



# Cabinet

## 19 March 2025

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Watson Street Masterplan</b>
<b>Cabinet Portfolio</b>	Inclusive Growth & Regeneration
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Richard McCauley
<b>Exempt Report</b>	No
<b>Reason for Exemption</b>	N/A
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Public Notice issued</b>	N/A
<b>Wards Affected</b>	Town Centre
<b>Report of</b>	Sean Traynor Director of Strategic Growth <a href="mailto:seantraynor@sthelens.gov.uk">seantraynor@sthelens.gov.uk</a>
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Mary Jefferson Head of Regeneration and Growth <a href="mailto:maryjefferson@sthelens.gov.uk">maryjefferson@sthelens.gov.uk</a>

<b>Borough Priorities</b>	Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life.	
	Promote good health, independence, and care across our communities.	
	Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all.	X
	Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy.	X
	Create green and vibrant places that reflect our heritage and culture.	X
	Be a responsible Council.	X

## **1. Summary**

- 1.1 After nearly 200 years of pioneering activities, Glass manufacturing at Pilkington UK' Watson Street Works ceased in February 2024 and in one of the single biggest UK investments by Pilkington for many decades, all production and associated jobs were successfully transferred to the adjacent Greengate Works site.
- 1.2 Extending to circa 30 acres of brownfield (previously developed) land located on the southern edge of St Helens town centre, Pilkington UK's decision to cease manufacturing operations at Watson Street Works has provided a strategically important windfall opportunity to redevelop the site for the continued positive benefit of the borough, complementing the ECF St Helens town centre regeneration initiatives.
- 1.3 The Watson Street site now forms an integral part of the St Helens Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation Campus, which is already home to Glass Futures, SINA Medical Glass and Inovus Medical. The site is also an integral component of the Liverpool City Region Life Sciences Investment Zone, being one of its three designated tax sites, offering financial benefits to businesses relocating and expanding in the area.
- 1.4 To maximise the sites potential contribution to the borough and to guide appropriate future development proposals, the Council and Pilkington UK (assisted by other key stakeholders) have commissioned production of an aspirational Masterplan for Watson Street. It proposes a vibrant mixed-use development comprising circa 764 new homes and 150,000sqft of commercial development, ancillary retail and leisure, alongside extensive public realm and high-quality structured landscaping, and with the retention and utilisation of some key non-designated heritage assets.
- 1.5 Following public consultations, engagement with leading regeneration developers, strategic partners, stakeholders and design panel review on the emerging proposals for the Watson Street throughout during 2024, the Masterplan has been refined and is presented to Cabinet for adoption.

## **2. Recommendation for Decision**

**Cabinet is recommended to:**

- 1) Note the outcome of the public consultation on the emerging Watson Street Masterplan, as presented at Appendix A.**
- 2) Adopt the Watson Street Masterplan presented at Appendix B.**
- 3) Endorse the Council's continued engagement with Pilkington UK and strategic partners (including Homes England and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority) to promote the earliest realisation of the Watson Street Masterplan.**

### **3. Purpose of this report**

- 3.1 To provide details of the consultation and engagement activities conducted in relation to the emerging Watson Street Masterplan and seek adoption of the Watson Street masterplan that has been informed, where appropriate, by the consultation feedback and stakeholder engagement.

### **4. Background / Reason for the recommendations**

- 4.1 The Watson Street Works have been at the heart and growth of St Helens for over 200 years, supporting 7,000 families at its peak and its pioneering glass production activities impacted globally. Glass manufacturing at Watson Street Works ceased in February 2024 and in one of the single biggest investments UK investments by Pilkington for many decades, all production and associated jobs were successfully transferred to the adjacent Greengate Works.
- 4.2 The furnace, equipment and stock on site will be drawn down to achieve a vacant possession in April 2025 and in providing vacant possession, NSG Pilkington will undertake the enabling and site investigation work for the surrender of the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) license and to address all known pollution and contamination issues.
- 4.3 Extending to circa 30 acres of brownfield (previously developed) land located on the southern edge of St Helens town centre, Pilkington UK's decision to cease manufacturing operations at Watson Street Works has provided a strategically important windfall opportunity to redevelop the site for the continued positive benefit of the borough, complementing the ECF St Helens town centre regeneration initiatives.
- 4.4 The Watson Street site now forms an integral part of the St Helens Advanced Manufacturing and Innovation Campus, which is already home to Glass Futures, SINA Medical Glass and Inovus Medical. The site is also an integral component of the Liverpool City Region Life Sciences Investment Zone, being one of its three designated tax sites, offering financial benefits to businesses relocating and expanding in the area.
- 4.5 The Watson Street site is recognised by the Liverpool City Region in its Investment Opportunities Prospectus. The Council's recently published 2024 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment also recognises Watson Street (at site reference SHLAA0037) as a significant deliverable and developable contributor to housing land supply in the Borough.

