



Minutes of Newton-le-Willows Neighbourhood Board

Friday 17 July 2026

Invitees			
Name	Initials	Role	Organisation
Mandated Board Members			
Chris Hickey	CH	Chair	Mercury Hampton
David Baines MP	DB	Member of Parliament, St Helens North	Member of Parliament, St Helens North
Natalie Carroll (maternity cover for Amie Parsonage)	NC	Portfolio and Partnerships Officer	Merseyside Police and Crime Commissioner
Ian Lewis	IL	Investment Manager	Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
Community & Co-Opted Board Members			
Alex Myhill	AM	Community Representative	Willow & Ram
Joanne Edge	JE	Community Representative	Newton Sports Club
Debbie Taylor	DT	Business Representative	Es Paradis Salon & Domestic Abuse WA12 CIC
Fiona Ruddy	FR	Third Sector Representative	Newton Community Centre
John Unsworth	JU	Cultural, Arts, and Heritage including Sports Groups Representative	Sea Cadet Corps
Reverend Chris Stafford	CS	Faith Representative	Team Rector at St Peters, Emmanuel Wargrave, and St John's
Catherine Twist	CT	Education and Opportunity Representative	Independent Member for Admissions and Exclusion appeal in St Helens
Claire Glover	CG	Health and Wellbeing Representative	Operations Manager at St Helens Wellbeing Service (CHCP)
Paul Romanko	PR	Business Representative	United Utilities Water Ltd
Local Authority Representatives			
Matthew Valentine	MV	Programme Lead	St Helens Borough Council
Rachel Bebbby	RB	Project Officer	St Helens Borough Council

Glenn Taggart	GT	Project Manager	St Helens Borough Council
Mary Jefferson	MJ	Head of Regeneration & Growth	St Helens Borough Council
Apologies Received			
Jon Julian Smith	JJS	Chief Inspector, St Helens	Merseyside Police
Mark Palethorpe	MP	Chief Executive	St Helens Borough Council
Councillor George Woodward	GW	Leader of the Council	St Helens Borough Council

Item	Title	Lead
1.	Welcome and Introductions	CH
2.	Declarations of Interest	CH
3.	Minutes of the previous Neighbourhood Board meeting held on 24 April 2026	CH
4.	Change in Board Membership	MV
5.	Community Pot Outcomes	MV
6.	Building Improvement Programme	MV
7.	Early Delivery Projects Update	MV
8.	Staffing Update	MV
9.	Any Other Business	All

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chris Hickey (CH) welcomed the Neighbourhood Board to the meeting

CH acknowledged apologies received from:

- Mark Palethorpe, Jon Julian Smith and George Woodward.

2. Declarations of Interest

CH informed members that no declarations had been received ahead of the meeting and invited Newton-le-Willows Neighbourhood Board Members to present any new declarations relevant to the agenda items. Declarations of interest were received from Joanne Edge, Debbie Taylor, Fiona Ruddy, John Unsworth, Reverend Chris Stafford and Paul Romanko for Agenda Item 5; whilst declarations of interest were received from Debbie Taylor for Agenda Item 6. All declarations were noted by the Chair for reference at the appropriate time.

3. Minutes of the previous Neighbourhood Board meeting held on 24 April 2026

CH reminded the Board that minutes from the previous Newton-le-Willows Neighbourhood Board meeting on 24 April 2026 have been agreed and are live on the St Helens Borough Council (SHBC) website. An overview of the key discussions and endorsements were provided, including:

- Catherine Twist (CT), and Claire Glover (CG) being appointed to the Board and attending their first meeting following the open application process for two additional Neighbourhood Board members;
- Overview of communications received from Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), following submission of the Regeneration Plan, release of monitoring guidance and the request for approval of the submission of the initial monitoring return for the Newton-le-Willows Pride in Place programme;
- Update on the Newton-le-Willows Neighbourhood Board Branding project, including endorsement of the draft Newton-le-Willows Neighbourhood Board logo;
- Noting progress on the delivery of 'early delivery projects' for Year 1 of the programme, covering 'St John's Playground', 'Earlestown Town Hall Audio, Visual and Lighting' installation, and 'Arts on Prescription'; and
- Outline of the proposed approach to the 'Community Pot' grant scheme, and to request endorsement for a pilot scheme developed for Year 1 of the programme.

