TRAFFORD COUNCIL

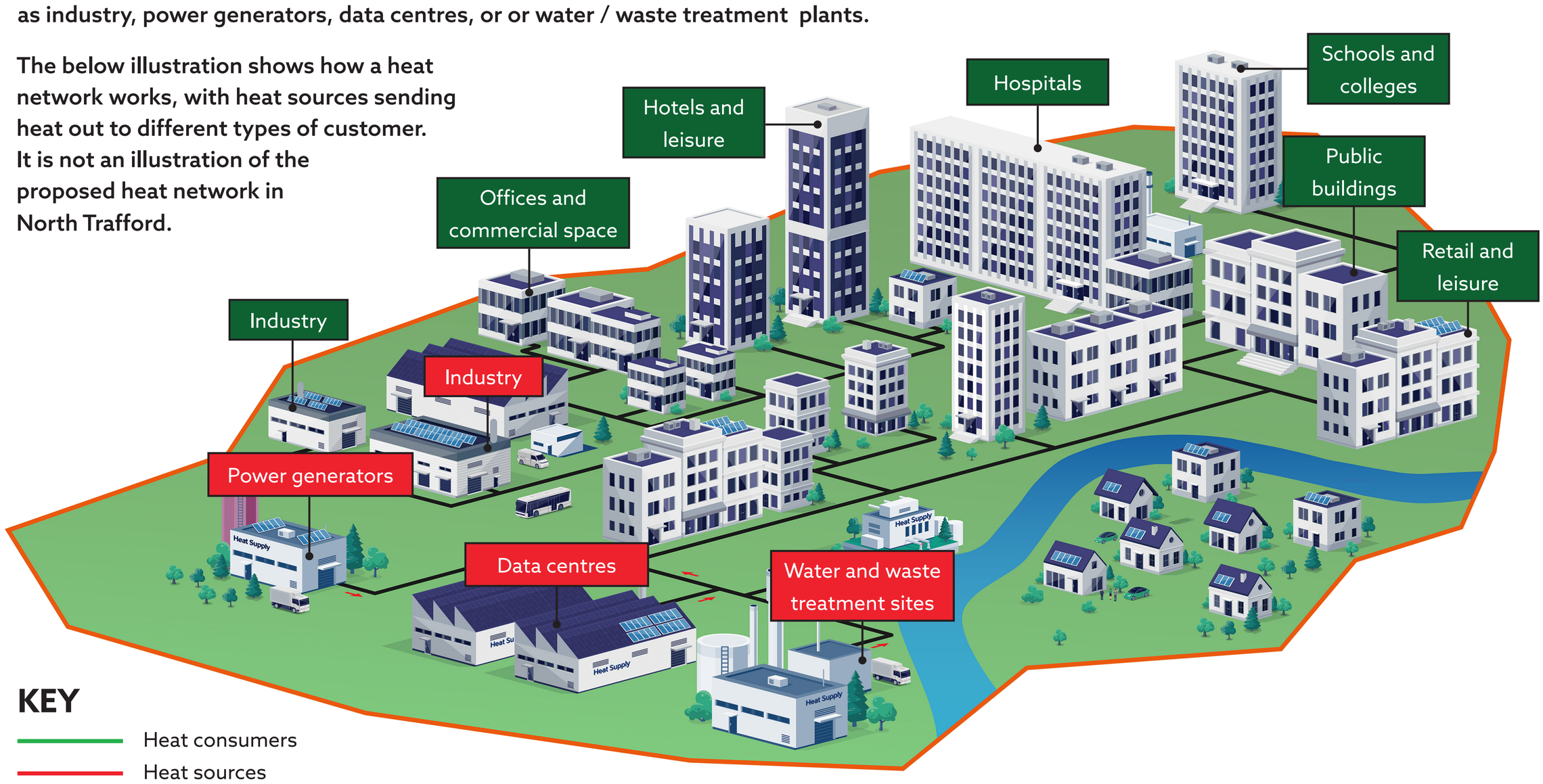
Zone Boundary Consultation

What are heat networks?

Heat networks are distribution systems of insulated underground pipes that take heating or cooling from a central source and deliver it to multiple customers, such as public sector buildings, shops, offices, hospitals, sports facilities, universities and residential buildings.

