# *Bridging the community asset gap in Liverpool City Region*

**December 2021**

# CONTENTS

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Recent years have seen increasing focus amongst policymakers and researchers on **social infrastructure** – the places and spaces in which communities meet, access services, have fun and relax. These include **parks and community buildings, libraries and GP surgeries, schools and sports centres, pubs, shops and cafes**, and many other places that communities value. The impact of austerity on local government in the UK has seen a number of these spaces close over the last decade. However, the Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 emphasised their value, and the government's 'Levelling Up' agenda has prompted renewed discussion about the role of community assets in **promoting economic activity and community cohesion**.

In Liverpool City Region (LCR), social infrastructure and community assets have been identified as a crucial part of plans to **'Build Back Better'** from the pandemic. Over 8,500 voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises operate across LCR, but the pandemic has affected both the income and operations of many of these organisations. Small cities, and towns such as St Helens, have been particularly vulnerable to cuts affecting social infrastructure and community assets over recent years, exacerbated by the decline of retail-led high streets.

**St Helens Borough Council** is seeking to address these challenges through a new **Localities Model**, which aims to ensure services are tailored to fit the specific needs of communities, delivered in partnership with organisations operating within the area (such as charities), and align with social infrastructure needs. This research contributes to this agenda by assessing the role played by social infrastructure assets in communities, and developing understanding of where there may **be gaps in the provision of social infrastructure**.

The research consisted of two main workstreams:

1. **Background interviews with policymakers.** We carried out interviews in spring 2021 to help understand the role played by community assets in local policymaking, speaking to officers and directors from Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, representatives of the local authorities in Liverpool City Region, and representatives from the healthcare, education and community and voluntary sectors.

2. **Mapping community assets.** We mapped various pieces of social infrastructure in four wards in the south of St Helens. Using network analysis, we drew 'catchment areas' around parks, community buildings, sports centres and other local places of interest to identify areas that were within reasonable

walking distance of these important assets. From there, we identified parts of the locality that might be considered 'social infrastructure deserts' – lacking some of the facilities and amenities that help communities thrive and develop resilience.

The research identified several emerging themes relating to social infrastructure and service provision in St Helens and Liverpool City Region:

**The social infrastructure data gap.** More support is needed for local and combined authorities to identify and understand gaps in local social infrastructure provision. Budget constraints mean useful data is not always easily available to many local authorities and reliance on consultancies to provide services in this area has grown in recent years. Mapping and indexing approaches have potential to bridge this gap, but will need to be supported by community-level, qualitative methods to understand the important role played by social infrastructure within local areas, and to align these with public service provision.

**The role of planning policy.** Two 'social infrastructure deserts' were identified in St Helens South – places lacking in a number of amenities and facilities considered to enhance community value and cohesion. In both cases, these were relatively new housing estates built over the last 30 years, and both heavily emphasise road connectivity over walking and active travel routes. Planning policy at national and local level, and supported by emerging spatial strategies at the city-region level, must support better integration of new housing with community facilities. The 20 Minute Neighbourhood concept, currently being implemented in

a number of cities across the world, has potential to be a useful framework for St Helens and other similarly sized towns in the UK as they accommodate more homes over the coming decades.

**Social infrastructure and levelling up.** The government's 'levelling up' agenda must focus on developing the social fabric of places as well as increasing economic opportunity. Cuts to libraries and other community facilities have fallen disproportionately on areas where need for community services is greatest and local authority budget cuts have constrained the ability of local leaders to maximise the potential of community assets. Providing adequate support for the development of community spaces, sports and leisure facilities, and other places for people to meet could contribute towards improved health outcomes and reduce pressure on the NHS.

**Developing social infrastructure indexes.** Recent years have seen various attempts at mapping and indexing areas based on provision of social infrastructure, community assets, and social fabric. However, by their nature, such indexes are top down in nature, applying universal indicators to measure outcomes regardless of the differences between places. To complement mapping and indexing approaches, we recommend further research into the development of community-based social infrastructure indexes, with indicators shaped by involvement from participants within local communities. Community workshops, forums and focus groups could also be utilised to inform this approach. Using this type of community research could help design more nuanced and grounded approaches to mapping social infrastructure and identifying gaps.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

This report details the research findings from a collaborative project developed by the Heseltine Institute for Public Policy, Practice and Place, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) and St Helens Borough Council. This pilot project was launched in early 2021 with the aim of using an asset-based approach to explore gaps in the data ecosystem supporting social infrastructure provision and community assets in Liverpool City Region (LCR).

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the extent to which we rely on, and value, the places and spaces in our communities which are often described as social infrastructure. These include publicly owned facilities such as parks, community buildings, libraries, GP surgeries, schools and sports centres, charities and volunteer groups, and private spaces that are nonetheless valued by the local community, including pubs, cafes, and shops. These places and spaces are vital to delivering public services. Perhaps less tangibly, however, they are also key to developing a sense of community that many have particularly valued since the start of the pandemic.

Given the increasing interest in the role played by social infrastructure in supporting the social and economic health of cities, we wanted to understand how local policymakers are integrating community assets into their plans for post-Covid recovery. We also wanted to explore how gaps in social infrastructure provision might be identified, and how different types of social infrastructure interact with each other.

The research involved two main workstreams:

1. Semi-structured interviews with policymakers and practitioners involved in public service delivery, community assets and the voluntary sector in LCR.
2. GIS mapping of social infrastructure and community assets in four St Helens Borough Council wards.

The objectives of the research were:

1. To review the impact of Covid-19 on public service provision and social infrastructure in LCR.
2. To assess the data ecosystem supporting social infrastructure and community assets in LCR.
3. To identify gaps in social infrastructure provision in the four identified wards in St Helens.
4. To collaboratively develop with LCRCA and St Helens Borough Council an approach to understanding the relationships between different types of community asset and social infrastructure.

The findings of the research will help to inform implementation of a new localities model in St Helens, adopted earlier this year by the council. The model seeks to ensure services are provided at the right level in the right places, by identifying gaps in provision and utilising existing community assets. The research also contributes to the objectives of LCRCA and the LCR Mayor to support the social economy across the city region.

The following section of the report provides context on the research, particularly the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on service provision in LCR. Background on Liverpool City Region's social infrastructure policies and the St Helens locality model is also provided. Section 3 briefly reviews the key literature on social infrastructure and community asset-based approaches. Section 4 details the research design and analysis. Section 5 outlines findings from the research interviews conducted with LCR policymakers, with key themes including gaps in the provision of data supporting social infrastructure, the relationship between community assets and public services, and the integration of social infrastructure into local economic policy. Section 6 illustrates the findings of mapping analysis of St Helens to identify gaps in social infrastructure provision. Section 7 assesses the findings of the research in the context of broader discussions about social infrastructure, the impact of Covid-19 on communities, and future directions in local and regional policy.

# 2. BUILDING BACK BETTER?: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN LIVERPOOL CITY REGION

## The impact of Covid-19 on local service provision

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on how local services are delivered. The immediate impact on service provision during the first UK lockdown of Spring 2020 was dramatic, with many local services moved online or suspended entirely. Equally notable since the start of the pandemic is the renewed focus in civil society on the importance of social infrastructure, community assets and the voluntary sector. Over 250,000 people nationwide reportedly signed up to local volunteer centres in the first three weeks of lockdown in March/April 2020 alone, while 750,000 people signed up to the NHS volunteer scheme. There are now an estimated 4,300 Covid mutual aid groups in the UK, delivering shopping to isolating or vulnerable people, collecting prescriptions, walking dogs, maintaining gardens and offering through-the-window chats. It has been suggested that the pandemic could usher in a "new ages of community power" as citizens continue to mobilise and support residents in need (Power and Benton 2021).

Concerns have been raised however about the effect of Covid-19 on particularly vulnerable communities. A report for the All Party Parliamentary Group on 'Left Behind' Neighbourhoods highlighted the greater risk in deprived areas from the number of residents with long-term illness or disabilities, the higher proportion of people with high risk health conditions such as cancer, asthma and coronary heart diseases; and the greater than average propensity of residents in these areas to work in jobs that have higher exposure to the virus, such as health and social care (Local Trust 2020). In addition to these vulnerabilities, there is concern that some communities lack the sort of social infrastructure that can help to plug gaps in service provision and provide support for vulnerable residents. In his report for the government on implementing the 'levelling up' agenda at community level, Danny Kruger MP emphasises the need for a social safety net that goes beyond state provision and highlights the risks faced by communities where social infrastructure is threatened:

> "Demand for help has risen sharply, but the Charities Finance Group estimates that charities will suffer a 24% loss in income, or £12.4bn, this year (2020), with the highest losses felt by the small charities which rely on fundraising events. Social enterprises like shops and cafes, which have built a model of income generation dependent not on grants and gifts but on trading, have suffered most of all as retail shut down."

> *(Kruger 2020)*

## Building Back Better in Liverpool City Region

In Liverpool City Region (LCR), the city-region metro mayor and combined authority moved quickly to acknowledge the impact of the pandemic on communities and local services, publishing the *Building Back Better* strategy in June 2020 (LCRCA 2020). The plan emphasises the economic and social challenges faced by LCR, most notably:

- Poor health: Prior to the pandemic, almost 70,000 people in the city region were not seeking work as the result of poor physical and/or mental health.
- Education and skills: The percentage of adults in LCR with no qualifications is higher than the English average. The proportion of adults educated to degree level is also lower.
- Deprivation: Almost one third of all Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in LCR are in the most deprived decile nationally.

The strategy highlights the role of social infrastructure in supporting place-based policy, noting the 8,500 voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises operating in LCR. However, the pandemic has affected both the income and operations of many of these organisations, in addition to the impact of the previous decade of local government funding cuts.

Small cities and towns have been identified as particularly vulnerable to economic trends witnessed over the last decade. The Liverpool City Region Town Centres Commission (Longlands et al 2021) has identified the decline in physical retail as a significant challenge for places such as St Helens, even before the economic impact of the pandemic. The commission identified the need for towns to diversify their offer for residents, workers and visitors, away from a reliance on retail and hospitality. Similarly, a review of the impact of Covid-19 on towns by the High Streets Task Force highlighted the need to develop more civic and community spaces, and urged more support for community and voluntary organisations (Grimsey 2021).

## St Helens Locality Model

St Helens Council launched its localities model in March 2021, with the aim of ensuring "service delivery is embedded in community settings and for communities to feel engaged and be listened to, in relation to the services they feel are important to them" (St Helens 2021a). The following principles underpin the localities model:

- Services offered in each locality need to be tailored to fit the needs of an area rather than being a generic or universal offering;

- There are wide variations between areas: in demographics, access to transport, geography, identity, deprivation and health outcomes;

- Services should be delivered where possible in partnership with organisations operating in the area such as charities and voluntary services;

- Performance is measured by outcomes at a local level.

Four provisional geographical localities currently cover St Helens. This project focuses on four wards in the St Helens South locality: Bold, Rainhill, Sutton and Thatto Heath, with a total resident population of almost 70,000.

A St Helens Council director interviewed as part of this research described the localities model as:

*"A way of reframing our frontline services. It's about them working in an integrated, preventative way and reducing the kind of silo working and referral between services. So it's about people taking ownership of issues in local communities, whether that's people or place issues, grot-spots, litter, antisocial behaviour, what the issues are in the local community that are causing those communities some pain or stopping those communities from maximising their own full potential."*

# 3. UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY ASSETS

## Asset-based Community Development

Asset-based community development (ABCD) emerged as an alternative strategy of community development in the 1990s and early 2000s. In contrast to 'needs-based' frameworks, which have been criticised as top-down, paternalistic and often one-dimensional (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993), ABCD approaches seek to identify assets within communities and attempt to co-ordinate a development strategy based on these assets (Russell and Arefi 2003). ABCD, it is suggested, provides an opportunity to assess the strengths of communities, assembling "new structures of opportunity, new sources of income and control, and new possibilities for production" (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993: 6). A key principle of ABCD is a recognition that emphasis on strengths and assets is more likely to inspire positive action than an exclusive focus on needs and problems (Mathie and Cunningham 2003). This approach has been identified as particularly appropriate for deprived communities and neighbourhoods, where intangible assets such as community relationships and social capital may be more important than physical assets such as housing (Moser 1998).

