating a community centre within the parks and making them more attractive to visitors with new toilets, cafes and other community facilities.

The wider theme of safety is borne out in the survey and interactive map responses. The new town park was welcomed with 44% of responders prioritising it, but they are keen that it is safe and not allowed to become a magnet for anti-social behaviour.

### **Community and belonging**

*“The main focus should be on helping people to upskill, find work and a feeling of community and belonging”.*

*“Ensuring that physical activity is prevalent in any of the planning of any areas for development. How we walk to work, how we use physical activity to connect to people, mental health, community integration and cohesion”.*

### **Crime and safety**

- 33 responses reference ‘safety’ and making Dewsbury a safer place to visit.

*“The town centre doesn't feel safe either by day or night”.*

*“I have a baby and would love to feel ok about taking him in to town”.*

*“My own family refuse to visit Dewsbury; preferring Batley & Morley where they feel safer”.*

*“There needs to be a holistic approach. Drug and crime issues need to be dealt with so that people feel safe to go into the town”.*

A major theme of the response is about overcoming the perception that Dewsbury town centre is unsafe and that crime is visible. Whilst the objectives and the scope of the Towns Fund cannot address all issues, addressing crime and increasing safety and its perception has come across strongly in this consultation.

The projects in the future Town Investment Plan (TIP) can act as a catalyst to increased safety and further investment, as is evident in this comment: More people going into Dewsbury and a safer environment would hopefully lead to better shops being encouraged to come back to the town centre. At the moment many residents visit nearby Ossett, Batley and Morley as they believe those towns are safer.

### **Heritage**



*“Concentrate on the history of Yorkshire and what Dewsbury can do to link into that to entice people back to the centre of Dewsbury. We need the right shops to bring in the right clientele to the town to then spend money and help or economy”.*

*“It would also be good to make an industrial trail/signage around the town including all famous buildings (or the sites where they stood), e.g. the old theatres, music halls, old train stations, etc”.*

### **Opportunities for young people**

*“Space for young people to connect and be creative”.*

*“A safe space for young people would also be valuable within the area where they could seek support, showcase their talent...”*

### **Skills and technology**

*“The main focus should be on helping people to upskill, find work and a feeling of community and belonging”.*

*“Giving out cash for beatification and vanity project doesn't affect the actual issues in the town... Lack of job opportunities, Kirklees as a whole does not attract business. Especially technology, which is the future”.*

### **Leisure**

*“New leisure centre, ideally including some leisure water or other family attraction; major employment opportunity for u25's/ attractive for local residents”.*

### **Invest in Dewsbury's community – avoid becoming commuter town**

*“I feel there is a danger it could become a commuter hub of soulless flats for people who never venture into the town and move away after 6 months if the focus of this development is wrong. Creating job opportunities within the town and attractive areas to meet will support businesses to grow as well as heavy investment in infrastructure and office space. A lot of work is needed to bring the community together and feel pride in their town”.*

### **Improve public realm**

*“This should involve redeveloping public realm (the market, the arcade) and changing the expanse of hard surfaces to a greater mix of pocket parks and greenery (research indicates this has a hugely positive effect on wellbeing in town centres), plus allowing shops and cafes to expand into shared spaces to increase pavement interest and removing vehicles from the town centre to encourage more active transport. Creating a mix of housing, flexible workspace and high-speed internet infrastructure will also be vital to Dewsbury's future in my view”.*

