



# Minutes of Newton-le-Willows Town Board

Friday 13 December 2024 14:30 – 16:30

Newton Sports Club, Crow Lane East, Newton-le-Willows, WA12 9XE

Name	Initials	Role	Organisation
<b>Board Members</b>			
Chris Hickey	CH	Chair	Mercury Hampton
David Baines MP	DB	Member of Parliament, St Helens North	Member of Parliament, St Helens North
Councillor Richard McCauley	RM	Cabinet Member for Inclusive Growth and Regeneration	St Helens Borough Council
Ian Lewis	IL	Investment Manager	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
<b>Community &amp; Co-Opted Board Members</b>			
Alex Myhill	AM	Community Representative	Riddling Rack
Joanne Edge	JE	Community Representative	Newton Sports Club
Debbie Taylor	DT	Business Representative	Es Paradis Salon & Domestic Abuse WA12 CIC
Paul Romanko	PR	Business Representative	United Utilities Water Ltd
Fiona Ruddy	FR	Third Sector Representative	Newton Community Centre
John Unsworth	JU	Cultural, Arts, and Heritage including Sports Groups Representative	Sea Cadet Corps
Reverend Chris Stafford	CS	Faith Representative	Team Rector at St Peters, Emmanuel Wargrave, and St John's
<b>Local Authority Representatives</b>			
Mary Jefferson	MJ	Head of Regeneration and Growth	St Helens Borough Council
Mark Bingley	MB	Programme Lead – Earlestown	St Helens Borough Council
Rachel Bebbly	RB	Project Officer	St Helens Borough Council
Matthew Valentine	MV	Project Officer	St Helens Borough Council

<b>Apologies Received</b>			
Kath O'Dwyer	KO'D	Chief Executive	St Helens Borough Council
Councillor Anthony Burns	AB	Leader of the Council	St Helens Borough Council
Amie Louise Parsonage	ALP	Portfolio and Partnerships Officer	Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner
Jon Julian Smith	JJS	Chief Inspector, St Helens	Merseyside Police
<b>External Attendees</b>			
David Watson	DW	Agenda Item 6 Speaker	Associate Director at Hatch Urban Solutions
Danny Crump	DC	Agenda Item 6 Speaker	Director of Urbanism at Layer.studio
Joanne Harrop	JH	Agenda Item 6 Speaker	Director at PLACED

<b>Item</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Lead</b>
1.	Welcome and Introductions	CH
2.	Declarations of Interest	CH
3.	Minutes of the previous Town Board meeting held on 28 June 2024	CH
4.	Board Appointment	MB
5.	Long-Term Plan for Towns Programme Update - Presentation	MB
6.	Appointment of Town Board Specialist	MB
7.	Communications Policy	MB
8.	Any Other Business	All
9.	Photographs	All

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Chris Hickey (CH) acknowledged apologies received from Kath O'Dwyer, Councillor Anthony Burns, Amie Louise Parsonage and Chief Inspector Jon Julian Smith.

CH welcomed Members to the meeting and noted this to be the first Town Board meeting with mandated, community, and co-opted Members, all in attendance.

Introductions were given around the table.

CH informed the Board of the meeting etiquette, including details of how the Chair would run the meeting.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

CH invited Town Board Members to make any declarations of interest relating to the Agenda Items.

Councillor Richard McCauley (RM) asked for it to be recorded that he is a member of the Planning Committee and advised that he would need to excuse himself from any future planning related matters.

CH declared that he had a declaration of interest in Agenda Item 6, as two of his business clients have submitted bids – CH advised he was not aware that those organisations had bid. Once the reports pack had been published, CH sought advice and following this, CH stated he would excuse himself from the discussion for said Agenda Item and appointed Ian Lewis (IL) as Deputy Chair for this item in accordance with the Terms of Reference.

## **3. Minutes of the previous Town Board meeting held on 28 June 2024**

CH invited comments on minutes from the previous Town Board meeting on Friday 28 June, to which none were recorded, and the minutes were agreed.

## **4. Board Appointment**

Mark Bingley (MB) provided an update on the report. The report gave an overview of the process undertaken to identify a shortlist of candidates and recruitment process for Board appointments.

MB discussed that section 3.3 of Agenda Item 4 showed the direct appointments (mandated) dictated by the Government's technical note for the LTPfT programme.

MB reminded the Town Board that at the meeting on Friday 28 June 2024, Board agreed that there was a requirement identified for involvement from Merseyside Police due to the strong focus on Safety and Security within the key investment themes. Thus, the Board invited Chief Inspector Jon Julian Smith (JJS) to be a mandated position on the Board to give a local operational overview.

