ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

November 2026

1. Introduction

1.1 This Engagement Strategy sets out how the Council will involve communities, stakeholders and general consultation bodies in the preparation of the new Local Plan. Its purpose is to ensure that engagement is meaningful, transparent and proportionate. The Engagement Strategy therefore provides a clear framework for when, how and with whom engagement will take place throughout the plan preparation process.

1.2 The Engagement Strategy informs the preparation of a new Local Plan that will replace the St Helens Local Plan adopted in 2022. The Local Plan is the statutory Development Plan for the borough, and sets out the long-term vision, spatial strategy, planning policies and site allocations for the plan period.

1.3 This Engagement Strategy will replace the existing 2025 Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) for Local Plan preparation. The SCI guidance on neighbourhood planning and consultation on planning applications will be published and updated separately.

1.4 The aim of this Strategy is for engagement on the new Local Plan to include residents, businesses, developers, landowners, infrastructure providers, community and voluntary organisations, and general consultation bodies. The new Local Plan and the engagement on it will have regard to the 2010 Equalities Act and will support targeted consultation for groups that are traditionally under-represented in the planning process. The preparation of the new Local Plan will draw upon other engagement that the Council has undertaken on other plans and programmes. Finally, the information in consultations will be presented to reflect the different localities of the borough and identify issues that affect particular localities.

The people of St Helens

1.5 St Helens has a population of 183,248 (2021 Census). St Helens has a higher proportion of the population aged 50 – 74 compared to the England average. St Helens has 43.4% of the population who live in the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally, and 97% of the population are of White ethnicity.

1.6 A snapshot of the population of St Helens shows that both males and females have a lower life expectancy at birth compared to the England average. St Helens has a lower mean annual income compared to England, a higher percentage of economic activity and a higher rate of estimated rough sleepers compared to England. In St Helens[1]:

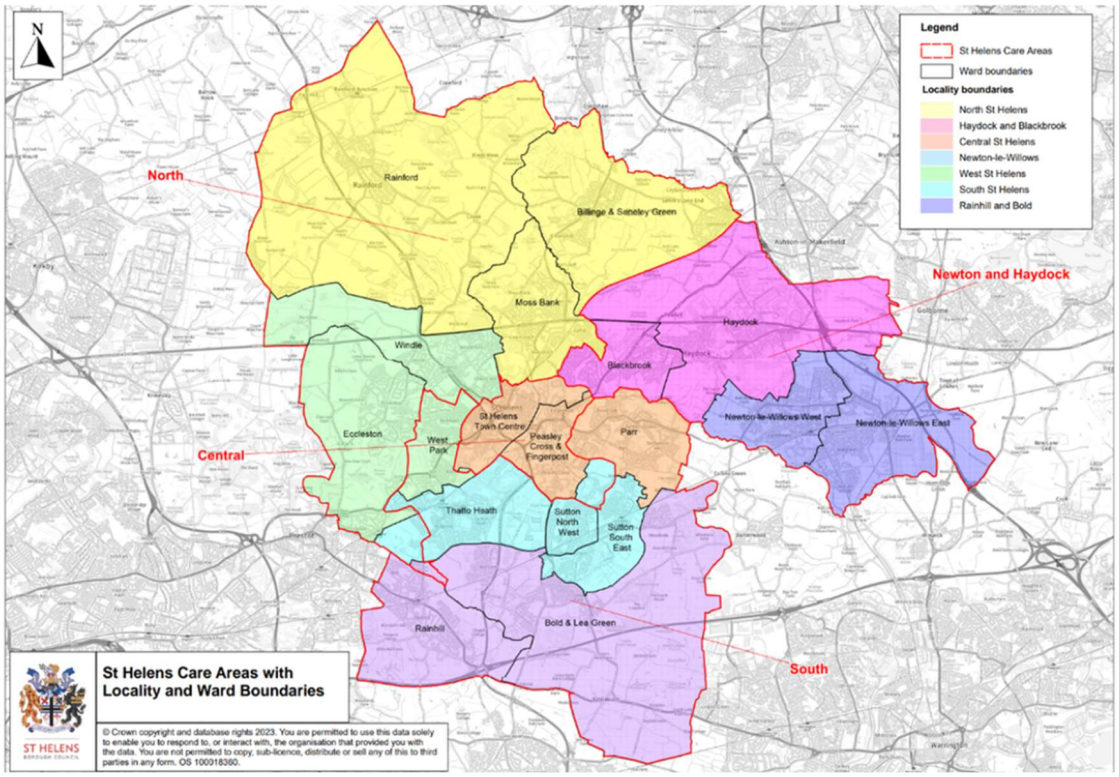
- Female life expectancy at birth (2021-23) is 80.5 years, compared to 83 years in England.
- Male life expectancy at birth (2021-23) is 76.8 years, compared to 79.1 years in England.

