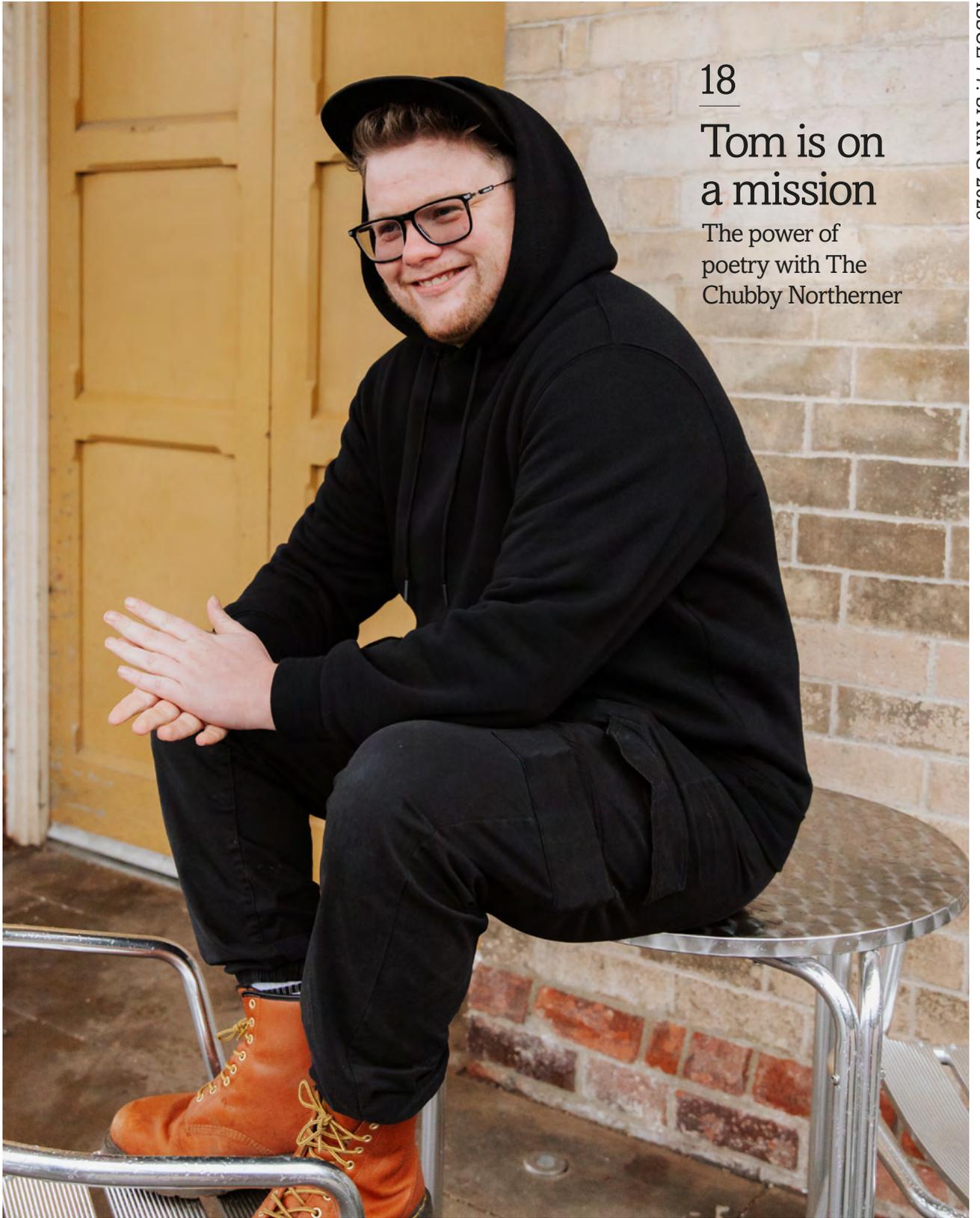


# BoroughLife



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Our gyms have been getting a makeover

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A new fund for community led projects has arrived



**Wigan**  
Council

# The Leader's column



## Welcome to the Spring 2026 edition of Borough Life.

As we move into the warmer months, this edition of Borough Life celebrates the continued progress we are making together – investing in our communities, supporting our neighbourhoods and planning confidently for the future.

One of our biggest priorities remains improving health, wellbeing and quality of life for residents of all ages.