Broadly, assets are identified as financial, human, natural or social resources that can be acquired, developed, improved or transferred (Ford Foundation 2004). Research on asset-based approaches by the IMCA Center for Sustainable Communities identifies a number of types of assets that can be identified within neighbourhoods, towns and cities, and utilised through economic development policy. These include:

- Natural amenities
- Historic resources
- Human capital
- Existing industries
- Prominent or important institutions

(Read 2012)

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) develop an alternative typology of assets, identifying three types: individuals; associations; and institutions. The authors propose, as a first step of asset-based local economic development, mapping community assets and identifying local capacities. The most comprehensive version of this process would "begin with an inventory of the gifts, skills and capacities of the community's residents – household by household, building by building, block by block" (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993: 5) Associations are defined as less formal and less dependent on paid staff than formal institutions, and include charities, community organisations and looser collectives such

as housing co-operatives. Institutions, meanwhile, are defined as "the most visible and formal part of a community's fabric" (ibid 7): private businesses; public institutions such as schools, libraries, police, and the health service; and other non-profit organisations such as local councils and social services.

## Community assets in the UK

In the UK, ABCD experienced a resurgence after the 2008 global financial crisis and subsequent recession. The Marmot Review of 2010, for example, encouraged asset-based approaches to developing healthy and sustainable communities as an alternative to more top-down models. Several 'Marmot cities' were established to trial asset-based approaches to public health, including Stoke, Newcastle, and Bristol. Evidence from Coventry, another Marmot pilot city, found that asset-based approaches along with a strong policy lead from the local authority resulted in a narrowing of the life expectancy gap between the most affluent and most deprived communities, along with improved education, health and life satisfaction outcomes (Faherty and Gaulton 2017). ABCD approaches have been particularly popular at the neighbourhood scale. Croydon Council for example, worked with local community groups to identify assets in three wards, aiming to shift the emphasis in public service provision from identifying 'deficits' to focusing on how to develop existing strengths within a community (Croydon Council 2014).

Among the most influential concepts within asset-based approaches is that of social capital, broadly understood as a person or group's access to resources via their social contacts (Alevizou et al 2016). Scholars such as Gutierrez-Montes et al (2009) have proposed systemising the identification of social capital as an asset, developing the Community Capitals Framework that has been used in a variety of locations. Approaches that emphasise social capital tend to highlight factors may prevent the effective utilisation of community assets, such as inequality, poor levels of participation and social exclusion (Brooks and Kendall 2013). Economic geographers meanwhile have tended to frame asset-based development around concepts such as capabilities and capacity building. Michael Storper for example conceptualises regions as collections of physical and relational assets, emphasising the relationship between different actors (Storper 1997; Scott and Storper 2003).

## Social infrastructure

Closely linked to ABCD approaches, the concept of social infrastructure has received growing attention since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. Definitions of social infrastructure vary from the broad and expansive to narrower versions focusing primarily on physical spaces. At one end of the spectrum, Slocock (2018) defines three types of social infrastructure:

- Buildings, facilities and the built environment: housing; play areas and open spaces; sports facilities; places to meet such as pubs, cafes, community halls and places of worship; transport infrastructure.
- Services and organisations: health; education; childcare and youth services; police and environmental services; broadband; gyms; sports clubs; charities; faith and community groups; housing associations.
- Strong and healthy communities: intangible assets such as social capital, social interaction and social norms (e.g. intolerance towards litter); resident control and influence over services; buildings and facilities; strong partnerships between different organisations.

In contrast, Latham and Layton (2019) adopt a narrower definition of those places and spaces where citizens meet and interact with one another. These spaces promote social interaction, community cohesion and exchanges of knowledge. According to this framework, social infrastructure is defined by its offer of sociality, particularly between differing individuals and groups. Klinenberg (2018) contrasts social infrastructure with spaces used exclusively by individuals or selected groups, such as private gated communities.

## Community assets and post-Covid recovery

The economic impact of Covid-19 has varied dramatically between places. Unemployment has risen across England and by the end of October 2020 the claimant count stood at 6.3% of the working age population, but this disguises large spatial differences in the unemployment rate. In Blackpool for example unemployment increased by 3.9 percentage points compared to 0.9 percentage points in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire (Houston 2020). Differences are also observed between regions. Unemployment grew faster in the North of England (North East, Yorkshire & Humber, and North West NUTS1 regions) in the first wave of the pandemic than other regions in England. Between March and July 2020, the claimant count in the North East increased from 4.9% to 7.8%, in the North West from 3.5% to 6.7%, and in Yorkshire and the Humber from 3% to 6% (NHSA 2020).

**Figure 1**

## Cycle of community deprivation: social infrastructure approach
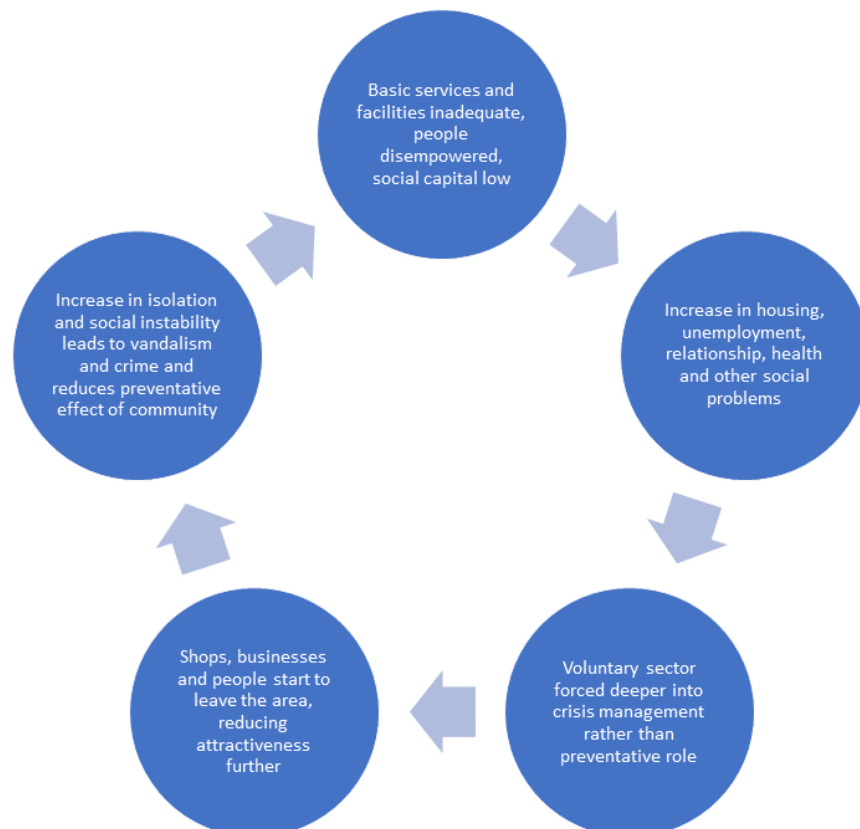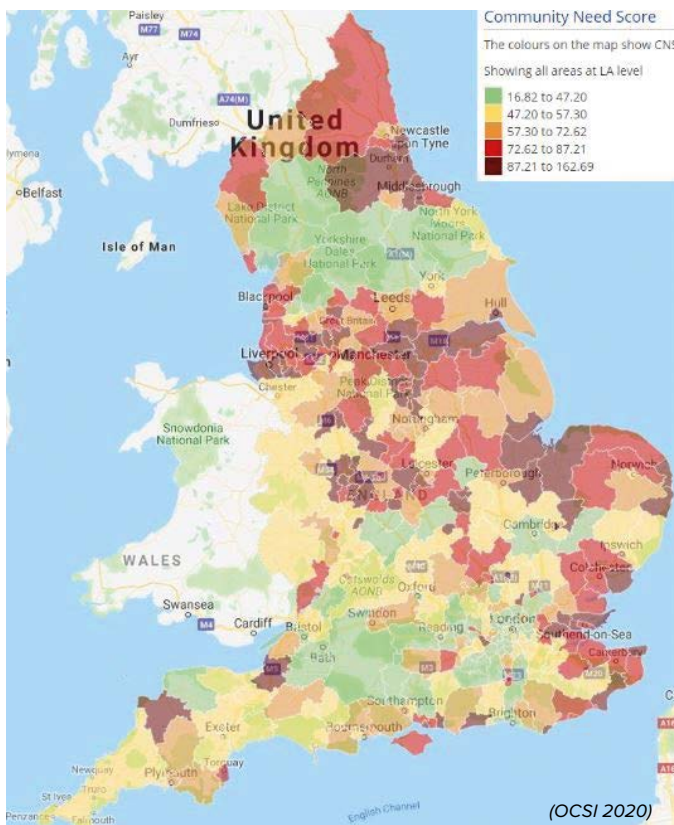


*(Slocock 2018)*

In terms of both health and economic impacts, areas with high levels of deprivation were impacted more significantly than wealthier areas, particularly during the second wave of the pandemic between September and November 2020. In October 2020, the 10% most deprived local authority areas were recording almost four times as many Covid-19 cases as the 10% least deprived areas, with many low income households unable to work from home and more reliant than higher earning employees on public transport (Robinson et al 2020). Public Health England has identified wide inequalities in health outcomes between different places as one of the key characteristics of the pandemic in the UK, citing in particular the rising burden of ill health due to non-communicable diseases in areas with the highest rates of hospitalisations and deaths (Campos-Matos et al 2020).

### Mapping and indexing social infrastructure

Over recent years, attempts have been made to quantify the impact of social infrastructure on local economies, civic life and community cohesion. Local Trust, the lottery-funded community support organisation, has been particularly active in this area, developing a framework to measure social infrastructure investment outcomes based on four forms of capital: social; physical; human; and natural (Frontier Economics 2021). This has been used to develop the Community Needs Index, incorporating 22 indicators across three domains: civic assets; connectedness;

and engaged communities (OCSI 2019). The index has been used to identify 'left behind' areas in the UK, defined by those with both high levels of deprivation and poor community and civic infrastructure, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

An alternative approach is taken by Onward's Social Fabric Index (Onward 2020), which focuses on community perceptions, as well as the presence of physical infrastructure. Its 79 indicators include, for example: the share of population who are members of a Neighbourhood Watch or Residents Association; the share of people who volunteer at least once a month; average minutes spent travelling to work; turnout at local elections; and levels of trust in institutions such as the police, NHS and press.

A proximity approach similar to the one adopted with this research was undertaken by the Australian Urban Observatory, which developed its Social Infrastructure Index based on proximity to various facilities, as outlined in Figure 3 below. However, the index was compiled based purely on the presence or otherwise of each facility in a neighbourhood (i.e. an area would score 1 if there is a library within 1000 metres, and 0 if there if there isn't).

**Figure 2**

## Community Needs Index: left behind areas



*(OCSI 2020)*

**Figure 3**

## Social Infrastructure Index indicators

| Measure | Destination | Distance Threshold (m) |
|---|---|---|
| Community Centres | Community centres | 1000 |
| Culture & Leisure | Museum/Art gallery | 3200 |
| | Cinema/Theatre | 3200 |
| | Libraries | 1000 |
| Early Years | Childcare | 800 |
| | Out of school hours care | 1600 |
| Education | Government primary schools | 1600 |
| | Government secondary schools | 1600 |
| Health and Social Services | Residential aged care facilities | 1000 |
| | Dentists | 1000 |
| | General practitioners (GP) | 1000 |
| | Maternal, child and family health centers | 1000 |
| | Other community health care centers | 1000 |
| | Pharmacies | 1000 |
| Sport and Recreation | Public swimming pools | 1200 |
| | Sports facilities | 1000 |

*(Australian Urban Observatory 2020)*

# 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

## Background interviews

The first stage of the project involved semi-structured interviews with policymakers and practitioners across Liverpool City Region. The aim of the interviews was to understand the impact of Covid-19 on service provision and social infrastructure and the role of community assets in local policymaking. 16 interviews were conducted in spring 2021. Due to social distancing restrictions in place during this time, interviews were carried out online. Interviewees were carried out with:

- Officers and directors from Liverpool City Region Combined Authority
- Officers from local authorities in Liverpool City Region
- Representatives from the community and voluntary sector
- Representatives from the healthcare sector
- Representatives from the education sector

## Mapping community assets

Asset mapping identifies and quantifies resources available within a defined area, providing information that can be used to inform and achieve policy goals (Underwood and Friesner 2017). Visualising community assets in map form has a number of identified benefits. Patterns of inequality in access to community facilities, for example, may not be as discernible in tables or charts (Hillier 2007). While asset-based approaches acknowledge that local input, from communities and local organisations, must drive the identification of assets, it is widely acknowledged that the mapping process itself will often be led by experienced researchers (Mathie and Cunningham 2003).

