

PRESS RELEASE

1st June 2025.

From: Stephen Curry, UCVR

“Axing” Riverside Project, being challenged

Upper Calder Valley Renaissance (UCVR) are disputing the withdrawal of funds to the Riverside Project by the Town Deal board and are challenging the reasons given for that decision.

Chair of UCVR, Stephen Curry, said “that the reason given for the withdrawal of support for this project was concerns as to our reduced contribution to the “visitor economy” and overall viability going forward. However, our original proposal to the Towns Fund was only partially about the visitor economy, and in terms of viability, the independent assessment commissioned by the council concluded the project was still ‘value for the money invested’.

The premises are now in a worse condition than before the Towns Fund accepted our project. With promises of support from the Council as project partners in the Town Deal we held off for two years from general repairs to the building. It is likely that we won’t be able to open the premises as it was before involvement in the Towns Fund. This is not an acceptable situation to be left in by any process”.

Peter Hirst, Community development director for UCVR, said that “the letter informing us of the decision suggested that the project was too community-focused. We found this astounding in that we are a voluntary-led community-focused organisation. We bid for the funds to improve the facility for the wider community whilst adding additional facilities for new local users such as cyclists with disabilities, who were a part of this project and who have been denied their cycling track as a result of this decision”.

Peter added “in the time we have managed the site it became clear it’s not financially sustainable without a range of activities bringing in income to support current sports facilities. Our bid to the Towns Fund was clear that our aim would also be social value based use of the site for community well-being. The town deal funds would have provided a facility that we could then have built on, adding more income generation in future phases. That’s what investment is all about, not just instant results.” The Riverside project has been successful in developing partnerships with user stakeholders, such as the Agricultural Show, Junior Football club, Scouts, dog training courses and other community groups. Separate investors have made the woodland area ready for a forest school project and well-being activities.

Martin McGroarty, UCVR director for health and well-being, said “There were indications that the council’s programme board and Chair of the Town Deal Board had predetermined to remove our funding well before we were put through the specific scrutiny process used to deliver their decision to “axe” the project. We raised our suspicions with the leader of the council in February based on misinformation being presented to the town deal board by the council and the excessive micro-management issues we were experiencing. During a

face-to-face meeting with councillor Sarah Courtney, we were assured that she and council officers were fully supportive of the project.”

Stephen Curry added, “We were told that the board wanted to be advocates for us. Yet when we presented to them during the recent process, not one board member asked a question. In fact only one board member has taken the trouble to visit the site and talk to us in the last 2 years despite several invites. It seems that the Town Deal board is now depleted of active community and business representatives, and its independence from the council is questionable.”

The UCVR is disputing the decision and is currently taking specialist legal advice on the legitimacy of the process and the basis for the withdrawal of funds.

Editor's Notes:

Upper Calder Valley Renaissance (UCVR)

UCVR is a not-for-profit social enterprise, who have been active in this area for over 20 years as a local community and social purpose organisation, enabling other local groups and organisations to develop. It has previously been facilitators in providing post-flooding support for businesses, involving IT and social media training and establishing networking groups to aid economic recovery. It has also supported groups with fund holding such as social housing residents, creating a social and community garden space. **See** <https://ucvr.org.uk/home/about/>