The Board also agreed at its meeting of 28 June that two community positions would be publicly advertised via the St Helens Borough Council (SHBC) website. This was to provide an open opportunity for the community to have a voice on the Board and to provide increased transparency to decision making. The positions were advertised for four weeks over the summer with shortlisting and selection undertaken by the Chair (CH) and MP David Baines (DB).

MB provided an overview that a further seven positions were created, as per section 3.5 of Agenda Item 4, with a co-opted route of recruitment chosen from SHBC and Ward Councillor nominations.

Two Business representatives from the four shortlisted were able to accept the opportunity to join the Board, with five co-opted members accepting invitation in total. Therefore, MB explained there are currently 2 Town Board vacancies for Business Representatives however, MB confirmed that the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have advised a pause in Board recruitment until a new prospectus for the programme is issued in the new year.

MB noted that Board Members are not restricted to their area of nomination and views are invited for each item discussed.

CH noted a strong and diverse skillset and good local knowledge across Board membership to help forge a community led Long-Term Plan.

CH invited a vote from mandated Board Members to endorse co-opted and community Board Member appointments which was passed unanimously.

**DECISION: Board approved the appointment of co-opted and community positions.**

## **5. Long-Term Plan for Towns Programme Update – Presentation**

MB gave an update that communication had been received from the new government that the programme would be retained and reformed with a revised prospectus expected in new year.

Progress to date was outlined, noting that government had postponed the originally timetabled milestone reviews, but that Council Officers had continued work to ensure programme momentum was maintained.

MB reminded Board that at the previous Board meeting on Friday 28 June, the Board agreed a portion of capacity funding was to be allocated to recruit a Project Officer to support the Board in the execution of duties and facilitate its operation.

MB introduced Rachel Bebbby (RB) as the appointed Project Officer, detailing RB's previous experience working within St Helens Borough Council and specifically within the Growth Delivering Prosperity Team supporting infrastructure projects.

MB confirmed that at the previous meeting on Friday 28 June, the Board also identified a requirement to appoint Town Board Specialist support for developing the Long-Term

Plan and 3-Year Investment Strategy. MB explained a procurement process has been undertaken to recommend a suitable provider which will be presented in Agenda Item 6.

MB informed Board that a drop-in session for Chief Executives of Long-Term Plan for Towns beneficiaries was held on Thursday 28 November. It was re-emphasised at this session that work should continue towards the programme whilst awaiting the revised prospectus, which gave confidence to continue with procurement. MB explained that wholesale changes are not expected in the review of the programme, with civil servants having advised that it is more likely that the existing guidance will be expanded upon.

MB highlighted that the correspondence from government noted that the Boards should feel empowered to continue work whilst the review is undertaken. MB noted the following key updates:

- Programme delivery will now commence in 26/27 financial year as opposed to 25/26 as previously outlined, giving time for Tranche 2 towns to fully engage in public consultation and develop a robust community led plan.
- A further £0.200m capacity funding is to be allocated to Town Boards in addition to the previously granted £0.050m awarded at the time of announcement and £0.200m funding for 24/25 financial year. MB confirmed that the total capacity funding to be awarded is now £0.450m.
- The additional capacity funding is not new money and is drawn from programme efficiencies within the £0.500m retained by government for programme management cost and establishment of a specialist task force.

MB informed mandated Board Members of a 'Welcome Meeting' for community and co-opted members in October, in which the red line boundary map and data packs were discussed. MB commented this was still not received, with guidance that these packs are currently under review and are due to be issued in the new year.

MB commented that should the Board want to expand the red line boundary there is opportunity to do this, however the programme red line boundary is likely to be formed based upon ONS Built Up Area mapping which has previously been presented.

RM expressed thanks to Council Officers for progressing to the current position during the period of uncertainty around the programme.

## **6. Appointment of Town Board Specialists**

The Chair (CH) exited the room due to the earlier declared conflict of interest; IL (Deputy Chair) then noted the purpose of this item was to advise the Board of a procurement process undertaken to commission a Town Board Specialist and present the findings to secure Board endorsement.

MB stated key items for the Gateway 2 submission include the Long-Term Plan and 3-Year Investment Strategy. MB detailed the submission should do the following:

- Outline the Long-Term Vision Plan and outcomes for the programme and community as well as a targeted 3-Year Investment Plan. MB reminded the Board that plans must be informed by consultation with the local community.

MB emphasised the scope of the Town Board Specialist Support is to gather public views via consultation and convert those responses into tangible projects that have a strong value for money and deliver benefits to the local community.

MB provided an overview of the procurement process that was facilitated by STAR procurement as specialist procurement advisors and the moderating body.

Six bids were received over the course of a 4-week period in October – managed by STAR - then evaluated by 3 Council Officers once issued. Categories which were evaluated as part of the recruitment process are outlined in section 3.6 of Agenda Item 6.