They can be developed across entire cities or a selection of buildings. The heat they use is sourced from a range producers of waste heat, such as industry, power generators, data centres, or or water / waste treatment plants.

The below illustration shows how a heat network works, with heat sources sending heat out to different types of customer. It is not an illustration of the proposed heat network in North Trafford.



Heat networks offer energy security, less exposure to volatile gas prices, and cleaner air with gas boilers removed. In high-density urban areas, they are often the lowest-cost low carbon heating option.

Highly efficient

Heat networks are highly efficient systems that remove the need for individual gas boilers or heaters in each building and can utilise local sources of low-carbon heat, which would otherwise go to waste.

Cost-effective

Heat networks are one of the most cost-effective ways of providing secure, reliable, and affordable low carbon heat to consumers and help us end our reliance on fossil fuels while cutting customer energy bills.

The future of heat

In 2024, around 3% of heat in the UK was provided by heat networks. It is estimated that heat networks will supply almost 20% of heat by 2050 to enable the UK to reach net zero.

A key step to meeting the UK's Net Zero target

Heat networks are an essential part of our path towards decarbonising heat, enhancing energy security and achieving net zero by 2050. As heating is responsible for about 20% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions, meeting our net-zero target will require the decarbonisation of virtually all heat in buildings.

The Energy Act 2023 is being used to establish the regulatory framework for heat networks in Great Britain and provide power to introduce heat network zoning in England through secondary legislation. The legislation is expected to be in place from 2026.

Greater Manchester has an ambition to decarbonise the heating sector by up to 36% by 2038, and to achieve carbon neutrality by the same year. Heat networks are a critical element of achieving these targets, and North Trafford has been identified as one of the priority areas for bringing them forward.

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What is heat network zoning?

Heat network zoning is the process of identifying and designating areas as heat network zones and then developing heat networks within them.

Zoning designates areas where heat networks are expected to provide the lowest-cost, low-carbon heating solution.

It gives towns and cities the tools to accelerate the development of heat networks and gives developers and investors greater certainty about the number of likely connections to networks. This opens opportunities for greener, cheaper heat to develop at pace and unlock the investment needed to build them.

Trafford has been identified as a front-runner city to develop a heat network zone and Trafford Council is consulting on a proposed heat network zone boundary.

Methodology for designating heat network zones

The UK Government uses data such as building type, size and energy usage to create a methodology for identifying potential heat network zones. The methodology has been tested with some front-runner cities to help finalise the methodology for the future. This data is then used by each city to refine the proposed heat network zone based on local factors and data.

Connecting buildings to a heat network in a zone

For a heat network zone to benefit the greatest number of people, **certain types of buildings may be required to connect.**

These could include:



New buildings



Non-domestic buildings above an agreed energy use threshold



Buildings that are already communally heated

There will be some exemptions to this – such as where it would not be cost-effective to connect to a heat network or where a better low carbon solution exists. Homes within zones which are not already communally heated will not be required to connect. However, should they wish to, they may apply for connection.

Heat network zoning legislation

In 2023, the UK Government held a consultation on heat network zoning to inform the secondary legislation. Feedback received in responses to the consultation is informing decisions on the zoning policy framework, including the process for identifying, designating, developing and operating heat networks across England. The Government published its response to the 2023 consultation in January 2026, which provides updates on the direction of travel for the policy. Secondary Legislation is expected to come into force later in 2026, and this is when heat network zoning policy will become law.

More information on the current status of heat network zoning is available on the government website