I'm pleased to share updates on the ongoing upgrades to our

leisure facilities, which are helping to modernise centres across the borough, improve accessibility and reduce energy use. These improvements mean better spaces for families, young people and older residents to stay active, social and well.

You'll also find the latest news on key development projects that are shaping the future of our town centres and neighbourhoods.

From regeneration schemes that are breathing new life into local high streets, to housing and infrastructure projects that support growth while protecting our green spaces, we are focused on creating places people are proud to call home.

Importantly, this work is about more than bricks and mortar – it's about jobs, opportunity and long-term prosperity.

Alongside this, we continue to champion the campaigns that matter most to our residents.

Whether it's supporting people through the cost-of-living challenges, providing opportunities for young people or strengthening community safety and pride, we are working closely with partners, volunteers and local organisations to make a real difference.

Thank you to everyone who plays a part in making our borough such a strong, caring and ambitious place. I hope you enjoy this edition of Borough Life and feel encouraged by what we are achieving together.

Councillor David Molyneux MBE  
Leader, Wigan Council



### 4-7 | NEWS IN BRIEF

Your latest news round-up.

### 8-9 | A LOT OF FRONT

A multi-million-pound project to boost Ashton town centre is underway, including the shop front scheme.

### 10-11 | DEVELOPMENT UPDATES

Flagship projects designed to breathe new life into our town centres are progressing at pace.

### 12-15 | A BE WELL MAKEOVER

Improved facilities are making our leisure and fitness sites the perfect location for boosting your wellbeing.

### 16-17 | SERVING IT UP IN SHEVY

As ever, we are on the lookout for tasty treats and cosy places to go across our borough, and there was plenty to shout about in Shevington.

### 18-21 | THE CHUBBY NORTHERNER IS ON A MISSION

We caught up with Tom Stocks, better known as The Chubby Northerner, to hear about what inspires him and the impact the arts can have on our communities.

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- Manage your account
- Access your child's swimming lesson progress
- Keep up to date with the best offers & news
- Contact with your Neighbourhood Coach app

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### 22-23 | REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL AT HAIGH

An important new member of the team at Haigh Woodland Park is already having a big impact. Plus, what to expect in 2026.

### 24-27 | A RINGING ENDORSEMENT

Inspectors found outstanding practices during a recent visit to children's services across our borough.

### 28-29 | OUR CURLING HERO

We will have our collective fingers crossed for Karen Aspey as she bids for a gold medal at the Winter Paralympics. Curling is our new favourite sport.

### 30-31 | PRIDE IN PLACE

A new national funding pot will be split across several areas of the borough and the projects it will support will be chosen by the community.

### 32-33 | BE LIKE RUBY

A victim of domestic abuse has bravely spoken about her experiences to help our campaign to tackle violence against women in all its forms.



### 36-39 | WHAT'S ON

Your handy guide to what's going on in your area over the spring months as we keep our fingers crossed for good weather so we can get out and about.



## On the cover

We, like many of you, had spotted Tom Stocks' pavement poetry while we were out and about. As soon as we heard his backstory, we realised he embodies what Wigan Borough is all about; proud of his home, community-minded, and above all else, kind and funny.

He's an ideal Borough Life cover star and we enjoyed the photo shoot in Mesnes Park.

## Check out the BoroughLife podcast

Don't miss the monthly episodes with hosts Hayley, Lucy and James, available on all major podcast platforms. [Linktr.ee/wigancouncil](https://linktr.ee/wigancouncil)

An accessible version of our magazine is available to view online on our Borough Life webpage. [www.wigan.gov.uk/BoroughLife](https://www.wigan.gov.uk/BoroughLife)



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For general comments email: [PR@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:PR@wigan.gov.uk)



## Follow Wigan Council



## Agilisys moves into new home at Civic

A technology firm that works alongside more than 120 councils has relocated its headquarters to Wigan Borough, in what has been described as a “game changing moment”.

Founded in 1998, Agilisys is a digital services and AI software company, focused on helping local government take advantage of technology.

With a workforce of more than 300 specialists, Agilisys is the trusted digital partner of local authorities across the UK, and after almost three decades in the capital, the firm has decided to move its main base of operations to the repurposed Civic building in Wigan town centre.