This project used network analysis mapping to identify 'catchment areas' for different forms of social infrastructure. The maps presented in this report were produced using ArcGIS Pro with data provided by St Helens Borough Council and other public institutions. A full list of data sets and detailed breakdown of analysis methods can be found in Appendix 1 at the end of this report.
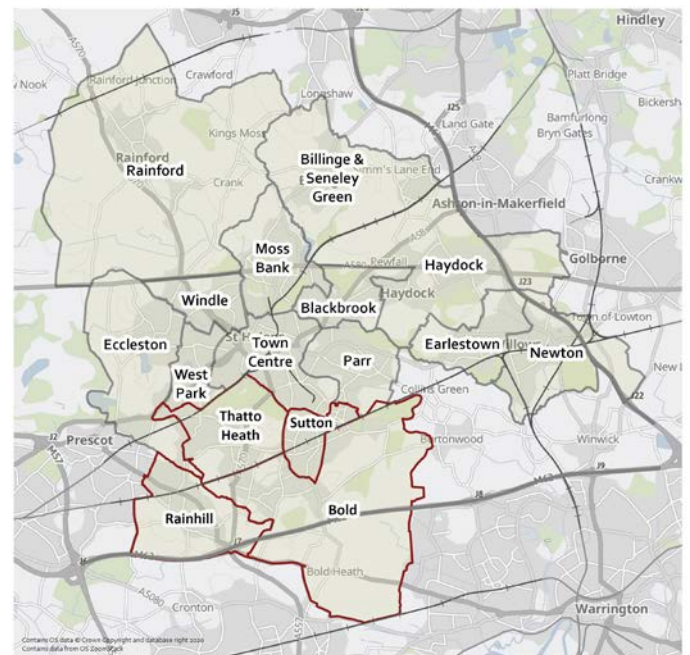
## St Helens

St Helens was selected as the case study area for this research in collaboration with local authority partners. The borough has an estimated population of around 180,000, of which around 100,000 live in the town of St Helens. Other settlements in the area include Eccleston and Rainhill to the west, Haydock to the north and Newton-le-Willows to the east.

According to the Index for Multiple Deprivation, St Helens is the 26th most deprived local authority area in England, from a total of 317. Nearly 25% of lower super output areas (LSOAs) in St Helens are in the 10% most deprived in England. However, there is significant variation within the borough. Parts of Eccleston, Rainhill, Newton and Billinge and Seneley Green are in the least deprived LSOAs nationally.

**Figure 4**

## Map of St Helens borough with the 4 wards of St Helens South outlined in red



**St Helens Borough wards**

The four wards of St Helens South are particularly deprived in the health and disability and employment indices of the IMD, as illustrated in the two maps overleaf.

St Helens South, and St Helens more broadly, fares better in other IMD sets: most notably there are low barriers to housing and services. Results vary significantly across the borough on the Living Environment domain, with the southern edges of the borough having a higher score than areas around the town centre.
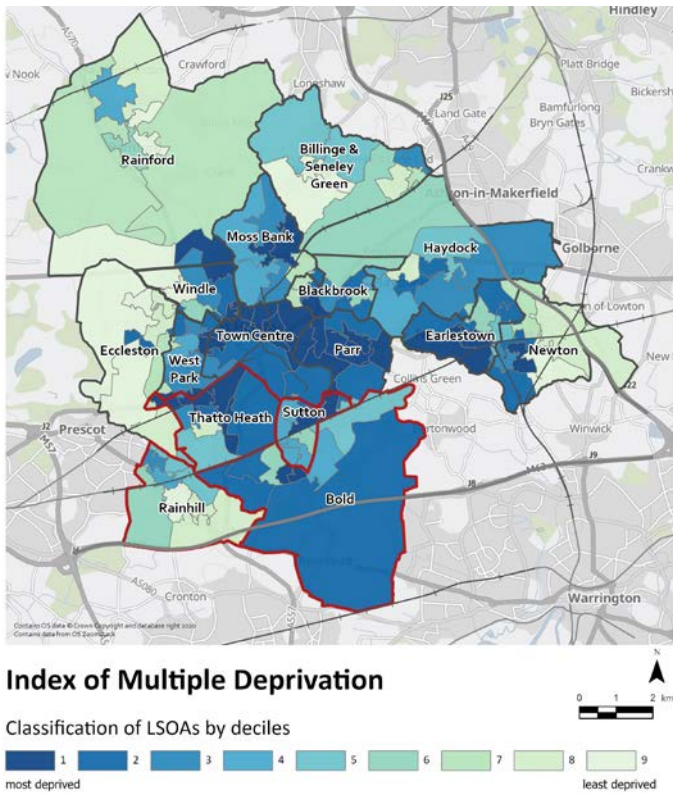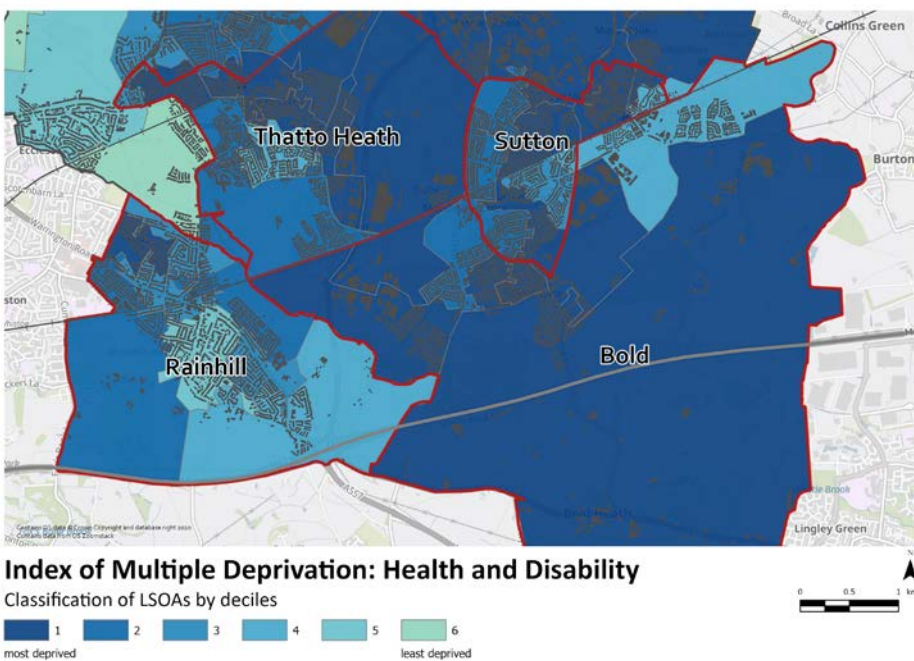
**Figure 5**

## St Helens IMD



**Index of Multiple Deprivation**

Classification of LSOAs by deciles

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9

most deprived                                                                 least deprived

**Figure 6**

## St Helens South Health and Disability IMD 2019[1]



**Index of Multiple Deprivation: Health and Disability**

Classification of LSOAs by deciles

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6

most deprived                          least deprived

1    The Health Deprivation and Disability Domain measures the risk of premature death and the impairment of quality of life through poor physical and mental health.
Relative health and disability deprivation is very pronounced - over 40% of St. Helens' LSOAs are in the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England.

**Figure 7**

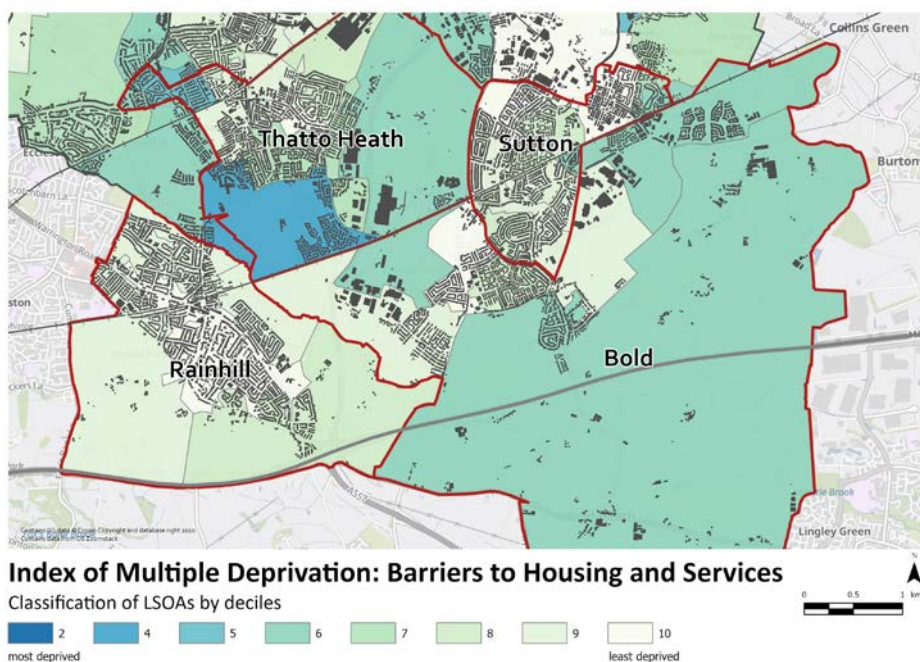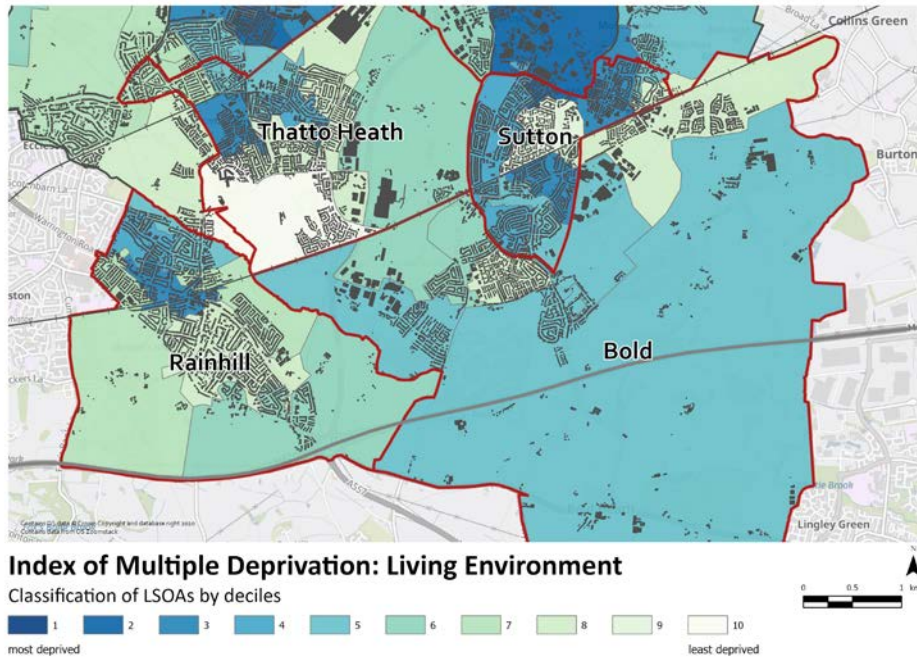# St Helens South Employment IMD 2019[2]



**Index of Multiple Deprivation: Employment**
Classification of LSOAs by deciles

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9
most deprived | least deprived
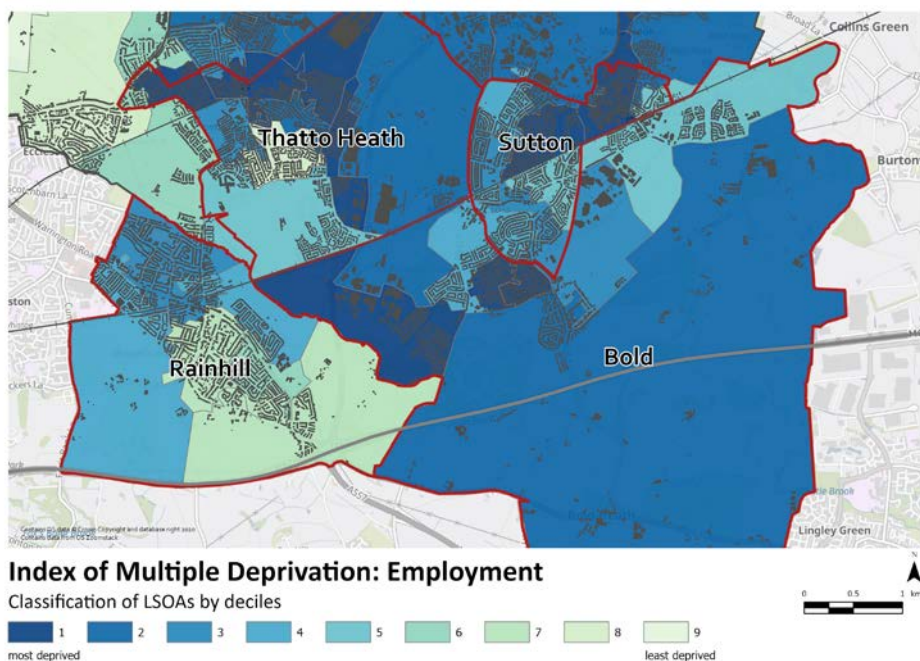
**Figure 8**

# St Helens South Barriers to Housing and Services IMD 2019[3]



**Index of Multiple Deprivation: Barriers to Housing and Services**
Classification of LSOAs by deciles

2 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10
most deprived | least deprived

2  The Employment Deprivation measures the proportion of the working-age population in an area involuntarily excluded from the labour market. This includes people who would like to work but are unable to do so due to unemployment, sickness or disability, or caring responsibilities. Nearly 30% of St. Helens' LSOAs in the most deprived 10% of LSOAs in England on this domain.