### **Interactive map responses**

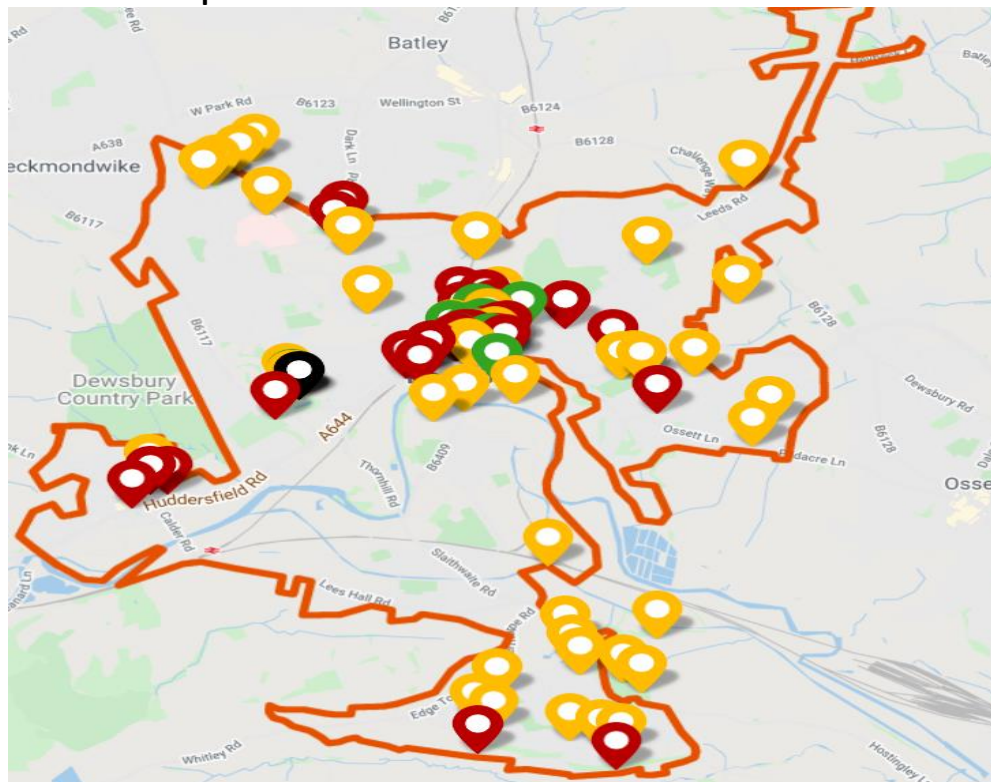
We received 98 contributions to the interactive map which included ideas, and something contributors either liked or disliked. The responses stretch across the consultation area with the majority focussing on the town centre. There were several suggestions including road

improvements and community policing matters which may not be possible to address via the scope of the Towns Fund, however these are all matters which will be fed back to Kirklees Council.

Key themes which emerged include the following:

- Importance of retaining and investing in Dewsbury's heritage and landmarks.
- Value of local parks with pins Crows Nest Park, Bywell Park, Leeds Road Playing Field, Overthorpe Park and more.
- Suggestions for potential projects including a new park such as increased safety measures and the potential of The Arcade being brought back into use.

### Interactive map



### Is this something you like, dislike or an idea?



### #MyTown website responses

A further 41 suggestions for Dewsbury were submitted via the Government's #MyTown website and a cross section of views are summarised below.

- “More local activities to engage youth (music events with local bands, art, new skills etc.), youth groups for socialising and education (health, wellbeing, gardening, sports activities). Activities for families with young children to get them in the town centre e.g. child friendly café’s with activities (Lego clubs, story days, sing-a-longs) as will alleviate those who cannot afford childcare.
- “Invest in unique ways to bring a more metropolitan nightlife back into the centre; independent bars, craft pubs etc. Revamp the current market place into a food and independent market as with Hull Markets, Barnsley Markets, Halifax Piece Hall, Sheffield’s Cutlery Works, Leeds Trinity Kitchen. Ensure that the town centre has a diverse range of independent businesses that offer different products so don’t compete against each other. Host regular meetings with business owners to discuss issues and work together collaboratively.”
- “I remember as a child when Dewsbury was the hub of the community. The market was incredible. A destination for people to come. My mum has told me many times that people used to come on coach trips to visit the market. There’s so much we could do in this area to encourage artisan foods, crafts, street artists to come along – let’s make Dewsbury a destination. A weekly farmers market perhaps. There’s so much history in our town – perhaps free walking tours. Bring some greenery back – make long causeway a place to want to be. A safe and welcoming environment for families.”
- “More modern benches and walk ways in the main town and more active facilities such as five a side pitches/ basketball/football etc.”
- “Prosecute companies/businesses offloading their rubbish into the river. Take more steps to avoid fly tipping. Find the source of the disgusting smell around the Sainsbury’s retail park area, sort it out! More police in town centre – hopefully this will deter the drug dealers/users.
- “I would love to see improved sporting facilities and park space for Dewsbury. Investment in open space such as Crow Nest Park, to help bring the community together and hold events. Sporting facilities are very limited, and often over-subscribed. This is clearly demonstrating the need for more in Dewsbury.”
- “Youth clubs with free activities for children and young people in the area.”
- “We have to stop being a commuter town that provides employment to Leeds and Sheffield. Dewsbury should create the environment for small scale (thus not multi-national companies) high value manufacturing. This will have a cascading impact on demand for other services and suppliers.”
- “There are far too many homeless people, drunks and drug abusers in Dewsbury town centre, which makes it appear to be an unsafe place. There have been incidents where a Royal Mail member of staff got stabbed in the hand with a used needle that had been discarded in a post box. Investments need to be made to tackle these issues properly.”
- “Fill the empty shops with anything. People would like to see them with at least something in than nothing.”
- With Dewsbury being in such a pivotal place for a commuter town, the town centre has been woefully neglected, with beautiful architecture left vacant through a lack of investment and support for businesses in the local area. Incentives and encouragement for businesses to reopen in Dewsbury is critically needed, as without

business presence, visual improvement will simply not be enough for sustainable growth.”

