



Minutes of Newton-le-Willows Neighbourhood Board

Friday 21 March 2025 14:30 – 16:30

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

Invitees			
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
Kath O'Dwyer	KO'D	Chief Executive	St Helens Borough Council
Ian Lewis	IL	Investment Manager	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
Amie Louise Parsonage	ALP	Portfolio and Partnerships Officer	Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner
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
Reverend Chris Stafford	CS	Faith Representative	Team Rector at St Peters, Emmanuel Wargrave, and St John's
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 Bebbly	RB	Project Officer	St Helens Borough Council
Laura Greenwood	LG	Project Officer	St Helens Borough Council
Apologies Received			
Matthew Valentine	MV	Project Officer	St Helens Borough Council
Councillor Anthony Burns	AB	Leader of the Council	St Helens Borough Council
John Unsworth	JU	Cultural, Arts, and Heritage including Sports Groups Representative	Sea Cadet Corps
Jon Julian Smith	JJS	Chief Inspector, St Helens	Merseyside Police
Observers - Apologies			
Mark Palethorpe	MP	Executive Director of Peoples Services (Chief Executive Designate)	St Helens Borough Council

Item	Title	Lead
1.	Welcome and Introductions	CH
2.	Declarations of Interest	CH
3.	Minutes of the previous Town Board meeting held on 7 February 2025	CH
4.	Long-Term Plan for Towns / Neighbourhood Plan Programme Update – Presentation	MB
5.	Engagement Strategy	MB
6.	Any Other Business	All

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chris Hickey (CH) acknowledged apologies received from Councillor Anthony Burns, John Unsworth and Matthew Valentine.

Mark Bingley (MB) updated that apologies have since been received from Mark Palethorpe and Jon Smith.

Kath O'Dwyer gave an overview to Mark Palethorpe, introducing him to the Board as the new Chief Executive of St Helens Borough Council when she retires later this month, and confirmed that Mark will replace her position on the Board.

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

2. Declarations of Interest

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

Councillor McCauley (RM) raised an ongoing declaration of interest to be noted as he sits on the Planning Committee.

No further declarations were declared.

3. Minutes of the previous Neighbourhood Board meeting held on 7 February 2025

CH noted the minutes from the previous Neighbourhood Board meeting on Friday 7 February are agreed and live on the Council website. CH then provided an overview of key decisions and endorsements from the Board, including:

- Full Board noted the updates in setting up an Engagement Sub-Group.
- Full Board noted the development of the Draft Engagement Strategy and agreed the Strategy is to be further refined, following their comments, and brought back to Board for endorsement.
- Board members to populate the availability spreadsheet.

4. Long-Term Plan for Towns / Neighbourhood Plan Programme Update – Presentation

MB gave an overview of the prospectus, milestones, and governance for the Plan for Neighbourhoods initiative which has replaced the Long-Term Plan for Towns Programme.

MB detailed the challenges in issuing Board papers in accordance with governance requirements this month given the issue of the new Plan for Neighborhoods Prospectus on March 4, Governance documentation on 12 March and a webinar hosted by civil servants from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for Chief Executives on the 17 March, which MB and Rachel Bebbby (RB) attended. MB stated the importance of ensuring Board Members received the most up-to-date information and this ultimately led to a further time requirement for development of the agenda. MB further announced that MHCLG will host drop-in Q&A sessions on a weekly basis up to 22 April so if Board have any questions throughout the programme then these can be shared at these sessions.

Presentation by Mark Bingley (MB)

MB displayed a presentation and outlined that the Plan for Neighbourhoods now replaces the previous Long-Term Plan for Towns programme and outlined that the Board now needs to create a 10-year 'Regeneration Plan' and 4-Year Investment Plan, which was previously a Long-Term Plan and 3-Year Investment Plan.

MB explained that Government have expanded the intervention themes from 3 to 8 to include the below themes:

- Regeneration and High Streets
- Safety and Security
- Transport
- Housing
- Work Productivity and Skills
- Cohesion
- Health and Wellbeing
- Education and Opportunity

MB stated this presents Board an opportunity through less restriction than the original themes. The broadened themes allow the Board to have a wider impact across Newton-le-Willows.

