



ST HELENS
BOROUGH COUNCIL

DREAM TEAM LOOKS TO A BRIGHT FUTURE

How a fresh and bold approach is helping St Helens to fulfil its potential

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THE MJ

Building back bolder

'We need the council to be an organisation that focuses on wellbeing, innovation, staff engagement and energises the workforce to be the best they can be.'

Kath O'Dwyer
Chief executive



St Helens is reinventing itself with a new breed of council and radical projects that will revitalise the borough.

Austin Macauley reports

Having largely gone under the radar for decades, St Helens is about to soar. From major regeneration plans and a global centre of excellence to its a pioneering approach to health and social care, this Merseyside borough has the building blocks to transform its image and future prospects.

Situated on the easternmost edge of the Liverpool City Region, it has great connectivity into Manchester to the west and Cheshire to the south.

Some would argue St Helens has been a success story waiting the happen. So what's different?

Since David Baines became leader in May 2019, the council has been under a new generation of political leadership and is now reaping the benefits of a new executive leadership team under chief executive Kath O'Dwyer. The council has essentially hit the fast forward button on everything good that's happening in the borough while throwing open the doors to new opportunities.

At the same time, it's used the turmoil of the pandemic to transform what was a very traditional council into what might be described as the Google of the local government world – where homeworking and flexitime are the norm and the office is a place for inspiration, innovation and collaboration.

Kath – veteran of numerous local authorities, latterly Cheshire East – admits it's 'probably' her last job before retirement. Far from being a comfy role to see out her career, leading St Helens Borough Council represents a chance to make a mark where it all began. St Helens born and bred, Kath was also a 'baby social worker' at the council 30 years ago and, having carved a reputation as an organisational fixer,

saw an opportunity to use her experience to help the borough realise its true potential.

A critical LGA peer review in 2019 highlighted some of key issues: the council was behind the times and resistant to change. And yet it had so much going for it, including its award-winning approach to integrating health and social care. Opportunities were being missed.

- 65% of the borough is green space
- Home to the largest housing projects in the Liverpool City Region
- St Helens has the city region's largest strategic employment site (Parkside)
- Council operates on a hybrid model – home-working combined with an agile hub
- St Helens Cares puts the borough at the forefront of health and social care integration
- St Helens Together has gone from a response to COVID to a catalyst for collaboration
- Glass Futures will make the borough a global focal point of green innovation

'St Helens didn't deserve to be where it was, it's better than that,' she says. 'It needed an injection of real passion and commitment to the place. We need the council to be an organisation that focuses on wellbeing, innovation, staff engagement and energises the workforce to be the best they can be.'

Within 10 days of taking over, Kath had sent staff home as the first lockdown was imposed. But far from stifling engagement, it opened up new opportunities.

Kath introduced regular and frequent online Meet the Chief sessions where staff could ask questions and her assistant chief executive Rob Huntington soon pressed ahead with an ambitious Ways of Working programme framed around a hybrid model (p4-5).

'We had a plan to move towards agile working over a three-year period,' Kath explains. 'But we thought, what are we waiting for? Everyone is working from home now. Let's not bring them back and instead use the time to develop our accommodation for collaboration, not just hotdesking.'

'There's been a history in St Helens of things being done to staff and when things change, everything being a surprise. That's why we recruited culture champions from within our workforce to help us design the changes and generate new ideas. The staff have been amazing in helping us shape what we do and how we do it.'

An almost entirely new executive leadership team was assembled during the pandemic – as Kath wrote recently in The MJ: 'Out of a team of six, five of us were recruited, virtually onboarded, inducted and all six bonded together, in the space of just 12 months.' At the time of writing, they have still only met physically once.

That team has set about tackling the council's 'strategic deficit' to ensure the many things that are happening across St Helens are coordinated and contribute to overriding goals. The new borough strategy focuses on six priorities – from giving children a positive start in life to supporting a well-connected economy – tied to a detailed and ambitious delivery plan.

It's enabled the council to provide clearer



and stronger leadership around regeneration, as demonstrated by the development agreement with English Cities Fund to repurpose town centres (p6-7) and collaboration with Glass Futures over a world-class centre of excellence.

‘You’d think of St Helens as an ex industrial place which would be deprived and grim when actually it’s

the opposite,’ says Kath. ‘We’ve got some fabulous and extensive green spaces and real pockets of affluence. We have some deprived wards, but our image doesn’t fit the reality.

‘But we have significant inequalities and COVID will exacerbate that. Levelling up for us is about bridging that gap.’

The borough’s town centres are ‘beyond tired,’ she says, a legacy of inaction for many years.

But that has its advantages and opens the door to new thinking. Unlike some areas, it doesn’t have regeneration programmes that no longer reflect market realities.

‘We are not a borough that has cranes on the ground, building shopping centres that are never going to be filled. We have the opportunity to leapfrog and create multi-purpose post-COVID town centres. It’s the same with the whole regeneration agenda.’

Like many parts of the country, St Helens witnessed community spirit in abundance during the pandemic with volunteering rates going through the roof – helped by a new volunteering portal and app (p12). It was maximised through #StHelensTogether, a collaborative effort to respond to the pandemic, and represents another chance to hit the reset button, Kath says.

‘One of the big ticket items for us is about starting a new conversation with residents about communities doing more for themselves. We don’t have the resources anymore to be the go-to fixer. We called on volunteers during COVID and were inundated. We now have the chance to embrace the opportunity that it has created to empower communities to do more themselves.’

The areas where St Helens has already forged ahead will just be a flavour of what’s to come, she says.

‘We want to be a council that learns from others but also leads the way as we are doing on health integration and agile ways of working. St Helens can be a borough that punches above its weight. As a resident, I will reap the benefits, as will my children and my grandchildren.’ ●

Lighting the way

Ex Terra Lucem – out of the earth, light.

