Royal Sutton Coldfield Plan for Neighbourhoods

Inaugural Meeting of the Royal Sutton Coldfield Neighbourhood Board

Minutes

Friday 28th March 2025
5pm – 6:30pm at the Trinity Centre, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1TF

Chair: Doug Wright MBE DL

Present:

Doug Wright MBE DL (DW)	Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP (AM)	Cllr Simon Ward
Cllr Richard Parkin	Nasir Awan MBE DL	Becky Stephens
Krishan Jaglan	Lynn Jennings	Nicola Gould
Lisa Martinali	Joy Scott-Thompson	Deepak Parekh
Claire Bridges	Josh Walsh	Paul Faulkner

In attendance:

Olive O'Sullivan (OOS)	Chief Executive Officer, Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council (RSCTC)
Steve Hollingworth	Head of Open Spaces and Environment, RSCTC
Jon Lord	Head of Regeneration and Sustainability, RSCTC
Mary Watkins	Head of Finance and Governance, RSCTC
Natalia Gorman	Project Manager, Events & Communications, RSCTC

1.	**Welcome & Introductions** Doug Wright introduced himself acknowledging the Town Council's trust in appointing him as Chair of the Plan for Neighbourhood Board and welcomed attendees. Board members introduced themselves and outlined the knowledge and experience they will bring to the Board. The Chair commended the diverse range of organisations represented and the commitment of those present to maximising the opportunity of the Plan for Neighbourhoods (PfN) funding for the Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield. In response to a question about communication, it was agreed that the Board should communicate as one voice, and that all communication should be channelled through the Chair and OOS. OOS advised that a dedicated PfN email address had been set up that would be used for future communications with Board members. **Action -** It was agreed a news release would be issued on 4 April by the Town Council, as the secretariat for the Board, and a message in Andrew Mitchell's weekly news to announce the inaugural meeting of the PfN Board. **Action -** It was also agreed that a communications strategy would be produced together with a FAQ booklet on the Fund.	 RSCTC AM RSCTC

2.	**Apologies** Apologies received from Cllr Ewan Mackey, Paul Sherrif - NHS, and the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner Wasim Ali.	
3.	**Chair to Nominate Vice Chair** The Chair nominated Cllr Simon Ward to be Vice Chair of the Royal Sutton Coldfield Plan for Neighbourhoods Board. **Decision** – Cllr Simon Ward appointed as Vice Chair of the PfN Board.	All
4.	**Background / Context** OOS summarised the background/history of the Plan for Neighbourhoods Funding. In September 2023 Government launched a £1.1 billion Long Term Plan for Towns Fund, where fifty-five towns were allocated a £20 million endowment-style fund to invest over a 10-year period in three key themes, Safety and Security, High Streets, Heritage and Regeneration and Transport and Connectivity. In March 2024, in the Spring Statement, the Chancellor confirmed an extension of the scheme with funding confirmed to extend the programme for an additional twenty towns to receive £20 million, including Royal Sutton Coldfield. In May 2024, the Town Council was confirmed as the accountable body for the Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Fund. In the Autumn Budget on 30 October 2024, Government confirmed that the Long Term Plan for Towns would be retained and reformed as part of a new regeneration programme and that all seventy-five towns that were originally selected would receive the package of up to £20 million funding and in December 2024, Alex Norris MP, Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government re-confirmed the Town Council as the accountable body for the Royal Sutton Coldfield Fund. On 4 March, the Deputy Prime Minister announced the renamed and revised Plan for Neighbourhoods, with three strategic objectives thriving places, stronger communities, taking back control, and a new Prospectus and guidance setting out details of the revised plan was published by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). It was noted that that Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council is the only Local Council, (i.e, town, or parish council) to be the accountable body for the funding. This places the Town Council in a unique position. AM informed the Board that when the Fund was announced in the House of Commons, he extended an invitation to Alex Norris to visit the Royal Town to show what has been achieved with the funding.	