3  The Barriers to Housing and Services Domain measures the physical and financial accessibility of housing and local services. The indicators fall into two sub-domains: 'geographical barriers', which relate to the physical proximity of local services, and 'wider barriers' which includes issues relating to access to housing such as affordability. As an urban area, deprivation in St. Helens in relation to access to housing and services is not a major issue.

**Figure 9**

# St Helens South Living Environment IMD 2019[4]



**Index of Multiple Deprivation: Living Environment**
Classification of LSOAs by deciles

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

most deprived                                                                    least deprived



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4   The Living Environment Deprivation Domain measures the quality of the local environment. The indicators fall into two sub-domains. The 'indoors' living environment measures the quality of housing; while the 'outdoors' living environment contains measures of air quality and road traffic accidents.

# 5. PLACING COMMUNITY ASSETS AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

This section details the findings of background interviews conducted with policymakers and practitioners from across Liverpool City Region. The key themes to emerge from the interviews are summarised below, along with selected quotes from interviewees.

## Gaps in the data ecosystem supporting social infrastructure

Gaps in the provision of data to support social infrastructure emerged as a key theme from the interviews. Discussions with local and combined authority officers revealed a paucity of information on how public services interact with other forms of social infrastructure, such as the community and voluntary sector. One local authority director highlighted how this can lead to difficulties in ensuring that limited resources are efficiently directed to the right places:

*"If we're going to align staff to localities, it has to be the right staff to meet the right needs and to work alongside the right assets in those areas. And where there are a lack of assets, we need to think about how we fill that gap and support the development of local community response in those areas. The one thing that I would need to be able to do that is a profile of each locality, and we are struggling I think to deliver that."* (Local authority director)

Further feedback was received on the data available to local authorities and the need to ensure it is available at the right scale. One interviewee identified trade data as an example of this gap:

*"There's economic data that is collected from cities but it's not disaggregated below the level of the region – things like trade data, for example, I think it's only London that knows its balance of trade and knows all the detail because it's treated as a region. So in Manchester and Liverpool you don't have that data – you've got North West data."*
(Local authority director)

A regular theme throughout the interviews was the feeling that information on service provision and outcomes is often not accessible in an integrated way. While data on local authority services may be available, data infrastructure is not always designed to make sharing and analysis as easy as it could be for local authority policymakers. Resourcing was identified as a major problem for local authorities in this regard – analysis teams do an excellent job but are constrained by the data available and, in some cases, the costs of accessing data sources:

*"We have the information. In this locality, how many flytipping reports have there been in the last two years? How many children are open to social care? How many are open to early help? How many reports of dog fouling have there been? We have all of that information, we just don't have it all in one place that will come back out to me to say 'that locality has these stats, that has that, that has that'. And then we can say 'OK, we need more staff in there for that area."*
(Local authority director)

*"We've never got the resources that we need for this kind of stuff. So basically I'll ask for a couple of favours, and I'll say "Don't send me a big spreadsheet, send me a map – it's just easier." A London local authority has invested loads of money into theirs and they're partnered with a private sector company that does all their stuff for them, but you can go on their website and click on a map, and it'll highlight wards with top ten of this or that, and deprivation indicators...I think we're a long, long way off anything like that."*
(Local authority director)

However, it was suggested by some that the Covid-19 pandemic had led to rapid innovations in the availability and presentation of health data, and that this could result in better outcomes in other areas where local authorities are responsible for service provision, although concerns were expressed about how access to data can be maintained for councils:

*"The population health data, the stuff that comes through CIPFA* [Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy], *that's really refined itself over time, I think. We got off to quite a slow start with it, but in terms of levels of infection, deaths, hospital rates, it really started to come into its own after a few months, and we're probably streets ahead of anywhere else on that. I was talking about it today in terms of, 'How do we continue to use that population health-level data when we're not in a pandemic?' Because it's so insightful and useful to service delivery and improving things for people."*
(Local authority director)

## Integrating community assets in service delivery

Interviews with combined and local authority officers also focused on how community assets can be integrated into public service delivery. A key theme was the benefit of shifting from traditional needs-based approaches, to those more focused on aligning assets with strategic objectives:

*"We have got quite a traditional paternalistic way of working with people, so that kind of 'do to, not do with' approach, and that kind of 'we know what's best for you approach'. If we're thinking about doing things differently and a more asset-based approach, we have to change the nature of the relationship between local communities and the local authority."*
(Local authority director)

However, at the combined authority level, concerns were expressed that further work is required to integrate asset-based approaches into strategic policy:

*"We need to move away from that approach that's about cutting a ribbon and shiny buildings. That's got to go. We need to focus much more on economic, environmental and social in a more coherent way. For some assets we don't really know enough about them, particularly community assets."*
(Combined authority lead)

Assets considered important in developing social infrastructure varied from physical hubs for community activities, to natural assets, and privately owned assets that nevertheless play an important role in building and maintaining community cohesion, such as pubs:

*"Those little community centres over the last five years probably have started to become unviable and they've closed down, and most of them weren't run by us, they were run by other trusts and organisations, and they've slowly closed down as unviable. And the ones that were left, that were viable, had to close down, and there is something about a focal point – literally having a roof over your heads to be able to meet people and talk and keep that community connection going. I think an actual physical resource is becoming even more important, and it's really challenging about how we build that up, because once it's gone, it's gone."*
(Local authority director)

*"I think more recently we're starting to recognise the importance of natural assets – green infrastructure, green walls, wildflower planting, better regimes for managing verges, for example...so it's still very, very early days, but I think that natural capital issue is gaining momentum now, certainly through the spatial planning process."*
(Combined authority lead)

*"It's interesting, isn't it, because at one point you would have said the local pub was your focal point, wouldn't you? I'd probably say mine is. But then they've been shut, so...the bookies, I say they're like an emergency service, because the little old men that go and sit in there all day are probably betting 20p or something, and all of that's been shut, hasn't it."*
(Local authority director)

Interviewees also highlighted online community groups, such as Facebook neighbourhood forums, as important community

assets in many areas, particularly during the pandemic lockdowns. However, this local authority director also highlighted the challenges for local authorities emerging from this trend, as it the activity undertaken is not always monitored and aligned with public service delivery:

*"You had local people stepping into a space that actually they started to own for themselves. So the Facebook groups set up, the local groups, support groups set up, people saying 'if anybody needs any help shopping or isolating, let us know'. So you had just what I would call very organic community-minded people stepping up and stepping together, and that was really, really evident across I think all local authority areas. So the question then from a local authority perspective was, how do we harness this? How do we engage with it? And how do we not take over? Because actually the reality is that local authorities have a tendency to take over things that work, so how do we maintain the ownership and what support can we give people?"*
(Local authority director)

## The impact of Covid-19 on local service delivery

Several interviewees reflected on the pandemic as an event that had placed significant strain on local authority resources, but also highlighted the potential to deliver services in different ways. For example, the poor health of residents was emphasised as a critical economic issue, and one that should be addressed through all aspects of local policy. Other interviewees focused on links between wellbeing and opportunities for growth, and the desire to embed environmentally friendly and green principles into many aspects of local policy:

*"Making that read across from health and health actually being a first-order economic issue, and understanding that in the context of your industrial strategy. I think you'd see that coming through much more strongly. But there would still be an emphasis on built environment and development, but again, a lot of that could be done through the green route – so things like housing retrofit, for example, is a really big industrial growth opportunity."*
(Local authority director)

*"As a city region, do we measure wellbeing? There are ways of doing it. You know, the whole of New Zealand is doing it. So, you know, if we've learned in the last year that health and the economy are inextricably linked, they're not two separate things at all. And I know this was a very stark example, a pandemic...but actually if you take the principle of that and say, well, what are we going to learn about this in terms of the link between the two?"* (Voluntary sector manager)

*"There's a much stronger emphasis on green – I think that's been accelerated. I think the door to being quite bold about green has been opened more widely during the pandemic, because people have seen air quality improve and have seen what can happen."*
(Local authority director)

Another key theme was the perception that the pandemic had demonstrated the benefits of localised governance in addressing some challenges, and the limitations of local responses in other areas. Participants noted the relative success in Liverpool City Region of surge testing and other public health measures led by local health teams, in comparison with the privately-run national Test and Trace scheme. However, others felt that a strong central response at national level was key to maintaining services in other areas.

> "We can call it devolution, call it whatever you like, but really it's about the ability to plan and co-commission and co-design policy at a local level. I think we've seen during Covid how really decentralised responses can be good for some things and not others – can be disastrous, actually, for others – but where you've got local and national working together in concert, you've got a really strong basis on which to go forward."
> (Local authority director)

Interviewees within local government and the voluntary sector reflected on the difficulties in aligning voluntary activity with services delivered by local government. During the pandemic, this situation was exacerbated by the huge surge in volunteers, particularly those signing up to assist the NHS:

> "We had the national government promoting the Royal Voluntary Services around the NHS volunteer programme around the NHS volunteer programme and I think that was confusing. I think national government really should have stepped back from that and allowed us to that work ourselves. What would have been more helpful is if the national government had actually distributed the funding they gave to that national organisation to the local infrastructure services to be able to coordinate that locally, we all would have had a much more sustainable, longer-term model."
> (Local authority director)

## Co-ordinating information sharing and service delivery at a city-region scale

Interview participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of working at both local and city-region scale. A number of participants noted the increased prominence of Liverpool City Region bodies such as the combined authority and metro mayor over the course of the pandemic. In particular, their role in providing strategic guidance over certain issues, and a platform for engagement with government, were highlighted:

> "There was sharing of information in terms of the Liverpool City Region, the emergency kind of infrastructure. The Mayor's role was probably around provision of funding, which was great. What they were able to identify for us was who was getting funding from the Mayor, who was getting funding from other charitable organisations."
> (Local authority director)

> "Some of that partnership working has improved because of it (the pandemic). There's a live crisis...people need to respond together. Because of the similarities across the different geographic areas in the city region, because of the similar goals. The six local authorities, the combined authority, the CCGs...we've all got those shared goals and a share focus over the last year."
> (Local authority lead)

However, others noted that in Liverpool City Region there remains some confusion about whether local authorities or the combined authority is responsible for certain services. This was particularly highlighted in policy areas where local authorities have responsibility for service delivery but the combined authority has strategic oversight, such as transport.

> "I think the combined authorities have a lot of the profile and a lot of the engagement with government on high-level strategy, but I think some of that has not really recognised – as I said before – a lot of the delivery is through local authorities, and that fine-grained understanding of how you get things done is often actually with the...not just the core city, but that handful of local authorities who've got real strategic capacity. So you've got to bring those two things together."
> (Local authority director)

On identifying economic and social assets, and integrating social infrastructure into service delivery, some interviewees noted that the combined authority is able to 'take a step back' and offer strategic advice, where local authorities may be overburdened by responding to immediate needs:

> "I think local authorities have also had to respond to the COVID pandemic just in terms of being slightly closer to some of the immediate response in their boroughs and the redeployment of staff to do different things, so I think there's an advantage that the CA's been able to have a longer-term strategic look at the future, and I think there are some really good strengths in how combined authorities can work with local authorities and are already."
> (Combined authority lead)

# 6. IDENTIFYING GAPS IN SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND ASSET PROVISION: EVIDENCE FROM ST HELENS

This section illustrates the findings of the mapping analysis carried out in St Helens. A selection of assets defined as social infrastructure have been mapped and the details of the analysis undertaken are provided below. Full information on the mapping methodology can be found in Appendix 1.