- “Regenerate the old market place (move the market back there), reopen the arcade and have reduced rates for all shops for the first year.
- Two community police officers in the town centre dealing with anti-social behaviour and pickpockets.
- A drug and alcohol worker/ homeless worker attached to the town centre to signpost rough sleepers and those with addictions.
- Theme days in the town centre with family activities and music.”

## Focus group/telephone interview feedback

To gather a richer understanding of people’s views on where funding should be prioritised and to ensure they are heard and invested in the success of projects, we gave key stakeholders further opportunities to have their say. This was in the form of online focus groups where groups of up to 10 people took part in discussions around local needs and also individual telephone interviews. The results are as follows.

### 1. Businesses

Businesses were approached through Dewsbury Chamber of Trade and other networks. Interviews were conducted with several business figures within the town and their feedback is below.

*“As an independent business adviser, I see opportunities to grow businesses in Dewsbury are limited because there isn’t the space. People are moving to Wakefield and other places where there are bigger units between 5-20,000 ft.”*

*“There is a real concern that this investment will not achieve the maximum return until safety in the town centre is addressed. The perception that it is unsafe to go into Dewsbury is very real and until people feel it is safer, ambitious capital projects will fail to get the backing they deserve.”*

*“Dewsbury suffers from an acute skills shortage. There is an oversupply of low paid, low skilled jobs and these positions can’t be filled. There are always vacancies. There’s a lot of informal economy work, a strong gig economy. We need a focus on helping create better paid jobs. Many women want to set up businesses and need support. We could do with an incubator to help create more high value jobs.”*

*“There is a healthy entrepreneurial spirit here, but it needs support. We need mentors to guide people with good ideas and business angels who are willing to take risks.”*

*“The branding of Dewsbury is not good. It needs to be more attractive to bring in inward investment – and it needs a safer environment. Civic pride is far too low. We’ve become synonymous with terrorism and kidnappings and we desperately need to change the narrative.”*

## 2. Young people

With over 30 per cent of Dewsbury's population being under 24, there is a strong view among young people that there is nothing for them in the town centre. This view was a common theme in several focus group discussions, where it quickly became apparent that unless the town offers more for young people, Dewsbury will lose a generation of people to neighbouring areas and other parts of the country.

We carried out three online focus groups with over 20 pupils at Kirklees College, Thornhill Community Academy and Westborough High School - and a cross section of their views are summarised below.

### **Kirklees college (age 17-21)**

*"There are too many empty buildings in Dewsbury. Can't we turn them into houses? Or places for people to work? I also think we need to give the town centre a clean-up. There are not enough bins and it feels scruffy."*

*"I would like to move away from Dewsbury as there's not much to offer here. The town centre has too many run down places and it doesn't feel welcoming."*

*"There needs to be more spots to hang out. There's no real place for young people. My parents have lived here all their lives and they say it's changed for the worse. Dewsbury used to be a lot more vibrant when they were younger. There's a massive arts centre in Bradford and lots of nice shops. But we don't have that here."*

*"When we go to the town centre we sit outside Greggs on the tables. There is nowhere else for us to go. It's much better in Leeds or Bradford. I'd like to go into Dewsbury more, but there's nothing there for us."*

*"Money should be spent on making Dewsbury a fun place to be. Culture would help – and it needs to be cleaner. A better shopping offer would help too. Daisy Hill sounds a good scheme. Watching our town go downhill has been painful. What will it be like in a few years' time?"*

*"Me and my sister used to sleep at my grandma's and she owns a pub in Dewsbury. We would walk through the streets and there would be drug needles on the floor and quite a few homeless people. There is too much crime here and it's intimidating."*

*"I fear crime will get worse because everything is closing. Huddersfield has a lot of knife crime and I'm worried that Dewsbury could be next. There are too many people taking drugs and it doesn't look like anyone is doing anything about it. I wouldn't bring my little sister here."*

The safeguarding lead for the college also added that they had concerns around the growth of county lines drugs gangs. In the last six months, they have seen evidence of a county lines gang in Dewsbury.

