

Newton-le-Willows Plan for Neighbourhoods

Engagement Strategy

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Background

St Helens Borough Council has been successful in securing Plan for Neighbourhoods funding for Newton-le-Willows. This was formerly Long-Term Plan for Towns. Plan for Neighbourhoods funding will build upon recent investment in the town and see up to £20 million in funding spent on local priorities over the next 10 years.

A Neighbourhood Board of local representatives from the community, local businesses, sports clubs, the third sector, faith groups and public sector agencies, alongside the local MP and relevant representatives from the Combined Authority and St Helens Borough Council (the Council) has been established to inform and shape the Newton-le-Willows's Plan.

Plan for Neighbourhoods funding will enable the delivery of projects that address key issues facing residents and stakeholders across eight themes:

- Regeneration, high streets and heritage
- Housing
- Work, productivity and skills
- Cohesion
- Health and Wellbeing
- Transport
- Safety and security
- Education and opportunity

Following the Autumn Budget, the Labour Government confirmed that the Long-Term Plan for Towns programme would be retained but reformed as a new regeneration programme. In March 2025, the Government published the Plan for Neighbourhoods prospectus, which set out the changes to the former Long-Term Plan for Towns programme. The updated programme includes the updated intervention themes (listed above) and three new strategic objectives – Thriving Places, Stronger Communities, and Taking Back Control.

The Council and the Neighbourhood Board want to ensure local people can actively contribute to the Plans, sharing their challenges, opportunities, and ideas, and shaping the 10-year Regeneration Plan for Newton-le-Willows.

Layer.Studio, Hatch Associates, and PLACED will be supporting the Council and the Neighbourhood Board in this process, delivering a comprehensive stakeholder and public engagement programme.

Underpinning our approach to engagement is a recognition of the importance of understanding the local area and context to frame the proposed engagement

activities. Layer.Studio and Hatch Associates are currently undertaking a local data and context review, drawing upon a range of available information, which will provide important insights to shape our initial understanding of Newton-Le-Willows, as well as encourage discussion and feedback from the public and stakeholders.

The conversations that take place through the engagement programme will help the Council and the Neighbourhood Board to prioritise the project proposals that could have the greatest impact on Newton-le-Willows, and to decide where funding should be invested.

Refining Expectations

PLACED, along with Layer.Studio and Hatch Associates, led an engagement strategy workshop on 15th January 2024 at Newton-le-Willows Sports Club. Four Neighbourhood Board members were in attendance following an application and selection process led by the Neighbourhood Board Chair and the Council. The four members, alongside officers from the Council, formed the Engagement Sub-Group to participate in the workshop and shape the Engagement Strategy.

The purpose of the workshop was to review the proposed engagement approach submitted as part of the tendering process, clarify expectations for engagement and lead to this refined Engagement Strategy document. In the session we covered;

- expectations for engagement,
- audience,
- engagement scope,
- timescales,
- challenges and opportunities, and
- any other business.

What are the key success criteria and outcomes? What would good engagement look like?

Our discussion of success criteria, outcomes and what good looks like included:

- **Reaching a broad and inclusive range of voices:** Of critical importance is reaching a diverse, representational range of voices.

The desire to reach many people was also expressed. This priority is shaped by a concern that a small reach would appear poor value for money and could lead to criticism. PLACED noted that engagement will be varied, promoted and shaped by local knowledge; however, many people

will choose not to engage, for a wide range of reasons and therefore, PLACED typically focuses on ensuring quality, meaningful conversations.

Whilst there were aspirations to reach people from a range of age groups, a need for targeted engagement with young people was identified as it was recognised this group is typically less heard in consultations.