[1] Data obtained from Local Insight England Customer Report for St Helens

- There is a higher proportion of the population that are economically active than nationally and regionally (79.8%, compared to 77.3% for North West and 79.5% for England).
- 20.9% of households are workless, compared to 17.2% in the North West and 13.9% in Great Britain.
- Median gross full time annual pay is lower than in England at £31,651, compared to £37,630; and workplace earnings have a gross weekly pay of £646.60, compared to £734.20 in the North West.
- There are 8.6 estimated rough sleepers for every 100,000 people, compared to 8.1 in England.
- Healthy life expectancy is lower for both males and females in St Helens than in England, at 55.7 years compared to 60.9 years for males and 56 years compared to 61.3 years for females. Whilst this has decreased nationally since 2011-13 in England, it has decreased more significantly in St Helens.
- Half of children live within the most deprived areas nationally, with 23.7% of children living in income deprived families.
- 40,829 people or 22.28% of the borough's population declared as disabled under the Equality Act.
- 20,030 people or 10.93% of the borough's population declared they had a long-term health problem or disability that limited their day-to-day activities a lot.

The localities of St Helens

1.7 St Helens is made up of seven different localities, shown on the map below.



1.8 There are a number of key characteristics within the defined localities of St Helens, below are some highlights for some of the localities from data obtained from the Local Insight England Customer Report for St Helens.

1.9 In **Central St Helens**, 60% of people live in the top decile most deprived households (nationally) in terms of income and there is a higher rate of working age benefit claimants here compared to the borough average.

1.10 In **North St Helens**, the proportion of the population aged over 65 is the highest in the borough (28.16% compared to 20.56% across St Helens).

1.11 **Newton-le-Willows** has the highest average household income in the borough (£46,392 gross household income compared to £41,971 in St Helens) but still below the England average of £56,218 and with a higher rate of benefit claimants than nationally.

1.12 **Rainhill and Bold** has the lowest proportion of households living in fuel poverty, 9.79% compared to 11.99% across the borough, and 16.64% in Central St Helens.

1.13 In **South St Helens**, the proportion of population with no qualifications is the second highest in the borough at 23.80% (behind Central St Helens at 29.85%). The proportion for the borough as a whole is 21.42%. **St Helens West** is the only area where this is below the national average (17.68% compared to 18.08%).

1.13 In **Haydock and Blackbrook** the proportion of residents in full time employment is the second highest in the borough at 78.82% (behind Newton-le-Willows at 80.47%).

2. Overview of Local Plan engagement requirements

2.1 For the preparation of the new Local Plan, the Council is required to undertake:

- scoping consultation;
- consultation on proposed Local Plan content and evidence; and
- consultation on the proposed Local Plan.

2.2 Following each of the three stages of consultation, the Council must publish a summary of each consultation (please note that this will not be immediately and can take some time to compile dependent upon the number of representations received and resources available), which will set out matters including:

- a summary of the feedback received in response to the consultation; and
- an explanation of how this feedback has been considered.

2.3 These engagement requirements have been factored into the Local Plan timetable, and are shown in bold below:

Key Milestones	Commence	Complete
Notice of Commencement		30/06/2026
Scoping consultation	**01/09/2026**	**06/10/2026**
Gateway 1 Self-Assessment		13/11/2026
6 week public consultation on proposed plan content and evidence	**02/06/2027**	**14/07/2027**
Gateway 2 assessor report published		24/11/2027
8 week public consultation on proposed Local Plan	**28/04/2028**	**24/06/2028**
Gateway 3 submission		01/09/2028
Submit plan to the Secretary of State		31/10/2028
Plan adopted by the Council		31/05/2029

Table 2.1 – Local Plan Timetable

3. Who do we consult?

The general consultation bodies

3.1 Regulation 2 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 (referred to as 'the regulations' from this point forward) sets out what general consultation bodies and specific consultation bodies are. The Government bodies, local authorities, parish councils and utilities companies are set out in Appendix 1.

The Local Plan consultation database

3.2 The Local Plan consultation database is made up of the general consultation bodies, as well as members of the public and local groups/organisations who request to join the database or have previously made representations on Development Plan documents.

3.3 Any interested individual or group is welcome to add their contact details, or the contact details of their agent or other representative, to this database. Contact should be made with the Planning Policy Team via email to planningpolicy@sthelens.gov.uk or by telephoning 01744 676190.

