



MEETING OF THE NEWTON-LE-WILLOWS TOWN BOARD

Date:	Friday, 7 February 2025
Time:	14:30 – 16:30
Location:	Newton Community Centre, Park Road South, N-le-W, WA12 8EX

Invitees

Name	Role	Organisation
Board Members		
Chris Hickey	Chair	Mercury Hampton
David Baines MP	Member of Parliament, St Helens North	Member of Parliament, St Helens North
Councillor Anthony Burns	Leader of the Council	St Helens Borough Council
Councillor Richard McCauley	Cabinet Member for Inclusive Growth and Regeneration	St Helens Borough Council
Kath O'Dwyer	Chief Executive	St Helens Borough Council
Ian Lewis	Investment Manager	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
Jon Julian Smith	Chief Inspector, St Helens	Merseyside Police
Community & Co-Opted Board Members		
Alex Myhill	Community Representative	Riddling Rack
Debbie Taylor	Business Representative	Es Paradis Salon & Domestic Abuse WA12 CIC
Paul Romanko	Business Representative	United Utilities Water Ltd
Fiona Ruddy	Third Sector Representative	Newton Community Centre
John Unsworth	Cultural, Arts, and Heritage including Sports Groups Representative	Sea Cadet Corps
Local Authority Representatives		
Mark Bingley	Programme Lead – Earlestown	St Helens Borough Council
Rachel Bebbly	Project Officer	St Helens Borough Council
Matthew Valentine	Project Officer	St Helens Borough Council
Apologies Received		
Mary Jefferson	Head of Regeneration and Growth	St Helens Borough Council
Joanne Edge	Community Representative	Newton Sports Club
Reverend Chris Stafford	Faith Representative	Team Rector at St Peters, Emmanuel Wargrave, and St Johns
Amie Louise Parsonage	Portfolio and Partnerships Officer	Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner
External Attendees		
David Watson	Agenda Item Speaker	Associate Director at Hatch Urban Solutions
Danny Crump	Agenda Item Speaker	Director of Urbanism at Layer.Studio
Joanne Harrop	Agenda Item Speaker	Director at PLACED



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE NEWTON-LE-WILLOWS TOWN BOARD

Friday 7 February 2025


AGENDA

Item	Title	Lead
1.	Welcome and Introductions	CH
2.	Declarations of Interest	CH
3.	Minutes of the previous Town Board meeting held on 13 December 2024	CH
4.	Draft Engagement Strategy	MB/ External Speakers
5.	Any Other Business	All

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ITEM 3

Appendix 1: Minutes of Newton-le-Willows Town Board

 <p>ST HELENS BOROUGH COUNCIL</p>	<h3>Minutes of Newton-le-Willows Town Board</h3> <p>Friday 13 December 2024 14:30 – 16:30</p> <p>Newton Sports Club, Crow Lane East, Newton-le-Willows, WA12 9XE</p>
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Name	Initials	Role	Organisation
Board Members			
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
Community & Co-Opted Board Members			
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 Johns
Local Authority Representatives			
Mary Jefferson	MJ	Head of Regeneration and Growth	St Helens Borough Council
Mark Bingley	MB	Programme Lead – Earlestown	St Helens Borough Council

Rachel Bebbby	RB	Project Officer	St Helens Borough Council
Matthew Valentine	MV	Project Officer	St Helens Borough Council
Apologies Received			
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
External Attendees			
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

Item	Title	Lead
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 the 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 updated:

- 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 Wetherspoons 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 will be 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 7 February 2025, and 21 March 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.

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1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Town Board on the progress made in the development of a Draft Engagement Strategy to inform community consultation activity, and to note the contents of the Draft Engagement Strategy created in consultation with the Engagement Sub-Group.

2. Recommendations for Decision

Board is recommended to:

- 1) Note the update on the formation of an Engagement Sub-Group.
- 2) Note the Draft Engagement Strategy contained at Appendix 1.
- 3) Note the expenditure of capacity funding for additional public engagement activities as set out in Section 4.