- **Quality, clarity and accessibility:** The engagement delivered must be of a high quality. The importance of clear and accessible communication was highlighted along with the need for materials (both promotional and engagement) that effectively explain the funding opportunity to local people. This is vital to ensuring that the local community can understand how to engage in the process.
- **Utilising a range of engagement methodologies:** A wide range of engagement approaches and methodologies will be utilised including online consultation, drop-in events, youth workshops, unmanned displays, and meetings with local community groups. This comprehensive and varied approach is expected to encourage good engagement levels and wide reach.
- **Engagement impact and legacy:** It is anticipated that engagement outputs set the direction of the 10-year plan. There were also aspirations for the public engagement delivered to build confidence in what the Council and Neighbourhood Board are aiming to achieve, developing trust and community buy-in. There was interest in understanding what 'quick wins' local people feel could be delivered as part of the funding that could make positive impacts in the more immediate future.

It was recognised that a transparent approach is required and there should be a clear evidence trail on why certain projects have been prioritised. It is hoped that the project will leave a positive legacy in Newton-le-Willows, fostering local people's feelings of pride and ownership.

- **Locations and geographic spread of events:** We will need to ensure we use the right locations with high footfall. Further, there needs to be a good geographic spread of consultation events – delivering events across the whole of Newton, Wargrave and Earlestown. It is anticipated that we will plot consultations on a map online to show we have been in different locations and have made notable efforts for broad reach.
- **Findings and outcomes:** It is important that the engagement findings and outcomes clearly illustrate what the community feels most strongly about and the town's priorities. This will include a visual public summary of engagement.

- **Evidencing outputs:** It was felt that any outputs or events delivered should be recorded (e.g. case studies or videos and photos) and these could be shared online to evidence efforts to reach a broad audience. PLACED should highlight in their evaluation report the broad reach to show efforts.

Audience

Our discussion identified the need for engagement with a broad reach with residents, along with more targeted meetings with local community groups. The following outlines initial feedback from the Sub-Group workshop, while further discussion with the Sub-Group and Neighbourhood Board will be required to identify the key groups and individuals.

There was interest in delivering several meetings with local groups whose members are 'community anchors' and whose work may relate to the broad investment themes of the Plan for Neighbourhoods funding e.g. heritage groups and transport groups.

Targeted engagement with young people from Newton-le-Willows is required, as it was perceived they are typically underrepresented in consultation processes. Hope Academy was identified as a potential pathway to accessing young people.

It was recognised that opportunities need to be provided for working people to participate, hosting events on days and times and at locations that are accessible to them.

It was acknowledged that the Neighbourhood Board members collectively had an excellent network of contacts – both formal (e.g., direct contacts, collaborators and service users) and informal (social media, friends, family). Utilising these in addition to other more formal methods would help the success of engagement. Providing appropriate promotional materials will assist in connecting with these networks e.g., digital posters, social media assets etc.

In addition to the public audience, there will be targeted engagement for the Neighbourhood Board and the Stakeholders identified in the tender. This will be led by Layer.Studio and supported by Hatch Associates. The following are identified stakeholder groups who the team will reach out to:

- Neighbourhood Board
- Ward Councillors and Elected Members
- SHBC Internal Teams, such as Highways, Transportation, Planning, Regeneration, Housing, and Public Health
- External Investment Theme Representatives, such as ECF Programme Team, Developers/Housing Associations, Merseytravel, Network Rail and/or Northern Rail, local NHS workers, and so

What things can people really shape?

Although there are ideas about the type of projects that could be supported through the fund, it is important to acknowledge that we are starting with engagement before certain ideas have been 'locked in.' PLACED, Hatch Associates and Layer.Studio will also be working closely together throughout, ensuring ideas can shape the project as they are heard. Therefore, there is a genuine opportunity for the community to shape the development of the Plan.

The themes and objectives highlighted in the Plan for Neighbourhoods prospectus will be a key determiner of what project types can be funded. However, it is recognised that the updated programme now includes eight intervention themes, and it will not be possible to cover every theme with a project.

What is off the table?

'Off the table' will be anything beyond the scale and scope of the funding. Whilst we will aim to focus engagement and conversations on the scope of this funding, where themes and comments emerge beyond that we will capture the information so this can be utilised later by the Council and other agencies. We will communicate that comments beyond the scope will be reported for information but may not directly shape the Plan.

