



EARLESTOWN: REGENERATION THROUGH CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND HERITAGE



TICKET OFFICE

CYCLE HUB

Introduction

This £20m package bid will deliver three bold and transformative interventions within Earlestown town centre, in line with the ambitious vision of St Helens Borough Council and its partner the English Cities Fund (ECF) articulated within the Earlestown Masterplan Development Framework (MDF).

Investment will revitalise Earlestown's historic market square and surrounding public realm; reimagine its Grade-II listed derelict Town Hall as a community and workspace hub; and improve safety and amenity at its rail station. Supported by secured match funding, these complementary projects will drive substantial regeneration and reinvigorate Earlestown as a place in which to live, work and invest.

The **objectives of the bid** are to:

- Create a sustainable, accessible and connected town centre
- Deliver a diverse, vibrant and animated town centre to encourage footfall, spend and improved quality of life
- Bring redundant historic buildings back into economic use
- Positively change perceptions of the town and develop pride in place

St Helens Borough Council has appointed English Cities Fund (ECF) (a joint venture between Muse Developments, Legal & General and Homes England) as its delivery partner for the Town Hall, Market and Earlestown Station projects, and through this partnership approach, ECF will bring the development management resources of Muse Developments alongside a professional and technical team to support the design and planning of the projects.

Proposed projects

The **Earlestown Town Hall** project will transform an empty Grade II-listed civic building into a modern cultural and commercial hub. It will deliver:



- New commercial workspace within a restored and remodelled interior ground floor, alongside hireable community rooms to accommodate cultural activity and service delivery;
- A restored upper-floor multipurpose hall and function space capable of hosting a range of visitor-attracting public events, civic meetings and private functions; and
- A new landscaped courtyard and architecturally designed café extension to the rear of the building, extending the town centre's hospitality offer and creating an appealing public gathering space.

The **Earlestown Market Square and Public Realm** project will renew the heart of Earlestown through comprehensive public realm upgrades and the transformation of the market square into a major visitor attraction. Investment will deliver:



- An iconic architect-designed market canopy structure, providing 1,087sqm of weather-protected trading space for market trading and community events, within a redesigned Market Square incorporating seating and landscaping and new kiosk micro-tenancies to promote activation outside of market trading times
- Significant streetscape enhancements including paving replacement, street furniture installation and tree planting along key Town Centre streets to improve pedestrian connectivity and enhance amenity, thereby attracting visitation and promoting growth in land values

The **Earlestown Railway Station** project will create a new arrival hub for Earlestown, supported by improvements to lighting, safety, connectivity, and interpretation of the region's rich railway history. Investment will deliver:



- Restoration and conversion of the c1830 railway building – the world's oldest rail passenger building still in service - into a café and heritage centre
- Public realm connectivity enhancements to better link the station to Market Street and the surrounding town centre; and
- Safety and connectivity enhancements within the central area, including widened paths, planting and lighting, to improve the visitor experience and support wayfinding.

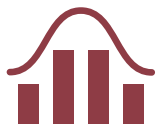
Currently overgrown and in a state of significant disrepair, investment will bring valued heritage assets (at the site of the world's first rail junction) back to public use, provide a focal point for regional visitors and improve connectivity for the local community.

What the Levelling Up Fund means for Earlestown

The Levelling Up Fund offers the opportunity to address a series of significant challenges in the borough that are rooted in long-lasting issues with unemployment, skills, health, crime and income deprivation.

26 St Helens Borough is the 26th most deprived of the 317 local authorities in England (IMD, 2019)

1 Government classes St Helens as a Category 1 local authority in its Index of Priority Places.



The borough is below average for five of the seven Levelling Up Missions with measurable metrics (living standards, transport infrastructure, education, health and wellbeing).

The three proposed projects for Earlestown are located in an area which is characterised by the following challenges and opportunities for the investment to address:



Significant Deprivation

Earlestown experiences deprivation in terms of employment, skills, health, crime and income deprivation. Earlestown has a high Community Needs Score according to the Local Insight Report illustrating barriers to civic participation and engagement. Regenerating the town centre will support pride in place and the development of employment opportunities and an improved culture and leisure offer will enhance quality of life in Earlestown.

19 High vacancy rates and low business growth

19% of town centre commercial property is vacant compared to 14.5% in England



There are high vacancy rates in leisure spaces (29%) and retail (13%) which is notably above the wider St Helens authority (4% and 12% respectively)

Declining occupancy in these sectors has created a visually unattractive streetscape with limited business activity outside of market days. Investment in the historic Market Square and bringing vacant prominent buildings back into use will stimulate footfall, spend and investor confidence in Earlestown.



Crime and Anti-social behaviour

30% of residents are currently at risk of victimisation compared to 20% nationally.

This creates a heightened feeling of anxiety and poor personal safety which contributes to lower visitation and avoidance of the town. Central to this is addressing the limited open space and enclosed exit around the railway station where 31% of local crime in a 400m radius currently occurs due to poor natural surveillance.

Improved public realm, wayfinding, lighting, and green space will improve community safety.



Lack of cultural offer

Despite its historic character, Earlestown lacks a cultural offer to its visitors which discourages people from spending time, with dwell time falling from 100 minutes in 2017 to 65 minutes in 2021.

Since 2017, visitor numbers have been declining from -1% between 2018-2019 to -27% between 2019-2020. Post-Covid, this pattern has continued at -34% between 2020-2021. With little sign of this pattern reversing, the absence of a strong visitor offer is a barrier to town centre recovery. Improving the historic market will drive footfall as market days serve a positive impetus for visitation with a rise of 3% (+4,600 people) since 2016.

An enhanced cultural offer through bringing iconic Town Hall and Rail Station heritage buildings back into reimagined use in will complement the historic Market and encourage visitors to the town.



Heritage assets at risk

St Helens Borough ranks poorly on the RSA Heritage Index 2020, ranking 313th out of 316 local authority areas. Whilst there are listed buildings of historic merit in Earlestown, these heritage assets are in disrepair and unoccupied prohibiting them from serving their function of uniting the community and generating pride of place.

Investment in heritage assets will bring them back into sustainable use and support a more active and engaged community.





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