## Parks and leisure

Boundaries were drawn based on the Fields in Trust guidance which suggests the following:

- Local Area for Play (LAP): Primarily for children under 6, these parks have minimal equipment and should be located no more than 100 metres (1-2 minutes' walk) from residential properties.
- Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP): For children who are beginning to play independently. Ideally located 5 minutes' walk from residential properties.

- Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP): Mainly for older children but with areas for younger children too. Ideally located no more than 15 minutes' walk from home.

Using these guidelines, we drew 5 minute and 10 minute walking boundaries to identify areas that were well served by public parks, and those poorly served. Residential areas close to district centres in Rainhill, Sutton and Bold, and south of the town centre, are well covered, but residents in parts of Thatto Heath and Sutton in particular have no play areas close by. For sports and leisure centres, we drew a slightly larger catchment area to acknowledge the reality that these facilities are likely to be used less frequently. The vast majority of residents in St Helens South are within 20 minutes' walk of a sports or leisure centre.

**Figure 10**

## Catchment areas for children's parks in St Helens South
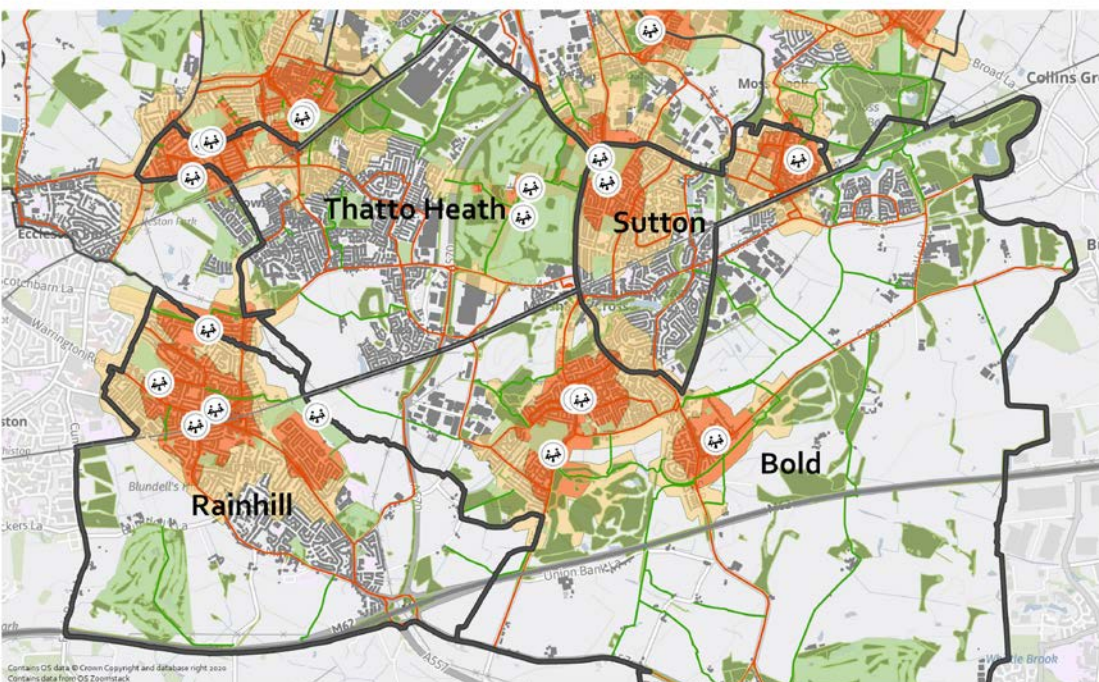
**Figure 11**

# Catchment areas for sports and leisure centres in St Helens South



**SPORT CENTRES** catchment area

- 🚌 sports centres
- — footpaths
- — bus routes
- 🟧 10 min walk
- 🟨 20 min walk

0   0.5   1 km
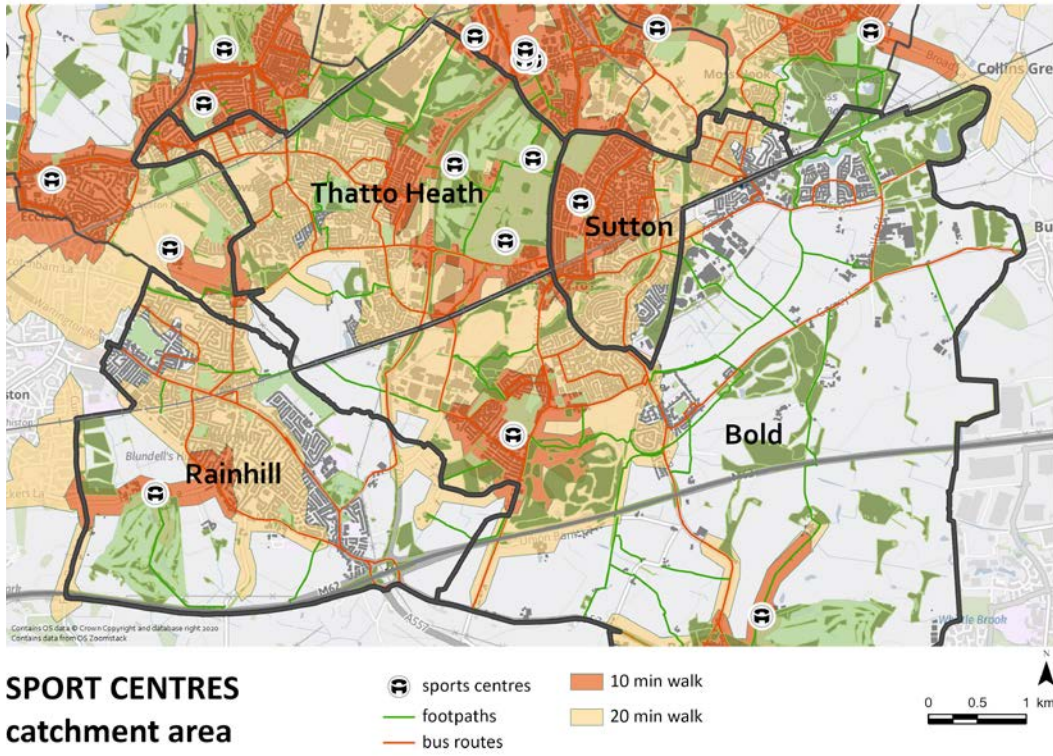
**Figure 12**

# Catchment areas for community centres in St Helens South



**COMMUNITY CENTRES** catchment area

- 🏛 community centres
- — bus routes
- 🟪 10 min walk
- 🟪 20 min walk

0   0.5   1 km
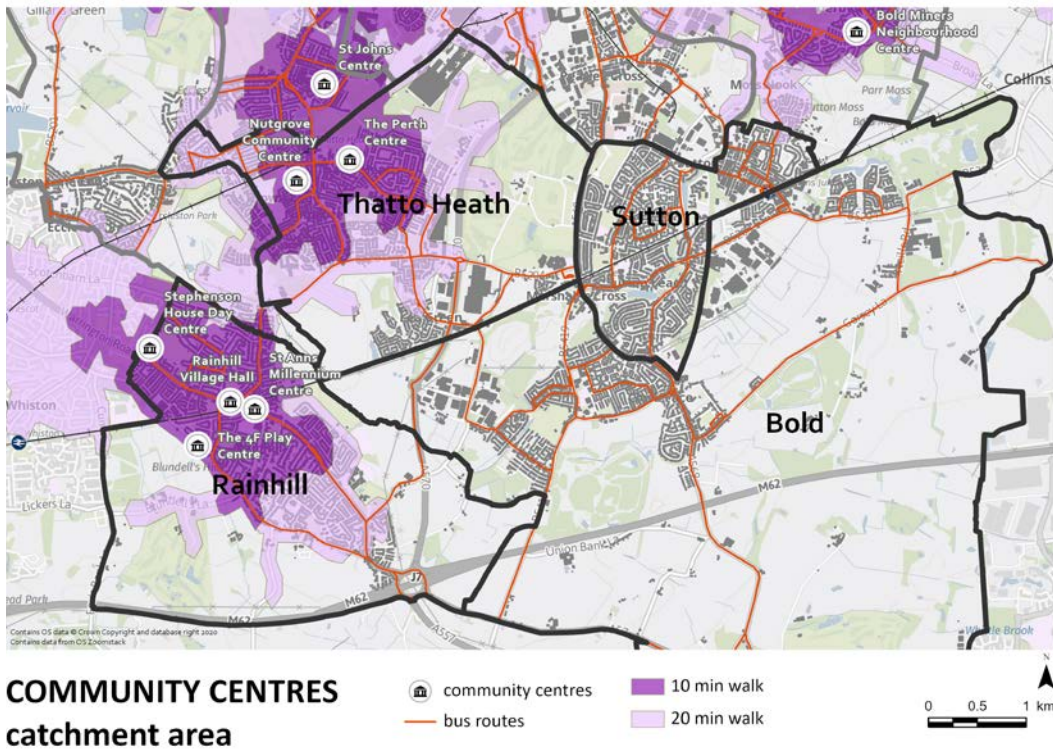
**Figure 13**

# Catchment areas for libraries in St Helens South
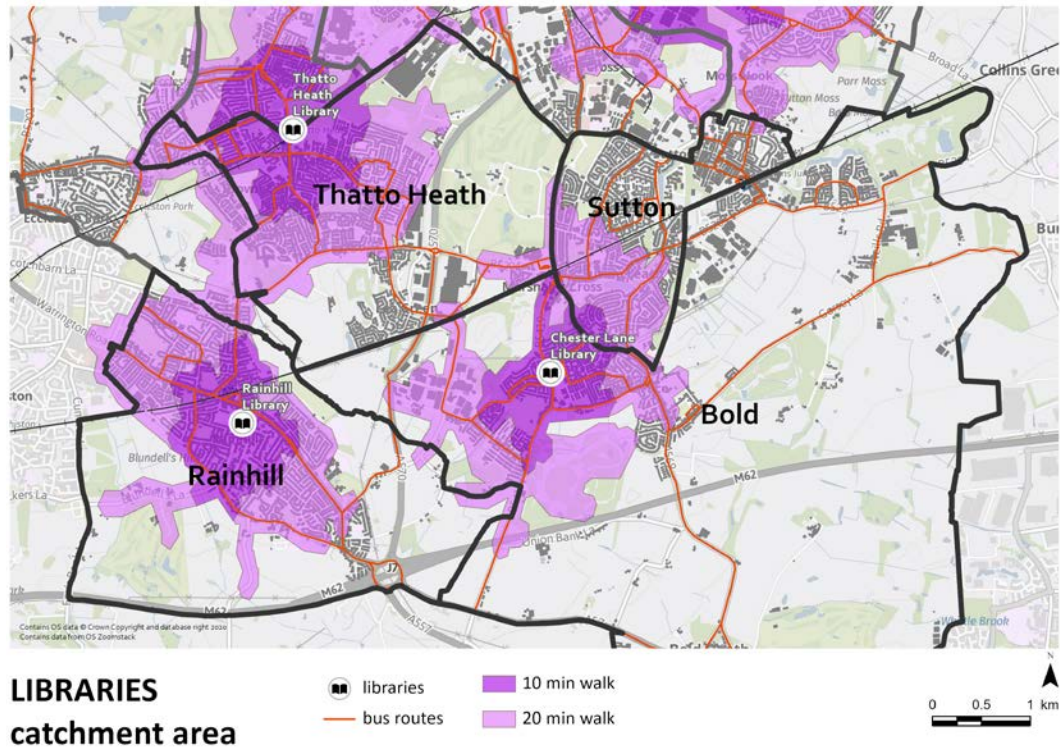


## Libraries and community centres

Similar to parks, St Helens South is reasonably well served by libraries within a 20 minute walk catchment area, with two notable exceptions: the area to the south of Thatto Heath and north of Sutton. Only publicly owned community centres are identified here, so some private facilities may be missing from the analysis. However, it is notable that Sutton and Bold are poorly served by these facilities.

## GP surgeries

St Helens South is reasonably well served by GP surgeries within 20 minute walking distance. However, once again the southern part of Thatto Heath ward has poor access to healthcare facilities.

## Retail

Figure 15 shows the whole of St Helens as, for many residents in St Helens South, the town centre will act as their main 'retail district'. Black points mark the centre of retail centres, and walking catchment areas of 5 and 10 minutes are illustrated. As would be expected, areas around key district centres such as Rainhill and Thatto Heath are well served, but there are significant areas in Thatto Heath and Sutton that are not within reasonable walking distance of a retail centre.