5.	**Plan for Neighbourhoods Government Guidance** OOS summarised the Prospectus and guidance which sets out Government's policy approach to the Fund, which is that the PfN Programme will drive growth and provide a new blueprint for bringing communities together, with an emphasis on learning from the experience of successive governments over the past 60 years of programmes with similar aims. The Prospectus sets out that places in receipt of funding should establish a Neighbourhood Board and that the Board, working with the local authority (Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council) should develop a Regeneration Plan setting out its 10-year vision together with a detailed Investment Plan, for the first four years of the programme, under the three Government objectives for the PfN Fund. The Prospectus sets out that Neighbourhood Boards are required to confirm finalised membership of the Board and any proposals to alter the place boundary by 22 April 2025. Neighbourhoods Boards are required to submit their Regeneration Plan to MHCLG for assessment and approval by Winter 2025. This Plan will included investment priorities for the first four year of the programme and delivery funding will be released from April 2026.	
6.	**Funding Profile & Timeline** OOS reported that funding of up to £20m will be provided over a 10-year period. The funding will be split 75% capital and 25% revenue (see attached) with the first delivery funding available from April 2026. Capacity building funding of £250,000 was received in December with an additional £200,000 to be released in the new financial year. This funding can be used for the establishment and running of the Board, community engagement securing advice and expertise for the Board on technical elements of the development and delivery of the plan and for preparatory works to ensure capital and infrastructure works can commence as soon as the capital funds are released.	
7.	**Governance & Boundary Guidance** OOS reported that in line with the Guidance published by MHCLG the PfN Funding will be managed through a partnership between the Neighbourhood Board, the Town Council, and the local community. As the accountable body for the Funding the Town Council is responsible for ensuring that the Fund is distributed fairly and effectively, in line with The Seven Principles of Public Life (also known as the Nolan Principles) and the Managing Public Money principles. The Town Council is also responsible for compliance with legal responsibilities in relation to subsidy control, state aid and procurement. In terms of Programme Assurance, the first line of defence is provided by the Town Council, and this is the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer, who is also the Council's Responsible Finance Officer. As the Chief Financial Officer for the Fund they are also required to submit an annual Statement of Grant Usage and an	

	Assurance Letter to MHCLG, which will provide written confirmation that all the necessary checks to ensure proper administration of its financial affairs regarding the funding programme, particularly in respect to financial administration and transparency of governance. The second line of defence is the MHCLG who will undertake a range of checks, on a risk and sample basis and the third line of defence will be carried out by the MHCLG's independent auditors. OOS reported that in line with the Guidance the Town Council had consulted with Andrew Mitchell MP on the appointment of Doug Wright as Chair and that this had been approved at a meeting of the Town Council on 25 March 2025. In relation to the operation of the Board and having given consideration to an alternative organisation, such as a community groups, acting as secretariat to the Board, the Board agreed that the Town Council should undertake this role, given the requirements to ensure it followed the associated governance, transparency and publishing requirements.	
	Decision – Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council undertake the role of secretariat to the PfN Board.	All
	OOS reported that the Chair had approved that Council Officers can attend meetings as observers. The Board was informed of two requests for members of the public to attend Board meetings to observe proceedings. Having considered the request the decision of the Board is that Board meetings would not be open to members of the public	
	Decision - PfN Board meetings would not be open to members of the public.	All
	However, the Chair of the Board advised he would be happy to meet with residents, community and business groups and it was agreed that arrangements are put in place for the Chair, plus another Board Member, together with a member of staff from RSCTC, to hold regular meetings with residents and other key stakeholders.	
	Decision - Arrangements are to be put in place for the Chair, plus another Board Member, together with a member of staff from RSCTC, to hold regular meetings with residents and other key stakeholders and that there would be an annual 'Come and Meet the Board' event.	All RSCTC
	It was noted that the Board's operations will be transparent and that its membership and governance arrangements, including minutes of meetings and decision logs will be published on the Town Council's website and in line with the Neighbourhood Board Guidance.	
8.	**Government Pre-approved Interventions that can be used and Powers Available to Local Authorities** The Board noted the Government Pre-approved Interventions that local authorities and Boards can use for the PfN Fund. This means that a business case would not be necessary for these projects. OOS advised that the scope of the projects had been	

	expanded and now included creating and improving green spaces, including the regeneration of existing parks.	
9.	**Terms of Reference** To give sufficient time for Board members to fully consider the draft Terms of Reference and in line with good practice, the Terms of Reference will be considered for approval at the next Board meeting. The Terms of Reference will be provided to MHCLG in draft form by the 22nd of April 2025 in line with the Government timescales.	
10.	**Code of Conduct & Register of Interests** The Board was advised that the draft Code of Conduct and Register of Interests is based on the seven principles of public life and that it is each Board member's responsibility to ensure that their register of interests is completed correctly. In response to a question about any Personal Liability of Board members, Board members were advised that unlike Trustees of a Charity there is no personal liability. However, there would be reputational risk to the Board if interests were not declared. The importance of operating in the spirit of openness, transparency, and the Nolan principles were stressed and it was agreed that if in doubt about a possible interest it was better to declare it, than not. It was confirmed that the interest forms would be published and that declarations of interests would be a standing agenda item for Board meetings. **Decision –** The Code of Conduct & Register of Interests Policy was adopted by the PfN Board. **Action -** Board members were requested to provide their completed Declaration of Interest Forms by 4 April 2025.	All All
11.	**Key Decisions** **Approve Board Membership** It was reported that The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) had nominated the Deputy PCC to the Board. The Board expressed a preference for a senior ranking operational representative from the Police to be represented. **Action –** that the Chair contact the Police and Crime Commissioner to discuss Police representation on the Board. OOS informed the Board that there had been fifteen questions at a recent Town Council meeting seeking to have more local community organisations on the Plan for Neighbourhoods Board. In addition, the Chair of the Sutton Coldfield Business Improvement District (BID) had written to formally request that the Board Chair consider including a representative from the BID Board on the PfN Board.	DW