4. Change in Board Membership

CH noted the change in Board membership due to local elections; Anthony Burns and Kate Groucutt are no longer on the board, stating that their input had been vital and wishing them the best for the future.

MV update the board on the Council's local elections in May 2026, the outcome of which saw Reform UK become the new administrative party for SHBC. On 21st May 2026, the new council was sworn in, with Cllr George Woodward as the leader, thus replacing Anthony Burns on this Board, with no direct replacement for Kate Groucutt. Both Cllr George Woodward and MP couldn't attend today's board as they are both at a Liverpool City Region meeting.

5. Community Pot Outcomes

CH requested that members of the Board with interests in the item leave the room, to which all conflicted Board Members, as listed in Section 2 complied.

MV outlined the process undertaken following the previous Neighbourhood Board meeting, in which the Community Pot approach was endorsed. Accordingly, a review panel was formed with CH, JJS, and MV as members to assess all applications. The panel liaised to agree documentation, inclusive of application forms, guidance and supporting materials, prior to the launch of the grant application window on 1 June 2026. Applications were accepted for a period of five weeks, until closure of the

window on 5 July 2026. A dedicated email account, NleWPrideInPlace@sthelens.gov.uk, was created to receive the applications and allow for correspondence with community groups who held an interest in the grant fund.

MV further added that a marketing campaign was undertaken to ensure local community organisations were aware of the opportunity, which included a press release on 1 June 2026 to announce the commencement of the application window. In tandem with this, other channels of promotion began, including targeted flyer distribution, inclusion within a residents' newsletter and Council staff newsletter, alongside the Halton & St Helens VCA e-bulletin.

To further enhance the local publicity, the Project Team hosted a drop-in event at Newton-le-Willows Library, with 17 groups attending the session. In addition, the Project Officer attended and presented at the Halton & St Helens VCA Forum. Finally, a dedicated Community Pot video was released on social media to provide information about the grant fund and signpost interested organisations.

MV summarised that due to the comprehensive engagement approach, 24 applications were received, with total bids being requested for just under £75,000 (circa £43,000 capital, £31,000 revenue). As the Community Pot has a £25,000 allocation in Year 1, this meant that the available funding was oversubscribed, though MV noted the level of funding applications received would fully expend the Year 2 allocation of £75,000.

MV added that the Community Pot review panel created an assessment criteria, which consisted of outputs and community benefits, sustainability, deliverability and value for money. Each panel member then carried out individual, independent assessments to ensure objectivity, prior to a moderation. This process ensured that the assessment was undertaken in line with good practice from public sector procurement rules, to ensure a fair and transparent process

MV detailed that circa £24,400 was allocated, with the remaining £600 to be rolled over into Year 2 of the Community Pot, this is due to the remaining balance not fulfilling any additional eligible applications. Confidentiality has been maintained so only the panel members and present board members know who's been awarded monies.

MV stated that should Board endorse the Community Pot outcomes, all applicants will be notified prior to the end of July. MV further added that further details of the awards and scoring process are available in Appendix 1, which redacted from publication under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act Section 3.

CH noted the difficulty in assessing the applications and how much he appreciated the time, effort, and thought put into the proposals.

Neighbourhood Board members commented on the process of the Community Pot, through development, engagement and assessment and supported that the process was ran in a fair and equitable manner to ensure that all applications were assessed on an even footing. Board members further added that the level of applications

received was positive and that with further engagement ahead of a Year 2 allocation, an increase in applications should be expected.

In addition, Board members queried what monitoring controls would be in place to ensure that distributed funds were spent as anticipated. MV advised that a proportionate assurance process would be in place, whereby successful bidders would be required to evidence spend and activity, without being too onerous for the value of the award.

DECISION: Neighbourhood Board members endorsed the successful applications.

Neighbourhood Board members who had declared an interest were invited back into the room.

6. Building Improvement Programme

CH introduced the Agenda Item 6 and asked MV to provide a detailed overview.

MV outlined that following the Neighbourhood Board's endorsement of the Building Improvement Programme at its meeting of 16 January 2026 and endorsement of Investment Theme subgroups on 6 March 2026, the Regeneration, High Streets and Heritage subgroup was created with PR, IL, and JU as members.