MB commented that scoring is weighted as 60% towards quality elements of the bid and 40% towards cost elements of the bid (including 10% Social Value).

MB highlighted that the recommendation to the Board is to appoint Hatch Associates Ltd (Hatch) who submitted a robust bid. Hatch were noted as having key experience with Tranche 1 towns which provided added value to the Board.

MB informed the Board that Hatch, the preferred Town Board Specialists, will join the Board via Teams to give a short presentation detailing their background and the approach they would take to the Long-Term Plan for Newton-le-Willows.

David Watson (DW), representing Hatch, explained the joint and collaborative submission between Hatch, Layer.studio and PLACED for the scope of works. DW explained that Hatch will be the contract lead and introduced Danny Crump (DC), representing Layer.studio, and Joanne Harrop (JH), representing PLACED, as part of the collaborative bid from three practices.

It was emphasised by DW that the collaborative approach brings a breadth of knowledge and experience as well as local insights from previous commissions.

DW gave an overview of the specialism brought by Hatch in economic development, detailing previous experience in developing evidence-led growth plans to support local growth, often supporting both Boards and Councils in these plans. It was detailed that Hatch has supported work locally in St Helens, such as the successful £20m Earlestown LUF bid commissioned by St Helens Borough Council, alongside working with 12 Towns Fund Boards, unlocking over £200m of funding across the country.

DC detailed that Layer.studio are a North-West based landscape and design specialist, bringing together people and nature. It was noted that Layer.studio has had previous experience of working with three Tranche 1 towns for the Long-Term Plan; Leigh, Heywood, and Rossendale.

JH introduced PLACED, a social enterprise in the Liverpool City Region, and gave an overview of experience working across St Helens for many years, and the wider North-West region in creative education and engagement programmes. It was explained that PLACED have been commissioned by St Helens Borough Council initially in 2019 and had previously delivered consultation events in Earlestown, supported the wider Masterplan for St Helens, and have worked with the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

DW outlined the approach that would be taken from supporting the Town Board, conducting thorough engagement, project development and project prioritisation to produce the Long-Term Plan and 3-Year Investment Plan for Newton-le-Willows, in accordance with LTPfT technical note.

Hatch concluded the presentation and invited Town Board Members to ask any questions.

RM asked what the expectation was of Board Members and how they can help with the creation of the Vision and 3-Year Investment Plan. DW responded that Board Members will bring a blend of experience and attributes, with the expectation for them to champion this programme and utilise their networks to promote the Long-Term Plan.

Paul Romanko (PR) raised the query that multiple types of engagement in particular at physical drop-in sessions bring different opinions dependent on the location, highlighting that one opinion can differ across a small geography. JH responded to state there can always be more engagement, with scope for additional services if needed, but the initial Town Board Workshop will be critical to pick the optimum locations for engagement, utilising the Town Board's key local knowledge.

Mary Jefferson (MJ) asked what the approach is proposed to be to engage harder to reach groups, for example, young people and disability groups. JH stated that the planned pop-up events create a broad audience through engagement in unexpected places. JH explained that they have, for example, previously undertaken engagement in well used places in the community (Supermarkets and Wetherspools in Earlestown were discussed as examples). JH highlighted it is key to identify if input from a demographic is missing and if specific targeted workshops need to take place. It was further elaborated that there will be a blend of public and stakeholder engagement, holding targeted workshops for retailers and interested parties if the approach is needed.

Fiona Ruddy (FR) asked what the timeline for outputs is and emphasised the enthusiasm to get things moving. DW detailed that the bid submitted was based upon an indicative 4-month programme, but this will depend on the revised prospectus. DC reinforced the enthusiasm for momentum and emphasised it is key to build this within the community in the early stages.

RM commented that this programme is a key opportunity and highlighted to not forget hard to reach business communities when consulting.

MB thanked Hatch Associates Ltd for their time and opened the conversation for discussion following Hatch exiting the Teams presentation.

David Baines MP (DB) emphasised that the Town Board is representative of the community and understand the local community really well. As such, they are obliged to utilise this local knowledge to ensure the Town Board Specialists tailor their engagement, for example, through the use of local language. Alex Myhill (AM) reinforced that the language used within the consultation needs to not include technical jargon, with an idea that consultation should be targeted for each area alongside a dedicated PR campaign. FR likewise proposed the need for targeted engagement in schools.

A group discussion took place around best practice and lessons learned from previous consultations. This highlighted the need to distinguish between consultations for the wider Newton-le-Willows area, such as the Town Hall and Market Square regeneration and the Parkside development.