MB noted there are also three strategic objectives of the fund, including thriving places, stronger communities, and taking back control, so there is real opportunity for the programme to include a wide scope of projects.

MB described the funding changes, highlighting the slight changes to the profile overall, whilst there are notable changes to profiling particularly in Year 1. MB highlighted that under Long-Term Plan for Towns programme there was a need to create a 3-Year Investment Plan, and since, the changes made by the Labour Government, under Plan for Neighbourhoods has extended that to a 4-Year Investment Plan. The capital funding allocation (£5.306m) for the 4-Years is the same as the previous 3-Year Investment Plan, however, originally there was £2.096m capital allocation for the first year which has now been reduced to £0.360m. MB stated this is due to an acknowledgement from the Government of challenging deadlines for Capital expenditure in Year 1 under LTPfT. The £0.360m for Plan for Neighbourhoods in the first year (2026-2027) does still allow the Board for high-impact quick win projects within the provided expenditure.

MB reminded Board that when the Labour Government announced their autumn budget review, a further £0.200m of capacity funding was provided. MB emphasised that MHCLG have since recognised the additional funding which has since been released to cater for the wider scope and additional themes, and to ensure thorough engagement and consultation. MB explained that the decision of the Board to await an updated

prospectus prior to commencing consultation was a correct one given the broadened scope.

MB added that in addition to the £0.200m capacity funding, there is a further £0.150m committed in 2026-27, meaning there is an additional £0.350m of capacity funding - £0.600m in total - to facilitate the Board, fund consultation, or the need for experts. This will enable the development of the 10-Year Regeneration Plan and 4-Year Investment Plan. MB highlighted the importance of this additional resource and explained that the appointed Neighbourhood Board Specialists will need to respond to the expand scope and cost their time accordingly.

MB explained that additional work is required to capture the data sets across the additional 5 investment themes, so the Board has an evidential base for the strategic case for change. MB advised that these additional costs are still being worked on by Neighbourhood Board Specialists including the need to ensure feedback loops with Board are appropriately captured as per the detailed updated prospectus. MB explained that a report will be considered detailing these costs at the next Board meeting.

MB presented the updated timeline for the Plan for Neighbourhood programme and announced that 22 April 2025 is the Board's next deadline. By this date, Board will have to agree their area boundary and finalised membership to MHCLG. MB highlighted that Board composition documents will now be submitted via a new Government portal which has simplified the process, and MB reassured Board that the new Board membership guidance does align with the current Board composition. MB stated that over Spring 2025, Government will review membership and boundary proposals and confirm whether these are acceptable.

Between Spring 2025 and Winter 2025, MB stated that Neighbourhood Boards should submit their Regeneration Plan for assessment and approval by MHCLG, with the Council's assumption that a deadline of November/December to work towards. MB underlined that Neighbourhood Board Specialists have been asked to provide a new programme to align with these dates and, noting the expanded scope, the current programme shows a final date for the Regeneration Plan of October 2025.

Kath O'Dwyer (KO'D) added to this, to say it will be key to manage public expectation, as once Plan for Neighbourhoods consultation commences people will be keen to see activity on the ground. KO'D added that this is a task for the Board collectively and individually to tell the story and the process behind organising, tendering, planning, and costing, and that there are statutory requirements to go through particularly relating to procurement – therefore it takes time. KO'D stated it will be key as a Board to identify some projects as 'quick wins' so the community can see the impact of the programme from the offset. MB agreed and highlighted there will be time when there will be limited communication from the Board and Council into the public domain due to extensive

work being undertaken to develop plans behind the scenes. MB highlighted there will be an exercise to identify and programme communications updates effectively. MB suggested this could be a task for the Engagement Sub-Group alongside the internal Council Communications Team. K'OD added that it is key to emphasis the full length of the programme being across 10-Years. Fiona Ruddy (FR) suggested having key visuals to show milestones of the programme to provide information to residents on what will happen and when. FR stated she does this effectively within her current role and can share any example visuals. CH further added that it is key to have visuals for people to access, digest and look forward to projects presented and commented that this has been done well for Earlestown.