3.4 Once on the database, the Council as Local Planning Authority strongly encourage individuals and organisations to inform the Planning Policy Team if their contact details have changed or they no longer want to be on the database so that the database can be updated. All personal information held on the Local Plan database will be securely stored and only used for the purposes of preparing planning policy documents.

Protecting your data

3.5 The Council will comply with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) which came into effect on 1 January 2021 and sets out the key principles, rights, and obligations for most processing of personal data in the UK, except for law enforcement

and intelligence agencies. It is based on the EU GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679) that applied in the UK before that date, with some changes to make it work more effectively in a UK context. The DPA 2018 sets out the framework for data protection law in the UK. It was amended on 1 January 2021 by regulations under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to reflect the UK's status outside the EU. It sits alongside and supplements the UK GDPR - for example by providing exemptions. It also sets out separate data protection rules for law enforcement authorities, extends data protection to some other areas such as national security and defence, and sets out the Information Commissioner's functions and powers.

3.6 Responses to public consultation may be summarised and may be made publicly available to view on the Council's website. The Local Planning Authority redacts comments from individual members of the public to remove personal data in respect of email addresses, telephone numbers and signatures unless they are required to be provided as part of a statutory process, such as a public inquiry, hearing, or examination.

3.7 For more information, on how we process your responses please visit https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/article/4243/Development-plans-privacy-notice.

4. How we will consult on the Local Plan

4.1 As set out in the Local Plan Timetable in Table 2.1, there are three statutory consultation stages for the Local Plan:

- The Scoping Consultation;
- Consultation on the proposed plan content and evidence; and
- Consultation on the proposed Local Plan.

4.2 Following the consultation on the Plan, and the Plan passing through Gateway 3, the Plan will go to Examination in Public. The arrangements for this are set out below.

The Scoping Consultation

4.3 The Council must undertake a scoping consultation in accordance with Regulation 20 of the regulations.

4.4 To inform the preparation of the scoping consultation, the Planning Policy Team will undertake informal early engagement on the plan, particularly with relevant teams within the Council, to ensure that the issues highlighted in the scoping consultation provide a comprehensive summary of the main issues affecting the borough.

4.5 The preparation of the scoping consultation will be informed by presentations and discussion with elected members.

4.6 This scoping consultation will seek views on:

- The main issues that affect St Helens and how these may impact neighbouring authorities or particular localities of the borough;

- How plan making could look to address these issues;
- Whether the Council's approach to developing and maintaining an evidence base to support plan making is appropriate; and
- Future engagement on the new Local Plan, including how we engage people and to identify at what stage people of plan making people want to be notified.

4.7 As part of the scoping consultation the Council are required to invite representations from general consultation bodies that we consider appropriate, and specific consultation bodies we consider have an interest in the Plan. The Council are not required to invite anyone else to make representations, but anyone can make representations at this stage.

4.8 The regulations require that the scoping consultation is for a minimum of 21 days and takes place before the Council publish their Gateway 1 Self-Assessment summary. The Local Plan timetable sets out that the scoping consultation will commence on 01 September 2026. The Council will exceed minimum requirements required in Regulation 20 as it will:

- Create and maintain a page on the Council's website setting out the necessary information for the scoping consultation;
- Invite representations from organisations / people on the Local Plan Consultation Database as well as the general consultation bodies identified in regulation 2 of the regulations;
- Publicise the scoping consultation on the Council's social media platforms, and via press releases;
- Run the consultation for five weeks, instead of the required 21 days;
- Run the scoping consultation alongside a Call for Sites exercise;
- Make any reasonable adjustments to ensure that any individual is able to access the consultation material and are able to respond, if they feel their concerns cannot be adequately conveyed in writing; and
- Make documents available at Council Offices (St Helens Town Hall)

4.9 The Council has commissioned Plan AI to use artificial intelligence to support officers to summarise the consultation responses received and provide a summary report of the main themes.

4.10 In accordance with Regulation 22 of the regulations, the Council will publish a summary of the scoping consultation that sets out:

- The general and specific consultation bodies we invited to make representations;
- The manner in which they were asked to make representations; and
- A summary of the main issues raised in the consultation and how we have regard to them.

Proposed Plan Content and Evidence consultation

4.11 Following the Gateway 1 Self-Assessment, the Council will start to develop a draft vision and proposed spatial strategy, informed by the consultation responses and sites received in the scoping consultation. The Council will undertake a consultation on the proposed plan content and evidence in accordance with Regulation 23 of the regulations.