MV further detailed that meetings were held on 17 June 2026 and 2 July 2026 to create a proposed process and define key programme criteria. MV noted that eligibility criteria were created which propose that:

- The applicant property must be located within the Earlestown conservation area;
- Applications must be submitted by the property owner or the leaseholder with a minimum of five years remaining on the lease and leaseholders can apply in partnership with the property holder;
- Planning permission and relevant consent (where required) should be granted prior to application;
- Only full and complete applications will be assessed.

MV explained that the proposed eligibility criteria have been informed by best practice from other similar programmes, to ensure that grant allocations are made on an appropriate and safeguarded basis.

Eligible works will include repair works to buildings, reinstatement and restoration of architectural features, professional fees, preliminaries and contingencies. The subgroup are proposing a draft assessment framework and scoring matrix, which will ensure that appropriate buildings are funded and fully aligned to the Neighbourhood Board's priorities.

MV added that the subgroup have identified primary and secondary priorities for assessment, whereby a weighting multiplier will be utilised to ensure applications are appropriately scored. The primary priorities, which are proposed to receive a 3x multiplier, are:

- Building condition;
- Townscape impact; and
- Support for longstanding and independent businesses.

Secondary priorities, which are proposed to receive a 2x multiplier, are:

- Heritage significance;
- Architectural merit;
- Occupancy; and
- Business type.

MV explained that whilst the priorities have been identified, the exact assessment criteria for each priority are yet to be developed and will be brought back to Board in October 2026. In addition to the priority criterion, any application located within the priority area of Stanley Street, Oxford Street, Bridge Street and Market Street (between Stanley Street and Bridge Street) will be given a 1.2x multiplier, which will be applied on the overall assessment score. A Neighbourhood Board member enquired as to how the programme will be resourced, MV replied that the programme will be supported by the Heritage Project Officer and MV, as agreed in the 16 January 2026 endorsements, with associated Council sections such as Planning briefed on the programme to ensure applicants are informed appropriately.

MV further detailed that engagement with local business and building owners is proposed to take place with a two-phase approach. Phase 1 is proposed to begin in Summer 2026, with the intention of providing high level detail and informing further programme development. Engagement throughout phase one will give potential applicants high level funding information, such as the proposed grant contribution rate of 85% in Year 1 and 75% in Years 2 and 3 of programme delivery, alongside the maximum grant allocation of £100,000 per project. Additionally, building and business owners will be informed of a high-level programme timeline and the aforementioned Board priorities.

MV continued that Phase 2 is proposed to be undertaken in January 2027, which will allow for full document packs to be developed and presented to the Neighbourhood Board in October 2026 and Council Cabinet in December 2026. This documentation pack will include, but not limited to, application information and guidance, grant funding agreements and design packs. Phase 2 engagement will be undertaken via an Expression of Interest process; whereby potential applicants can engage with the Project Team to gain a greater understanding of the programme and allow for tailored discussion around any potential application.

MV noted that further information for the assessment criteria and process flowchart can be found within the appendices for Agenda Item 6.

CH invited Neighbourhood Board members to make any comments or queries in relation to the provided update.

Neighbourhood Board members discussed the risks of the programme, particularly that safeguards should be in place to ensure unsuitable buildings are not funded if applications are brought forward. Members of the Regeneration, High Streets and

Heritage Subgroup responded by explaining that the assessment criteria had been stress tested to ensure that it was fit for purpose as the primary vehicle of ensuring suitable applications could be progressed through to funding.

In addition, Neighbourhood Board members noted the positive progress to date on the programme and recognised the positive and transformational potential that the programme can bring to the Earlestown conservation area.

DECISION: Neighbourhood Board endorsed the proposal for the Building Improvement Programme framework.

7. Early Delivery Projects Update

CH introduced this item on the progress made towards the 'early delivery projects' for Year 1 of the programme and invited MV to provide an update.

MV updated the Neighbourhood Board as follows:

St Johns Playground

Community consultation, which commenced in May 2026, has now concluded. Sessions were undertaken at numerous venues across the area at St Johns Playground, Hope Academy, Newton-le-Willows Library, Lyme Community Primary, Newton-le-Willows Health and Fitness Centre, and Newton-le-Willows Football Club.

The proposed playground theme, voted for by respondents of the survey, is canals and trains. Further information provided by the consultation includes types of play equipment desired and comments on what will make the playground more welcoming.