MB added the Communications Team are equally doing an education piece prior to engagement starting which will provide details about the Board and the Plan for Neighbourhoods. David Baines (DB) added that some of these communications are highlighted within the Engagement Strategy detailed later on.

Paul Romanko (PR) asked if the funding profile is set in stone. MB responded that the capital / revenue split is 75%/25% and this is set in stone, however it is possible for Board to roll over funding, but Board will have to ask for permission from MHCLG to do so. PR highlighted the benefits of potentially rolling money forward if needed as Board want to spend the fund on the right projects. K'OD highlighted she has rolled money forward before for other Boards, but it is not a straightforward process, so Board should look to spend the fund as profiled if possible. KO'D also added that when talking about the programme it will be much more powerful for residents to hear and see faces they know, rather than the Council.

MB displayed the governance updates to the programme which included that Boards are advised to appoint a Deputy Chair, and it is for the Chair, in partnership with the MP and Local Authority to consult on this. MB stated the need for a Deputy Chair for scenarios that CH cannot attend and said this will be actioned outside of Board and an update provided to Board.

Government have equally announced that under Plan for Neighbourhoods, membership may be refreshed at the end of the first 4-Year Investment Period. MB advised that Government have provided a Board membership list with a few additional members aligned with the intervention themes. MB recommended that Board freeze membership to allow consistency whilst developing proposals, until such point that Board have a list of projects from the Regeneration Plan and a skills analysis can be undertaken to identify any gaps (similar to the approach taken with St Helens Town Deal Board).

MB stated that the Council will now publish a decision log of all the decisions made by Board for transparency. Equally, MB advised that a Privacy Notice has been shared

online aligned with UK data protection legislation, this is due to the information collated by MHCLG on Board membership.

Furthermore, MB re-emphasised the deadline of 22 April and the need to submit any proposals to alter the default boundary. MH reminded Board that the original maps are taken from ONS Built Up Data and concerns were raised that key green spaces were excluded. MB stated Neighbourhood Board Specialists have previously shared their view on where the boundary should be, and this was shared at the Neighbourhood Board Workshop on 7 February. MB shared a further map (below at Figure 1) which asked for comments from Board Members to also include sections highlighted in blue, as these include Sankey Valley connections and rural areas.