https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/heat-network-zoning

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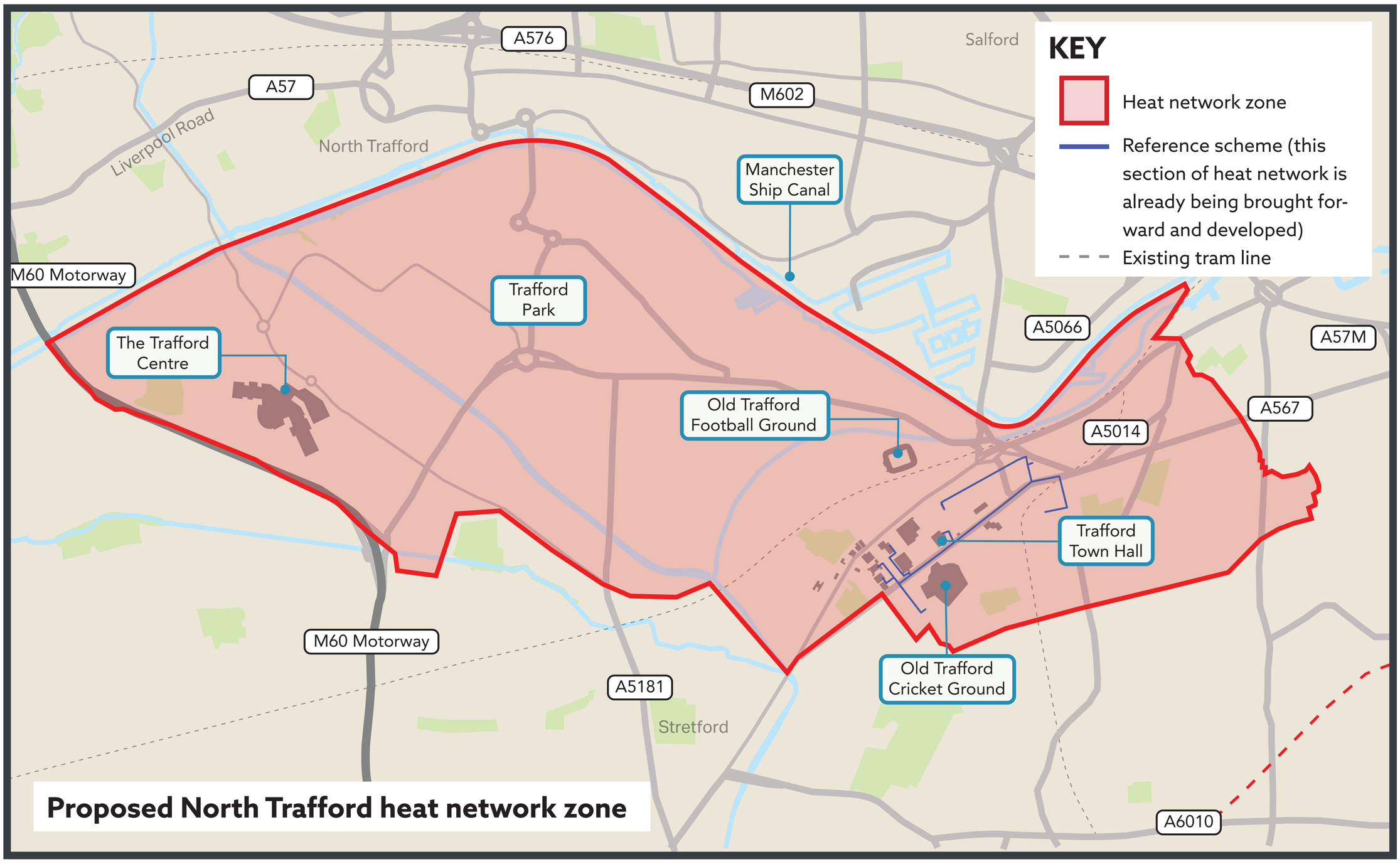
Zone Boundary Consultation

What is the proposed heat network zone for North Trafford?

North Trafford has been identified as a place where heat networks can provide the lowest-cost, low-carbon heating option.



Proposed North Trafford heat network zone

Our aim is for Trafford to be carbon neutral by 2038. Heat networks can help large buildings to decarbonise their heat, helping reach this ambitious target.

Our early investigations have identified that a heat network zone could:

Reduce carbon emissions significantly	Deliver carbon savings of approximately 2.5 million tonnes of CO_2 equivalent (CO_2e) over 40 years, which is roughly 64,000 tonnes of CO_2e per year on average, compared to a gas boiler baseline.
Reduce air pollution from gas heating	Improve local air quality by replacing large numbers of individual gas and fossil fuel heating systems in a heavily built-up, industrial and commercial area with centralised low-carbon heat sources.
Save building owners money on heating costs	Provide one of the lowest-cost ways to decarbonise heat at scale in the area over the long term, with the potential for more stable heating costs as networks develop.

While every building is different and will be assessed on its individual needs and circumstances, connecting to a heat network can provide the lowest-cost, lowest-carbon option for many.

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How was the proposed heat network zone for North Trafford identified?