Timescales

Timescales are outlined in the 'Deliverables' section below. Broadly, we will look to deliver most public engagement early in the process to ensure maximum impact. Public engagement is expected to launch in April 2025.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

Key challenges of delivering this engagement programme include:

- We have been awaiting updated programme details from central government. The Plan for Neighbourhoods prospectus has only recently been published (March 2025) with notable changes to intervention themes and strategic objectives.
- A great deal of engagement has already been delivered in Newton-le-Willows and there is therefore the risk of engagement fatigue. The Council and Neighbourhood Board are acutely aware of this. It is therefore essential that the specificity and purpose of this consultation is clearly communicated.
- Developments that have been the focus of previous engagement activity are not yet underway, and so residents cannot see any changes. This could

create a sense of apathy and a view that Plan for Neighbourhoods might not happen.

- There are many different communities in the area and there will be a need to balance the geography and communities of Earlestown, Newton and Wargrave. If events focus on only one of these communities, this could attract criticism. Alongside this, there is a possibility that there might be too much focus on Earlestown as that is what is fresh in people's minds following the most recent consultations.
- It will not be possible to deliver all projects that residents and stakeholders suggest. Expectation management will be important.
- There have been negative responses from the public on social media. It will be vital to monitor and moderate all responses to the online engagement to ensure it remains respectful.

Opportunities / local strengths:

- There are many public events in Newton-le-Willows that receive high footfall and are attended by diverse audiences. These could be excellent locations for pop-up events.
- Earlestown Market was a successful location for previous consultations, which also experienced high footfalls.
- Diverse communities in the area and many active local community groups.
- Active and engaged heritage groups.
- PLACED have previously delivered a positive engagement workshop in Hope Academy.
- The Neighbourhood Board have strong links and a commitment to success which will be key in driving the project.

Communications

A Communications Approach for the project is set out later in this document, outlining the deliverables and leads for these. Note that this is the approach for this engagement specifically, rather than the longer-term communications approach for the Neighbourhood Board.

In addition, the Council's Communication Team will deliver an education piece on the Neighbourhood Board, and funding more widely, prior to any promotion about the events or engagement. The aim of this is to inform the public of the Neighbourhood Board, the differences between this project and the Earlestown Masterplan and clarify the purpose of engagement.

Engagement Approach

Public engagement

It was discussed at the Engagement Workshop that there is a mix of communities and groups within Newton-le-Willows that need to be given the opportunity to engage. Following the Engagement Workshop and discussions with the Sub-Group, PLACED has refined the Engagement Strategy, adding activities and approaches that will seek to deliver against the aims and respond to the challenges identified.

Our initial proposed engagement deliverables consisted of:

- Engagement Strategy Workshop and Engagement Strategy refinement
- Online engagement
- Pop-up events x 2
- Final report

Following the Engagement Strategy Workshop, the following have been added:

- Hope Academy school workshop x 1
- SEND school workshop x 1
- 3-hour drop-in events x 4
- Self-led engagement materials
- Production of social media assets
- Interim engagement report
- In-person flyer distribution and walkaround
- Project feedback / update via online engagement

The proposed drop-in events can be for any group the Sub-Group / Board agrees on targeting, and these will likely include SEND, community groups, sports groups, heritage groups and businesses. This will need to be informed by the Sub-Group and Board's local knowledge of key groups.

Some suggestions provided by the Sub-Group include Wargrave House School/ Ascent Autism Specialist College (SEND), Crownway Community Centre (Community Groups), Newton Sports Club (Sports Groups), Newton-le-Willows Library (Heritage Groups), and St Peters Church (Business Groups). It is envisaged that some of the students participating in the Hope Academy school workshop will also contribute from a SEND perspective. This can be reviewed and monitored during delivery.

Council Officers will support our efforts to reach a diverse audience and local minority groups with informal visits to different groups, sharing information about the funding and flagging the different opportunities to engage in-person and online, this is detailed within the Engagement Activity Breakdown.