### **Thornhill Community Academy (age 15-16)**

*“I find the town centre quite intimidating and scary at times. When my mum and dad were my age they said it was really popular. Now it’s full of empty shops. It’s very upsetting to see what’s happened. It was a good place for my mum and dad – but not for me. I prefer to go to Wakefield or Leeds.”*

*“I plan to go to Leeds after I’ve finished school to study A levels. There are loads of really good facilities there and not a lot to keep me here. There are not many youth clubs or things for young people to do – and it can be quite dirty. I don’t feel comfortable walking single alleyways. It’s not safe.”*

*“There should be more things for young people here. I look at the big Mecca Bingo in Dewsbury and think this is good for older people. But what is there for younger people?”*

*“I’d like to see a skatepark or indoor football pitch near to me. Or just somewhere good to meet friends and get some food.”*

*The designated safeguarding lead, who helped organise this session, also added: “I used to work at Dewsbury market and it was much more vibrant in the 1990s. It used to be rammed on Saturdays. There are some beautiful buildings here but it needs a hub. With some care and attention – and a vision – Dewsbury could be a great place for young people to get on the housing ladder.”*

#### **Westborough High School (age 13-14)**

*“I don’t really go to Dewsbury town centre. It needs more shops and places to meet. I go with mum to the White Rose instead.”*

*“I like the market but I go to restaurants with my family in Leeds. I’d love to see a skatepark here.”*

*“I’d like somewhere closer where I can access a cinema. It’s too far from me and costs £15 to get there. There are not many places where I can go and meet friends in Dewsbury.”*

*“This is a good opportunity for Dewsbury. I’d like to see the money spent on a better leisure centre, an ice cream bar, an indoor space for young people, a football pitch, a theatre and more sports opportunities. There is no indoor space where we can play games. If we had this I would go into Dewsbury all the time. At the moment I tend to stay in and go on the Playstation.”*

*“I don’t feel safe in Dewsbury when it’s dark. Someone might mug me. I wouldn’t want to be on my own.”*

*“My parents said Dewsbury used to be better when they were young. They don’t really want me to go into town with my friends because they don’t think it’s safe.”*

*“It would be great if there was an indoor space for young people. Just somewhere we can hang out and socialise with friends. It would be amazing.”*

### 3. Voluntary sector

We wrote to a comprehensive cross section of community and voluntary sector groups inviting them to take part in our online survey and/or share their views by telephone or through an online focus group.

Telephone interviews and online sessions took place with a number of groups including Community Plus, Kumon Y'all, The Dewsbury Partnership and other community initiatives. The feedback below is a summary of these discussions.

*“There is a good sense of community in Dewsbury, but it’s fractured and very siloed. People don’t tend to reach out beyond their community. It’s quite insular and when communities don’t mix then they become distrustful of each other. We need better facilities and community provision to help people mix.”*

*“When I started work there was a lot of tension in the town centre with people gathering and drinking. Some improvements have been made – but we need better places where people can meet. It can be an intimidating environment. Walking under the underpass to the car park when it’s dark is not a nice experience.”*

*“There are too many pound shops, vape shops etc. It’s not an aspirational offer and it’s not something you would take pride in. There are some great buildings but this needs to be matched by a better offer. When we do events at the town hall, people just come and then go home. There’s nowhere to go before or after. There’s nowhere to have a nice meal or a drink in a quality bar.”*

*“We’ve seen a lot more loneliness of late. Covid-19 has left so many people badly isolated. People are now declining befriending services where someone telephones them. They want to meet someone face to face. They want that human contact.”*

*“The ring road in the 1980s was a death knell for the town. It cuts us off.”*

*“There is a lot of racism on Facebook groups. We have to address this and build stronger community spirit and understanding. There is a lot going for Dewsbury – it has brilliant links to the countryside, but we have an image problem.”*

*“When I speak to young people about the town they think it’s dead. It is practically on life support.”*

*“I don’t think the town centre reflects the whole of Dewsbury. The market has become too Asian focused and people in the white community have told me they go elsewhere now. The challenge is to make the town serve all communities and provide something for all different groups. It has an increasingly narrow offer.”*

*“Racism is still bad and whatever interventions come from the Towns Fund, they must be driven by not only supporting economic growth but also building better community relations. There is a big gulf between Savile Town and Thornhill and they look at each other with*

*suspicion and distrust. There are good people here and the challenge is to bring them together.”*

#### **4. Housing**

Key housing organisations were targeted by email and encouraged to share their views and preferences through our online survey. The opportunity to take part in a telephone/online interview was also offered and the following reflects a discussion with Martyn Broadest from Connect Housing.