It’s our borough’s motto and is incredibly fitting for this moment in time as we look forward after what has been a challenging year for us all.

Breaking that light through the ground is no easy feat. But here in St Helens we are starting to see rays of light shine as we build on a year of change to reset, not restore, what was here before.

Changing how you operate can be an unsettling time for staff and for residents but our borough is ready for it, and if anything we’re even more determined than before COVID to work together and create the services and communities we need and deserve.

During the pandemic the response of St Helens’ residents, businesses, charities, clubs and organisations was outstanding. As a council, through St Helens Together we coordinated support and harnessed the huge outpouring of kindness, compassion and talent in our communities, working with residents and partner organisations to keep essential services running and get through it together.

That spirit of cooperation and ‘can-do’ approach to challenges and new opportunities is here to stay.



At the heart of all our plans are the people of St Helens. We’re working hard to change the council’s relationship with our communities, co-creating policies that will improve lives, and bringing residents with us – and allowing them to lead – on our journey of transformation.

That means we’re not being seen as an unwieldy bureaucratic organisation dictating and doing things to people, but rather instead we are empowering and enabling communities to have a real say on what matters to them.

There is a growing feeling of optimism that things are starting to change here in St Helens, and with plans like the world-leading Glass Futures project preparing to build on site, delivery partners in place to support huge scale redevelopment plans for our town centres, and development opportunities being given regionally significant status as a result of Government schemes like freeports, this is an extremely exciting time for the borough.

The light is shining strong here in St Helens.

Cllr David Baines,
Leader of St Helens Borough Council

Creating the WoW factor

Adjusting to life under a pandemic required a seismic shift for St Helens Borough Council and it's seized the opportunity for fundamental change to ensure there won't be a return to business as usual

Like many local authorities, St Helens Borough Council had to radically alter the way it operated as an organisation within a matter of days when the first lockdown was announced. Unlike most, it's not going back to 'normal'.

Introducing almost wholesale homeworking at an old-fashioned council – dubbed traditional and resistant to change by a 2019 LGA peer review – was no mean feat. It had only recently begun the arduous task of replacing outdated IT systems and processes and agile working seemed a world away.

But having made the shift, explains assistant chief executive Rob Huntington, the leadership team asked themselves: why go back?

The borough needs a modern, agile council to help it drive regeneration and economic growth, develop a more empowering and enabling relationship with communities and businesses and, ultimately, reverse widening inequality.

The pandemic provided the catalyst to accelerate that transformation, he says.

'We have had to do a lot of stuff differently as a result of a global pandemic. Initially, it was about crisis leadership, dealing with the emergency and sending the workforce home. We could have carried on like this and dealt with the response, which is what a lot of local authorities have done – viewed Teams as a temporary fix, mothballed their buildings and waited for pandemic to be over.

'But very early on we saw it as a massive opportunity to move from crisis to change leadership and, with the backing of elected members, make this a hybrid organisation.'

To help staff through the changes, the council introduced the Ways of Working (WoW) programme – covering everything from restructuring the organisation and the way it uses its buildings to digital innovation and a staff wellbeing programme.

Two of its four main buildings will be disposed of, either demolished as part of regeneration plans or transferred to community ownership. With home being the main place of work for most staff, the council's Atlas House headquarters have been turned into an agile hub – a place to collaborate with colleagues and hold meetings. Staff were heavily involved in its development, a theme that runs throughout WoW.

As well as staff surveys and forums, the council created a network of 150 culture champions who share information across the workforce, act as a sounding board and essentially help the executive leadership team to gauge how staff are feeling.

'We've probably done five to 10 years' worth of

change in six months,' says Rob. 'Culturally it's been a fundamental shift. Work is now something you do, not somewhere you go.

'Communication is key in times of such uncertainty, particularly at an organisation as complex as a local authority where you've got the business-as-usual stuff, you're dealing with the pandemic and the impact of the pandemic – both through your work and personally.'

'I want us to change the perception of local government and St Helens. I want us to be cool!'

Rob Huntington
Assistant chief executive

New breed of council

The way the council operates across the borough will be fundamentally different in the future with a far more targeted and localised approach based on data and intelligence.