MV further added that alongside the community consultation, procurement activities have begun, with an expression of interest process resulting in five contractors submitting documentation. The next step will include the five contractors submitting to a competitive tender, which will be facilitated according to public sector procurement rules, ensuring compliance. Following this, design and a planning application will follow, pursuant to works being undertaken in Winter 2026/27

Neighbourhood Board members agreed that this is a key project and will show intent with works commencing over winter and were keen to ensure that there would be a social value weighting in the procurement process so local companies would feature in the running to deliver the works.

ACTION: Project Team to circulate full consultation outcomes to Neighbourhood Board members.

Earlestown Town Hall AV and Lighting

MV outlined that enabling works are now underway, which have been funded by the Council through the main works construction programme of Earlestown Town Hall. Simultaneously, the procurement process is ongoing which will identify the supplier to supply and install lighting and AV equipment following practical completion of the Earlestown Town Hall main works construction programme.

Neighbourhood Board members enquired as to whether a visit to the Town Hall could be organised, to which MV responded that the Project Team will look into this request.

ACTION: Project Team to review access request to Earlestown Town Hall

Arts on Prescription

MV updated the Neighbourhood Board that a progress meeting was held on 3 July 2026 with the Arts on Prescription delivery team. Initially, uptake was lower than anticipated and further engagement was undertaken. Consequently, four taster sessions and two open days at Newton Library have now been held, along with additional marketing and communications. At the time of preparing papers for the Neighbourhood Board, 18 expressions of interest had been received.

MV continued that of the 18 expressions of interest, 9 have identified as being suitable candidates for the programme. The attrition in this number is in part due to some expressions of interest requiring support above that which the project can offer; those expressions are signposted to an appropriate provider for their needs. The sessions began on the 29 June 2026 and will continue until 7 September 2026.

Neighbourhood Board Members added their support to the progress of the Arts on Prescription project. The Board felt that the implications of getting people onto the programme would greatly benefit the wider community.

Spring Clean

MV advised that the subgroup has proposed a potential date of 8 May 2027, with the intention to build a bigger programme around this. The proposal includes a community day based at a central location, with an option for an informal community engagement, alongside litter picking teams to tackle pre-determined routes. In addition, community groups and organisations could be engaged to participate in a wider effort with skips provided to tackle additional areas around Newton-le-Willows.

Neighbourhood Board Members were keen to suggest that certain local 'grot spots' could be targeted to be cleaned up. There was a request that sequencing the community clean up with the Council's ongoing maintenance would be advantageous.

8. Staffing Update

MV detailed that on 3 October 2025, the Regeneration Plan was endorsed by the Neighbourhood Board alongside the Council management fee for the programme, which was agreed at 6%

MV added that the 6% management fee included provision for a full-time Project Officer and Programme Lead of one day a week. Also included within the fee was services such as financial and legal, with the management fee agreed to be reviewed annually based on the programme requirements.

Thus, the management fee will be taken under review and brought back to the October 2026 Neighbourhood Board meeting for discussion. This approach ensures

that adequate resourcing is provided for the programme requirements. Neighbourhood Board members noted the requirement to ensure that the programme is properly resourced as the delivery phase progresses and noted the value to date of delivery.

MV added that, as of 20 July 2026, RB will no longer be allocated to the Newton-le-Willows Pride in Place Programme. RB has taken up an opportunity as Programme Lead for the Town Centre East and Fingerpost Pride in Place Programme, an opportunity which is well deserved. In place, MV introduced GT would be joining the programme as an experienced Project Manager.

CH, MV and Neighbourhood Board members put their thanks on record to RB for the work to date in supporting the Board and associated activities.

9. Any Other Business

CH thanked Neighbourhood Board members for their contributions and invited any other business.

Neighbourhood Board members noted that the ongoing projects are progressing well and requested a standing item of a high-level visual project plan of current progress, including milestones. MV responded that this can be built into future Board papers.

ACTION: Project Plan timeline to be built into future Board papers

Neighbourhood Board members discussed the ongoing roadworks and diversions within Earlestown town centre. The Neighbourhood Board raised concerns about the impacts on Earlestown and requested an update from Council officers and whether any actions could be undertaken by the Board, or representations made from the Board to support local businesses. MV noted that the Neighbourhood Board is a distinct organisation from the Council and should Board members wish to make a representation they could choose to do so; however, he noted that any representation would be required to reflect a unanimous position of all Board members. MV also noted the remaining funding allocations and that any direct interventions would need to align with the Regeneration Plan mandate and advised that subgroups could discuss this.

CH closed the meeting.