3. Background

- 3.1 At the Town Board meeting of 13 December 2024, Hatch Associates outlined their approach to public consultation and the development of the 10-Year Long-Term Plan and 3-Year Investment Plan. Board Members unanimously endorsed the appointment of Hatch Associates and their consultant team (Layer.Studio and PLACED) as Town Board Specialists.
- 3.2 Whilst the original scope for services included for up to 4 engagement events, Town Board resolved to review the scope of the commission to include further engagement activity. Board Members agreed that the Draft Engagement Strategy should be considered at its next meeting on 7 February 2025, prior to any public consultation or engagement commencing.
- 3.3 Following a meeting with Hatch Associates and the Council's Project Team, the Chair endorsed that an Engagement Sub-Group should be formed to initially develop the consultation approach for the Long-Term Plan and 3-Year Investment Plan, and latterly be the consultative body for future engagement and communications. It was agreed that the Engagement Sub-Group should contain Town Board members and representatives from the Council's Communications Team.

- 3.4 Prior to the festive period break, Town Board Members were invited to express their interest in joining the Engagement Sub-Group via a short application process coordinated by the Project Officer. The application window closed on 8 January 2025.
- 3.5 In total, four applications were received from the following persons and subsequently reviewed by the Chair in consultation with the Programme Lead and Project Officer:
- Amie Louise Parsonage (Police and Crime Commissioner)
 - Alex Myhill (Community Representative)
 - Joanne Edge (Community Representative)
 - Fiona Ruddy (Third Sector Representative)
- 3.6 All four applications were taken forward to enable the creation of the Engagement Sub-Group. Furthermore, the Engagement Sub-Group will be supported by the Council's Jayne Taylor (Head of Communications, Engagement, and Reputation Management).
- 3.7 On 15 January 2025 at Newton Sports Club, an Engagement Workshop was delivered by Hatch Associates, supported by their specialist community engagement consultant PLACED, alongside Council Officers (including the Head of Communications, Engagement, and Reputation Management) and members of the Engagement Sub-Group.
- 3.8 Taking on board the steer provided by the Engagement Sub-Group, PLACED have refined the Draft Engagement Strategy (contained within this report at Appendix 1), adding further engagement activity that will seek to deliver against the aims of the Engagement Sub-Group and respond to the challenges identified.
- 3.9 PLACED initial proposal contained the below project deliverables:
- Engagement Strategy Workshop and Engagement Strategy Refinement
 - Online engagement
 - Pop-up events x 2
 - Final report
- 3.10 In addition, Layer.Studio and Hatch Associates will lead on the delivery of the following for the Town Board and stakeholders:
- 3 x Town Board & Stakeholder Workshops
 - One to one place observation sessions
 - 3 x Thematic Stakeholder workshops
 - Town Walkshop (walkarounds across Newton-le-Willows to uncover place opportunities)
- 3.11 Following the Draft Engagement Strategy Workshop, the following have been added:

- School workshop x 1
- Drop-In events x 5
- Self-led engagement materials (summary boards about the project to include a QR code)
- Production of social media assets
- Interim engagement report
- In-person flyer distribution and walkaround

3.12 The proposed drop-in events can be for any group the Sub-Group/Board agree on targeting. This will need to be informed by their local knowledge of key groups. Some initial suggestions provided by the Sub-Group included a local heritage group and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

3.13 In addition, further consideration by the Sub-Group of inclusive engagement approaches with local minority groups (e.g., BAME, disabled, and LGBTQIA+) is required. This will need to draw on their local insights and knowledge, as well as consider the most effective ways to raise awareness amongst groups through proposed engagement activities (e.g., drop-in events, pop-ups, engagement materials, online).

4. Financial Section – This Section is exempt from publication under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act Section 3.