*“Kirklees is characterised by a large number of households that can’t access good quality housing at affordable rates – and we support the Council’s aim to create town centre housing in Dewsbury.*

*“The town centre needs more footfall and it needs people with disposable income. But we need to build a strong sense of community to drive demand for people to live there. We also need a safe environment and we need to accentuate the positive features of the town so people feel safe. It could be something as simple as events, activities and pop up markets. We need the space occupied with positive things to inject confidence into the town.*

*“We need to give the place a pull factor. Pocket parks, green spaces and tree lined roads can also contribute to that positive psychology and sense of wellbeing. It can make a huge difference. We need to give people a reason to be there. That’s how we can create a good community where people want to live.”*

#### **5. Culture/arts**

Creative Scene, an organisation that supports communities to take part in, make and experience arts and culture, helped set up a focus group with young people (late teens/early 20s) to discuss their views on Dewsbury. A summary of the discussion is below.

*“The town centre does not reflect the people of Dewsbury in that a lot of people don’t use it. People my age don’t think there is anything there for them. There are very few restaurants and bars – and I’d like to see more events.”*

*“I’d love to see a community garden. I really like Birstall in Bloom. It would also be good if we had more places to relax, better public realm, pop up events and an artistic hub.”*

*“That’s a good idea. Events bring people from all communities together and we need that. Also, a creative or cultural hub for young people would not only create a buzz. It would give young people more confidence to do their own thing. People from Dewsbury are proud but they don’t have enough opportunities to express that.”*

*“When I go into Dewsbury now, there are too many charity shops, take aways and empty buildings. It’s feels very low on confidence. A creative space would at least give it a bit of energy and drive. There’s nothing to do for young people. No youth groups, no youth facilities*



*and no music places. Young people can be a catalyst for creativity – yet we’re treated as an afterthought.”*

*“We could also do with a skatepark, football facilities and basketball court.”*

*“I plan to leave Dewsbury as soon as I can. I don’t feel safe here. Opportunities for graduates are pretty scarce too. If you find a half decent job there are hundreds of people going for it.”*

*“There is not much opportunity here to grow yourself if you’re interested in the arts or music. There’s no music venue for young bands to play, for example. It’s different in Huddersfield, though. They’ve got a much better music scene.”*

*“If Dewsbury was more focused on young people I think a lot of young people who’ve left would come back. It just needs one creative hub to start a scene. Give young people some control. Trust them and you’d start to see confidence flooding back.”*

*“We need to encourage more creatives in the area. They’re an important part of any diverse community.”*

## **6. Faith groups**

All faith groups were targeted by email and encouraged to participate in our online survey. We also reached out to try and secure further engagement through online and telephone discussion. Several interviews were set up with the Indian Muslim Welfare Society, Dewsbury team parish and Dewsbury Evangelical Church, and the feedback below summarises these discussions.

*“There is no great identity to Dewsbury and the regeneration question we should be posing is what is it that holds people together?”*

*“A lot of industry has gone and lots of shops in the town centre have gone. The market is historic but it can be a bit quiet nowadays. My worry is that links between the white working class community and the South Asian community are not strong. Cohesion needs to be improved because there is separatism.”*

*“Some people coming from Easter Europe to work here are learning Urdu faster than English because that’s what’s spoken in the factories.”*

*“I live two miles from the town centre and the church is on the edge. But I’ve not been into town this year. It doesn’t have lots to offer. I would like to see some of the empty buildings used as co-working space. I am currently letting someone work in our church because they can’t go into the office and don’t have a suitable set-up at home. I’m sure there’s a need for it.”*

*“There is community spirit here – but it exists in pockets. We have to make sure it’s spread across the whole town.”*

*“We have to think more about how the roads work too. The ring road is almost a psychological barrier that encourages people to go around rather than into Dewsbury.”*

*“This investment is a big opportunity and we have to use it to shake off the social stigma that holds Dewsbury back. We need people to look at us afresh. We’re known for all the wrong reasons. People associate us with the UK’s youngest suicide bomber, the kidnapping of Shannon Matthews and the Yorkshire Ripper being tried here. David Cameron once called us an example of broken Britain too. It’s time we’re associated with something positive.”*