Further consideration by the Sub-Group of inclusive engagement approaches with local minority groups (e.g. BAME, disabled, and LGBTQIA+) is required. This will need to draw on their local insights and knowledge, as well as consider the most effective ways to raise awareness amongst groups through the proposed engagement activities (e.g. drop-in events, pop-ups, engagement materials, and online).

Further refinement has been undertaken with the Engagement Sub-Group following feedback from the Neighbourhood Board, with the Strategy brought to the Board meeting on 21 March for endorsement.

Stakeholder engagement

In addition, Layer.Studio and Hatch Associates will lead on the delivery of the following for the Neighbourhood Board and stakeholders:

- 3 x Neighbourhood Board & Stakeholder Workshops
- 1-1 place observation sessions
- 3 x Thematic Stakeholder workshops

Final attendees and invites for these sessions will be aligned to the identified stakeholder list provided above and confirmed through an online session with the Engagement Sub-Group (e.g. working with the group on stakeholder identification/mapping). This discussion will also include the most appropriate forum for the various stakeholders. For example, a Thematic Workshop may serve well the engagement of local business groups – not only high street, but also key industrial and logistics areas i.e. Sankey Valley Industrial Estate.

Project Engagement Charter

To support the project in ongoing communications, we suggest establishing a Project Engagement Charter. This consists of setting out three or four 'next steps' that the Council / Neighbourhood Board commits to, helping to ensure people feel the process is transparent. These can be communicated during engagement, so people know how they can be kept 'in the loop.'

For example:

- Sharing of the engagement report on social media and websites. This can either be the full report or the visual summary.
- Committing to public updates via the Plan for Neighbourhoods website at a minimum of every six months.
- Identifying and sharing specific areas where engagement findings have shaped decisions.

The above are optional. As a minimum, we would suggest sharing the public summary report. These have been discussed with Council Officers, and no issues identified. They need to be further agreed with the Neighbourhood Board prior to the commencement of engagement delivery.

Engagement Deliverables Plan

The following provides our proposed revised engagement deliverables schedule. Please note that the milestones are indicative at this stage and will be informed by the timings of the publication of the updated prospectus, guidance from central government and local elections.

Deliverable	PLACED responsibilities	Council / Neighbourhood Board / wider Design Team responsibilities	Milestones
Engagement strategy Workshop and production of this strategy document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver Engagement Strategy Workshop with Sub-Group • Review engagement strategy for agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input at meetings • Engagement Strategy sign-off 	January 2025 / Sign off March 2025
Online engagement Online platform with survey, ideas wall and map features. Includes full management, and a project update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft and launch online engagement platform • Manage engagement process, moderating comments • Update website as appropriate throughout the process • Update based on feedback • Undertake analysis of findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and feedback on the website in a timely manner, with all online engagement materials additionally signed off from the Council's Comms Team • Provide materials required to create the platform e.g., images, logos, text, as required • Respond to PLACED where questions arise • Promote on social media and the Council website, alongside other communication channels • Feedback on analysis to enable reporting 	Launch April 2025 Can remain live for project duration, with updates. Scope to keep live after the project, with timeframes to be discussed.

<p>In-person flyer distribution and walkaround (1/2 day)</p> <p>Direct promotion through hand-delivering flyers to businesses to help raise awareness and enable informal conversations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design flyers promoting engagement opportunities • 2 x PLACED staff to conduct in-person flyer distribution/walkaround • Locations with high footfall e.g. Earlestown Market Street and Newton High Street 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback and sign-off flyers from the Council • Provide any contacts / key target businesses 	<p>April 2025</p>
<p>Pop-up events x 2 (proposed as being at existing events)</p> <p>Visual events with a range of structured engagement questions / activities for all. Ideally tap into existing events</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ordinate event locations • Create draft questions and materials for agreement • Lead on the creation of engagement materials and activities • Co-ordinate input from wider design team • Print all materials • Deliver 2 x pop-ups at approx. five hours each • 2 x PLACED Team members to deliver each event • Undertake analysis of findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend events that we could deliver in conjunction with • Agree questions prior to design of engagement materials in-line with dates set out below • Provide project information and wider context information as required • Provide collective feedback (single point of contact per org) on draft boards • Sign-off of materials in a timely manner 	<p>April 2025</p>

