



Minutes of Newton-le-Willows Town Board

Friday 7 February 2025 14:30 – 16:30

Newton Community Centre, Park Road South,
Newton-le-Willows, WA12 8EX

Name	Initials	Role	Organisation
Board Members			
Chris Hickey	CH	Chair	Mercury Hampton
Councillor Anthony Burns	AB	Leader of the Council	St Helens Borough Council
Kath O'Dwyer	KO'D	Chief Executive	St Helens Borough Council
Ian Lewis	IL	Investment Manager	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
Jon Julian Smith	JJS	Chief Inspector, St Helens	Merseyside Police
Community & Co-Opted Board Members			
Alex Myhill	AM	Community Representative	Riddling Rack
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
Local Authority Representatives			
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
Apologies Received			
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

Mary Jefferson	MJ	Head of Regeneration and Growth	St Helens Borough Council
Amie Louise Parsonage	ALP	Portfolio and Partnerships Officer	Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner
Reverend Chris Stafford	CS	Faith Representative	Team Rector at St Peters, Emmanuel Wargrave, and St Johns
Joanne Edge	JE	Community Representative	Newton Sports Club
External Attendees			
David Watson	DW	Agenda Item Speaker	Associate Director at Hatch Urban Solutions
Danny Crump	DC	Agenda Item Speaker	Director of Urbanism at Layer.Studio
Sarah Brooks	SB	Agenda Item Speaker	Project Landscape Urbanist at Layer.Studio
Joanne Harrop	JH	Agenda Item Speaker	Director at PLACED
Amy Melia	AMe	Agenda Item Speaker	Project Manager 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 13 December 2024	CH
4.	Draft Engagement Strategy	MB/ External Speakers
5.	Any Other Business	All

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chris Hickey (CH) acknowledged apologies received from David Baines MP, Councillor Richard McCauley, Mary Jefferson, Amie Louise Parsonage, Reverend Chris Stafford, and Joanne Edge.

CH welcomed Members to the meeting and introductions were given around the table.

2. Declarations of Interest

CH stated no declarations were received at the time of preparing this briefing but invited Town Board Members to make any declarations of interest relating to the Agenda Items.

No declarations were declared.

3. Minutes of the previous Town Board meeting held on 13 December 2024

CH noted the minutes from the previous Town Board meeting on Friday 13 December are agreed and are published on the Council website. CH then provided an overview of key decisions and endorsements from the Board, including:

- Full board endorsement for community and co-opted positions
- Full board endorsement for Town Board Specialists
- Full board endorsement for the Communication Policy

4. Draft Engagement Strategy

Mark Bingley (MB) provided a verbal update on the background of the report and process to setting up an Engagement Sub-Group who have shaped the Draft Engagement Strategy.

At the previous Town Board meeting of Friday 13 December, agreement to the Communications Policy and appointment of Hatch Associates (and their consultant teams) was ratified by Board Members. MB reminded Board that an additional recommendation from Ian Lewis (IL) was sought for the Draft Engagement Strategy to be brought to Board before adoption, this was endorsed by Board Members.

MB stated that following a meeting with Hatch Associates, the Chair endorsed the approach to form an Engagement Sub-Group to steer the Engagement Strategy. All Town Board Members had the opportunity to lodge an expression of interest, with four applications received and shortlisted. All four applications were reviewed by the Chair, Programme Lead and Project Officer and assessed against their skillset and experience. All four applications were approved by the Chair with group membership being: Amie Louise Parsonage, Alex Myhill, Joanne Edge, and Fiona Ruddy.

MB explained that in addition to Board appointees, the Council's Head of Communications, Engagement and Reputation Management, Jayne Taylor, will also sit on the Engagement Sub-Group for specialist expertise and advice.

Presentation by Hatch Associates, PLACED and Layer.Studio

MB then invited Town Board Specialists, Hatch Associates, PLACED and Layer.Studio to give a presentation on the Draft Engagement Strategy.

Amy Melia (AMe) presented a review of the Engagement Strategy Workshop held on 15 January 2025 at Newton Sports Club with the Engagement Sub-Group. AMe noted the following key points which were covered in the Workshop:

- Expectations and aspirations for engagement
- Target audiences
- Scope of delivery
- Timescales of bringing the consultation forward

AMe explained that there was a consensus of expectation that engagement should have a broad reach, utilising a range of engagement methods with clear and accessible language. AMe informed Board that the funding opportunity should be clearly explained with a need for impact and legacy alongside well evidenced outputs. There should be a clear differentiation between the Long-Term Plan for Towns and other funding initiatives such as Levelling Up Fund.

AMe commented that a broad reach is required to engage diverse local groups that are community anchors within Newton-le-Willows. AMe stated groups targeted should be inclusive and ensure that lesser heard groups are reached throughout the consultation process inclusive, for example, of young people, SEND groups, minority groups, heritage groups. AMe reminded Board that PLACED are to lead on public engagement within the programme, with Hatch Associates and Layer.Studio to lead on Town Board and Stakeholder consultation.

AMe noted the challenges regarding scope and timescales, as guidance is awaited from central government as part of the updated technical pack. AMe also explained there were potential timescale impacts due to the pre-election period and engagement fatigue from previous programmes.

AMe explained that both challenges and opportunities were discussed, with opportunities being presented around high footfall and diverse public events and markets, and utilising active local community groups which could be used for consultations. Additionally, utilising the Town Board's wide reaching links into the community and commitment to success to drive forward the programme.