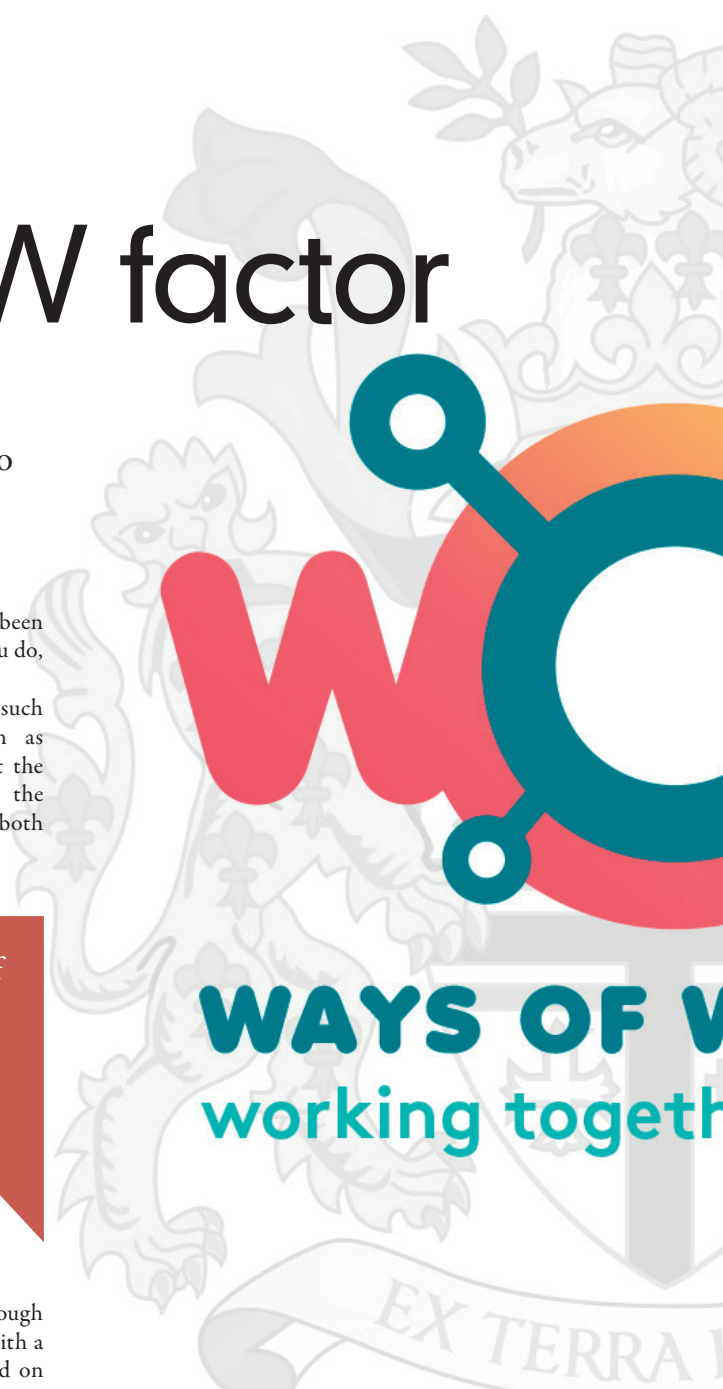
WAYS OF WORKING (WoW) – CREATING A NEW KIND OF COUNCIL	
•	Headquarters turned into an agile working hub with collaborative spaces, resource areas and touch down areas
•	New 'flexitime' employment contracts
•	Work socialisation programme to stop staff from feeling cut off - from book and cookery clubs to yoga classes
•	150 culture champions appointed to share information, shape ideas and be the 'barometer' for how staff are feeling
•	New app created for staff to book a room, a desk, or parking space at the agile hub
•	25 mental health first aiders across the council provide practical help
•	Leadership development programme now includes training on managing remote teams
•	'Starting work at the council' programme sees recruitment, induction and on-boarding conducted on Teams and via video

Smaller locality hubs across St Helens will see the council take services to the communities that most need them. It's about shifting from being buildings focused to outcomes focused, Rob explains.

'I think there's been a realisation through COVID that local authorities need to get to know their communities better.

We will have drop-in points across the borough

for our workforce so that they are taking services to the communities – not expecting residents to come to Atlas House or the town hall. We will be data-led, focusing resources on particular localities until we see a shift.' Changes like this will require new roles and different skill sets. But under a hybrid model – where staff can work remotely and flexibly – the council is able to cast the net far wider when it comes





to recruitment. In many ways, St Helens is following the lead of global organisations like Twitter, Facebook and Google in declaring the switch to homeworking enforced by COVID is permanent and offices are a place to collaborate and innovate.

'Why not copy them rather than follow other local authorities? I think we are now a hell of a lot more productive than we were. We have got to be a platform for change, we're no longer a deliverer of everything.

'We can't thrive as a borough with underlying problems like high demand for children's and adult services and generational worklessness. How do we address those challenges and who needs to sit at the table? This is a chance to completely reimagine things.'

The council has cast aside its traditional image and Rob believes if it continues to engage and invest resources in its workforce, it can be a force for change in local government.

'I want us to change the perception of local government and St Helens. I want us to be cool! There's a mindset of deficit thinking, "we can't do that because..." – that needs to be flipped on its head.' ●

'Staff have become so much more engaged in how the council works... that's created a real sense of energy about the place.'



The journey from Tipp-Ex to Teams

Culture champion Victoria Kehoe reflects on rapid changes at St Helens Borough Council

It's fair to say I found St Helens Borough Council a bit 'traditional' when I joined back in July 2019.

I'd been on work experience there when I was 15 and had a summer job when I was 16 – we're talking over 30 years ago.

When I walked in, some of the same staff were still there who I'd worked with when I was a teenager. They recognised me from and even remembered my leaving present.

It was lovely and it's great to have people with so much local knowledge and experience within an organisation. But I soon found that it wasn't the only thing that hadn't changed.

When an invoice came in, you still had to fill out a paper slip and put it in an envelope to send it to finance and they were still using Tipp-ex. I had to ask, isn't this on a system – how are we not automated? Lots of old-fashioned systems, it was bizarre.

When the pandemic hit, my first thought was: how are we going to be able to work from home when it took eight weeks for me to get a desk and a computer? I'd been hotdesking around the office for my first two months!

Yet when lockdown happened, IT had everything sorted within a week.

Looking back, it was a sign of how the organisation was changing and an early indication of how COVID was about to fast-track our transformation – no more paper invoices, no more Tipp-Ex, it's all online. We're all on Teams.

But it runs a lot deeper than systems and processes. As a culture champion, I've seen how staff have become so much more engaged in how the council works and the way in which that's created a real sense

of energy about the place.

As soon as she joined in 2020, the chief executive started sending weekly emails to everyone and running online sessions where she invited people to ask her questions. They were a bit quiet to start with – we weren't used to being asked – but that soon changed.

Culture champions from across the council meet monthly but we also connect via sub-groups and constantly share information and experiences. We've become a kind of barometer for the management to gauge how staff are feeling during what's been a very challenging time.

They have also put ideas and support in place to prevent people feeling isolated, such as book clubs, intranet resources about keeping yourself well – and are constantly generating other ideas and getting our input.

There's a lot of excitement and nervousness about what happens next in terms of how we work. Our headquarters at Atlas House will be a very different place and it'll be a bit like starting a new job all over again – where do you sit, where do I get a coffee?

The culture champions' forum provides a safe place for people to bring these things up and talk about them.