**Figure 14**

# Catchment areas for GP surgeries in St Helens South



HEALTHCARE - GPs catchment area

- GP
- bus routes
- 10 min walk
- 20 min walk
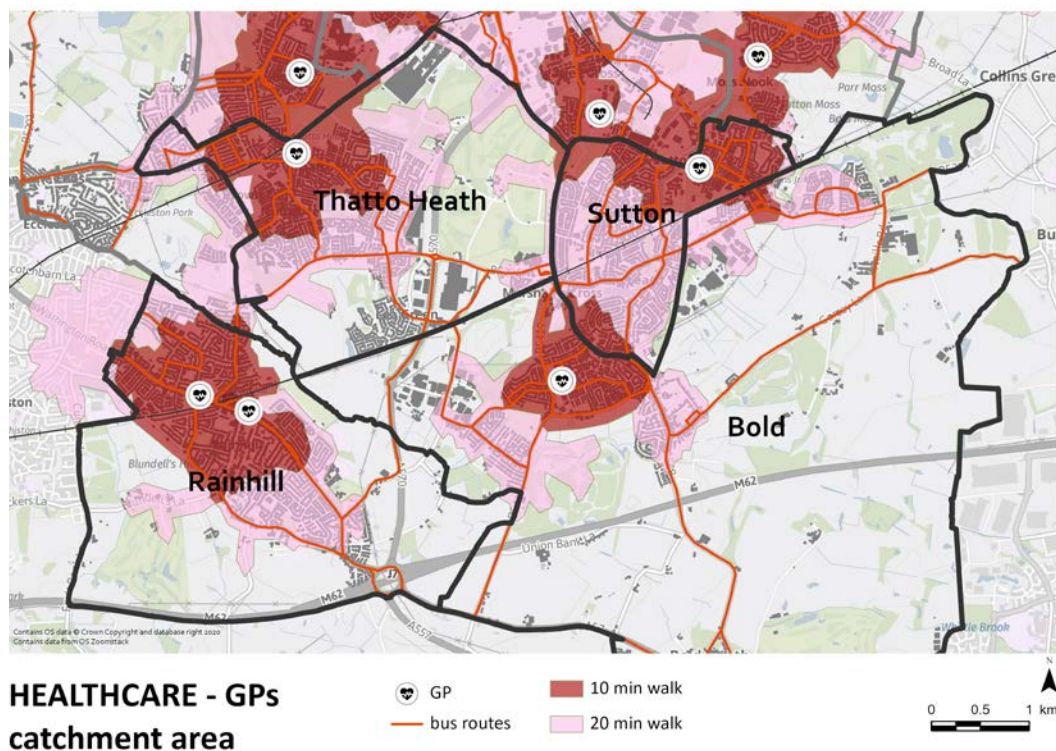
## Community support organisations

Figure 16 illustrates the location of foodbanks in St Helens and areas within a 10 minute and 20 minute walk. All food banks are operated by the Trussell Trust, except the facility located in Bold which is ran by the Sutton Community Food Project.

Figure 17 illustrates the relationship between the location of foodbanks and average house prices. Foodbanks are predominantly located in areas with lower than average house prices.

During the first lockdown in Spring 2020, thousands of Covid Mutual Aid groups were established across the UK. Eight official groups were established in St Helens, assisting a variety of vulnerable and isolating residents with food deliveries, picking up prescriptions, walking dogs, and many other services. This map illustrates the location of these groups, and average house prices in St Helens. While we anticipated some community groups would be established in areas with relatively high house prices, such as Rainhill, Figure 18 also demonstrates the presence of Covid Mutual Aid groups in areas where house prices are lower, including parts of Thatto Heath and Sutton.

**Figure 15**

# Catchment areas for retail centres in St Helens South
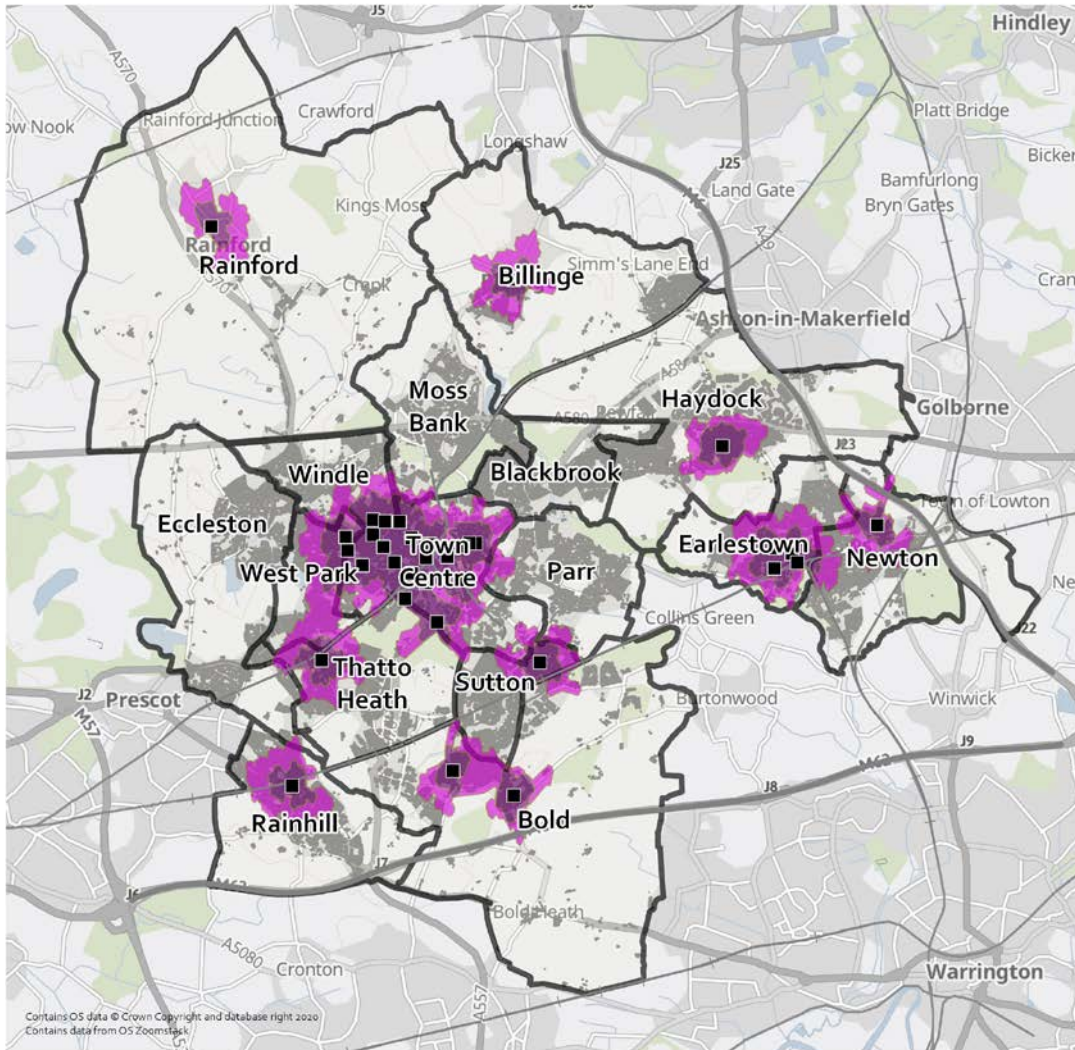


## Retail Centres - catchment area
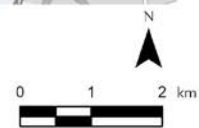
■  retail centres

▮  5 min walk

▮  10 min walk

**Figure 16**

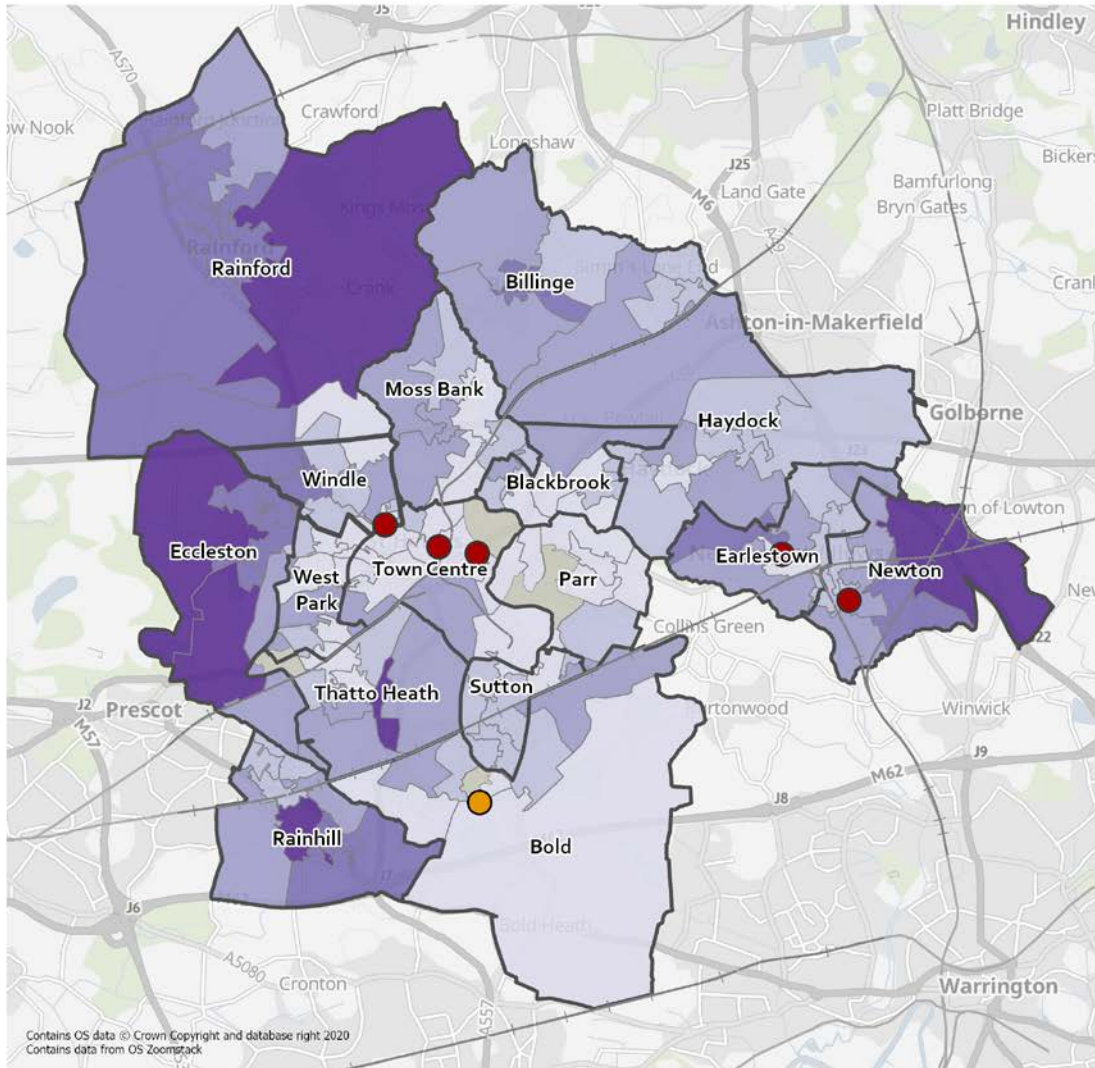# Catchment areas for foodbanks in St Helens South
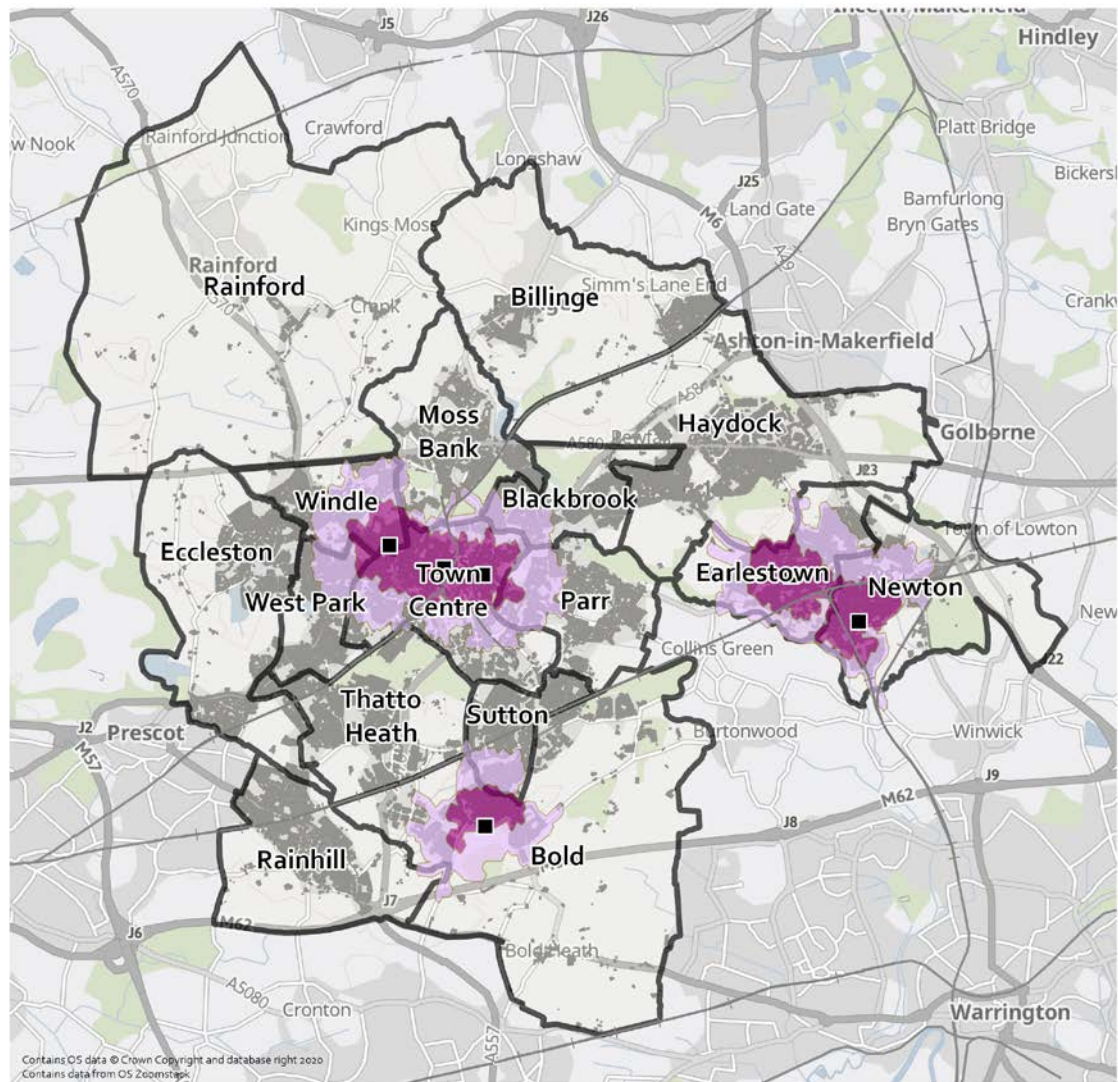