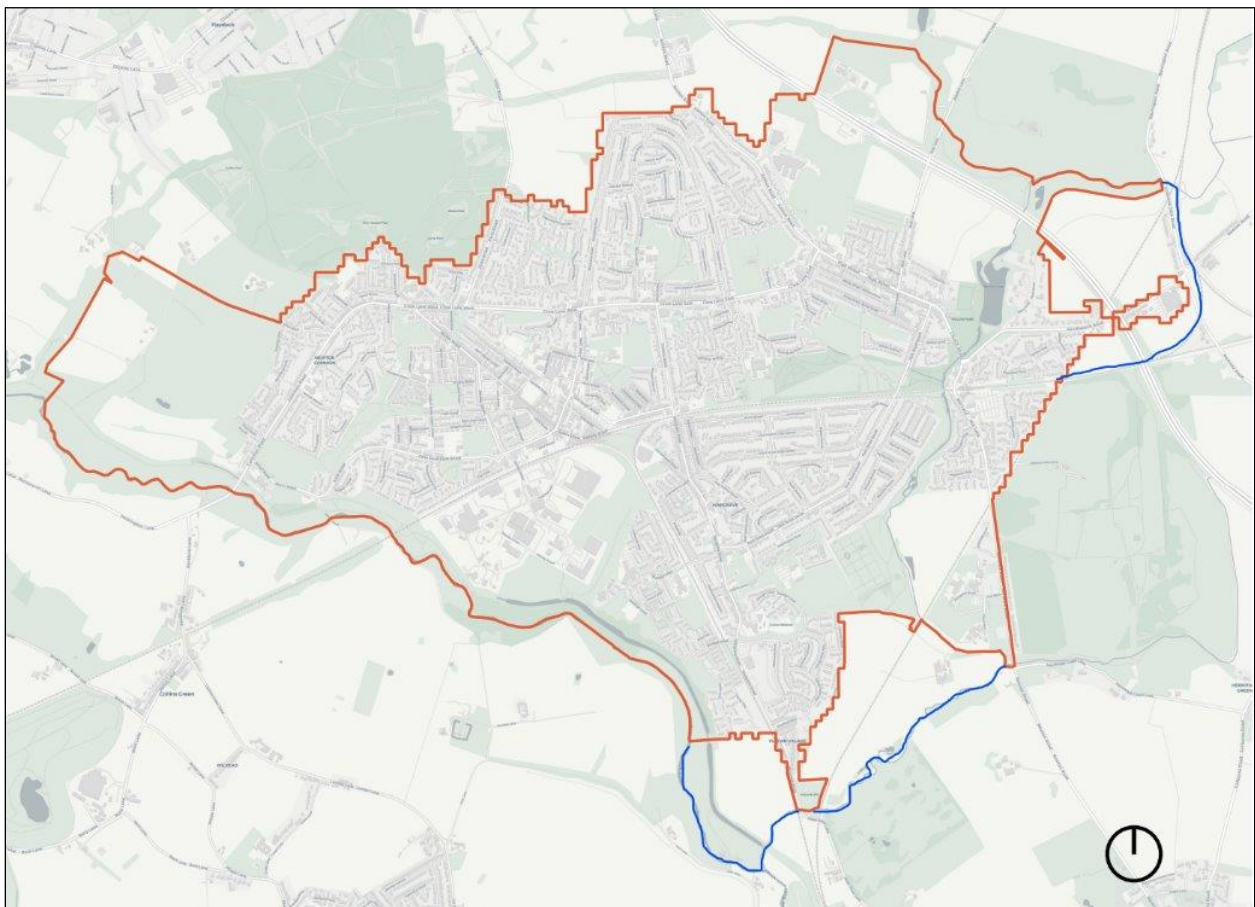


Figure 1: Proposal to alter the 'default' area boundary.

MB highlighted that having these areas does not mean a project will take place here but by maximising the boundary it allows Board to capture as many projects as possible.

MB confirmed to Board that the boundary shown does not go outside the Ward boundaries of Newton-le-Willows East and West.

KO'D emphasised the importance of ensuring we do not stray into other local authority areas as crossing Borough and constituency boundaries could present challenges. Alex Myhill (AM) said it is key to keep within Golborne Dale Road.

PR agreed that the boundary needs to be as wide as possible to encompass as much possibility. DB highlighted the benefit to the programme that we can amend the boundary area and expressed he would be happy to support the current amendments.

PR asked if there are any equivalent programmes in Warrington to see their boundary map. MB confirmed Warrington Borough Council has not been identified as a beneficiary but communications with Wigan have happened previously. MB advised that he and RB have set up a Liverpool City Region Wide Plan for Neighbourhoods group with Knowsley Council and Halton Council. DB asked if the town identified as a beneficiary in Wigan is Leigh, and MB confirmed that this is the case.

FR stated she is supportive of the boundary as long as we do not come up against any land issues with Warrington or Wigan. DB stated it may be that cross-partnership working is needed but agreed the boundary should remain within the ward/ borough boundaries.

CH thanked Board members for their contributions and asked Neighbourhood Board if they endorse the proposal to alter the default area boundary map (as shown in figure 1) and the proposal to freeze Board membership. This approach was endorsed without objection.

NOTE: A key milestones visual to be used to show the timeline of the programme.

ACTION: Chair to meet with the MP and Local Authority to consult on appointing a Deputy Chair.

NOTE: Board Membership to be refreshed at the end of the first 4-Year Investment period cycle.

ACTION: A decision log to be published on the Council's website.