Workshop with young people at a local secondary school x 1 Targeted design workshop for young people at Hope Academy. Creative session also delivering social value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act as the lead contact for school • Design tailored workshop • Provision of workshop resources and materials • PLACED Team to lead delivery • Undertake analysis of findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm preference on workshop and age range • Provide timely feedback on draft activities 	April 2025
Workshop at a local SEND school x 1 Targeted SEND workshop at Wargrave House. Creative session also delivering social value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Act as the lead contact for school • Design tailored workshop • Provision of workshop resources and materials • PLACED Team to lead delivery • Undertake analysis of findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide timely feedback on draft activities 	April / May 2025

<p>Drop-in events x 4</p> <p>Attending up to four existing groups to informally talk through project and enable them to engage with a reduced set of engagement boards / activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend existing local community or business groups (dropping into already planned sessions) up to 3-hours each • Create draft questions and materials for agreement • Co-ordinate input from team • Print all materials • 2 x PLACED Team member to deliver • Undertake analysis of findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Officers to support the delivery of sessions alongside 2 x PLACED team member • Guidance on which groups to attend • Agree questions prior to design of engagement materials in-line with dates set out below • Provide project information and wider context information as required • Provide collective feedback (single point of contact) on draft boards, with a maximum of three rounds of comments • Sign-off of materials in a timely manner, with additional approval from the Council's Comms Team 	<p>April / May 2025</p>
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<p>Mobile self-led engagement</p> <p>Produce an A1 summary board about the project to include a QR code and scope to leave comments in a box</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create questions and materials for self-led engagement (expected to be one A1 board printed three times, directing people to online engagement / events) • Lead on the creation of engagement materials and activities • Create draft questions and materials for agreement • Co-ordinate input from team • Print copies for three venues • Undertake analysis of findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree questions prior to design of engagement materials in-line with dates set out below • Provide project information and wider context information as required • Provide collective feedback (single point of contact) on draft boards • Sign-off of materials from the Council in a timely manner • Provide guidance on where activity can be placed and contact to enable this to happen. Up to three venues. 	<p>April / May 2025</p>
<p>Social media / info gathering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of social media graphics with links to online engagement • Gathering of social media numbers on those posts PLACED lead. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback and sign-off materials created from the Council 	<p>April / May 2025</p>

Reporting Interim highlight report and full report with qualitative and quantitative data, along with public summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide regular summary updates on engagement findings (bulleted, emailed) • Provide interim highlight report to inform visioning and project ideas • Draft and provide final engagement findings report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback • Review and sign-off in a timely manner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft w/c 12/05 • Final 26/05
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All above dates are indicative and can be adjusted following further discussion.

The proposed stakeholder engagement activities, led by Layer.Studio and supported by Hatch Associates, outlined above (Neighbourhood Board workshops, stakeholder discussions, and thematic workshops) will be programmed during February-June. For example, Layer.Studio and Hatch Associates used the Neighbourhood Board Meeting on the 7th of February as a first engagement event with Neighbourhood Board members.

Communications Plan

Communication	PLACED	Council
Press and media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None included in budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council to lead on any press and media comms Council to deliver education piece prior to commencing engagement Council to lead on capturing the engagement on video, attending several events and speaking to the Neighbourhood Board / design team / officers about the project
Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide social plan for sign off Provide assets and details of events Post about events and engagement opportunities on own platforms Post on local groups Track engagement on own posts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sign off PLACED posts Post about project, tagging PLACED in social media
Posters / flyers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create flyers with QR code linking to online consultation. Print 20 A3 posters and 200 flyers In-person flyer distribution / walkaround 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council to sign-off flyers
Direct email comms with networks / contact lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council to lead on any email comms with key stakeholders Neighbourhood Board to share information with contacts / share email contacts where appropriate

Key dates and materials sign-off process

The following sets out our standard approach for sign off and should provide a sense of potential timeframes for consideration.