### **5. Watson Street Masterplan**

- 5.1 To maximise the sites potential contribution to the borough and to guide appropriate future development proposals, the Council and Pilkington UK (assisted by other key stakeholders) have commissioned production of an ambitious Masterplan for Watson Street, as presented at Appendix B.

- 5.2 The appointed expert master planning team have engaged with a significant number of leading regeneration developers and key stakeholders to test the direction of travel, deliverability and product from a placemaking and market perspective. The proposals have also been considered by the North-West Design Review Panel, Places Matter group.
- 5.3 The incredible unique opportunity that is presented by Watson Street has been excitedly recognised by all parties, and the vision for the site is to:

***“Recognise and celebrate the rich heritage of Pilkington and St Helens. Deliver a crafted blend of uses that supports wider regeneration of the town centre. Amplify distinct characteristics of the place and create a modern identity around a liveable and super connected industrious neighbourhood.”***

- 5.4 The Masterplan proposes a vibrant mixed-use development comprising circa 764 new homes and 150,000sqft of commercial development, ancillary retail and leisure, alongside extensive public realm and high-quality structured landscaping, and with the retention and utilisation of key non-designated heritage assets.
- 5.5 The Watson Street site is bisected by the elevated rail line with connections underneath and the proposal is for residential led development on the western parcel (measuring circa 8 hectares/20 acres) influenced by, and proposing the establishment of a positive relationship with, the neighbouring existing residential developments of The Shires and Reflection Court.
- 5.6 A comprehensive Transport Assessment has been undertaken to support the Masterplan, evaluating the transport impacts through micro-simulation traffic flow modelling (VISSIM) and strategic traffic analysis (SATURN) modelling, to review transport impacts, revealing specific traffic flow patterns, broader trends, strategic impacts of the proposed junction layouts, and necessary mitigation measures.
- 5.7 The Transport Assessment has therefore informed the vehicular access proposals including active travel provision for the western parcel, which would be served via new vehicular junctions, with new at level signalised walking and cycling crossing provisions on the A58 Linkway West and Canal Street. These proposals align with the adopted Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan.
- 5.8 The eastern parcel (measuring circa 3 hectares/7.5 acres) is commercial-led due to the adjacency of the established Ravenhead Retail Park and St Helens Community Fire Station. Access to this part of the site would be served via Milverny Way and Violet Way, which are reached from ‘Cannington Roundabout’ at the intersection of the A58 Linkway East/ Linkway West.
- 5.9 In accordance with the Liverpool City Region Life Science Investment Zone Prospectus, the commercial element of the proposed Masterplan aims to bring

forward a Life Sciences development that has potential to employ more than 300 people, which would far exceed the circa 70 persons employed at the Watson Street Works in recent years and complement the Council's Project Halo proposals.

- 5.10 The Masterplan, if approved, would support future planning applications and be a 'Material Consideration' in the assessment process for the redevelopment of the site as a mixed-use regeneration location for residential, ancillary retail and leisure and employment uses.
- 5.11 Full regard throughout the Masterplan development process has been given to the Council's Local Plan and its provisions to protect employment land in the Borough. The land is allocated 'white' land and is therefore not 'safeguarded' or 'allocated.' The Local Plan requires that existing employment land be properly assessed, and justification provided for any change of use. The Masterplan sets out how the proposal can provide modern manufacturing accommodation that will employ more than the wider site has in recent years.
- 5.12 The use for residential led mixed use development is consistent with adjacent town centre re-development and in line with NPPF housing targets, helping the borough meet its housing supply and thereby protect greenbelt land from housing development.

## 6. Masterplan Delivery

- 6.1 Whilst the primary purpose of this report is to seek adoption of the Watson Street Masterplan, deliverability is an important consideration and indicative projected milestones established by the master planning team are as follows:

Ref	Phase	Start	Completion
1	Consenting (Masterplan)	Ongoing	March 2025
2	Business Case Development	November 2024	March 2026
3	Infrastructure Planning	March 2025	December 2025
4	Full Business Case Agreed	January 2026	March 2026
5	Infrastructure Stage Predevelopment work (up to appointments)	October 2025	March 2026
6	IPPC Remediation	April 2026	December 2026
7	Infrastructure Works (to align with delivery)	October 2026	March 2028
8	Phase 1 Housing	April 2028	March 2031
9	Phase 1 Commercial Works	April 2028	October 2030
10	Phase 2 Housing	April 2030	March 2033
11	Phase 3 Housing	April 2032	March 2036
12	Phase 2 Commercial Works	April 2031	December 2033
13	Phase 4 Housing	April 2034	March 2038