4.12 The consultation on the Proposed Plan Content and Evidence will seek views on:

- The draft vision and proposed measurable outcomes;
- The proposed aims and objectives of the Local Plan;
- The proposed spatial strategy approach, and including, where appropriate, broad locations of development;
- A summary of the emerging evidence informing the Local Plan and the evidence that we still intend to gather; and
- The preferred approach for draft Development Management policies, subject to the evidence that the Council has in place.

4.13 This consultation period will be for 6 weeks, in accordance with the regulations. It is anticipated that this consultation will take place from 2nd June until 14th July 2027. The Council will:

- Create and maintain a page on the Council's website setting out the necessary information for the Proposed Plan Content and Evidence consultation;
- Invite representations from organisations / people on the Local Plan Consultation Database as well as the general consultation bodies identified in Regulation 2 of the regulations, including those who requested to be notified of the scoping consultation;
- Publicise the Proposed Plan Content and Evidence consultation on the Council's social media platforms, and via press releases;
- Make any reasonable adjustments to ensure that any individual is able to access the consultation material and are able to respond, if they feel their concerns cannot be adequately conveyed in writing;
- Make documents available at Council Offices (St Helens Town Hall) for inspection;
- Hold meetings with various organisations to discuss the content of an emerging Local Plan, as appropriate; and
- Hold public exhibitions / road show events to explain the content of an emerging Local Plan, and answer questions

4.14 In accordance with the regulations, we will also ask if those making representations request to be notified at subsequent stages of the Local Plan.

4.15 The Council will commission Plan AI to use artificial intelligence to support officers to summarise the themes consultation responses received.

4.16 In accordance with Regulation 24 of the regulations, the Council will publish a summary of the Proposed Plan Content and Evidence consultation which sets out:

- The general and specific consultation bodies we invited to make representations;
- The manner in which they were asked to make representations; and
- A summary of the main issues raised in the consultation and how we have regard to them.

Consultation on the proposed Local Plan

4.17 Following the publication of the Gateway 2 assessor report, the Council are required to undertake a public consultation on the proposed Local Plan, in accordance with Regulation 27. The draft Local Plan will be informed by the evidence gathered by the Council, consultation responses to the proposed plan content and evidence and the observations of the Gateway 2 assessor. As part of the consultation, the Council will seek views on:

- The proposed Local Plan – this is the plan we intend to submit to the Secretary of State and will include a full set of policies and site allocations;
- A map of proposed Local Plan policies, in accordance with Regulation 25;
- Details of the evidence that has been gathered to inform the preparation of the Local Plan; and
- A summary of consultation from the previous two statutory consultation stages which summarises the main issues raised and how we have addressed them.

4.18 This consultation period will be for 8 weeks, in accordance with the regulations. It is currently anticipated that this consultation will take place from 28 April until 24 June 2028. The Council will:

- Create and maintain a page on the Council's website setting out the necessary information for the proposed Local Plan consultation, including a link to the Council's interactive mapping system to allow site allocations and policy designations to be viewed;
- Invite representations from organisations / people on the Local Plan Consultation Database as well as the general consultation bodies identified in Regulation 2 of the regulations, including those who requested to be notified at subsequent stages, and to notify the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority under Regulation 28 (conformity with operative spatial development strategy);
- Publicise the proposed Local Plan consultation on the Council's social media platforms, and via press releases;
- Run the consultation for a minimum of six weeks;

- Make any reasonable adjustments to ensure that any individual is able to access the consultation material and are able to respond, if they feel their concerns cannot be adequately conveyed in writing;
- Make documents available at Council Offices and Libraries;
- Hold meetings with various organisations to discuss the content of an emerging Local Plan, as appropriate; and
- Hold public exhibitions / road show events to explain the content of an emerging Local Plan, and answer questions.

4.18 In accordance with the regulations, we will also ask if those making representations request to be notified at subsequent stages of the Local Plan.

4.19 The Council will commission Plan AI to use artificial intelligence to support officers to summarise the consultation responses received.

4.20 In accordance with Regulation 30 of the regulations, the Council will publish a summary of the consultation which sets out:

- The general and specific consultation bodies we invited to make representations;
- The manner in which they were asked to make representations; and
- A summary of the main issues raised in the consultation and how we have regard to them.

Submission of the Plan

4.21 Regulation 34 specifies the documents that are required to be submitted to the Secretary of State. The documents relating to the consultation are:

- A statement setting out a summary of the consultation and engagement activities carried out by the Local Planning Authority in preparing their proposed Local Plan;
- A summary of consultation on the proposed Local Plan; and
- Representations made under Regulation 28 (conformity with operative spatial development strategy)

4.22 When the Plan is submitted to the Secretary of State, the Council is required to publish the documents and make them available for inspection in Council Offices.