Councillor Nazia Rehman, portfolio holder for finance, resources, and transformation, said: “As Wigan Council is looking to be at the forefront of advances in digital



Representatives from Wigan Council, Agilisys, and digital partners at a recent event at Civic

and AI technologies, the relocation of Agilisys is a game-changing moment. It highlights the type of innovative and forward-thinking companies that want to come and work here.

“The move is not only a massive display of confidence in our borough and digital ambitions, it also signals significant employment, skills, and

development opportunities for our workers and young people, as well as benefits for our public services and local businesses.

“Following the impressive revival of the old Civic building, which encouraged Agilisys to relocate their operations, this is an exciting sign of things to come with various other regeneration projects in the pipeline across the town centre.”

## Tackling off-road bike nuisance in your communities

An operation to tackle the anti-social use of off-road bikes has seen such success in Wigan Borough that it has been adopted across Greater Manchester. In May 2024, Operation Handbrake was launched in response to repeated reports of anti-social behaviour and nuisance caused by off-road bikers in areas across the borough.



Forming part of the Community Safety Partnership between Wigan Council and Greater Manchester Police, the operation led to the seizures of 101 bikes last year, an increase from 68 in 2024.

There have also been several arrests over the past 18 months and up to a 66 per cent reduction

in reports in hotspot areas, with these positive results leading to the operation being adopted across Greater Manchester’s 10 districts.

Councillor Kevin Anderson, portfolio holder for police, crime and civil contingencies, said: “It is great to see such positive results since the launch of Operation Handbrake, which highlights a genuine partnership between the council and police, and a commitment to tackling issues that matter most to our residents.

“I’m really proud that the success of the operation has led to it becoming a force-wide initiative, but our work does not stop here. We will continue to be tough on anti-social bikers to ensure that our residents feel safe and can enjoy our public spaces.”

## Hospice team is the star attraction



Wigan and Leigh Hospice is the latest organisation to receive a coveted Believe Star.

Representatives from their amazing team visited Wigan Town Hall in February for an unveiling ceremony (pictured above).

They will have a Star placed both in Believe Square, Wigan, and Civic Square in Leigh, to reflect their contribution to families across our borough for decades. Their compassion and unwavering support for those in need is an example to us all.

## Here for You support hits £15m

Wigan Council’s cost-of-living campaign has reached another significant milestone.

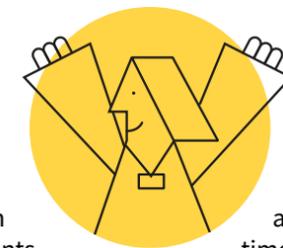
Here For You has surpassed the £15m mark, meaning this amount of previously unclaimed financial support has now been received by our residents.

The campaign sees council officers work closely with partners to identify opportunities to access support that households are entitled to.

Councillor Susan Gambles, cabinet holder for housing and welfare, said: “This additional income can have a life-changing impact.

“Our teams are there to offer expert guidance and support and each time we reach a milestone like this we are determined to continue our efforts to help our communities.”

[www.wigan.gov.uk/hereforyou](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/hereforyou)



## Blue plaques announced for 2026

A historic seat of learning and a renowned scientist whose work has had a lasting impact will receive Wigan Borough blue plaques. Following a public nomination process throughout 2025, Wigan Grammar School and Dr John Garton have been chosen by Wigan Council.

Wigan Grammar School’s plaque will be placed at the Thomas

Linacre Centre on Parson’s Walk, Wigan, and Dr Garton’s at his family home in Golborne.

Councillor Chris Ready, cabinet holder for communities and neighbourhoods, said: “Both recipients exemplify the values of progress and excellence that our borough celebrates, and we look forward to unveiling these plaques in 2026.”

## Around the borough

In **Hindley**, a project to upgrade the railway station is underway. It will see £6.5m of investment to install two passenger lifts and a new footbridge. Works have been planned to keep the station open throughout the construction period.

A popular play area in **Standish** reopened in late 2025 following an investment in new equipment. Upgrades to Ashfield Park, on Wigan Road, included a new multi-play unit and netted climbing frame, along with swings, seesaws, balance beams and more.

The historic **Tyldesley** Library has reopened following a major refurbishment and £1.5m investment. As a result all library related services have now returned to the much-loved Grade II listed building on Stanley Street.

In **Leigh**, the multi-million pound Youth Hub outside the Progress with Unity Stadium recently celebrated its third birthday. Opened in 2023 following a £2m investment by Wigan Council, the hub has helped thousands of young people.