PR asked whether the commission is a fixed price in relation to engagement or if it is a cost reimbursable contract. MB responded that services, as outlined within the specification, would be provided on a fixed-cost basis. MB further explained that the specification sought up to 4 engagement events with Hatch's bid including 2 in person events and 2 digital events and that an indicative programme of 16 weeks was provided from contract award to completion of the Long-Term Plan and 3-Year Investment Plan. MB detailed that extension to this scope will likely incur additional costs however these would be quantified following production of the draft engagement strategy which will be presented to Board for approval at a later meeting.

Deputy Chair (IL) recommended that the Town Board endorse the appointment of Hatch as Town Board Specialists with a recommendation that the draft Engagement Strategy is brought back to Board for endorsement prior to public or stakeholder consultation starting. This approach was endorsed without objection.

**DECISION: The Board endorsed the appointment of Hatch Associates Ltd as the Town Board Specialist, subject to the Council's formal approvals.**

**NOTE: A secondary endorsement is sought from Town Board following the production of the draft Engagement Strategy.**



## **7. Communications Policy**

The Chair (CH) advised Agenda Item 7 had been developed to provide transparency and consistency around communications, protect the integrity of the Board and outline governance in responding to external enquiries.

MB reminded Board of the lengthy discussion in the 'Welcome Meeting' on Wednesday 23 October around the management of communications on social media and within the wider community.

MB informed that Council Officers have developed guidelines for communication for the Board, which are not intended to act as a code of conduct, but rather to promote best practice in managing communication with the community.

Board Members were advised that they can post on personal social media channels should they wish; however, they are reminded that any contact from the public or media organisations should be via the outlined process within the provided policy.

- All media enquiries should be directed to Council's Media Team.
- Any public enquiries are to be directed to Council's Project Team for logging and consistency in communications.

MB stated a Town Board website is in development and will act as a central signposting for enquiries, providing information on the programme and its purpose. Alongside this, a commitment has been made within the policy that responses are provided to enquiries within ten working days to ensure all communication is actioned in a timely manner.

MB opened the floor for questions and endorsement of the policy.

PR raised if the policy could be expanded as to how Town Board Members communicate with one another so that communications can be captured. MB advised that St Helens Borough Council can act as a central 'hub' for the Board to capture communications. In the first instance, communications should be directed to the Council Project Team.

MB confirmed a project directory is currently being built to provide a list of contacts for supporting the Board.

AM enquired if there could be dedicated social media pages. Following discussion, it was agreed that a broadcast channel such as a website would be the best practice.

**DECISION: Board approved the endorsement of the Communication Policy presented.**

**ACTION: Project Team to share a Project Directory for Board Members.**

**ACTION: Project Team to continue to create a Town Board website.**

## **8. Any Other Business**

FR raised whether dates and times of future meetings could be confirmed. MB responded that dates are in the diary for meetings on February 7 2025, and March 21 2025. Dates for the rest of the calendar year will be scheduled in due course. FR added an openness to meeting frequently to ensure decisions are made efficiently.

IL suggested that where possible Agenda items should be issued in good time in advance of future meetings to brief Board Members. MB advised this is contingent on receipt of the technical pack and understanding the full scope for the programme. Once clarity is achieved around the technical specifics, a detailed programme timeline can be developed with Agenda items developed ahead of future meetings to be discussed.

MB advised an updated Terms of Reference could be brought to Board at the next meeting given lessons learned within the programme to date.

MB also confirmed an engagement plan would be brought to Board aligned with the new technical note, once received from government, for Board discussion on consultation and engagement. The Chair (CH) advised that due to the change of government there is a need to wait for technical advice to be issued to ensure any engagement plan is appropriate to the new technical pack.

DB advised that whilst the board is keen to build momentum as quickly as possible, public spending does take time due to the requisite governance when spending from the public purse. As a result, patience will be required from the Board whilst due process is undertaken. RM noted this and stated that funding is over a 10-year period and a Long-Term Plan is important for how the money is spent gradually over time.

MB advised that the Board could provide feedback to Hatch at the February meeting around Board steer on engagement and consultation.

Joanne Edge (JE) noted unavailability for February and March meeting dates and asked for advance planning of future dates to avoid missing meetings. MB advised meetings will be on Fridays at the same time to account for key diary availabilities, but that a process will be undertaken to collate all Board Members availability for future meetings.

RB raised the requirement to return declaration of interest forms as soon as possible ahead of the next Town Board meeting on February 7, 2025.

**ACTION: Project Team to create and circulate a Board Member availability spreadsheet for future meetings.**

**ACTION: Project Team to update the Terms of Reference.**

**ACTION: Board Members to complete and return Declaration of Interest Forms.**

## **9. Photographs**

Board Members had both individual headshots and a full Board photograph taken.