A lot of what we are doing will continue online and we will have a really good induction in place and a e-system for a learning and development. That's why I think that while the pandemic has created the conditions for us to adapt rapidly, those changes are being embedded as permanent ways of working.

One thing's for certain, it's a world away from the council I worked at as a teenager, or the one I joined two years ago. ●

Victoria Kehoe is one of the council's culture champions and is a children's improvement programme manager in children's services

Major regeneration plans will transform the borough and create a cleaner, greener and healthier future while linking to its proud industrial heritage

Making the past part of the

Over the coming years, St Helens is set to witness economic development on a scale not seen since its industrial heyday.

Despite the best of intentions, grand visions and regeneration plans have come and gone in the past without coming to fruition. The difference this time round is the council's new executive and political leadership have put the focus on strategic thinking, taken the level of ambition up several notches – and they've got the big guns on board.

A 20-year development agreement with English Cities Fund (ECF) will see key sites across the borough undergo regeneration as part of a carefully planned programme. The initial focus will be on regenerating the town centres of St Helens and Earlestown, which have been in need of investment for many years.

Best known for major schemes such as Salford Central and Merchant Gate in Wakefield, ECF is a national strategic joint venture between Muse Developments, Legal & General and Homes England. Together with the council, it's currently developing a masterplan that will reshape the borough and have a huge impact on its economy.

St Helens is ideally located on the eastern edge of the Liverpool City Region, bordering Greater Manchester and enjoying excellent connectivity and an abundance of sites ripe for development. While the borough's potential was a key factor, says Phil Mayall, regional director at ECF, the decision to partner with St Helens was as much about the level of commitment and drive shown by the council's political and executive leadership.

'We work with a lot of local authorities and St Helens have been really bold. They came to us and wanted to know how we did Salford Central and whether it could be done in a borough.

'There's no reason why geography needs to matter. It's about identifying where the assets are that you have influence over, capturing that value gain and applying it elsewhere so that you create a virtuous circle. What's good about them is they've been clear from the start that they've had too many masterplans in the past and they want to be able to say how things will be delivered.'

When ECF did its homework on St Helens it ticked

'It's towns like St Helens that will solve the country's productivity gap because there's only so much the big cities can do.'

Phil Mayall
Regional director, English Cities Fund

a lot of boxes, he says, such as the council's long-term intent, its strong relationship with Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the borough's proximity to other major centres.

'The borough has got history and culture,' he says. 'It's got a passionate community that really cares. A lot of the fundamentals are there that really matter.'

'It's towns like St Helens that will solve the country's productivity gap because there's only so much the big cities can do. Earlestown has great architecture and independent shops but hasn't been relevant to local people for a long time. We need to give these centres a purpose because in the post-pandemic world we will see even more emphasis on people wanting to have everything they need close by. For places like St Helens, it's the future.'

Town centre investment

St Helens is also one of 100 towns invited by the Government to bid for support from the £3.6bn Towns Fund. The independent St Helens Town Deal Board has submitted an investment plan designed to 'deliver a town centre that matches the potential of the borough and underpins the role that St Helens will have in the Liverpool City Region'.

The plan has been shaped by extensive public engagement and reflects many of the things residents care most about, says chair John Tabern, such as celebrating the town's glass-making heritage.

It focuses on six key projects – from town centre living and a comprehensive repurposing of the heart of St Helens to 'healthy communities', including a

youth zone and health innovation hub based in one of the town's most iconic buildings, The Gamble. The latter will provide key health services and training and co-working space for SMEs in a bid to build on the success of St Helens Cares.

All projects are aligned with the Glass Futures centre of excellence (p 9), a globally significant research and development hub into the town which is due to open next year.

Indeed, one of the projects is directly connected. Glass Futures phase two will see a former bottle factory, Cannington Shaw, become a world class innovation centre for medical glass production and visitor centre 'where glass past meets glass futures'.

The plans complement the borough-wide work by ECF and the council, says John, with the two working in tandem.

'St Helens is a post-industrial northern town that lost its traditional industries. That left quite a void in the town and successive administrations have come and gone publicly promising this and that – all genuinely working to deliver things. The public has become cynical, which you can understand.'

'What's fundamentally different with this administration is they not only mean it, they are putting things in place that are bringing it to fruition. They've really engaged with the Town Deal board and have put more capacity in place on the executive side. When this council say things, they actually mean it.'

He cites the council's recent demolition of a large car park, regarded as a local eyesore, which was blocking sight of the town's historic Sankey Canal area. Regeneration on the scale planned in St Helens takes time, he says, and projects like this 'are a symbolic way of saying to the public "things are happening" while also creating debate about how we can use the space'.

What the partnership with ECF, the Town Deal and a number of other key projects represent is an opportunity to finally fulfil the borough's full potential, says Lisa Harris, executive director of place.

'The scale of four place based opportunities ensures that St Helens will play a regional role in the north west and be a bridge between Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester as well as connecting with Cheshire.' She has put together an entirely new place team,



the future

bringing a new team of eight place leaders together who have a wide range of experience, everything from town centre regeneration and private sector green investment to delivery of large-scale infrastructure schemes.

This new capacity will allow St Helens to be a 'different partner'.

'With ECF we will deliver, with Glass Futures we facilitate and with Parkside we're an investor. The next stage is to create a Prosperity Acceleration Collaborative Environment (PACE) team – a set of technical experts to help and support private sector investors to make their opportunities become a reality.

'We have people in the team who bring their networks as well as their knowledge and skills. For example, on digital infrastructure we're now working with City Fibre, which has included St Helens on its hitlist of towns for fibre broadband, and we're linking them in with the city region's "digital super spine". This collaboration allows us to make St Helens a smart place within a smart region.

'It's all about delivery. Having the best opportunity, using the right networks and working with the right partners to make things happen.'

Overcoming market failure in post-industrial towns is a major challenge for places across the north of England, says Mark Bousfield, director of commercial development and investment at Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

He believes St Helens Borough Council has the vision and understanding to seize on unique opportunities like Glass Futures and transform the borough.