**Foodbanks - catchment area**
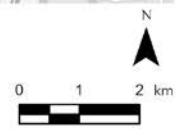
■ foodbank
10 min walk
20 min walk

**Figure 17**

# Foodbank locations and average house prices by LSOA



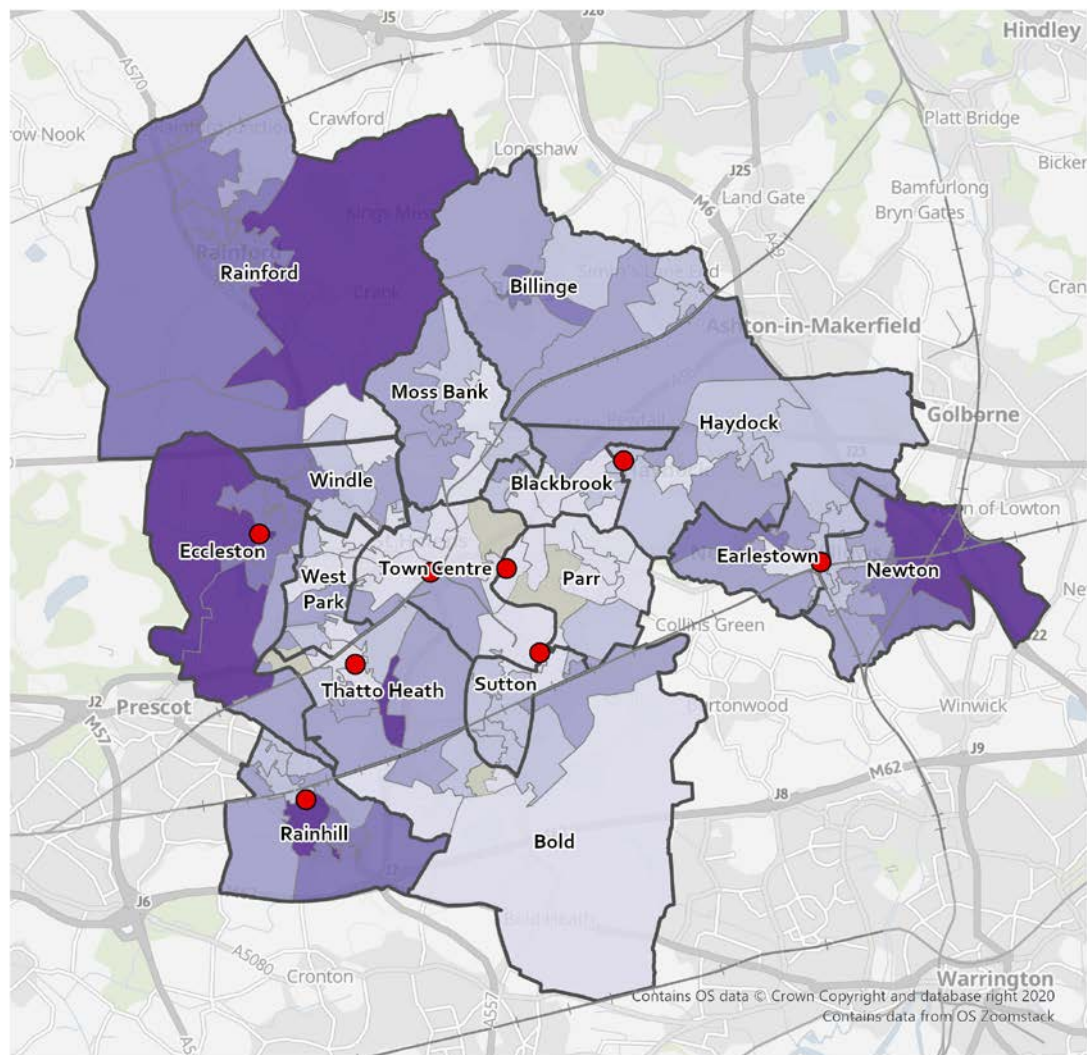## Foodbanks and House Prices

House Prices in December 2020

- no data
- up to 102,500
- 102, 501 to 147,500
- 147,501 to 187,625
- 187,626 to 228,500
- 228,501 to 305,000

Foodbanks

- Trussell Trust Foodbank
- Sutton Community Food Project

**Figure 18**

# Covid Mutual Aid group locations and average house prices by LSOA



## Covid Mutual Aid and House Prices

House Prices in December 2020     ● Covid Mutual Aid

- no data
- up to 102,500
- 102,501 to 147,500
- 147,501 to 187,625
- 187,626 to 228,500
- 228,501 to 305,000

**Social infrastructure 'deserts'**

By drawing walking catchment areas around key social infrastructure we can identify areas that are poorly served not only by public services but also less formalised community assets such as parks, retail centres and community organisations. In St Helens South, two small areas were identified as being particularly disconnected from social infrastructure: Waterside Village, Thatto Heath (Figure 20) and New Bold, Sutton (Figure 21). Further discussion on these identified 'social infrastructure deserts' follows in Section 7.

**Figure 19**

# Social infrastructure 'deserts' in St Helens South
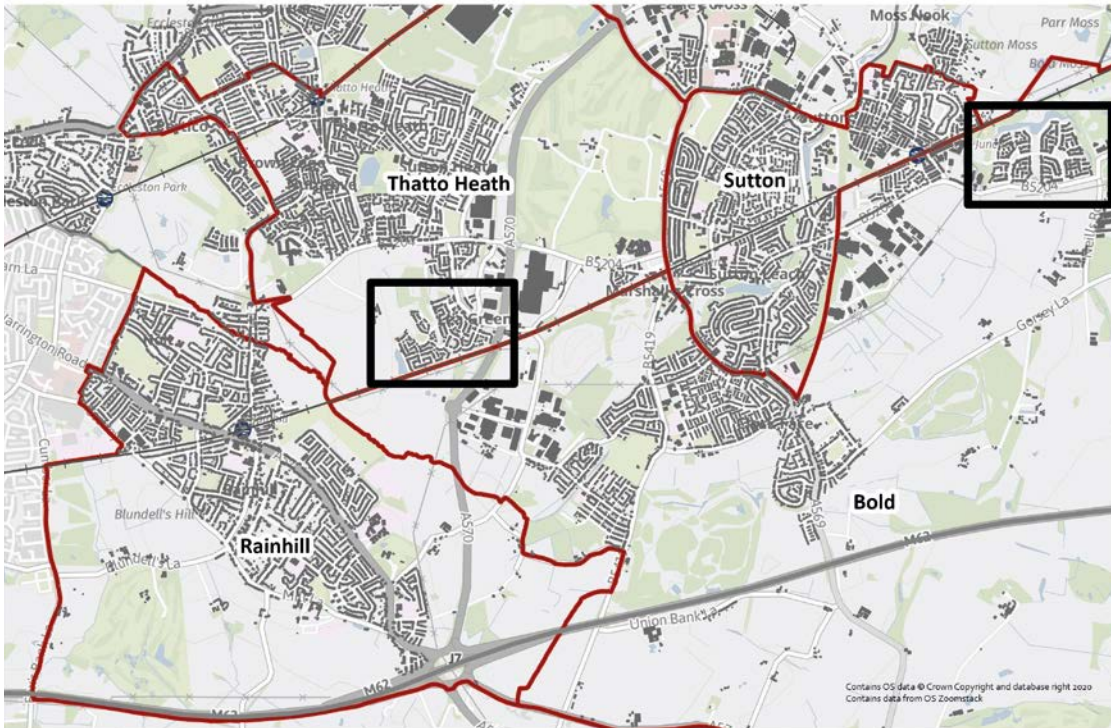
**Figure 20**

## Waterside Village, Thatto Heath



**Figure 21**

## New Bold, Sutton

# 7. POLICY DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section summarises the key findings from this research, assesses the implications for policy at national, regional and local level, and outlines some potential future avenues for research that could build on and expand these findings.

## The social infrastructure data gap

Findings from interviews with local policymakers and practitioners in Liverpool City Region support previous research on the data ecosystem supporting social infrastructure. A recent briefing from the Local Government Information Unit called for improved availability of data on social infrastructure, recommending that the UK government work closely with the Office for National Statistics and local authorities to develop a coherent data set and noting that available data is "fragmented, inconsistent and patchy" (LGUI 2021: 8).

For local authorities, resourcing is a key concern. While organisations such as Local Trust, and various planning consultancies, can offer valuable assistance in mapping community assets and identifying areas of infrastructure need, constrained local authority budgets can make these services unaffordable. Innovations over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic have led to greater availability of some health and economic data for local authorities, and government should aspire to ensure these improvements are embedded in the wider data infrastructure supporting public service delivery. Partnerships with higher education institutes are helping to bridge this gap, as evidenced by the work of the University of Liverpool's Consumer Data Research Centre on Local Data Spaces, which has developed helped to develop free to access reports for local authorities on health inequalities and economic vulnerabilities (UoL 2021).

This research identified the potential of network analysis mapping to explore gaps in social infrastructure. Feedback from local policymakers on this approach has been positive, and network analysis could be scaled up and applied at the city-region scale in support, for example, of the Liverpool City Region Spatial Development Strategy which is currently in development. However, there are limitations of this approach, largely based on the data available. Mapping is based only on those pieces of social infrastructure that are known about – there may be informal community groups, for example, that are not picked up through this process. To complement the production of these maps, additional groundwork at the community level will also be required to understand which assets offer value to different parts of the community, and how these interact with public service delivery.