Community projects in **Atherton** are set to receive a share of a £1.5m funding pot from the national Pride in Place Impact scheme. More details will become available throughout 2026.

Looking to get online and learn new digital skills? Our new Digi Dens are available at Family Hub locations at The Meadows, Ridyard Street, **Wigan**, Mornington Road, **Hindley** and Formby Avenue, **Atherton**. More information can be found at [www.wigan.gov.uk/familyhubs](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/familyhubs)

Older and disabled people across **Wigan Borough** will benefit from free round-the-clock travel on Bee Network buses, with the permanent lifting of the 9.30am restrictions on concessionary passes from March.

## Green means go for road maintenance

Wigan Council has been ranked at the top of the charts when it comes to its approach to road maintenance.

Following the government's recently introduced traffic light rating system in measuring how well councils are maintaining local roads, Wigan Council is one of only 16 out of 154 local authorities to achieve the top rating - placing it in the top 11 per cent across the country.

The ratings have been determined by the Department for Transport, looking into the current condition of local roads, how much councils are spending on maintenance, and how effectively local authorities are following best practice.



With our road network encompassing more than 1,000km, this green rating has been achieved thanks to the investment in preventative maintenance and the quick and effective response to reactive works.

Councillor Paul Prescott (pictured), cabinet portfolio holder for environmental services and transport, said: "We take the approach that prevention is better than cure, with proactive works to tackle problems before they happen."

"Nearly 90 per cent of our investment in roads is spent on preventative maintenance, assessing roads for early signs of wear and carrying out earlier interventions, at a lower cost than reactive works."

## Election time for Wigan Borough

Wigan Borough will go to the polls in May with a third of the seats in the council chamber up for grabs.

Local elections take place in three out of every four years in our borough, meaning 25 out of the full 75 seats are contested each time.

For full information about the 2026 elections, including voter identification requirements, polling station locations, and results, please visit:

[www.wigan.gov.uk/Elections](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/Elections)



Election day is Thursday, 7 May. Make sure you're registered to vote:

[www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote)

## Leigh park's new tree trail for curious nature lovers

A new digital tree trail is helping visitors to a popular Leigh park learn more about nature.

Created by Wigan Council in collaboration with local social enterprise Leigh Hackspace, the trail at Pennington Hall Park lets curious residents scan a QR code for facts about different tree species.

There are 15 separate scan points in total, all featuring the specimen's English and Latin names and linking to a webpage with information such as where the tree is native to, its growing conditions, and other species features.

Councillor Chris Ready, cabinet portfolio holder for communities and neighbourhoods, said: "We all love a stroll at the park and admiring the trees – but most of us probably don't know our Ash from our Elder!"



"That's why we've created the Pennington Hall Park QR Tree Trail, so those who want to know more about what they're looking at can simply pull out their phone, scan the sign and read all about the different species."

"It's a fun idea that we hope will encourage people to visit the park,

take time to connect and interact with nature, and be more curious about the world around them."

Species found at Pennington Hall Park include Golden Weeping Willow, Japanese Maple, London Plane and the unusually named Handkerchief Tree.

## Football hubs celebrating more than two years of community success

From the next generation following in the footsteps of Ella Toone, to those enjoying a casual kickabout with mates, thousands have been enjoying the state-of-the-art football hubs in Wigan Borough.

The sites at Laithwaite Park, Wigan, and William Fosters, Ince, have become new homes for community clubs and organisations with thousands taking advantage of the first-class facilities.

Opened in 2023 and operated by charitable trust Leisure United, the two hubs have provided matchday and training slots for 167 teams from 20 affiliated clubs, with 3,602 affiliated matches taking place last season.

Wigan Council invested more than £5m, alongside a £7.6m grant from the Football Foundation, to bring the projects forward. The hubs' community facilities have



also seen local organisations such as mental health and disability groups base their sessions from the site.

Councillor Nazia Rehman (pictured above at the opening of the hub), cabinet portfolio holder for finance, resources and transformation, said: "A lot of hard work was put in behind the scenes

to make this project a reality, so it's great to see the participation levels at both of these state-of-the-art facilities.

"I'm particularly proud to see the increased usage from women and girls teams, and that people of all ages and backgrounds have taken the opportunity to play here."

## Lights, camera, action: Filming fund set to help creative youngsters

A new fund will allow young people to film a documentary with chart-topping band The Lottery Winners, following a major BBC production at Leigh Town Hall.