DECISION: Board approved the endorsement to freeze Board membership until such time that the Regeneration Plan is developed, and a skills review can be undertaken aligned to the projected defined in the Investment Plan.

DECISION: Board approved the proposal to alter the 'default' area boundary as set out in Figure 1.

5. Engagement Strategy

CH voiced his appreciation to the Project Team and Engagement Sub-Group in the development of the Engagement Strategy. MB then gave a verbal update on the report of the progress made in the development of an Engagement Strategy, and a Communications Plan.

MB reminded Board Members that an Engagement Sub-Group was set up in January to work up the Draft Engagement Strategy which was shared at the last Neighbourhood Board on 7 February. The meeting of 7 February gave Board the opportunity to comment on the Strategy and Board were supportive of this approach and the Strategy to date.

Following 7 February, the Engagement Sub-Group met again to further refine the Strategy given the emphasis of community engagement as a 'key pillar' in the Plan for Neighbourhoods programme.

MB highlighted the key changes from the Draft Engagement Strategy, with one being the changes to drop-in sessions, which were originally only allocated an hour. MB stated the Project Team and Engagement Sub-Group were conscious of the breadth of community and stakeholder groups and did not want Board to have to pick which individual groups to target. In doing so, MB describes that each drop-in session length has been tripled to allow groups to be invited across a 3-hour period to talk about their views and suggested improvements for Newton-le-Willows.

MB discussed the approach to engagement, with PLACED leading on the public engagement, Layer.Studio and Hatch Associates to lead on stakeholder engagement, and MB and RB as the Project Team to fill in any gaps in engagement. MB emphasised that there is a collective responsibility to ensure engagement is as wide reaching as possible. MB further pointed out that the appendices of the Agenda Pack in the Engagement Strategy and Communications Plan details who is going to do what and provides further context for the Board.

MB detailed that alongside the extension of the original drop-ins, there are additional time and cost implications for the activities sought after alongside a broadened scope. MB detailed the additional expenditure required, and if approved, consultation is set to commence early April to mid-May. Following consultation, Neighbourhood Board Specialists are to assess the findings and provide the Regeneration Plan and 4-Year Investment Plan in approximately October before submission prior to Winter 2025.

MB highlighted that following the Engagement Sub-Group session in March, Sub-Group Members endorse the current Engagement Strategy and are happy with the current context and activities included.

DB asked which Board Members sit on the Engagement Sub-Group. MB stated group membership is Amie Louise Parsonage, Alex Myhill, Joanne Edge, and Fiona Ruddy.

KO'D asked if stakeholders for the drop-in sessions are required to turn up for a full 3 hours, or are they expected to drop-in throughout the 3-hour period. MB confirmed that groups are to drop-in across the 3-hour period when suits. PR supported this approach and suggested if drop-ins can be overlapped from the afternoon into the evening, then this could be an ideal approach.

MB advised Board Members to review the 'Engagement Activity Breakdown' at the back of the report, and stated RB has collated a stakeholder list that has been shared with Engagement Sub-Group for comment and can be shared with the wider Board to ensure we collate as many groups as possible.

Chris Stafford (CS) noticed that one of the suggested locations is St Peters Church, but faith groups are not detailed, CS wanted to ensure this was noted as this will include an additional stakeholder group.

AM highlighted to Board that the Engagement Sub-Group have equally agreed that the fliers should be increased so they can be handed out by Board Members and at key events. MB noted that this is included within the additional fee, from 900 fliers upped to 5000, and Board Members can equally distribute these. RM added this is key to utilise in high footfall areas such as bars. KO'D added that it will be key to target events with these fliers too. MB included that it will be down to everyone to collectively promote, and a lot of work and thought has gone into the Engagement Strategy.

MB further announced that PLACED are to host 2 pop-up events, with the first event to be targeted being the Artisan Market in Earlestown on 12 April, with the second event identified to either be the 19 April Easter Trail in Newton, or the May Markets in Newton which the Engagement Sub-Group agreed may be more suitable to target.

RM asked can it be assured that care leavers and looked after children are also accounted for within the engagement.