'Every town is trying to do this. The only difference is the credibility of the management team and the leadership. I can't say enough about how much better they are now in St Helens.

'The recent changes in political and officer leadership have brought in a very strong focus on St Helens' value proposition.

'It's about high quality, close-knit community living and an ability look over to Liverpool and Manchester. It's not just an ambition but an intent to renew itself - Glass Futures, St Helens town centre, Parkside Freepoint, there's a sense of not only what it can be but how they take it on that journey.' ●



Building sustainable communities

The pandemic has fuelled demand for neighbourhoods where everything is on your doorstep and it's a trend that works well for areas like St Helens.

The borough has consistently outstripped its housing targets in recent years and is home to some of the largest developments in the city region.

Mark Bousfield, director of commercial development and investment at Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, describes St Helens as a microcosm of the housing divide.

'It's an interesting housing market,' he says. 'You have million-pound homes in the greener bits and signs of market failure in others. The real challenge for places like St Helens is how you develop urban led, high density liveability.'

Its Local Plan will see 7,290 homes built over the next 15 years – 30% of which will be affordable, and more than two-thirds will be on brownfield land.

Two sites, at Cowley Hill and Moss Nook, have recently gained planning permission for more than 2,000 new homes – another example of St Helens Borough Council is proactively helping to bring brownfield sites back into use. Some £2m of funding was secured from the combined authority to support the remediation and infrastructure to fulfil the site's potential.

The positive planning outcome provides further recognition for the quality of the council's planning service, with an enviable 100% of applications determined within the statutory or agreed timescale for the past two years.

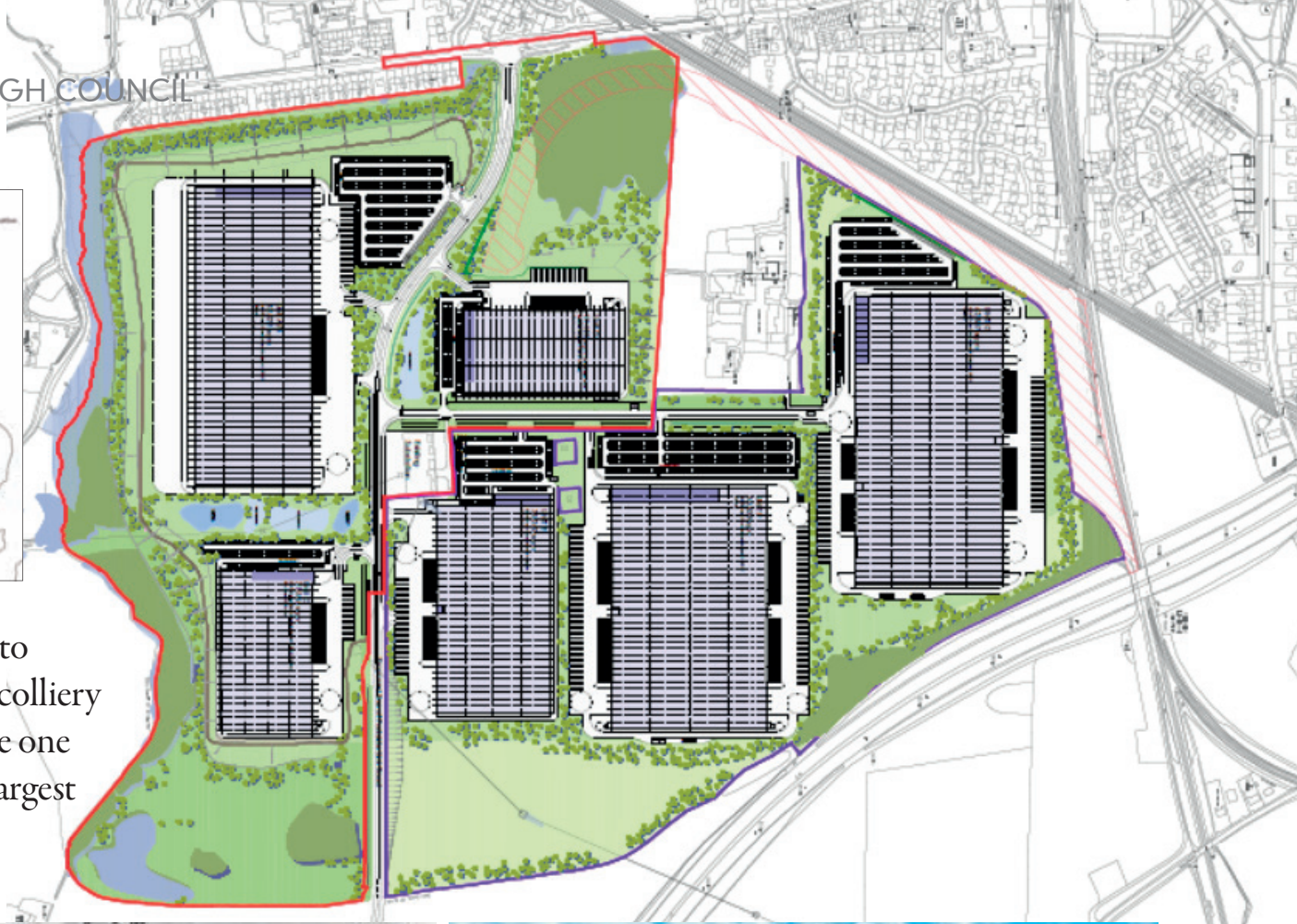
The emphasis is on extending existing communities and marrying housing development with infrastructure to ensure sustainability and with this new ambition there is no reason why St Helens can't have the greenest places to live in the region. For example, Bold Forest Garden Suburb, a new settlement planned in the south east of the borough, is set to become a green housing exemplar.