A proposed zone boundary has been identified for North Trafford based on national zoning modelling, which uses data on building types, size and energy usage to identify areas where a heat network may provide access to the lowest-cost, lowest-carbon heat.

When defining the proposed zone boundary, the following factors were considered together:

High heat demand

Areas with lots of heat use such as the town centre and hospitals.

Anchor buildings

Large, constant heat users (such as hospitals, civic buildings and leisure centres).

Low-carbon heat sources

Proximity to potential heat sources such as wastewater, rivers or waste heat.

Building density and proximity

Where buildings are close together, which keeps pipe lengths shorter.

Deliverability and phasing

The ability to build the network in stages, starting from core areas and expanding over time.

Future growth and regeneration

Planned developments and regeneration areas that could strengthen the long-term case for a heat network.

- Not all buildings connect at once, or at all
- Zones balance cost, deliverability and carbon

The proposed zone has been refined through early discussions with some local stakeholders, and technical work. The outputs of this consultation will help refine and finalise the zone boundary.

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Zone Boundary Consultation

Have your say on the proposed heat network zone for North Trafford

We're consulting on the proposed zone boundary for a heat network zone in North Trafford.

We have used many key variables and the latest national zoning modelling to inform our plans for the proposed zone, but we are keen to **get feedback on the zone boundary** from anyone who might have an interest in it, including building owners, statutory bodies, transport bodies, utility operators and existing heat network operators. We would also welcome feedback from those who live or work in or near the proposed zone boundary.

We want to know if you agree with the proposed zone boundary or not, and why.

How to have your say

The consultation is open from **Thursday 26 November 2026** to **Friday 22 January 2027**.
Full consultation information is available at: https://trafford.citizenspace.com/place/nthz-boundary-consultation

We will also be hosting a series of online 'Q&A' style webinars where you can receive a presentation about the consultation and ask your own questions. You can register for one of the below sessions below via the consultation webpage:

Wednesday 02 December 2026	**8:15 to 9:00am**
Tuesday 15 December 2026	**12:30 to 1:15pm**

Thursday 07 January 2027	**10:30 to 11:15am**
Wednesday 13 January 2027	**2:30 to 3:15pm**

Feedback to the consultation can be provided by:

Completing an online form at:
https://trafford.citizenspace.com/place/HeatNetworkZoneBoundaryConsultation

Emailing
NorthTraffordZoneBoundary@aecom.com

You can also contact us if you have further questions via the contact details above.

Feedback received as part of the public consultation will be used to potentially amend the zone before we confirm its boundary and formally designate it as a heat network zone.

Following the consultation, a Consultation Statement will be published with details of the outcome.

Data protection

Trafford Council is committed to respecting your privacy and will comply with all applicable data protection and privacy laws. We're consulting you to get your views on the proposed heat network zone boundary in Trafford, so we may need to share your information with certain other bodies for the purposes of the consultation and for creating reports. This includes the Department for Net Zero and Energy Security and contractors or advisors who provide services to us in relation to the consultation.

Further details on our Privacy Policy can be found on our website

https://www.trafford.gov.uk/trafford-council-privacy-notice

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Zone Boundary Consultation

Next steps: developing a heat network for North Trafford

Designating a zone boundary is a key step towards building a resilient heat network for North Trafford.

The proposed zone boundary will be reviewed based on the consultation feedback and we will consider whether any changes need to be made.

The below activities will also feed into future delivery of the heat network zone.

Working with our selected developer, Vital Energi, to design and build the heat network once the final zone has been designated

Identifying potential locations for a central heat source

Talking to potential producers of waste heat to gauge their interest in connecting to the network for their waste heat to be used via the central source

Talking to some building owners who may be required to connect or will be using the network to understand their needs

Talking to other key stakeholders to ensure we continue to understand key opportunities and constraints to identify the best approach for a heat network in Trafford.

Key considerations

Designing and building a heat network is a big job and will take time. We are currently estimating that the Trafford Civic Quarter Heat Network will be operational in the late 2020s.

The North Trafford heat network won't be fully developed and switched on in one go. Phasing will be required so the network can start operating to deliver its many benefits as soon as possible.

Work will be closely coordinated with that of other infrastructure operators such as highways, rail and utilities, to help ensure every opportunity is taken to join up on construction works already planned, to avoid multiple disruptions.