5. Next Steps

5.1 Following the feedback from Town Board on 7 February, PLACED will conduct further refinement to the Draft Engagement Strategy in consultation with the Engagement Sub-Group, this will ensure stakeholder groups have been thoroughly identified. The Draft Engagement Strategy will then be brought back to the next Town Board meeting on 21 March 2025 for endorsement from Board.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The Draft Engagement Strategy appended to this report sets out the draft consultation and engagement approach for the Long-Term Plan and 3-Year Investment Plan to ensure engagement is thorough and sufficiently widespread to gather views representative of the diverse local community. The Town Board is therefore invited to discuss the recommendations at Section 2 of this report.

7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1: Draft Engagement Strategy

Newton-le-Willows Long-Term Plan

Draft Engagement Strategy

Prepared by: Jo Harrop

February 2025

Background

St Helens Borough Council has been successful in securing Long-Term Plan for Towns (LTPT) funding for Newton-le-Willows. The funding will build upon recent investment in the town and see up to £20 million in funding spent on local priorities over the next 10 years. A Town Board of local representatives from the community, local businesses, sports clubs, the third sector, faith groups and public sector agencies, alongside the local MP and relevant representatives from the Combined Authority and St Helens Borough Council (the Council) has been established to inform and shape the town's Long-Term Plan.

LTPT funding will enable the delivery of projects that address key issues facing residents and stakeholders across three themes:

- Safety and security
- High streets, heritage and regeneration
- Transport and connectivity

Following the Autumn Budget, the Labour Government has confirmed that the LTPT programme would be retained but reformed as a new regeneration programme. Government have reassured Town Boards that they should feel empowered to continue their work whilst the Government's review will seek to extend the scope of the programme rather than reduce.

The Council and the Town Board want to ensure local people can actively contribute to the plan, sharing their challenges, opportunities, and ideas, and shaping the 10-year vision for Newton-le-Willows.

Layer.Studio, Hatch Associates, and PLACED will be supporting the Council and the Town Board in this process, delivering a comprehensive stakeholder and public engagement programme.

Underpinning our approach to engagement is a recognition of the importance of understanding the local area and context to frame the proposed engagement activities. Layer.Studio and Hatch Associates are currently undertaking a local data and context review, drawing upon a range of available information, which will provide important insights to shape our initial understanding of Newton-Le-Willows, as well as encourage discussion and feedback from the public and stakeholders.

The conversations that take place through the engagement programme will help the Council and the Town Board to prioritise the project proposals that could have the greatest impact on Newton-le-Willows, and to decide where funding should be invested.

Refining Expectations

PLACED, along with Layer.Studio and Hatch Associates, led an engagement strategy workshop on 15th January 2024 at Newton-le-Willows Sports Club. Four Town Board members were in attendance following an application and selection process led by the Town Board Chair and the Council. The four members, alongside officers from the Council, formed the Engagement Sub-Group to participate in the workshop and shape the Engagement Strategy.

The purpose of the workshop was to review the proposed engagement approach submitted as part of the tendering process, clarify expectations for engagement and lead to this refined Engagement Strategy document. In the session we covered;

- expectations for engagement,
- audience,
- engagement scope,
- timescales,
- challenges and opportunities, and
- any other business.

What are the key success criteria and outcomes? What would good engagement look like?

Our discussion of success criteria, outcomes and what good looks like included:

- **Reaching a broad and inclusive range of voices:** Of critical importance is reaching a diverse, representational range of voices.

The desire to reach many people was also expressed. This priority is shaped by a concern that a small reach would appear poor value for money and could lead to criticism. PLACED noted that engagement will be varied, promoted, and shaped by local knowledge; however, many people will choose not to engage, for a wide range of reasons and therefore, PLACED typically focus on ensuring quality, meaningful conversations.

Whilst there were aspirations to reach people from a range of age groups, a need for targeted engagement with young people was identified as it was recognised this group is typically less heard in consultations.

- **Quality, clarity and accessibility:** The engagement delivered must be of a high-quality. The importance of clear and accessible communication was highlighted along with the need for materials (both promotional and engagement) that effectively explain the funding opportunity to local

people. This is vital if the local community are to be able to understand how to engage in the process.

- **Utilising a range of engagement methodologies:** A wide range of engagement approaches and methodologies will be utilised including online consultation, drop-in events, youth workshops, unmanned displays, and meetings with local community groups. This comprehensive and varied approach is expected to encourage good engagement levels and wide reach.
- **Engagement impact and legacy:** It is anticipated that engagement outputs set the direction of the 10-year plan. There were also aspirations for the public engagement delivered to build confidence in what the Council and Town Board are aiming to achieve, developing trust and community buy-in. There was interest in understanding what 'quick wins' local people feel could be delivered as part of the funding that could make positive impacts in the more immediate future.

It was recognised that a transparent approach is required and there should be clear evidence trail on why certain projects have been prioritised. It is hoped that the project will leave a positive legacy in Newton-le-Willows, fostering local people's feeling pride and ownership.

- **Locations and geographic spread of events:** We will need to ensure we use the right locations with high footfall. Further, there needs to be geographic spread of consultation events - delivering events across the whole of Newton and Earlestown. It is anticipated that we will plot consultations on a map online to show we have been in different locations and have made notable efforts for broad reach.
- **Findings and outcomes:** It is important that the engagement findings and outcomes clearly illustrate what the community feels most strongly about and the town's priorities. This will include a visual public summary of engagement.
- **Evidencing outputs:** It was felt that any outputs or events delivered should be recorded (e.g. case studies or videos and photos) and these could be shared online to evidence efforts to reach a broad audience. PLACED should highlight in their evaluation report the broad reach to show efforts.

Audience

Our discussion identified the need for engagement with a broad reach with residents, along with more targeted meetings with local community groups. The following outlines initial feedback from the Sub-Group workshop, while further

discussion with the Sub-Group and Board will be required to identify the key groups and individuals.

There was interest in delivering several meetings with local groups whose members are 'community anchors' and whose work may relate to the broad investment themes of the Long-Term Plan fundings e.g. heritage groups and transport groups.

Targeted engagement with young people from the town is required, as it was perceived they are typically underrepresented in consultation processes. Hope Academy was identified as a potential pathway to accessing young people.

It was recognised that opportunities need to be provided for working people to participate, hosting events on days, times and in locations that are accessible to them.

It was acknowledged that the Town Board members collectively had an excellent network of contacts – both formal (e.g., direct contacts, collaborators and service users) and informal (social media, friends, family). Utilising these in addition to other more formal methods would help the success of engagement. Providing appropriate promotional materials will assist connecting with these networks e.g., digital posters, social media assets etc.

In addition to the public audience, there will be targeted engagement for the Town Board and the Stakeholders identified in the tender. This will be led by Layer.Studio and supported by Hatch Associates. The following are identified stakeholder groups who the team will reach out to:

- Town Board
- Ward Councillors and Elected Members
- SHBC Highways, Transportation, Planning, Regeneration Officers
- ECF Programme Team
- Landowners and developers
- Local businesses (e.g. town centres, commercial/industrial areas, business representative groups)
- Merseytravel, Network Rail and Northern Rail
- Relevant statutory undertakers and owners of other third-party infrastructure
- Active travel and other highway user groups
- Consultants from co-dependent projects.

What things can people really shape?

Although there are ideas about the type of projects which could be supported through the fund, it is important to acknowledge that we are starting with engagement before certain ideas have been 'locked in.' PLACED, Hatch Associates and Layer.Studio will also be working closely together throughout, ensuring ideas can shape the project as they are heard. Therefore, there is genuine opportunity for the community to shape the development of the Long-Term Plan.

It was noted that a key determiner of what is possible and timings for engagement, will be further updates and confirmation from central government about the themes / project types that can be funded. In November 2024, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) advised that a new prospects for the LTPT initiative would be launched early in 2025.

What is off the table?

'Off the table' will be anything beyond the scale and scope of the funding. Whilst we will aim to focus engagement and conversations on the scope of this funding, where themes and comments emerge beyond that we will capture the information so this can be utilised later by the Council and other agencies. We will communicate that comments beyond the scope will be reported for information but may not directly shape the Long-Term Plan.

Timescales

Provisional timescales are outlined in the 'Deliverables' section below. Dates are indicative and can be adjusted following confirmation from central government on funding themes. Broadly, we will look to deliver most public engagement early in the process to ensure maximum impact.

Action: PLACED to work with Layer.Studios and Hatch Associates to ensure there is clear revised programme for public and wider stakeholder engagement activities, once confirmation has been given by central government.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

Key challenges of delivering this engagement programme include:

- Awaiting programme detail from central government.
- A great deal of engagement has already been delivered in Newton-le-Willows and there is therefore the risk of engagement fatigue. The Council and Town Board are acutely aware of this. It is therefore essential that the specificity and purpose of this consultation is clearly communicated.

- Developments that have been the focus of previous engagement activity are not yet underway and so residents cannot see any changes. This could create a sense of apathy and a view that Long-Term Plan might not happen.
- There are many different communities in the area and there will be a need to balance the geography and communities of Earlestown, Newton and Wargrave. If events are focused in only one of these communities, this could attract criticism. Alongside this, there is a possibility that there might be too much focus on Earlestown as that is what is fresh in people's minds following most recent consultations.
- It will not be possible to deliver all projects that residents and stakeholders suggest. Expectation management will be important.
- To ensure that the online engagement remains respectful, it will be vital to ensure timely monitoring and moderation of all responses.

Opportunities / local strengths:

- There are many public events in Newton-le-Willows that receive high footfall and are attended by diverse audiences. These could be excellent locations for pop-up events.
- Earlestown Market was a successful location for previous consultations, which also experienced high footfalls.
- The Council is exploring opportunities to create a Regeneration Hub within Earlestown town centre that could potentially be used for consultations.
- Diverse communities in the area and many active local community groups.
- Active and engaged heritage groups.
- PLACED have previously delivered a positive engagement workshop in Hope Academy.
- The Town Board have strong links and a commitment to success which will be key in driving the project.

Communications

A Communications Approach for the project is set out later in this document, outlining the deliverables and leads for these. Note that this is the approach for this engagement specifically, rather than the longer-term communications approach for the Town Board.

In addition, the Council's Communication Team will deliver an education piece around the Town Board, and funding more widely, prior to any promotion about

the events or engagement. The aim of this is to inform the public of the Town Board, the differences between this project and the Earlestown Masterplan and clarify the purpose of engagement.

Engagement Approach

Public engagement

It was discussed at the Draft Engagement Workshop that there are a mix of communities and groups within Newton-le-Willows which need to be given the opportunity to engage. Following the Draft Engagement Workshop and discussions with the Sub-Group, PLACED have refined the Draft Engagement Strategy, adding activities and approaches that will seek to deliver against the aims and respond to the challenges identified.

Our initial proposed engagement deliverables consisted of:

- Engagement Strategy Workshop and Engagement Strategy refinement
- Online engagement
- Pop-up events x 2
- Final report

Following the Draft Engagement Strategy Workshop, the following have been added:

- School workshop x 1
- Drop-In events x 5
- Self-led engagement materials
- Production of social media assets
- Interim engagement report
- In-person flyer distribution and walkaround

The proposed drop-in events can be for any group the Sub-Group/Board agree on targeting. This will need to be informed by their local knowledge of key groups. Some initial suggestions provided by the Sub-Group included a local heritage group and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Note: It is envisaged some of the students participating in the school workshop will also have SEND. This can be reviewed and monitored during delivery.

In addition, further consideration by the Sub-Group of inclusive engagement approaches with local minority groups (e.g. BAME, disabled, and LGBTQIA+) is required. This will need to draw on their local insights and knowledge, as well as

consider the most effective ways to raise awareness amongst groups through the proposed engagement activities (e.g. drop-in events, pop-ups, engagement materials, online).

Further refinement will be undertaken with the Engagement Sub-Group following feedback from Town Board, with the Engagement Strategy brought to the next Board meeting on 21st March 2025 for endorsement.

Stakeholder engagement

In addition, Layer.Studio and Hatch Associates will lead on the delivery of the following for the Town Board and stakeholders:

- 3 x Town Board & Stakeholder Workshops
- 1-1 place observation sessions
- 3 x Thematic Stakeholder workshops
- Town Walkshop.

Final attendees and invites for these sessions will be aligned to the identified stakeholder list provided above and confirmed through an online session with the Engagement Sub-Group (e.g., working with the group on stakeholder identification/mapping). This discussion will also include the most appropriate forum for the various stakeholders. For example, a Thematic Workshop may serve well the engagement of local business groups - not only high street, but also key industrial and logistics areas i.e., Sankey Valley Industrial Estate.

Project Engagement Charter

To support the project in ongoing communications, we suggest establishing a Project Engagement Charter. This consists of setting out three or four 'next steps' that the Council / Town Board commit to, helping to ensure people feel the process is transparent. These can be communicated during engagement, so people know how they can be kept 'in the loop.'

For example:

- Sharing of the engagement report on social media / websites. This can either be the full report, or the visual summary.
- Committing to public updates via the LTPT website at a minimum of every six months.
- Identifying and sharing specific areas where engagement findings have shaped decisions.

The above are optional. As a minimum, we would suggest sharing the public summary report. These have been discussed with Council officers, and no issues identified. They need to be further agreed with the Town Board prior to commencement of engagement delivery.

Engagement Deliverables Plan

The following provides our proposed revised engagement deliverables schedule. Please note that the milestones are indicative at this stage and will be informed by the timings of the publication of the updated prospectus, guidance from central government and local elections.

Deliverable	PLACED responsibilities	Council / Town Board / wider Design Team responsibilities	Milestones
Engagement strategy Workshop and production of this strategy document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver Engagement Strategy Workshop with Sub-Group • Review engagement strategy for agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input at meetings • Engagement Strategy sign-off 	January 2025 / Sign off March 2025
Online engagement Online platform with survey, ideas wall and map features. Includes full management, and a project update.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft online engagement platform • Launch online platform website • Manage engagement process, moderating comments • Update website as appropriate throughout the process • Update based on feedback • Undertake analysis of findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and feedback on the website in a timely manner, with all online engagement materials additionally signed off from the Council's Comms Team • Provide materials required to create the platform e.g., images, logos, text, as required • Respond to PLACED where questions arise • Promote on social media and the Council website, 	Launch March / April 2025 Can remain live for project duration, with updates. Scope to keep live after the project, with timeframes to be discussed.

		alongside other communication channels <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback on analysis to enable reporting 	
In-person flyer distribution and walkaround (1/2 day) Direct promotion through hand-delivering fliers to businesses to help raise awareness and enable informal conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design flyers promoting engagement opportunities • 2 x PLACED staff to conduct in-person flyer distribution/walkaround 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback and sign-off flyers from the Council • Provide any contacts / key target businesses 	April 2025

<p>Pop-up events x 2 (street or shop) Visual events with a range of structured engagement questions / activities for all. Ideally tap into existing events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordinate event locations • Create draft questions and materials for agreement • Lead on the creation of engagement materials and activities • Co-ordinate input from wider design team • Print all materials • Deliver 2 x pop-ups at approx. five hours each • 2 x PLACED Team members to deliver each event • Undertake analysis of findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend events that we could deliver in conjunction with • Agree questions prior to design of engagement materials in-line with dates set out below • Provide project information and wider context information as required • Provide collective feedback (single point of contact per org) on draft boards • Sign-off of materials in a timely manner 	<p>April 2025</p>
<p>Workshop with young people at a local secondary school x 1 Targeted design workshop for young people. Creative session also delivering social value.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act as the lead contact for schools • Design tailored workshop • Provision of workshop resources and materials • PLACED Team to lead delivery • Undertake analysis of findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm preference on workshop / age • Provide timely feedback on draft activities 	<p>April 2025</p>