4.23 The Council at this stage will notify the general consultation bodies and persons / organisations on the consultation database, including those who requested to be notified at previous stages.

Examination in Public

4.24 The Local Plan examination in public is overseen by a Planning Inspector and scrutinises the submitted plan, associated evidence and any additional written

submissions. The examination must be carried out in accordance with Regulation 35. This requires the Council, 6 weeks in advance of the hearings, to:

- Publish the information about the examination hearings; and
- Notify the general consultation bodies and persons / organisations on the consultation database, including those who requested to be notified at previous stages.

4.25 Anyone who has made a representation in relation to the Local Plan must be given the opportunity to appear before and be heard by the examiner, in accordance with Section 15d of the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act. Where multiple people may want to speak about a similar issue at the examination hearings, the Planning Inspector may ask for a spokesperson to be nominated.

4.26 There may be a need for further consultation to take place during the examination in public, or the examination may need to be paused for further work to take place. If a further consultation is required, the Council will notify the general consultation bodies and other organisations and individuals on the Council's consultation database.

Appendix 1 – General Consultation Bodies

General consultation bodies in Regulation 2 and how this is applied in St Helens, where relevant:

Consultation body listed in Regulation 2	Local application to St Helens
a) Active Travel England	
b) Any person – to whom the electronic communications code applies as a result of a direction given under section 106 (3) (a) of the Communications Act 2003, and who owns or controls electronic communications apparatus situated in the planning authority's area;	Openreach Mobile UK
c) Canal & River Trust	
d) The Civil Aviation Authority	
e) The Coal Authority	
f) Sport England	
g) The Environment Agency	
h) The Forestry Commission	

i) A highway authority within the meaning of section 1 of the Highways Act 1980 (31), any part of whose area is in or adjoins the planning authority's area (Including the Secretary of State, where the Secretary of State is highways authority)	• St Helens Borough Council (as highway authority)
	• National Highways
	• Neighbouring highway authorities:
	  ○ Halton Borough Council
	  ○ Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
	  ○ Lancashire County Council
	  ○ Warrington Borough Council
	  ○ Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

j) Historic England	
k) Homes England	
l) if it exercises functions in the planning authority's area— • an integrated care board • Electricity supply • Gas supply • Water and sewerage undertaker	• Merseyside and Cheshire ICB • Electricity North West • Cadent Gas Limited • United Utilities • Scottish Power Energy Networks
m) an Integrated Transport Authority for an integrated transport area within the meaning in section 77(1) of the Local Transport Act 2008(38), which is in or adjoins the planning authority's area;	• Liverpool City Region Combined Authority / Merseytravel • Greater Manchester Combined Authority / Transport for Greater Manchester • Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority

n) The Marine Management Organisation	
o) Natural England	
p) A Neighbourhood Forum any part of whose area is in or adjoins the planning authority's area	There are no neighbourhood forums in St Helens. Adjoining the LPA area is: • Golborne and Lowton West Voice (Wigan)
q) Network Rail	
r) The Office for Nuclear Regulation	
s) The Office of Rail and Road	
t) Not Applicable – applies to Greater London	
u) a relevant consultation body any part of whose area is in or adjoins the planning authority's area;	Neighbouring Local Planning Authorities (and constituent authorities of the Liverpool City Region): • Halton Borough Council • Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council • Liverpool City Council • Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council • Warrington Borough Council • West Lancashire District Council • Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council • Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council Parish Councils: • In St Helens o Billinge Chapel End o Bold o Eccleston o Rainford o Rainhill o Seneley Green o Windle • Adjoining the LPA area: o Bickerstaffe (West Lancs) o Burtonwood and Westbrook (Warrington) o Croft (Warrington) o Cronton (Knowsley) o Cuerdley (Warrington o Great Sankey (Warrington) o Knowsley (Knowsley) o Penketh (Warrington)

	○ Prescot (Knowsley) ○ Simonswood (West Lancs) ○ Up Holland (West Lancs) ○ Whiston (Knowsley) ○ Winwick (Warrington) Minerals and Waste Planning Authority: • MEAS Local Policing Bodies: • Merseyside Constabulary • Cheshire Constabulary • Greater Manchester Constabulary • Lancashire Constabulary Combined authority and combined county authorities: • Liverpool City Region Combined Authority • Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority • Greater Manchester Combined Authority
v) Not Applicable – applies to Greater London	
w) Education authority	St Helens Borough Council
x) Lead Local Flood Authority	St Helens Borough Council
y) Responsible authority for a Local Nature Recovery Strategy	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority