



## Minutes of the St Helens Growth Board

2:00pm – 4:00pm, Monday 21 October 2024,  
Room 10, St Helens Town Hall

### Board Members in Attendance:

Board Member (Deputy)	Role	Organisation
Councillor Richard McCauley	Chair and Portfolio Holder for Inclusive Growth and Regeneration	St Helens Borough Council
Councillor Kate Groucutt	Portfolio Holder for Economy, Business and Skills	St Helens Borough Council
Lisa Harris	Executive Director of Place Services	St Helens Borough Council
Hazel James	Owner and Managing Director	Brendan International
Steve Coffey	Chief Executive	Torus
Stuart Rogers (Deputising for Phil Mayall)	Project Director	MUSE
Simon Pierce	Principal & Chief Executive	St Helens College
Ruth Du Plessis	Director of Public Health	St Helens Borough Council
Liz Walls	Assistant Principal (Super Curriculum)	Carmel College
Malcolm Jackson (Deputising for John Downes)	Chief Operating Officer	Langtree
Clare Richards (Deputising for Catherine Holmes)	Head of Markets, Partners and Places - North	Homes England

### Observers in Attendance:

Steven Tant – Deputy Area Lead, Department for Business and Trade

### Secretariat in Attendance:

Karl Allender – Scrutiny Officer, St Helens Borough Council

### Local Authority Representatives in Attendance:

Sean Traynor – Director of Strategic Growth, St Helens Borough Council

Mary Jefferson – Head of Regeneration and Growth, St Helens Borough Council

Rachael Buckley - Partnerships Officer, St Helens Borough Council

Matthew Thompson- Public Health Practitioner

### 1. WELCOME – CHAIR

The Chair welcomed Board Members (and those deputising) and expressed sincere thanks for their ongoing commitment to the borough of St Helens.

#### 1a. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Board Members:

<b>Board Member</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Richard Katz	Chief Executive	Glass Futures
Kath O'Dwyer	Chief Executive	St Helens Borough Council
Councillor Anthony Burns	Leader	St Helens Borough Council
Neil Syder	Managing Director	Pilkington NSG
Phil Mayall	Managing Director	MUSE
John Downes	Chief Executive	Langtree
Paul Nolan	Director	Mersey Forest
Catherine Holmes	Head of MPP North	Homes England
Neil Hargreaves	Managing Director	Knauf
Jane Beardsworth	Senior Manager North	Arts Council England

## 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

<b>Item</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Member(s)</b>	<b>Interest</b>
All	All	Councillor Richard McCauley	Declared an interest in all items specific to planning as member of the St Helens Borough Council Planning Committee
4	Homes England Overview	Steve Coffey	Declared an interest in the item in relation to the Public Body's Review

## 3. PROGRESS ON THE ST HELENS GROWTH AND REGENERATION PROGRAMMES & HOMES ENGLAND AND TORUS OVERVIEW

The Chair highlighted the amount of work, investment and projects that are being carried out across the borough amounting to a collective investment of over £200 million. The Chair, being conscious that Board Members should be fully informed of this activity, duly invited presentations under this item and item 4 to provide an overview of the scale of investment and potential opportunities for businesses, residents and the borough.

Sean Traynor highlighted the projects that the Council have been leading on over the course of the past 12 months and the progress made to date, including:

### St Helens Town Deal

The Council was awarded £25M to be expended and invested by March 2026. The planning period has been extensive, but all projects are currently in the delivery phase as summarised:

- **Cannington Shaw No7 Bottle Shop** - full planning consent secured alongside heritage skills academy funding, with the main contractor appointed and mobilised. Scheduled completion in Summer 2025.
- **Connected Places** - a holistic transport and movement strategy across the town centre. Investment secured for network structure for the enhancement of specific locations e.g., Peasley Cross Roundabout, to support the wider strategy.
- **Gamble Building (incorporating Youth Hub)** - RIBA Stage 2 has now been completed, including a national conservation survey in relation to the design of the archive's facility. A number of unsuccessful funding bids were reported and lobbying

activity had commenced for funding assistance to realise the optimum repurposing. Members of the Growth Board were invited to help realise this ambition.

- **Digital Infrastructure** – digital connectivity weaknesses in the town centre were highlighted and this project will compliment private sector network investment to resolve matters. The procurement process was underway, as well as a project website launch and stakeholder engagement implemented. Delivery scheduled from early 2025.
- **Healthy Communities** – the former Clickworks premises have been acquired for the Skills Academy element, with a primary focus on careers guidance/opportunities in Adult Social Care, and the repurposing works scheduled in 2025. The Business Connect element is to be the subject of a revised Business Case as a successor to the original St Helens Chambe proposition.
- **SINA Medical Glass** – the former J K Phillips building is under redevelopment to house this production facility that will have the capability to meet the UK's requirements for medical vials and also serve export markets.
- **Town Centre Living and Regeneration** – Stuart Rogers provided an overview of progress made. Works have commenced on the temporary bus hub and vacant possession of the Hardshaw Centre and other requisite properties achieved. Commencement of the main works scheduled for Summer 2025.
- **The World of Glass** – was the first completed project under the Town Deal programme. Visitor numbers had increased following the investment and are being monitored. Similar to many other visitor attractions, sustainability challenges remain, and Board Members were invited to consider assistance to this valued amenity.

#### Life Science Investment Zone

It was explained that the LCR Life Science Investment Zone (incorporating Glass Futures, Inovus Headquarters and Skills Academy, Project Halo, SINA Medical Glass, the Watson Street Works, Hynet, and the District Heat Network) provides a range of exciting economic development opportunities.

#### Watson Street

This was highlighted as a new, significant mixed-use development opportunity, with a masterplan under production and two related public consultations. Support from Homes England was recognised alongside the beneficial integration of the former Watson Street Works operations at the Green Gate Works site.

#### St Helens Town Centre Regeneration

The brand announcement for the new town centre hotel operator was imminent with positive communications and PR activity around this development. In addition, the successful relocation of businesses to Church Square Shopping Centre and the regular pop-up markets had received positive feedback.

#### Earlestown Town Centre

Progress on pre-development activity, planning applications and delivery programmes were noted for the Levelling Up Fund Round 2 initiative.

#### Newton-le-Willows Long Term Plan for Towns

This new programme was under development, including establishment of a Board and future production of a Delivery Plan, with a government announcement on next steps for this programme expected in the Autumn Statement.

### Omega West

A consented development for over 2 million sq. ft of employment floor space over 4 units (including TJ Morris, and Iceland), which are scheduled to be operational from Spring 2025 will create thousands of jobs in the area.

### Parkside

Parkside Link Road is scheduled for completion in Spring 2025, with final works on the M6 J22 tie-in, and significant progress is being made across the Parkside LCR Freeport programme.

### Strategic Housing

The housing market is very strong across St Helens and is testament to the Local Plan allocations process, with almost all allocations progressing positively (including Cowley Hill and Bold Forest Garden Village as examples).

### Strategic Transport

Highlights include adoption and proactive delivery of the St Helens Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), aimed at improving the safety, comfort and attractiveness of walking, wheeling, and cycling throughout the Borough. Positive progress is also being made on Business Case developments for the former Sutton Oak Line and Carr Mill Rail Station.

Sean Traynor also highlighted to the Board the importance of social value being embedded in all projects and how important it was that opportunities were maximised. It was further reinforced that, as a Borough, embedding social value must be considered collectively.

The Chair thanked Sean Traynor for his presentation and stressed the importance of providing learning opportunities in order to enable local people to benefit from the growth that is being experienced across the Borough. Engagement with schools and colleges will be vital, as will links with investors to support career planning and upskilling/reskilling adults to add to the optimisation of social value.

As well as upskilling and training young people, officers expressed the need for, and importance of engaging children in design and planning. It was noted that across all projects and programmes, children had been involved in shaping plans and stimulating interest in design. Board Members shared positive experiences on this subject matter.

**Decision:** The Board noted the presentation.

## **4. Homes England and Torus Overview**

Steve Coffey opened the item with an overview of the Torus Group, including planned investment across the Borough and noting their extensive social value activity. A presentation provided an overview of the Torus' current £200m investment programme. Including sites at Elephant Lane, Lancots Lane, Rutland Street, Newton Hospital and Parr Mount Court.

Claire Richards endorsed the discussions around partnership and collaboration work promoted through the Growth Board and explained the role of Homes England, being a national agency to support the delivery of quality housing and placemaking as well as creating jobs and driving the local economy. Further context and partnership work was provided.

The Homes England Strategic Plan 2023-28 was presented outlining the key focus of regeneration and place making, place-based working, partnership working and championing environmental sustainability. The St Helens focus in relation to Homes England and the Strategic Place Partnership was outlined, which includes master planning activities, site investigation and intervention whereby partners can unlock opportunities in the later phases of ongoing programmes.

In response to the presentations, Board Members discussed recovery housing and if there was any support provision through Homes England or Torus, noting that specialist housing and eligibility can be challenging. Board Members also raised energy efficient housing and the ongoing challenges with climate change, which Claire Richards shall raise via national research platforms. The challenges faced at a local level, and particularly in the North, around intervention rates (concerning viability of schemes) was also referenced, and it was queried as to whether this was being discussed with Government in terms of greater flexibilities. Claire Richards acknowledged these as live issues and would provide updates at future meetings of the Growth Board.

**Decision:** The Board noted the Presentation

## **5. TAKING OUR PRIORITIES FORWARD: INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION**

Councillor Kate Groucutt opened the discussion on developing a collective identity for the Board and considering collective work in tackling the Board's key priorities relative to this discussion. These included:

- Creating the condition for scale and productivity growth on our business; and
- Creating training and employment opportunities.

It was suggested that the Board should initially focus on designing and delivering marketing activity to raise awareness of the significant opportunities available across the Borough, empowering and involving teaching staff and parents in communicating these messages. The key sectors where skills are in demand in the borough were highlighted and these include life sciences, manufacturing, heritage and climate change/net zero.

The identified project would be enhanced by a Project Team engaging with local business to help facilitate and deliver interactive workshops at careers fairs, industry events, standalone sessions and parents network groups. The Board was presented with a series of potential project examples and ideas for consideration.

In response, Ruth du Plessis considered that targeting deprived areas was key to any project the Board carried out as it would support areas of need, particularly around promoting and raising expectation and not just aspiration. There was a general consensus of support from the Board to this proposition and that young people being ready to work needs to be prioritised given the ever-increasing challenges in NEET figures; this extends to all levels of academic ability for young people to be employment ready to support identified business needs and opportunities.

It was further discussed that a presence at careers fairs, careers advice in schools and support and guidance opportunities are necessary to find the right path for young people,

with teachers and educators needing to be fully aware of the opportunities open to students and how teachers can be enriched with information on the landscape of opportunities, and also flexible apprenticeships schemes. In this context the Cradle to Career project had the potential for expansion and added value.

The key ask of the Board was to consider which project could provide the most impact and maximise its potential.

Simon Pierce suggested a 'Skills Show' could be successful and include borough wide schools, colleges and the public. This could support and enhance the Inovus LCR Life Sciences Skills project (as its funding award of £1m is significant) and provide an opportunity to make a real impact and drive this forward.

Liz Walls noted that the impact of projects supported by the Board needs to be widespread and not focussed on a select number of students. Carmel will be supportive of all projects and offered the services of their Liaison and Marketing Teams.

Hazel James reminded the Board of the need for warehousing/fulfilment roles and that these roles should not be ignored and must be promoted also.

Claire Richards offered the Board the support of Homes England's Social Value Team to support with any chosen project.

**Decision:** The Board noted the presentation and Councillor Groucutt agreed that both the Cradle to Career and Inovus Skills project options would be taken forward, with further information provided to facilitate this action.

## **6. DEPARTMENT FOR BUSINESS AND TRADE / MINISTRY OF HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT MATTERS**

Steve Tant provided a brief overview of progress made in terms of the facilitation of meetings with the Secretary of State. The key areas of progress include:

- Working on devolution projects and embedding into the Combined Authority.
- Focusing on Local Growth Plans and how local authorities were pushing forward the national economy growth agenda agreed in the City Region.
- Developments tied into the Invest 2035 agenda, the National Industrial Strategy; and
- How local areas can add to the local economic agenda with a particular focus on:

Advanced manufacturing  
Cleaner energy  
Creative industries  
Defence  
Digital technologies  
Financial services  
Life sciences  
Professional and business services

Council Officers highlighted that St Helens has a lot to offer in adding value at 'place level' and also to the national economic agenda. Demographically St Helens can benefit from the cross network between Liverpool and Manchester that is being extensively promoted.

**Decision:** The Board noted the verbal update

**7. MENTAL HEALTH CHARTER FOR BUSINESS**

**Decision:** The Board agreed to carry this item over to the next meeting on 10 February 2025

**8. UPDATE ON THE 2024 ST HELENS BUSINESS EXPO**

**Decision:** The Board agreed to carry this item over to the next meeting on 10 February 2025

**9. NEXT STEPS**

The Chair confirmed that at the next meeting a full, 12-month review of the board will be presented.

**10. Date of Next Meeting**

14:00-16:00, Monday 10 February 2025 in Room 10 at St Helens Town Hall

**11. A.O. B**

The Chair invited any items under AOB and, with none being received, the Chair thanked all attendees before closing the meeting.