6.2 The Project Team recognise that realisation of the Watson Street opportunity, as set out in the Masterplan, will be reliant on key delivery partnerships across the infrastructure, residential and commercial aspects of the project; therefore, the business cases that are to be developed will evaluate (with specialist input) the preferred delivery option for each aspect. Key stakeholders currently identified include:

- St Helens Borough Council
- NSG Pilkington
- Homes England
- LCRCA (investment, housing, transport, and skills functions)
- ECF (in relation to the St Helens town centre regeneration programme)
- Local education establishments
- Heritage and community groups
- Civil engineering and remediation contractors
- Residential developers and social housing providers
- Commercial developers
- Life Sciences manufacturing businesses

#### Projected Outcomes

6.3 Watson Street is a large strategic opportunity that is projected to deliver a range of key benefits and deliverables that include:

- Circa £400M GVA to the local economy
- Circa 300M of investment into the Borough
- Over 300 new permanent jobs
- 764 new homes
- Redevelopment of 30 acres of brownfield land
- Significant temporary employment during construction
- Increased footfall, dwell time and expenditure in the town centre
- Support future business case investments for transport, retail, and leisure
- Council tax and business rate revenue receipts

6.4 The development will also contribute positively to local, regional and national policy frameworks as outlined in Section 19 of this report.

## **7. Consideration of Alternatives**

7.1 Do Nothing – this option has been discounted as the absence of a Masterplan to guide would not maximise the sites potential contribution to the borough and could lead to inappropriate future development proposals.

7.2 Alternative Masterplan - the proposed scope and scale of development has been the subject of multiple design iterations following extensive consultation/ engagement with the public, commercial developers and key stakeholders. The presented Masterplan has received overwhelming support to date and is therefore presented for adoption.

## **8. Conclusions**

- 8.1 The Watson Street site is a strategically important windfall opportunity to redevelop the site for the continued positive benefit of the borough, complementing the ECF St Helens town centre regeneration initiatives. It forms an integral part of the St Helens Advanced Manufacturing & Innovation Campus, and the Liverpool City Region Life Sciences Investment Zone.
- 8.2 To maximise the sites potential contribution to the borough and to guide appropriate future development proposals, a Masterplan has been produced for a vibrant mixed-use development following public consultations and engagement with strategic partners and stakeholders.
- 8.3 Cabinet are therefore invited to consider the recommendations at Section 2 of this report.

## **9. Legal Implications**

- 9.1 There are no direct legal implications arising out of this report at this stage.

## **10. Financial Implications**

- 10.1 There are no direct financial implications from this report at this stage.
- 10.2 A separate Delegated Executive Decision covers the Project Management resource requirements as identified in Section 17 below.

## **11. Equality Impact Assessment**

- 11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is provided at Appendix C.
- 11.2 A summary of the findings from the EIA shows there are no negative impacts to the community of St Helens resulting from the development of the Watson Street Works site. Positive resultant impacts would include:
- New residences, inclusive of affordable housing and later living, near Town Centre amenities.
  - Improved connectivity with Town Centre amenities through improved accessibility and active travel.
  - Increase in biodiversity net gain through introduction of new green and blue space with accessible public realm.
  - Retention of employment land and introduction of new multi-use employment opportunities, with previous employment protected and transferred to Greengate Works, resulting in a forecast net increase in jobs.

## **12. Social Value**

- 12.1 Social value is a key priority for the Council and for the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. Adoption of the proposed Masterplan for Watson Street

would help realise its ambitions for development, thereby securing a combination of high-quality new homes and life sciences sectoral employment units that will create long-term high quality local employment, skills and supply chain opportunities.

### **13. Net Zero and Environment**

- 13.1 The Watson Street Masterplan will deliver physical regeneration benefits through the provision of new greenspace to enhance biodiversity, alongside transport and public realm improvements that will support a more sustainable town centre, helping it adapt to the impact of climate change in recognition of the Borough's declared climate emergency, aiming to minimise and mitigate carbon emissions at all stages in the process.
- 13.2 The development aims to set new standards for sustainable development, use of sustainable materials and contributing to net zero with renewable electricity and heat. The project intends on accessing a wider district heating system and renewable energy sources for electricity.