*“The social fabric is very frayed but we are still in a very good location and have a lot going for us. We’re close to all the major motorways yet we still don’t have a hotel.”*

*“The church is very involved in the community and we can see there is a lot of need. People are struggling at the moment and we have a bout 30 regulars coming to church every day now that need a hot drink and a sandwich.”*

*“I would prioritise investment in sports playing fields because this can have a massive impact on young people’s welfare. On our side of Dewsbury there is not one playing field that people can access in the summer months for activities. There is little provision for Muslim children to play football and this needs to be improved. Because Muslim children attend the mosque they can’t always go to football training sessions in the week – and then they miss out on games at the weekend because they’re not picked. There needs to be wider sports provision to support all communities.”*

## **7. Active living/public health**

All public health stakeholders were targeted by email but in the course of our discussions it became apparent that lockdown had triggered a big interest in sports, particularly cycling. Through voluntary sector conversations, several people signposted us to groups involved in promoting physical activity and making Dewsbury’s country park a place where people could exercise freely.

We spoke with a park ranger, Dewsbury based mountain bike group and local community worker who all wished to share their views on how Dewsbury should be a cycling exemplar. Their feedback is summarised below.

*“Dewsbury has high levels of child obesity and other health problems associated with a lack of physical activity. We have amazing links to the countryside and great bike trails. All we need is a cycling hub to inspire a new generation to get on a bike. Leeds has an urban bike park and I don’t see why Dewsbury shouldn’t have one too.”*

*“The greenway here is incredible. You can literally walk to Bradford. It’s a great asset that we should be looking to build on. Lots of people are interested in biking now. It’s a good habit picked up in lockdown that needs encouraging.”*

*“I’m a park ranger and I’ve seen how the country park became incredibly valuable during lockdown. It’s a real hub for different cultures and a place where everyone can come to*

*exercise, walk, bird watch, picnic or simply get some fresh air. Lots of people use it to go to work. Many don't have gardens either so it's a godsend. The importance of green space has really been highlighted this year.*

*"We've only got basic pathways, however, and haven't even got interpretation boards. We could really do with a visitor centre*

*"A centre could be used to run events, walks, talks, educational events and rent bikes so people can get on the greenway and enjoy themselves. We need to get people active and this is a great opportunity. There's a massive interest among people in Dewsbury for cycling at the moment and there's nowhere where you can go and rent a bike.*

*"We've seen all sorts of people asking about cycling. People of different faiths, all communities. It's something that could unite people."*

*"I'm chair of Rise Kirklees and we've been looking at developing some tracks at Dewsbury Country Park. If we could develop a bike hub – with café, toilets, bike hire etc. – it would really engage people.*

*"We've had a consultation with the public and are looking to build some trails. With some solid infrastructure in place we could really get lots of people involved in active travel. We could even have a bike library where bikes are donated and fixed up so people can buy a cheap second hand bike to ride.*

*"There are lots of people here who would like to ride a bike but they don't have the skills. They need facilities. There is not much across Dewsbury where young people have somewhere to go. Play parks only work for up to seven year olds. After that there's nowhere for older teenagers to go. They get bored.*

*"Once you get out into nature riding a mountain bike can be really exhilarating. It's great for mental health and wellbeing – and there's an enormous sense of freedom. We have miles and miles of countryside here that we should be looking to capitalise on."*

## **8. Leisure/transport**

We targeted a number of key stakeholders in the leisure sector and carried out a focus group with people from Kirklees Active Leisure. We also spoke to the Sustrans Partnership Manager for Yorkshire and Humber about active travel in Dewsbury. The feedback below summarises these conversations.