CH asked if there is any engagement set to be in rail stations. Joanne Edge (JE) highlighted that the Engagement Sub-Group talked about rail stations as a potential location for the 'self-led engagement' activity but highlighted that there could be difficulties with numbers as people will be unlikely to be dwelling as they will be arriving in time for specific trains. RM asked if these self-led engagement boards will have a QR code, MB confirmed this.

MB discussed that following the last Engagement Sub-Group session it was decided by the Sub-Group that the self-led engagement boards should be mobile, and rail stations were identified as a potential location. MB said the boards can be rotated every 2 weeks

or so and ways to understand where the best locations are working for engagement needs to be investigated. CH added that they use a QR code scanner which is a relatively cheap software which can monitor where QR codes have been scanned. FR highlighted that a lot of people who use Newton-le-Willows Train Station are commuters, whereas she uses Earlestown Train Station, so it would be key to capture both train stations.

PR added he can tell a lot of work has gone into the Engagement Strategy and asked if there is a way to make sure there is a consistent message and brand throughout between the Neighbourhood Board Specialists and Council. MB added that at the last Engagement Sub-Group session Members were shared the draft engagement materials for comment and this will be fed back into PLACED to ensure there is consistency. K'OD added the materials will include the Council logo as the accountable body.

K'OD added that it would be ideal to engage businesses in the distribution of leaflets and obtaining a list of them and where to locate them. K'OD further noted that Ward Members can be utilised to hand out leaflets within the community if needed.

DB noted that there are dedicated engagement workshops for a secondary school and SEND school but asked if leaflets can be distributed to other local schools. RB responded that headteachers email addresses have been collated and will be asked if digital leaflets and engagement links can be sent through parent mail. DB raised that only one parent or guardian is potentially signed up to parent mail, with JE stating that a lot of leaflets get unfortunately thrown away before it reaches the parents from her previous experience working in education. Debbie Taylor (DT) added that QR codes can be added onto schools' newsletters, which can be shared either digitally or physically.

FR asked if the Council produce residents' newsletters. KO'D responded to state they do, and contact can be made with residents via email and address in line with the privacy notice.

DT asked if there is anything that can monitor and reduce people trying to sway a consultation. MB added that this has been previously raised with PLACED and there will be someone from PLACED who goes through the data online and ensures this is not the case. RM added the survey will evidence this and collect this data as part of the consultation. MB added that the Plan will marry up the evidence base from the data pack provided by Government, the strategic evidence base for change developed by Hatch Associates and Layer.Studio, and community consultation that will present the will of the community.

MB finally noted to Board Members that the Communications Plan attached as an appendix is a live document, and the Council will seek to positively add to this if there are communications to share.

CH asked Neighbourhood Board Members if they endorse the Engagement Strategy, Communications Plan, and additional expenditure. This was endorsed without objection.

ACTION: RB to share a stakeholder list with Neighbourhood Board to collate any other key stakeholders for communications.

NOTE: Engagement Strategy to also include faith groups as an additional stakeholder if a consultation event is held.

DECISION: Board approved the endorsement of the Engagement Strategy, Communications Plan and additional expenditure presented.

6. Any Other Business

CH thanked Board Members for their contributions and noted that the next Neighbourhood Board is on Friday 9 May and Board meetings have been scheduled until July. CH stated RB has circulated an availability spreadsheet and asked Board Members who have not filled this in to do so.

DB announced since gaining confirmation about the Neighbourhood Plan and from discussion with other MPs at Westminster, that Newton-le-Willows Neighbourhood Board are in a strong and advanced position. DB therefore thanked everyone for their work to date and stated a well done is needed.

K'OD thanked the Neighbourhood Board as this will be K'OD's last Board representing as the Chief Executive of St Helens Borough Council and stated it has been a pleasure to work with everyone. K'OD emphasised that it is a very coherent Board and added that as a resident of Newton-le-Willows K'OD has an invested interest and will be following the Neighbourhood Plan.

ACTION: All Board members to populate availability spreadsheet.