	The Board was advised that there is a considerable number of local groups in the Royal Town that represent the range of interests set out in the Government Guidance that could be considered to join the Board with the Town Council already actively engaged with over 130 local groups. This guidance also sets out that Boards should "consider the size of the membership and whether it would be useful to work with smaller thematic groups to deliver the Fund objectives." The Board acknowledged the vibrant voluntary and community sector in Royal Sutton Coldfield and the significant contribution they make to the lives of so many residents across the Royal Town. The Board also acknowledged the important role of the BID in representing and promoting the interests of businesses in the town centre and the initiatives the BID is delivering to help increase the attractiveness and foot fall in the town centre. The Board also recognised that there are other organisations in Royal Sutton Coldfield that promote businesses, e.g. the Chamber of Commerce, and that local businesses, social enterprises and employers should work together to reflect the views of those organisations. Having considered the Government guidance, the Board welcomed the interest of residents on the composition of the Board and the BID's interest in the Plan for Neighbourhoods and recognising the BID as an important local stakeholder would welcome and encourage the BID to work alongside the Board in facilitating engagement with the Business community.	
	Decision – To approve the PfN Board Membership as presented to the Board on 28th March 2025.	All
	Decision – The PfN would establish smaller groups to facilitate engagement on a thematic basis.	All
	Consider any Changes to the Pre Boundary for MHCLG to approve. At present, the default geographic boundary for Royal Sutton Coldfield is identified based on the 'built-up area' as defined by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This crucially excludes both key existing and emerging neighbourhoods and critical green spaces, including Sutton Park. In the case of the former, Minworth is excluded as are the two substantial new developments at Peddimore and Langley which will both be delivered during the 10-year period of the PfN. The Board was advised that it could submit a request to MHCLG to amend the default boundary which must conform with five criteria. The proposed change to the boundary would address the omissions and allow the opportunities afforded by the funding allocation to be maximised and the three objectives of the PfN to be fully realised.	

	The proposed changes had been assessed against MHCLG criteria, and all are considered eligible to be included and meet the requirements. The boundary change excludes privately owned arable land and private golf courses as these fall outside the scope and funding remit of the PfN programme. The Board discussed the proposed change to the boundary and agreed that it should be amended to include critical green spaces, and the neighbourhoods of Minworth and Peddimore and Langley. Furthermore, the Board agreed that the place boundary for the Fund should mirror the Sutton Coldfield Parliamentary Constituency and the constituency boundary to be formally submitted to MHCLG for its consideration as the Place Boundary for the Royal Sutton Coldfield Plan for Neighbourhood Fund. AM proposed that he would simultaneously raise this with the Minister directly which the Board noted. **Decision -** that the proposed boundary change is amended to mirror the Sutton Coldfield parliamentary constituency boundary which is also the area covered by Royal Sutton Coldfield Town Council. **Approve the use of capacity funding for the Town Council to engage support.** The Board in partnership with the local authority is required to develop a vision and Regeneration Plan for the next 10 years, together with a more detailed Investment Plan for the first 4 years of the programme. The overarching vision and Regeneration Plan should reflect the local community's priorities and be developed through robust and meaningful grassroots engagement. The Plan for Neighbourhoods Prospectus outlines best practice community engagement guidance, which includes for example, focusing on those less likely to be heard, targeting areas where there has been underrepresentation in the past, holding engagement events where people and communities meet and consider passporting funding directly to voluntary and community sector organisations to maximise reach. There is Plan for Neighbourhoods Capacity Funding available to assist with the engagement and development of the Regeneration Plan. Therefore, it was proposed to go to the market to procure specialist support and capacity for this purpose, with a minimum requirement to hold a public meeting, visit a school and have two field days where people meet, in each of the 8 Wards. In addition, it was proposed to passport funding to one voluntary/community organisation to maximise community reach in each Ward. It was suggested that it could be a requirement in the tender documentation that the specialist support should be provided by a Sutton Coldfield or Birmingham based supplier. Having considered this, the Board concluded that it was also important that the provider of this support was independent and that they did not bring any bias to the engagement activity, recognising that there would be an opportunity for local groups to access funding via the local community allocation of £24,000.	All

	Decision – to approve the procurement of a specialist supplier/s to carry out grassroots community engagement, to produce a vision, Regeneration Plan for the next 10 years, and a detailed Investment Plan for the first 4 years of the programme. **Decision –** that voluntary/community sector organisations for each Ward be commissioned to collaborate with the successful supplier once appointed. **Decision –** to approve a budget of up to £50,000 for the specialist supplier contract, and a community pot of £24,000 for voluntary/community sector engagement, allocated from Neighbourhoods Capacity Revenue Fund.	All All All
12.	**Future Meeting Dates** 20th June 2025 12th September 2025 5th December 2025 Board meetings will be scheduled every 12 weeks.	

Signed: ______________________________

Date: ______________________________