- **Four weeks prior to the event:** PLACED will draft questions for agreement.
- **Three weeks prior to the event:** PLACED will work with the consultant team to develop materials.
- **Two weeks prior to the event:** PLACED to provide draft materials. Note this is dependent on provision of information (images, text).
- **Within three days of issue/eleven days prior to the event:** Comments for each organisation come from a single source i.e., all client comments are sent via one person to ensure there is consensus prior to sending.
- **Eight days prior to event:** PLACED will amend the boards in-line with comments and issue a second version.
- **Within three days of issue:** Comments are received as per point 2.
- **Four days prior to the event:** PLACED will make final changes and issue for print. A final copy will be shared with the client and design team.

Engagement Activity Breakdown

Engagement Activities			
Engagement Activity	Description	Targeted Groups	Potential Locations
PLACED			
Online Engagement Platform	Online platform with a survey, ideas wall and map features	Open to all	Online platform
2 x Pop-up Events	Visual events with a range of structured engagement questions/activities	Open to all	Tapping into existing events with high footfall
1 x Targeted School Workshop	Workshop with young people using creative engagement	Young people	Local secondary school
1 x Targeted SEND School Workshop	Workshop with young people with SEND needs, using creative engagement	Young people with SEND needs	Local SEND school
4 x Drop-in Events	Attending locations with existing stakeholder groups, and inviting themed groups to 'drop in'	Community Groups Sports Groups Heritage Groups Businesses	Well established locations with classes taking place
Mobile Self-led Engagement	Production of A1 summary boards about the project to include a QR code and scope for a comments box	Open to all	Up to 9 locations with high footfall, locations to rotate approx. every 2 weeks
Social media/information gathering	Creation of social media graphics and links to online gathering	Open to all	PLACED social media
In-person flyer distribution and walkaround	Direct promotion through hand-delivering fliers to local people to raise awareness and	Passerby's and local businesses	Locations with high footfall and business

	enable information conversation		
Reporting	Engagement findings report, summary updates and interim highlight reports	n/a	St Helens Borough Council to publish appropriate information
Layer.Studio and Hatch Associates			
01 Neighbourhood Board & Stakeholder Workshop	Information gathering to inform the baseline mapping and findings against the themes from Neighbourhood Board	Neighbourhood Board members - complete	Neighbourhood Board meeting - complete
1-1 Place Observation Sessions	1-2-1 meetings with Board members and stakeholders to focus on sector specific issues	Neighbourhood Board members and stakeholders	Online - Teams
3 x In-Depth Thematic Stakeholder Workshops	In-depth themed workshops to be undertaken with stakeholders	Ward Councillors and Elected Members, SHBC Internal Teams, External representatives from each investment theme	Accessible locations
02 Town Board & Stakeholder Workshop	Feedback on challenges and opportunities to gain the emerging vision	Neighbourhood Board members	Neighbourhood Board meeting
03 Town Board & Stakeholder Workshop	Vision outcomes/ objectives alignment to opportunities linking to 'on menu' activities	Neighbourhood Board members	Neighbourhood Board meeting
St Helens Borough Council			
Education Piece	Education piece on who the Neighbourhood Board is and the	Open to all	Council social media Council website

	funding more widely		
Engagement Video	Capture the engagement on video/ photograph at a pop-up event to form an evidence base	Open to those who attend / engage	Pop-up event location
Social Media and Press	Post and advertise the engagement opportunities taking place	Open to all / targeted posts if needed	Council social media
Council Website	Hosts information on the engagement opportunities and signposts to PLACED online platform	Open to all	Council website
Targeted Advertising - Email	Targeted emails inviting stakeholders to events and providing promotional materials and links to online engagement activity	Aligned with the investment themes and key stakeholders	Online - Email
Targeted Advertising -Posters	Targeted locations to leave a physical poster and/or surveys, or hand out at key events	Open to all	Notice Boards or Digital Notice Boards or hand out at key events
Direct Engagement	Visits from the project team or attendance at events to talk through the programme and direct to the online platform	Aligned with harder to reach communities	Across Newton-le-Willows