Gateway 1 Self-assessment St Helens Borough Local Plan

This Gateway 1 self-assessment has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2026 'The Regulations' and the Local Plans guidance Gateway 1 for local plans: what you need to do - GOV.UK in the context of the preparation of the St Helens Borough Local Plan.

It should be noted that this covers the Gateway 1 Assessment for Local Plans under Regulation 21 of the Regulations and the Gateway 1 Assessment for Minerals and Waste Plans under Regulation 46. This is because our new Local Plan will incorporate the council's Minerals and Waste Plan.

How we got ready to prepare a new Local Plan

We started the first steps of preparing a new Local Plan for St Helens Borough Council on 30 June 2026 when we published our notice of intention to commence plan making and our Local Plan timetable. We carried out our Scoping Consultation and Call for Sites between 1 September and 6 October 2026.

The 30-month plan preparation period commences when the Gateway 1 Self-Assessment is published (13 November 2026). Government policy says we should adopt the new plan within 30 months of this date. This is to help ensure we have an up-to-date local plan that responds to the needs of the area and our communities.

This page explains what we did to get ready to meet the 30-month timeframe. It also has links to further information and where you can get updates.

We published a timetable for preparing the Plan

The timetable shows when we expect to carry out the different stages and activities for preparing a plan. It helps us check if and how we can adopt the plan within the 30-month timeframe. We'll keep this updated as we make more progress.

The timetable provides a detailed and achievable roadmap for adopting the local Plan within 30 months. It sets out a logical sequence of activities, consultation stages and decision points, giving confidence that the plan can be delivered on time while allowing for ongoing monitoring and adjustments where necessary.

To help deliver our plan within 30 months, we:

- Have sought delegated powers to give the Executive Director of Place authority, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Property and Regeneration, to make changes to the timetable and help streamline the process and avoid potential delays.
- Have proactively engaged with stakeholders as part of our Scoping Consultation and Call for Sites (carried out 1 September – 6 October 2026).

- Will promote the use of digital technology, use software and engagement tools to analyse local plan representations as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- Set up regular meetings with the Cabinet Working Group to discuss items and provide updates.
- Provide regular meetings and updates on the progress of the Local Plan with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Property and Regeneration.

Engagement with stakeholders, residents and the Cabinet Working Group will help to ensure that a robust and comprehensive plan is produced that reflects the vision and objectives for achieving sustainable development in St Helens Borough. We will continue to engage with all stakeholders throughout every consultation period and throughout the Local Plan process.

View our Local Plan Timetable here.

We established project management and governance arrangements

Preparing a Local Plan is a complex process. It involves many people across the council and from other organisations. Thinking early about how the work is planned, managed and signed off helps us monitor our progress and keep the work on track. It also helps us anticipate and manage any risks to us adopting the plan within 30 months.

We've developed a project plan to help us prepare the plan in line with our Local Plan timetable and meet regularly with our key decision makers to monitor how this is going. When we developed the project plan we identified some risks to its delivery. We have reflected on these risks and identified things we can do to reduce these risks.

Guidance advises us:

- to consider our governance procedures
- to ensure we have efficient sign off processes in place with key decisions makers

In order to ensure that there is the correct level of decision making in place for each stage for the Local Plan preparation, we have sought delegated authority from Cabinet to approve, submit and publish the required documents and statements for statutory Gateways 1, 2 and 3 (including all associated evidence documents, reports, supporting data and analysis) to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Property and Planning.

We planned how we'll consult on the Plan

Public consultation is essential for the Local Plan to represent the needs of our communities. It must be easy for people to have their say in a way that works for them, so they can influence the way the area develops. By planning this early, we can ensure people are aware in advance and can get involved from the start.

We have undertaken a scoping consultation to get people's views on what the plan could contain and how we propose to consult on the plan at key stages.

We used this consultation to help us prepare an Engagement Strategy. This describes how we'll consult and communicate with our communities as we continue to prepare the plan. More details as to the means and nature of engagement and full details of events will be provided in advance of each formal consultation stage.

We are seeking to maximise engagement from our residents and we aim to provide a wide range of engagement opportunities. We have already undertaken some informal engagement activities and planned to increase our resource and use of digital software to analyse the responses in a timely manner.

We are planning a mix of consultation and communication approaches to get more people involved. This includes:

- In-person sessions at appropriate and accessible locations
- Website and social media updates
- Drop in and exhibitions

We want to increase the use of digital engagement, so you can expect to see us using new ways to engage. We will also use digital technology where appropriate to help analyse your responses more quickly and publish this on our website.

Information about upcoming consultation activities will be made available on our website and social media channels as well as through email communication and in public notices.

Our Local Plan Engagement Strategy can be viewed here Engagement strategy - St Helens Borough Council

We began scoping the content of the Plan

Scoping includes considering how well the existing plan is working and gathering baseline information about the area. This helps to identify our future needs and ambitions. Starting this early means we can begin preparing the new plan with a clear vision, making it quicker and easier to consult on the plan and make decisions about it.

To gain an understanding of the development needs for our area, we have looked at the existing evidence about our area and the people our plan needs to provide for. We have also considered our current Local Plan and how well it has delivered for our communities and what may need changing.

We are currently processing and analysing all comments received in response to our Scoping Consultation and Call for Sites. The responses will be used to inform plan preparation as we move towards our Proposed Local Plan Content consultation in June/July 2027. A summary of the responses received will be published ahead of this consultation.

Using the information we have gathered, responses from the Scoping Consultation and submissions to the Call for Sites along with the input from key council and partner services, we have:

- begun to consider a draft vision for the area
- started to identify measurable outcomes to monitor our progress towards the vision
- started to understand the development requirements for our area

We have also started:

- to commission the preparation of evidence base documents and studies
- to look at what new planning policies and information or data we would need for decision making about new developments

This work is helping us to understand the anticipated content of our Local Plan and will provide the basis for the proposed Local Plan content consultation.

We began a Strategic Environmental Assessment

We're legally required to identify, describe and evaluate likely significant effects on the environment of:

- implementing the Local Plan
- reasonable alternatives, taking into account the plan's objectives and scope

This process will consider how community, national and international environmental protection objectives and any other environmental challenges are taken into account in the plan. It will help us to predict significant environmental effects and develop ways of preventing, reducing and offsetting these.

It is important we start this work early and are transparent about how we're doing the assessment when engaging stakeholders and communities.

We've identified other relevant plans and programmes and collected baseline information, looking at the area's environment and relevant designations to identify potential issues or problems.

We're establishing the scope of our SEA and the level of detail we will need to include in our draft environmental report. Our SEA Scoping Consultation was carried out with statutory consultees between 1 September and 6 October 2026. Responses from the statutory consultees will be taken into account when considering the final scope of the document.

Further SEA will shortly commence, as the Council are in the process of appointing consultants to assess the potential impact of development and help us to refine development options.

How to stay up to date

You can sign up to email updates about progress with the Local Plan and upcoming consultation activities.

If you wish to participate or would like to be informed of the Local Plan process, please provide us with your details by email at planningpolicy@sthelens.gov.uk.