<p>Drop-in events x 5 Attending up to five existing groups to informally talk through project and enable them to engage with a reduced set of engagement boards / activities that the pop-up events</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend existing local community or business groups (dropping into already planned sessions) up to one hour each • Create draft questions and materials for agreement • Co-ordinate input from team • Print all materials • 1 x PLACED Team member to deliver • Undertake analysis of findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance on which groups to attend • Agree questions prior to design of engagement materials in-line with dates set out below • Provide project information and wider context information as required • Provide collective feedback (single point of contact) on draft boards, with a maximum of three rounds of comments • Sign-off of materials in a timely manner, with additional approval from the Council's Comms Team 	<p>April / May 2025</p>
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<p>Self-led engagement Produce an AI summary board about the project to include a QR code and scope to leave comments in a box</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create questions and materials for self-led engagement • Lead on the creation of engagement materials and activities • Create draft questions and materials for agreement • Co-ordinate input from team • Print copies for three venues • Undertake analysis of findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree questions prior to design of engagement materials in-line with dates set out below • Provide project information and wider context information as required • Provide collective feedback (single point of contact) on draft boards • Sign-off of materials from the Council in a timely manner • Provide guidance on where activity can be placed and contact to enable this to happen. Up to three venues. 	<p>April / May 2025</p>
<p>Social media / info gathering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of social media graphics with links to online engagement • Gathering of social media numbers on those posts PLACED lead. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback and sign-off materials created from the Council 	<p>April / May 2025</p>

<p>Reporting Interim highlight report and full report with qualitative and quantitative data, along with public summary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide regular summary updates on engagement findings (bulleted, emailed) • Provide interim highlight report to inform visioning and project ideas • Draft and provide final engagement findings report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback • Review and sign-off in a timely manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft w/c 12/05 • Final 26/05
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All above dates are indicative and can be adjusted following further discussion.

The proposed stakeholder engagement activities, led by Layer.Studio and supported by Hatch Associates, outlined above (Town Board workshops, stakeholder discussions, thematic workshops, and a ‘walkshop’) will be programmed during February- April (dependent upon revised guidance). For example, Layer.Studio and Hatch Associates will use the Town Board Meeting on the 7th February as a first engagement event with Town Board members.

Communications Plan

Communication	PLACED	Council
Press and media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None included in budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council to lead on any press and media comms Council to deliver education piece prior to commencing engagement Council to lead on capturing the engagement on video, attending several events and speaking to the Town Board / design team / officers about the project.
Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide social plan for sign off Provide assets and details of events Post about events and engagement opportunities on own platforms Post on local groups Track engagement on own posts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sign off PLACED posts Post about project, tagging PLACED in social media
Posters / flyers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create flyers with QR code linking to online consultation. Print 20 A3 posters and 200 fliers In-person flyer distribution / walkaround 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council to sign-off flyers
Direct email comms with networks / contact lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council to lead on any email comms with key stakeholders Town Board to share information with contacts / share email contacts where appropriate.

Key dates and materials sign-off process

The following sets out our standard approach for sign off and should provide a sense of potential timeframes for consideration.

- **Four weeks prior to the event:** PLACED will draft questions for agreement.
- **Three weeks prior to the event:** PLACED will work with the consultant team to develop materials.
- **Two weeks prior to the event:** PLACED to provide draft materials. Note this is dependent on provision of information (images, text).
- **Within three days of issue/eleven days prior to the event:** Comments for each organisation come from a single source i.e., all client comments are sent via one person to ensure there is consensus prior to sending.
- **Eight days prior to event:** PLACED will amend the boards in-line with comments and issue a second version.
- **Within three days of issue:** Comments are received as per point 2.
- **Four days prior to the event:** PLACED will make final changes and issue for print. A final copy will be shared with the client and design team.