### **14. Health and Wellbeing**

- 14.1 The Watson St Masterplan aims to establish a high liveable, healthy community. The Masterplan takes account of key cycling and walking infrastructure opportunities and connections as well as links to local and regional public transport links. The creation of new parks and open spaces will encourage pedestrian access and outdoor play and activity.
- 14.2 The Masterplan includes 150,000sqft to accommodate 300 new jobs. Stable, high quality and secure work improves health and wellbeing through higher paid income, social interaction and a positive sense of purpose. Being part of a site attracting life science sector end users will bring an additional sense of pride to future employees.
- 14.3 The site is near St Helens bus and rail stations allowing future employees to use active travel modes to travel to the site.
- 14.4 Adoption of the Watson Street Masterplan would positively influence a considerable number of wider determinants of health such as quality housing, employment, skills, and quality of place.

### **15. Customer and Resident**

- 15.1 The Masterplan has been directly informed by public consultations, engagement with leading regeneration developers, strategic partners, stakeholders and design panel review on the emerging proposals for the Watson Street throughout during 2024. A Consultation Report is provided at Appendix A.



15.2 The Masterplan provides for 764 homes and 150,000 sq. ft of commercial space, which will be of direct benefit and opportunity to residents.

## 16. Asset and Property

16.1 There are no direct Council Asset or Property considerations at this stage. It is however considered that delivery of the Watson Street Masterplan would have a significantly positive impact on St Helens town centre, complementing the ECF regeneration programme and therefore benefitting the Council's assets therein.

16.2 It is also envisaged that delivery of the Watson Street Masterplan would provide benefit to the Council's assets and property through infrastructure enhancements and/or developer contributions in accordance with the prevailing Development Plan requirements.

## 17. Staffing and People Management

17.1 To date, requisite project management support (to oversee production of the Masterplan) has been externally commissioned, with IMT Consulting appointed. Technical discipline input has also been provided via the Growth Delivering Prosperity (GDP) Team and Planning Service.

17.2 Subject to the recommendations at Section 2 being approved by Cabinet, extended project management support is required to progress Masterplan Delivery Project Milestones 1 to 6 (see Section 6 of this report). This will be further commissioned by the GDP Team who will also provide oversight for the overall project on behalf of the Council. The project management cost, expected to be in the region of £30,000 per annum, is detailed in a separate Delegated Executive Decision that is under currently under preparation.

## 18. Risks

18.1 The key risks associated with the approval of the Masterplan are:

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
<b>Implementation Risks</b>	Risk that the proposal as set out is not supported or challenged by the development sector and cannot be brought forward as designed.	There has been extensive engagement with about 20 developers on the site and proposals for a mixed-use masterplan. A study by JLL confirmed market interest in the site.
<b>Wider Implementation Risks</b>	Risk that the masterplan cannot be funded or commercially viable	These risks will be evaluated as part of the delivery and business planning work at the next stage.

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
<b>Technical Risks</b>	Risk that studies have not identified material issues impacting on the design and approach of the masterplan.	A thorough set of support studies accompanies the masterplan setting out the basis for which the masterplan is set. Further intrusive investigations are planned at the next stage to confirm the location of mine shafts and other key constraints.
<b>Public Support</b>	Risk that the public does not support the approved masterplan.	The project team undertook two rounds of public consultation on the plans and received very positive feedback and support.
<b>Other uses</b>	Risk that other beneficial uses are put off from making investment enquiries.	The site plan as proposed can accommodate a range of employment and residential developments. Special large-scale investment enquiries will be fully evaluated against the benefits of the masterplan proposal.

## **19. Policy Framework Implications**

19.1 As set out in Sections 4 to 6 of this report, the Watson Street opportunity (supported by the proposed Masterplan) directly and positively responds and accords with multiple local, regional and national policy frameworks, ranging from housing delivery to Investment Zones.

## **20. Impact and Opportunities on Localities**

20.1 The Watson Masterplan proposals directly and positively respond to, and support, the locality activities in the neighbouring St Helens town centre, including the aligned locality initiatives forming part of the ECF regeneration programme.

## **21. Background Documents**

21.1 St Helens Borough Strategy 2021-2030.

21.2 St Helens Borough Local Plan Up to 2037.

21.3 St Helens Borough Inclusive Growth Strategy 2023-2028.

21.4 St Helens Borough Council Housing Strategy 2022-2027.

21.5 Liverpool City Region Life Sciences Investment Zone Prospectus 2024.

21.6 Cabinet Report: St Helens Manufacturing and Innovation Campus Strategic Acquisition - 24 May 2023.

## **22. Appendices**

22.1 Appendix A - Watson Street Consultation Report

22.2 Appendix B - Watson Street Masterplan

22.3 Appendix C - Equalities Impact Assessment