A collaborative approach – whether it's between council departments or partners – is essential, says Lisa Harris, executive director of place.

'You see that silo mentality too much. This is about place-shaping, building new communities and enhancing our existing communities. It's not just houses but new places for whole communities to grow and thrive.'

It plays into the concept of '15 minute cities', according to English Cities Fund regional director Phil Mayall, and the need to reduce the footprint of towns and make them multifunctional and better connected.

'Everything you need should be within a 15-minute walk - education, work, home, leisure and retail,' he says. ●



Plans are underway to transform a former colliery site into what will be one of the north west's largest employment parks



From geology to geography

Local authorities often talk about realising hidden potential for economic growth. When it comes to Parkside, it's literally the case.

The vast former colliery site in the east of the borough close to Newton-le-Willows has lain dormant and shielded from view since the pit closed more than a quarter of a century ago.

But a new life awaits Parkside in the form of an employment park that is expected to create more than 1,300 logistics and manufacturing jobs and generate £80m a year for the local economy. It will be the largest strategic employment site in Liverpool City Region.

Rail freight proposals are at the heart of the aspirations with a new terminal connecting the site to the UK's rail freight routes, providing the vital missing link between the north and south of the nation.

Adding to the development's cache is the fact that Parkside is part of the city region's Freeport proposals, forming the largest of three tax and customs zones that are designed to simplify customs procedures and offer attractive incentives to new business operations and investment.

The council estimates that all of those projects together would add up to £417m a year to the economy.

Parkside employment park, a joint venture between the council and local developer Langtree, has an enviable location – next to the M6, M62, West Coast Mainline and Liverpool-Manchester railway. Which

PARKSIDE: IN NUMBERS

£417m a year boost to economy (including freight terminal and Freeport)

1,330 jobs

£2.2m in additional business rates

457 construction and supply jobs during development

1 million+ sq ft of new employment space

£24m secured by council from city region strategic investment fund

begs the question, why has it taken so long?

John Downes, managing director of Langtree, believes it boils down to the site being 'out of sight, out of mind'.

'I always get the same reaction from people when I open the gates and take them onto the site for the first time: bloody hell! It's the scale of it that gets you and it can't be seen from outside.'

The redevelopment of Parkside has become something of a personal mission for John, who followed in his father's footsteps when he took a job at the colliery as a 16-year-old in the mid-1970s.

'It has been a long time coming. One of the reasons is it's had green belt status even though it's an ex industrial

site. We have to be mindful of local concerns and the development will involve protecting the surrounding environment and adding new green spaces with public access.'

There are also plans to create links between different habitats, including a local wildlife site and potentially a 'trim trail' providing new footpaths and outdoor fitness equipment.

Having the council as a partner brings added scrutiny, he admits, but will lead to a better scheme in the long run.

'We bring the commercial acumen and the council bring the economic development drive and as long as you are respectful of each other's agenda then you get that dynamism.'

A key aspect of Parkside will be a £40m link road connecting the site to the M6.

'From a regeneration point of view, we're talking about bringing a site back into use and potentially creating significantly more jobs than were there at the time of the colliery,' John says. 'It's a great location for logistics. People wrongly think of logistics as people working in low pay, low skill jobs but the sector isn't like that and pay is higher than the national average.'

'The economy needs to change and move forward and take advantage of what its assets are now. It used to be geology – 200 years' worth of coal in the ground – now it's geography.' ●



Glass past meets Glass Futures

A global centre of excellence will put St Helens at the forefront of a green industrial revolution and restore its position as the home of glass

'This is an opportunity for St Helens to not just climb back to being a unique centre of glass technology in the UK but leading the world again.'

Richard Katz
Chief executive, Glass Futures

When you have a globally significant development like Glass Futures on your doorstep, it's nigh on impossible to overstate its importance.

The £54m glass research and innovation facility won't just be a catalyst for economic growth in St Helens and the surrounding area, it will revolutionise the way glass is made throughout the world and shift the industry onto a greener footing.

It will also spark a new supply chain in an area that, thanks to the pandemic, will resonate with pretty much everyone in the country: the production of medical glass vials.

But perhaps most excitingly of all, it has the potential to be magnet for the brightest minds and create a hotbed of innovation, spinning off in a multitude of directions.

Work on the construction of Glass Futures' new base, which received planning approval in May, will soon begin on a site next to Totally Wicked Stadium – home of St Helens RFC – in the centre of town and it's expected to be completed in late 2022.

The not-for-profit initiative is the brainchild of chief executive and former glass manufacturing entrepreneur Richard Katz, who describes it as 'a mission' to give something back to the industry by helping it to decarbonise.

One of Glass Futures' real feats has been to unite a fiercely competitive industry around a common and crucial cause. The world's biggest manufacturers are not just members of Glass Futures, they are investing in its new centre.

'No individual glass manufacturer has time, or is able, to incur the costs of experimentation on their own line because they have to operate 24/7 and must not be interrupted. What we're doing in St Helens is to change the whole world's method of manufacture of glass.'

Having searched for a home for Glass Futures, Richard soon discovered all roads led to the Merseyside borough.

'St Helens was absolutely on a global pedestal as the home of the float glass process, which revolutionised the manufacture of flat glass for windows. This is an opportunity for St Helens to not just climb back to being a unique centre of glass technology in the UK but leading the world again.'

He says the 'revolution' at St Helens Borough Council made the decision even easier.

'It was quite clear the new team were keen to make their mark on St Helens in lots of different ways and they could see the strengths that a global entity would bring. It's not just civic pride, it's part of the regeneration, an opportunity for employment, for a new horizon – and

it's a big investment.' In the space of just two years, a partnership between Glass Futures, the council, the combined authority, developer and landowner Network Space and UK Research and Development has taken it from concept to an approved scheme that will be delivered in record time.

Glass Futures has very quickly become ingrained in the future development of St Helens, from the town centre regeneration plans to the new borough strategy and its goal to build a greener economy.