AMe highlighted that additional scope has been included following the Workshop to deliver:

- 1 x school workshop
- 5 x drop-in events (groups to be identified)
- Self-led engagement materials including summary board(s) to be placed within the community locations, comments boxes and/or QR codes to be used to provide feedback.

- Social media asset production with links to online engagement to further drive participation.
- Interim engagement report to give a steer towards visioning and project ideas.
- In-person flyer distribution and walkaround to hand-deliver flyers to raise awareness of the programme.

David Watson (DW) added that the Board should consider the best use of the drop-in events to reach the broad target audience.

AMe further added a suggestion that a project engagement charter could be produced. This would provide transparency of the consultation process for the community and would include sharing engagement reports, alongside committing to public updates.

MB reminded Board that the Engagement Strategy is in draft currently and that refinement by the Engagement Sub-Group is still possible. The requirement for additional events was raised at the previous Town Board, when the mandate was given to ensure consultation and engagement was robust and wide reaching.

MB noted that due to the recent loss of an elected member, there is a potential by-election at a later date, and therefore Purdah will apply. Purdah refers to the pre-election period and during this time, communications and consultations are generally restricted.

MB also stated lessons will need to be learned from previous consultation exercises to ensure that a manageable list of impactful projects can be brought before Board for consideration.

Joanne Harrop (JH) noted that flexibility is possible across the consultation process, reactive to lessons and findings as the consultation progresses. DW added timescales are important to accelerate where possible. Should any Engagement Sub-Group follow-ups be required it would need to be scheduled soon to meet timelines. MB noted this but re-emphasised to Board the need to wait for government guidance towards the amended programme, as it will be key in shaping the scope of the programme.

KO'D commented that it is essential to ensure engagement with a broad range of young people. As some young people do not attend schools within Newton-le-Willows, there would be a need to introduce consultation through groups including sports groups, the Sea Cadets etc.

KO'D also added she was pleased to see focus on SEND groups within the Draft Engagement Strategy and suggested that Wargrave House/ Ascent College could be appropriate to engage.

KO'D emphasised that the working aged population should also be considered in how consultation is targeted. Engagement outside of working hours at times to enable the availability of as many people as possible, will ensure consultation allows all groups to feel heard when projects are suggested.

KO'D suggested community groups such as Parkside Community Group and other groups such as High Street Hive and Earlestown Thrive could be engaged with as they have existing community reach.

DW noted that spreading the awareness of online tools as well as in-person events is important in reaching some of the mentioned audiences, such as young and working people, and that the language should reflect this.

Fiona Ruddy (FR) expressed that she is delighted to see that a lot of the Engagement Sub-Group comments had been taken on board and added into the Draft Engagement Strategy.

FR further supported KOD's suggestion of considering sport groups due to their reach and footfall and added that costing of additional engagement would need to be discussed.

FR raised that in Joanne Edge's (JE) absence, branding and a concise message were discussed at the Workshop on Wednesday 15 January as being important, so a clear message can be given of what is being consulted. Alex Myhill (AM) agreed on the importance of branding to differentiate the consultation and Long-Term Plan for Towns programme from other regeneration delivery across the area.

FR suggested schools could potentially be involved in the logo creation to provide community involvement through the development of the branding. Paul Romanko (PR) noted enterprise and marketing qualifications are delivered at local schools and colleges which presents a potential opportunity to link into this resource. John Unsworth (JU) also added that similar opportunities may be accessible within the uniformed services, such as the Sea Cadets.

MB commented that community involvement is a good idea and will need to be coordinated to ensure all assets are appropriate across social media, letterheads etc. MB further advised that the programme name 'Long-Term Plan for Towns' will most likely change as part of the revised prospectus from government, which consequently will affect branding, and therefore Board need to wait for this update.

PR added that Board should best use the resources available in delivering all aspects of the branding.

It was noted by DW, DC and KO'D that procurement of branding should be through local Graphic Designers or sourced from local groups where possible and that this would be another social value commitment to the local community.

MB provided a financial update to Board and advised that approval for additional expenditure on consultation will be brought before Board at its next meeting on 21 March 2025.

AM suggested the last weekend of May would be a good date for launching the programme and raising awareness due to existing events with high footfall. CH also mentioned that Newton Sports Club is a great venue for a similar well-attended event to achieve comprehensive community engagement.

DW emphasised to Board that the overall programme timeline and mapping needs to be considered to incorporate Board ideas into a deliverable timeline of consultation and project development.

MB noted that the milestones from government have not yet been received and could dictate the timeline of events. It may be that some events can be attended by council officers and not always the PLACED team to give flexibility in targeted events.

FR asked if there was any anticipation that the programme would deviate from the previously advised investment themes. KO'D advised that the programme should be based around the three current investment themes and whilst there is not a solid indication from central government, it is not expected that the three headings will change dramatically. MB added that the current guidance is that 'Town Boards should feel empowered to continue their work' and the key decision for the Board is to decide on how consultation is best delivered to engage all aspects of the local community.

KO'D noted that any feedback received from consultation, which does not necessarily fit within the new programme investment themes, can be signposted to appropriate programmes that may be running suitable projects.

JH noted that a key decision is to identify the groups for the five drop-in sessions ahead of the next Engagement Sub-Group.

NOTE: The Draft Engagement Strategy to be further refined and brought back to Town Board on 21 March 2025 for endorsement.

ACTION: Council officers to coordinate suggestions of suitable groups for drop-in sessions via email, to be shortlisted for the next Engagement Sub-group.

5. Any Other Business

Rachel Bebbby (RB) reminded Board Members that an availability spreadsheet for future Town Board meetings has been circulated and asked for this to be populated.

ACTION: All Board Members to populate availability spreadsheet.