## What characterises areas with poor social infrastructure?

This study identified two areas in St Helens South that are particularly poorly served by social infrastructure: Waterside Village (in Thatto Heath ward) and New Bold (in Bold ward). Both areas consist largely of relatively new developments. Waterside Village sits on the site of a former colliery, with over 700 homes developed over the last decade. New Bold was developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Both areas consist primarily of three and four bed houses, mostly semi-detached and detached. Neither area ranks in the most deprived or least deprived parts of St Helens according to the IMD: Waterside sits in the fourth most deprived decile (with the first decile being the most deprived) and New Bold is in the fifth most deprived decile. In common with much of St Helens, the two areas perform poorly on the health and disability measure of IMD. By other measures, the two areas perform well: on the employment IMD measure, New Bold is in the sixth most deprived decile and Waterside in the fifth most deprived.

According to the network analysis mapping carried out for this research, both Waterside and New Bold have limited access to children's parks and libraries. New Bold is not within 20 minutes' walk of a sports centre or community centre, while Waterside does not have a GP surgery within 20 minutes' walk. Both areas have reasonable access to public transport, particularly rail: Waterside is within walking distance of Lea Green station, although this journey does involve travelling along a busy A road and across a dual carriageway, while New Bold is around 15 minutes' walk from St Helens Junction station. However, both developments are heavily car-based, with most houses offering private driveways and wide residential roads. Cycling infrastructure in both areas is limited. Waterside is physically cut off from other parts of St Helens by the elevated A570 which runs immediately east of the area, and the large warehouses and distribution centres at the nearby Lea Green depot. Pedestrian access from New Bold to the town centre is limited by the rail line running immediately north of the area.

While only providing a limited insight into social infrastructure gaps in this small case study area, this analysis does demonstrate the important role played by planning in ensuring places are not cut off from community facilities. National planning policy should encourage development of new homes with sufficient green space, parks, community hubs, retail centres and other facilities, with the aim of building cohesive and accessible places. At a local and city-regional level, provision of social infrastructure is at the heart of placemaking and must go alongside development of new homes of all tenures.

## Addressing social infrastructure gaps through policy

Over recent years, and particularly since the EU referendum of 2016, there has been significant focus on the policies needed to improve life outcomes in so-called 'left behind' places, particularly towns, suburbs and coastal communities. While understandable attention is focused on the role of employment in improving opportunities in these places, there has been a welcome shift towards acknowledging the role of social infrastructure in shaping place outcomes. Polling carried out on behalf of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Left Behind Neighbourhoods found that people in the 225 areas in England they identified as 'left behind' felt a lack of social infrastructure was an important factor in the perceived decline of their local community. 57% of people polled who felt their areas were missing out on key community resources identified a lack of 'places to meet' as a problem, while 55% of respondents reported a shortage of leisure and sports facilities. 49% of respondents felt they were missing out on access to parks and green spaces (Local Trust 2020). A lack of civic assets, community engagement and connectivity are associated with outcomes such as low pay, poor employment prospects and poor mental and physical health outcomes. The Local Trust research found for example that income in 'left behind' areas with weak social infrastructure is on average £7,000 lower per household than across England as a whole (Local Trust 2019).

Any version of 'levelling up' must therefore focus on developing the social fabric of places as well as increasing economic opportunity and improving health outcomes. Cuts to libraries and other community facilities have fallen disproportionately on areas where need for community services is greatest. In Liverpool City Region, Sefton has just six remaining libraries – one for every 45,000 residents. In Halton, four remain open – one for every 32,000 residents. In St Helens, there are 13 libraries with one per every 13,000 residents (St Helens Council 2021b). More broadly, local authority budget cuts have constrained the ability of local leaders to maximise the potential of community assets in their areas, and to use up to date and good quality data to support social infrastructure provision. Providing adequate support for the development of community spaces, sports and leisure facilities, and other places for people to meet could contribute towards improved health outcomes and reduce pressure on the NHS.

This research has also highlighted the relevance of the 20 Minute Neighbourhood concept, also known as the 15 Minute City. The Town and Country Planning Association describe the concept as being about:

> "Creating attractive, interesting, safe, walkable environments in which people of all ages and levels of fitness are happy to travel actively for short distances from home to the destinations that they visit and the services they need to use day to day – shopping, school, community and healthcare facilities, places of work, green spaces and more. These places need to be easily accessible on foot, by cycle or by public transport – and accessible to everyone, whatever their budget or physical ability, without having to use a car." (TCPA 2021: 7)

While the concept has gained in prominence over recent years, and particularly during the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, the evidence base on applying the framework to provision of social infrastructure remains limited, particularly in a UK context. Further work is needed to understand how the 20 Minute Neighbourhood concept can be applied effectively and integrated into policy at a national, regional and local level.

## Limitations of indexing and mapping approaches

As highlighted in chapter 3, recent years have seen various attempts at mapping and indexing areas based on provision of social infrastructure, community assets, and social fabric. Indexing approaches are being used by various local authorities in England, with one of the most impressive examples being Barking and Dagenham's Social Progress Index, which uses indicators to measure wellbeing and opportunity as well as provision of services and infrastructure. The growth of indexes to support identification of social infrastructure gaps is welcome, and have huge potential to assist local authorities in aligning service priorities and using limited resources effectively.

However, by their nature, such indexes are top down in nature, applying universal indicators to measure outcomes regardless of the differences between places. The Onward Social Fabric Index, for example, uses a varied range of indicators to measure the strengths of relationships, physical infrastructure, civic institutions, economic value and 'positive social norms', including levels of trust in institutions such as the police and NHS, and the share of people in an area that report in public polling to support the monarchy. These indicators may be useful in measuring community cohesion in some areas, but other places may exhibit different forms of social fabric.

To complement mapping and indexing approaches, we recommend further research into the development of community-based social infrastructure indexes, with measures shaped by involvement from participants within local communities. This could take the form of surveys of communities on, for example, how willing they are to travel to particular amenities, or which facilities are most important to them. Community workshops, forums and focus groups could also be utilised to inform this approach. Using this type of community research could help design more nuanced and grounded approaches to mapping social infrastructure and identifying gaps.

In addition, further work is needed on identifying and assessing the 'people' dimension of community assets. The growth of thousands of Covid-19 Mutal Aid Groups since the start of the pandemic highlights the importance of developing and maintaining social capital and community cohesion. As this report emphasises, physical assets are an important part of this agenda. However, the conditions for developing good social infrastructure are not solely related to physical locations, but are also highly reliant on people with the time, energy and will to carry out voluntary activity. Measuring how such an environment can be created is difficult and dependent on a wide range of factors, but understanding how such conditions can be created is essential to this agenda.

## Conclusion

This research aimed to provide insight into gaps in social infrastructure provision and the data ecosystem around it. Local authorities face significant challenges in managing local services while aspiring for improvements in the social, economic and health outcomes of their residents. As a result, local authorities across the UK are working closely with community and voluntary organisations, and there is increasing understanding of the role of social infrastructure in shaping a wide variety of policy outcomes. Further research is required to quantify the importance of social infrastructure and how this can be measured across a diverse range of areas. It is clear that mapping and indexing approaches have a key role to play in this process, in conjunction with community-based research. Ultimately, while physical assets such as parks, are crucial to social infrastructure, it is crucial to understand the needs of specific communities and the role of the people within them in building great places to live. The role of co-production will, then, be crucial in any future research in this area.

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# APPENDIX 1: DATA SOURCES AND MAPPING ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

## Data sources

*Data compiled by St Helens Borough Council and provided in shapefile format:*

| Dataset | Data geometry | Source | Last updated |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bus Routes | Lines | LCRCA | Oct 2019 |
| Children's Parks | Polygons | St Helens Council | Mar 2020 |
| Community Centres | Points | St Helens Council | Jul 2017 |
| GPs | Points | NHS | Feb 2020 |
| Libraries | Points | St Helens Council | Nov 2019 |
| Public Right of Way (footpaths) | Lines | St Helens Council | May 2019 |
| Sports and Fitness Centres | Points | St Helens Council | Jul 2017 |
| St Helens Wards | Polygons | Electoral Services | Apr 2019 |

*Data gathered online via open access:*

| Dataset | Data format | Source | Last updated |
|---|---|---|---|
| Covid-19 Mutual Aid | Web map | Covid-19 Mutual Aid | 2021 |
| Foodbanks | Address list | Trussell Trust / Independent Food Aid Network | 2021 |
| House Prices | CSV | Office for National Statistics | Dec 2020 |
| Indices of Deprivation | Shapefile | Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government | Feb 2019 |
| Open Map Local * | Shapefile | Ordnance Survey | 2021 |
| Open Roads | Shapefile | Ordnance Survey | 2021 |
| Retail Centres | Geopackage | Consumer Data Research Centre | Apr 2021 |

*this dataset includes railways, roads, water lines and surfaces, building areas, woodlands and green spaces, and it was used to compose backdrop maps

## Data analysis

Data was processed to create choropleth maps and to conduct network analysis. Choropleth maps present data in form of counts, rates or percentages, aggregated in predetermined geographic boundaries. This is a popular method of displaying statistical data, offering a straightforward way to visualise extensive datasets and to produce thematic maps. Network analysis is a type of spatial analysis that uses connected geometries to resolve problems related to movement and accessibility across a network of, for instance, roads, rivers or utilities. The series of choropleth maps in this report correspond to the Indices of Deprivation and House Prices, and networks analysis was used in the maps concerning St Helens facilities (children's parks, sport centres, community centres, libraries and GPs) and data related to foodbanks and retail centres.

## Indices of Deprivation 2019

The Indices of Deprivation relate to a set of data measuring deprivation in LSOAs – Lower Layer Super Output Areas - a geographic designation created to display small area statistics in England and Wales.[5] The data is organised according to seven domains, based on different indicators. These domains are also combined to compose the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), an overall measure of deprivation.

The data downloaded [6] contains the IMD and the seven domains for the whole of England, corresponding to 32,844 LSOAs. This was added to a base map containing the boundaries of St Helens wards using a clip tool, to extract the areas of interest (119 LSOAs). The maps created display the data according to deciles, a ranked classification that divides all LSOAs in 10 groups. LSOAs in the '1' class are in the group of most deprived 10 per cent of LSOAs in England, while LSOAs in the '10' class are in the least deprived 10 per cent group.

Five maps were produced – one map displaying the IMD in St Helens and four maps displaying four domains (Barriers to Housing and Services, Employment, Living Environment and Health and Disability) focusing on the St Helens south area (Bold, Rainhill, Sutton and Thatto Heath wards). The maps also contain data from the Ordnance Survey, indicating main roads, railways and built area.

## House Prices

The data used to display House Prices is derived from the dataset 'Median price paid for residential property by LSOA", a component of the House Price Statistics for Small Areas (HPSSAs) produced by the ONS[7]. The data downloaded is CSV file of all prices between 1995 and 2020, for all LSOAs in England. The data input in the map was first prepared in Excel, selecting the 119 LSOAs in St Helens, and added in ArcGIS using a join tool to connect the CSV table to layer containing spatial data – in this case, the IMD layer.

The map produced displays the data using the 'natural breaks' method of classification, where the classes are based on natural groupings inherent in the data. Therefore, it is possible to distinguish classes as 'no data' (with a '0' value in the CSV table) and to group similar values together, to give a better idea of price ranges.

## Foodbanks and Covid mutual aid groups

Two new layers with point features were created from the information collected online, using the edit tool to digitise the over the base map of St Helens.

## Network Analysis

The maps employing network analysis are based on the Open Roads dataset from OS. The analysis applied is the 'service area', which allows to determine an area (in our maps called 'catchment area') around a 'facility' (a point feature) according to travel time using a road network.

Seven maps were produced using this tool, according to various walking distances:
- Children's parks (5 and 10 minutes)
- Sport centres (10 and 20 minutes)
- Community Centres (10 and 20 minutes)
- GPs (10 and 20 minutes)
- Libraries (10 and 20 minutes)
- Foodbanks (10 and 20 minutes)
- Retail Centres (5 and 10 minutes)

In the case of the 'children's parks' and 'retail centres' two new layers were created as point features since these datasets were provided in a polygon geometry. For the 'children's parks' it was used a 'feature to point' tool to create a feature class containing points at the centre of the polygons. As the original polygons are relatively small, a single point is acceptable to determine the location and to conduct the network analysis.

The 'retail centres' layer contains much larger polygons, and a new feature class was created from manually digitising point around the polygons, in strategic locations were the polygons intercept major roads. Also, new points were added in neighbourhoods where small commercial areas could be identify. The resultant map therefore is a combination of the original dataset, using the classification for retail centres proposed by the CRDR, and the points edited to create the new layer.

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5   LSOAs have an average of 1500 people or 650 households.
6   Available at  Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 | Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (arcgis.com).
7   The HPSSAs contains 49 datasets in total.

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Copies of the report can be accessed at:

www.liverpool.ac.uk/heseltine-institute