While most places start small and build up when it comes to the green agenda, says executive director of place Lisa Harris, St Helens has done the opposite.

'We have flipped it the other way round by starting really big with Glass Futures. It's international, bringing the glass industry together to solve the carbon problem. We had a lightbulb moment a few months ago that we don't want to compete with our neighbours, what's the point? What makes St Helens different is we're industrial. It's a place that's not afraid of chimneys. Why can't it continue to be industrial, but in a green way?'

Thoughts are already turning to future phases. While the next step will be to support the manufacture of glass vials and create a glass-themed visitor centre, the third phase will see Glass Futures' innovation applied to foundation industries to spread the environmental benefits.

'What it's going to do to the locale is create an awful lot of jobs and bring the importance of being a global centre of excellence for glass research and development, innovation and training,' Richard explains. 'Our membership is global and we already have one member that's planning to locate its research and development team here.'

'You can't have investment like this and not impact enormously on the supply chain. The glass industry internationally will be sending people to be trained here. It'll be like a giant Lego set to be experimented on. Hands-on learning – creating the next generation of glass engineers.' ●

GLASS FUTURES

- 160,000 sq ft global centre of excellence
- World's first experimental furnace, capable of melting 30 tonnes of glass per day
- Connecting glass industry to academia to forge a sustainable future based on recyclable, zero-carbon products
- 80 new jobs created - plus many more in the supply chain





Putting down roots

St Helens is ahead of the curve when it comes to health and social care integration and it has the momentum to stay there, explains *Mark Palethorpe*

There's a well-known saying about tiny acorns and mighty oaks, but that famous proverb certainly springs to mind whenever I talk about our journey to health and social care integration in St Helens.

Strong foundations were laid back in 2018 when the council and NHS St Helens CCG commenced their journey of integration with the launch of St Helens Cares – our joined-up place-based approach to health and social care.

St Helens Cares also brings together a broader base of partners including NHS providers, housing providers, the fire and rescue service, police and the voluntary and community sector. The borough of St Helens has significant deprivation, inequality, and unemployment, causing poor population outcomes to be higher than the England average for suicide, alcohol-related admissions, life expectancy, and childhood obesity, together with lower GCSE attainment. These challenges – which will have been exacerbated by the pandemic – generate high demand for services when resources are already stretched.

St Helens Cares unites the key wellbeing commissioners and providers to deliver sustainable

Dave's story

Dave, 45, was admitted to hospital with complications from diabetes which resulted in an amputation of his right leg. Struggling with the aftermath, both physically and mentally, he became isolated as his flat was not suitable for a wheelchair or his needs and he was unable to get out.

A district nurse who came to change his dressings saw Dave was upset and essentially trapped - unable to clean, do his shopping or prepare decent meals.

He was referred to the Contact Cares team and the multidisciplinary team swung into action, immediately getting him a place at Brookfield



Resource Centre, an intermediate care service in St Helens.

He received support from all areas - including physiotherapy, OT, mental health - and

after several weeks, moved to a transitional tenancy flat where he could regain his independence and confidence. Dave says it's helped him to rebuild his life.

'I wouldn't be here without all these people who supported me every step of the way. I now have a new flat they helped me find which is near family and is accessible. I've had a prosthetic fitted and I've got back to riding my scooter which was a big thing for me.

'I know there is support there for me still if I need it at Contact Cares - I still have bad days as well as good days but I'm getting back to being as normal as possible.' ●

'St Helens Cares unites the key wellbeing commissioners and providers to deliver sustainable high-quality health, care and support to the proud people of the borough.'

Contact Cares

Previously health, social care and community services in St Helens were delivered within a fragmented and complex system with services developed independently rather than as a virtuous system. Contact Cares is a single point of access for all social care and adult health referrals, and the first point of contact for children referrals. It is a multi-disciplinary team of qualified and unqualified social care staff, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, general nursing and housing staff, who together coordinate and carry out assessments from either self-referral or referral by a health or care professional, providing a joined up and holistic response to meet residents' needs.



Jean's story

Jean came to Brookfield Resource Centre when her husband Ray, who had heart failure, was admitted to hospital for an operation following deterioration in his condition. Ray refused to go until he knew Jean was safe as she struggled with mobility around the house. She was referred by the frailty nursing team to crisis response team – both part of the Contact Cares front door service – who completed an assessment and arranged a respite placement at Brookfield.

When Ray left hospital, the discharge team arranged a placement for him at Brookfield and made sure he and Jean had rooms next to each other so they could be together during his final days.

'Everyone at Contact Cares and Brookfield did the best for us - not what was easiest for them,' says Jean. She adds: 'I asked Ray before he died if he had any regrets and he said he didn't – the fact I got the chance to ask him this - the people at Contact Cares have been marvellous making this happen – I cannot thank everyone enough.'

Jean is still in Brookfield while further adaptations are carried out to her house to enable her to safely return home – with carers planned to come in several times a day once OTs and physios are happy with her bed transfer and ability to manage steps. ●

St Helens Business Intelligence Hub

Business intelligence functions have been brought together into one single team with staff members remaining in their employing organisation but working collaboratively across the system. The combined intelligence creates a multi-faceted picture of need, supporting the appropriate development and deployment of resources. Just one example of this collaboration is our risk stratification arrangements for patients at risk of suicide by combining data available from different sources to give a detailed picture of individual and cohort need.

Integrated finance and performance board

The council and the CCG have established an integrated board including officers from both organisations, the CCG governing body and council cabinet members. This place-based approach has gone further than most traditional integrated health and care models adopted elsewhere, overseeing an integrated commissioning fund of £633m that's underpinned by a significant S.75 agreement.