*"We're a local charitable trust with 13 sites across Kirklees and we have a lot of untapped potential in Dewsbury. We have the most outdated leisure centre across Kirklees and it really needs investment. Access for children and parents to our centre isn't great and we could get a lot more people visiting with the right facilities.*

*"A family attraction splash park with other activities like soft play laser tag could really push demand – because there isn't a good family attraction offer in Dewsbury.*

*“There is an area of land to the south, which covers the dry side of the sports centre, that the council are looking at with potential for redevelopment – and we think leisure could be a really exciting part of investment plans. Our sports centre does not currently inspire people to come into Dewsbury like the Active Leisure Huddersfield centre does, for example. But leisure water parks can really attract a wider audience that brings more spending into town and has a big impact on the area.*”

*“We are the largest employer of under 25’s in the whole Kirklees District and have a key role to play in supporting young people. Also, having a string leisure activity is not only key to promoting fitness and wellbeing, but is essential to attracting major employers to the area.”*

*“I’m the Sustrans partnership manager for Yorkshire and Humber, and we feel that there’s a real chance to make Dewsbury a jewel in the crown for Kirklees where active travel is concerned. There are already some fantastic greenways there, but they’re not connected. We need to make these green corridors more joined up and accessible. It’s also about making Dewsbury a safer place to walk.*”

*“There are lots of opportunities – for example, the green corridor that exists where the Spenn Valley Greenway starts has the potential to deliver high quality off road routes along the river that lead into the town centre and other key destinations.*”

*“Cycling has been overlooked in Dewsbury and there is so much potential there.”*

## **9. Dewsbury’s MP**

An online interview was conducted with Mark Eastwood MP and his feedback is summarised below.

*“Our town’s heritage is important and we must preserve it. There are some fantastic buildings and great architecture. But we do need to modernise the town centre and get rid of some of the 1970s style buildings.*”

*“The feedback I’ve heard on the need to bring different communities together is something we have to address. I would encourage investment in an interfaith project opposite Pioneer House in the town centre. They are doing some impressive work and are offering burial services, prayer rooms and a library and community centre. It would make a big difference to the town. There is also scope for a community hub on the hill separating Thornhill and Savile Town. These spaces are important.*”

*“We also need to make the gateway to Dewsbury more attractive. It’s not welcoming and it doesn’t give a good first impression. There’s too much concrete around the market square and town hall and we need something to improve long causeway. Upgrading our digital connectivity would be good, but we also need some modern co-working space.”*

*“Town centre living is good and we have to accept that housing in the town is needed. This will help with footfall and building a community. But we need supporting infrastructure. There*

*are no restaurants at all. We need cafes and bars and more variety in the market. Our leisure centre is a bit tired too. It could do with investment.*

*“But as well as preserving our heritage, we should be protecting our key industries like furniture and bedding. We are the third largest manufacturing base in the UK for office furniture, but there is a skills shortage that we need to address. I’d suggest investment in a specialist skills training centre for bedding and furniture.”*

## **10. Other interested parties**

We looked to engage with people who are looking to invest in Dewsbury and spoke to the Senior Strategic Land Manager for the Church Commissioners. This body is responsible for managing the investment assets of the Church of England. The conversation is summarised below.

*“We are investing in a development with 1,500 houses and huge business park in the north side of Dewsbury.*

*“I’m from Huddersfield and know Dewsbury well. It has some very beautiful buildings and its strength is in its proximity to Leeds. However, that is also a weakness as if investors are looking at this region they will most probably invest in Leeds. Dewsbury does not feel a welcoming place.*

*“It needs a vision to make it stand out and needs to find a distinctive identity of its own.”*

## **Conclusion**

The common theme among all participants of this consultation is an eagerness to improve Dewsbury. With the right interventions, this suggests there is ample scope to significantly shift low levels of civic pride and create a much stronger sense of belonging.

A key factor that cannot be ignored is the oft-repeated view that communities are fractured along religious and racial lines, isolation is increasing and too many people do not feel they have a stake in their town centre.

This suggests that while driving growth in Dewsbury is critical, economic recovery needs to be combined with a social recovery – and building community spirit is paramount.

With more time, and especially because of Covid-19 restraints, we would have liked to consult further and reach more people in key sectors. Recruitment and business are two areas where we would have liked to get a deeper understanding of the skills challenges holding Dewsbury back.

But a fundamental strength of this consultation is the healthy level of engagement achieved with young people. Their wish to have a greater stake in Dewsbury town centre shows an

eagerness to contribute to civic life more. If acted upon, this could deliver more vibrancy and ensure a sizeable section of the community uses the town centre more.

Similarly, the attachment shown to green space is something that not only mirrors national trends relating to the pandemic, but is also something that Dewsbury can capitalise on. As a great example of a place where all communities feel they have a stake and wish to use it for reasons ranging from walking and exercise to birdwatching and picnicking, there is a great opportunity to further strengthen community.