Our response to the pandemic demonstrates the real value of integrated arrangements. The unprecedented challenge of COVID stress-tested the strength of these relationships and the shared vision and objectives of the partners like never before. But again, the level of integration and strong partnership enabled effective systems to instantly mobilise support for our shielded list and vulnerable groups, including help, testing and vaccination for the homeless and our care homes, and the coordination of the vaccine rollout based on local integrated knowledge and intelligence.

Integrated care partnership

In anticipation of the forthcoming legislation and the establishment of integrated care systems (ICSs) on a statutory footing, St Helens Cares has established itself as a shadow Integrated Care Partnership ICP, dovetailing the place arrangements into the wider Cheshire and Merseyside ICS requirements.

Key to this is the stakeholder advisory group which brings the voice of residents to help challenge and co-produce. Our local governance arrangements have been further developed into a new collaboration agreement signed by a wider group of local partners.

We have ambitious plans for further integration, utilising the St Helens ICP, which is starting to develop collaboration between local providers to improve the care pathways for our residents. They will take responsibility for the budget and pathway to support improved commissioning of services for local people, working alongside service users, carers and families.

The council has been a major driving force in this integration journey and will continue to be so during this transitional year from shadow to full ICP and ICS. A combination of joint innovation, managed risk taking, a passion for improved outcomes and a real commitment to improving our residents' experience of health and care, together, of course, with strong relationships, have been the key ingredients in developing true and continuing integration in St Helens. ●

Mark Palethorpe is executive director of integrated health and social care at St Helens Borough Council and accountable officer for St Helens CCG

high-quality health, care and support to the proud people of the borough.

The initial focus was on implementing tangible changes to the way in which system partners work together, working with citizens to create a place-based approach that would provide the necessary support to foster a culture of integration, community resilience and self-care.

A key feature of St Helens Cares, and fundamental to its success, has been the establishment of an integrated executive leadership team overseeing integrated NHS, public health and social care commissioning. Crucially, it involved the establishment of the combined executive post that I now hold between the council and CCG – combining the executive director of health and social care role within the council with the accountable officer for the CCG. This placed responsibility for social care, public health and NHS commissioning within the remit of one senior person and a combined leadership team.

Over the past three years, this joint team has gone from strength to strength and has enabled a shared understanding of challenges, enhanced collaboration and integration with rapid decision making and system re-design at a pace that just would not have been possible within a traditional structure where senior posts would be split across different organisations and different teams.

Under our integrated senior team, staff employed by the council work hand in glove with those employed by the CCG with shared line management arrangements, shared goals and shared outcomes. Here are just some of the successes St Helens Cares has achieved.



A sense of togetherness

The pandemic saw the council, voluntary sector, communities and businesses join forces under the St Helens Together banner. It's now becoming the new normal

It started as a way to 'harness that sense of pride and community spirit to build a network of support'.

Launching St Helens Together in the early days of the pandemic, leader Councillor David Baines said it would help people through 'extraordinary times'.

More than a year later he reflects on the response: 'St Helens has a strong sense of community and our residents are strong and proud, they demonstrated their passion for helping others throughout the pandemic – they were amazing.'

But the initiative – a partnership between the council and a range of voluntary organisations brought together by Halton and St Helens Voluntary Community Action – proved so successful it's become a catalyst for real change going forward.

Through an online portal and an award-winning smart phone app, St Helens Together made it easier for local people to offer their time by linking them to volunteering opportunities and peer support.

With thousands of people shielding and self-isolating, it enabled communities to rally themselves at a critical time. In the first six months alone, some 1,744 volunteers registered on the system and devoted 8,688 hours to help others – equating to more than £80,000 worth of work.

Halton and St Helens VCA had already planned to launch a portal, backed by a council grant, to link voluntary organisations with volunteers. When COVID came it proved to be the ideal vehicle for a swift response as St Helens Together.

'We had needed better methods of mobilising

volunteers for some time,' explains Sally Yeoman, the CVA's chief officer. 'We can do it so much quicker now. What we have found with connecting with new volunteers during the pandemic is for many it was their first experience of volunteering and they now realise you can do all sorts of things and it's not as difficult as they thought it was going to be.'

As well as accelerating progress on volunteering, St Helens Together has become an opportunity to begin building a genuinely collaborative approach to improving life chances in the borough.

A new strategy for the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector takes the initiative's name as its title and sets out a practical roadmap to ensure its 650 groups and organisations play a pivotal role in the borough's inclusive economic growth.

The fact it mirrors the design of the new borough strategy is highly symbolic – the St Helens Together ethos is a theme that runs through both strategies.

'Our strategy sits within the borough strategy,' Sally says. 'It gives us a framework to inform and challenge the borough strategy. The council has shown it understands the expertise of the sector and how it can help. You can see the thread running through it that's jointly created by the sector and the council. It's a long time since we did that.'

The borough strategy outlines the council's pledge to empower and enable residents and community organisations while asking them to take a more active role in return. It's about 'an open and honest two-way

conversation' about the part everyone has to play.

Years of austerity have reduced the council's capacity in many areas. But its new executive and political leadership have seized it as a chance to foster real collaboration that makes the most of borough's assets and resets the local authority's role, says Sarah Bullock, assistant director for policy and change.

'The pandemic has shown us that the community, the sector and businesses have a lot of the solutions and are willing to deliver on them with a bit of enabling support from us.'

'The sector has this pipeline of opportunities but often lacks capacity and sustainability is a real issue. While as a local authority we can't necessarily offer grants anymore, we can provide time and expertise, for example to get funding bids together. You get richer bids by working together and we're seeing more money come into St Helens as a result.'

The borough is one the Government's 100 priority places invited to bid for support from the £220m Community Renewal Fund.

'The council helped us put a bid together,' explains Sally. 'It was a very inclusive process and that way of working feels different. That's the journey to greater sustainability.'

'Our council has done quite a bit in recent years in terms of keeping the sector as stable as it can. But it's definitely been turbo-charged under Kath O'Dwyer and her team. The focus now is on what can we all do together?' ●