Finally, we received considerable feedback from people asking for Dewsbury's identity to be strengthened. This presents a considerable opportunity to build on the existing work in the Dewsbury Blueprint and use Towns Fund interventions to develop a better narrative around the town's future. With a stronger accompanying vision, this will help win hearts and minds, while ensuring projects have the greatest chance of success.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Press release announcing the consultation**

# Chance to have your say on how £25m should be spent on Dewsbury

Dewsbury Town Board wants residents, businesses, community and faith groups in Dewsbury to share ideas on how £25million of government funding should be spent to improve their area.

By Ian Hirst

Thursday, 5th November 2020, 12:36 pm  
Updated Thursday, 5th November 2020, 12:42 pm



Dewsbury town centre

The town is eligible for up to £25m funding for projects to deliver economic, cultural and social benefits to our town as part of the Government's Towns Fund.

Dewsbury Town Board includes representatives from local community and businesses, and is facilitated by Kirklees Council.

The aim of the board is to guide the delivery of projects funded through the Government's Town Board on behalf of local people.

ADVERTISING







<https://www.dewsburyreporter.co.uk/news/politics/chance-have-your-say-how-ps25m-should-be-spent-dewsbury-3026260>

<https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/dewsbury-could-set-25m-windfall-19220553>



## Most Popular

-  Dewsby men among group of 32 charged in connection historical child sexual exploitation
-  Passenger and vehicle abandoned after Batley police car chase
-  Cyclists form guard of honour for Upper Hopton community stalwart
-  Mirfield pub to stay shut says landlord

## Appendix 2

### Final week of consultation press release

# Last chance to have your say of £25m Dewsbury plan

Residents across Dewsbury have one week left to share ideas on their priorities for a potential £25million of Towns Fund government investment as part of the Our Town Dewsbury consultation.

By Ian Hirst

Thursday, 26th November 2020, 9:04 am

Updated Thursday, 26th November 2020, 10:37 am



People have until November 30 2020 to [complete an online survey](#) to set out their priorities for Dewsbury.




Hundreds of surveys and comments as part of the Our Town Dewsbury consultation have been submitted with priorities raised so far including access to skills, jobs and education opportunities, regenerating the high street and town centre, and art, music and creative industries.

Councillor Peter McBride, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Regeneration, said: "We have received a brilliant response to the Our Town Dewsbury consultation so far. With £25m of investment available, this is an opportunity to build on our blueprint ambitions and deliver major economic growth and regeneration in Dewsbury."

ADVERTISING



## Most Popular

-  Dewsbury men among group of 32 charged in connection historical child sexual exploitation
-  Passenger and vehicle abandoned after Batley police car chase
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-  Mirfield pub to stay shut says landlord

<https://www.dewsburyreporter.co.uk/news/politics/last-chance-have-your-say-ps25m-dewsbury-plan-3048113>

<https://kirklestogether.co.uk/2020/11/24/final-week-for-contributions-on-towns-fund-consultation-in-dewsbury/>

## Appendix 3

### A5 leaflet delivered to residents across Dewsbury





## Appendix 4

### Key pieces of social media coverage and discussion



**Chris J Lever** ► **Dewsbury & Batley News, Events & Information**

26 Nov · 🌐 · ...Towns Fund government investment as part of the Our Town Dewsbury consultation.

DEWSBURYREPORTER.CO.UK

**Last chance to have your say of £25m Dewsbury plan**



  11 32 comments • 4 shares



**Kirklees**

19 Nov · 🌐

We're looking for your thoughts on how the Towns Fund investment can transform Dewsbury! Visit our website to provide your views 🙌

<http://orlo.uk/PL0Ya>

**#OurTownDewsbury**

11 comments





## Councillor Aleks Lukic - Dewsbury East

Page · 1.9K like this · Politician

18 Nov · ⚙️ · ...help make sure the Government's promised Towns Fund has the greatest impact for Dewsbury. Can I urge everyone reading this to f...



10

32 comments · 10 shares



## Mark Eastwood MP

24 Nov · 🌐

Residents across Dewsbury have one week left to share ideas on their priorities for a potential £25million of Towns Fund government investment as part of the Our Town Dewsbury consultation.

The team have already has hundreds of surveys and comments as part of the Our Town Dewsbury consultation. Priorities raised so far include access to skills, jobs and education opportunities, regenerating the high street and town centre, and art, music and creative industries.

Local people have until 30 November 2020 to complete an online survey to set out their priorities for Dewsbury. The survey, along with more information about the Towns Fund, can be found at [www.ourtowndewsbury.co.uk](http://www.ourtowndewsbury.co.uk).