The new initiative from Wigan Council, working alongside its cultural partners, means 100 per cent of BBC filming fees will be reinvested back into the town.

A production crew for a prime-time drama has now wrapped at the town hall, marking a first significant filming boost for the site.

A range of creative opportunities will be provided for young people as a result, including the chance to document the build-up to chart-toppers The Lottery Winners' huge hometown gigs at the Progress With Unity Stadium in 2026.

Councillor Keith Cunliffe, deputy leader of Wigan Council, said:



Councillor Cunliffe, The Lottery Winners, Curious Minds, and Northern Heart Film

"Leigh is a brilliant place full of young people who have so much to offer and so much potential."

"I'm so proud that we have been able to reinvest 100 per cent of the profits raised through the BBC filming at Leigh Town Hall right back into the local community, working alongside local partners and bringing opportunity to the

town; all while boosting our Film Friendly Borough ambitions. This is Progress with Unity in action."

Curious Minds, a local charity aiming to improve access to arts education and cultural learning, will also be receiving some of the money to deliver small grants for young people across the borough.



# Shop fronts shine in regeneration spotlight

A flagship project providing a makeover for shop fronts in the heart of Ashton-in-Makerfield is underway.

With the first works starting in September, a handful of businesses have undergone their glow-ups with a further dozen on the schedule for 2026.

It's all part of the Our Future Ashton regeneration project with well-known names Cupcakery, Indulge Hair (pictured above), and Ashton Thai Spa among those to have benefitted from the works so far.

Owner of Indulge Hair, Heather Fletcher, said: "I'm incredibly grateful to receive this grant to support our

shopfront renovation. As a local girl who has lived and worked here my entire life, co-owning the business for 11 years, plus a further four years as sole owner, I know this town means everything to so many people.

"Owning a business has its challenges these days, so any support is received with open arms."

The project sees high-quality upgrades to the shop fronts, as well as conservation and restoration work to high street buildings.

This could be anything from repair and redecoration works to more intricate measures to help the high street maintain its unique look and feel, within a conservation area.

As part of the wider Our Future Ashton scheme – which will see £6.6m invested in the town – a new market square catering for a wide range of traders and set-up to host community functions is in the pipeline.

With another 12 businesses set to have their shop fronts refurbished before spring, keep your eye out next time you are in the town centre.

Heather added: "We've already had a lot of positive feedback from our lovely clients and the facelift has definitely helped us stand out from being tucked away in the corner.

"It's wonderful to see our community thriving and getting a fresh new face-lift and I'm thankful to be part of our little town's journey."



**Councillor Nazia Rehman, cabinet portfolio holder for finance, resources and transformation, said:**

"Investment in shopfront improvement schemes is about more than aesthetics; it's about confidence. Grant funding allows us to help local businesses refresh their premises, attract customers and trade sustainably.

"When combined with wider public realm works, these improvements create safer, more welcoming town centres that people want to visit and spend time in.

"The result is stronger local economies, renewed pride of place and high streets that can adapt and thrive for the future."

But there isn't just one shop front improvement scheme taking place in the borough, so move over Ashton, because Leigh is undergoing its own makeover.

In addition to its wider regeneration project – which includes redevelopment of Civic Square and Market Place, plus a refurbished Leigh Market – the high street has also been given a boost. You may have seen the first completed project at Leigh's Tearoom & Community Hub, which is taking up space at the former Finesse gift shop on Bradshawgate.

Offering a selection of scrumptious, homecooked meals, the 1920s themed tearoom also donates organic produce to residents in need and provides a welcoming space to

connect, network, and support the community.

Val Hogan, founder of the community project, said: "Everything we do gets reinvested into the community, and our new shop front has had an amazing impact. "We have had lovely feedback and lots of people coming to visit us. The unique touches and attention to detail are fabulous, and it feels like there is quite a bit of excitement on Bradshawgate now that the regeneration project is starting."

Building work has also begun at Twentymans Pizza, Jazz Hairdressing, and 97-99 Bradshawgate, with 15 grants made available to upgrade premises and revamp shop fronts throughout Leigh town centre.

Funding for these aspects of Leigh and Ashton's regeneration schemes was secured by Wigan Council through the government's Local Regeneration Fund



**Funded by UK Government**

[www.wigan.gov.uk/OurFutureAshton](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/OurFutureAshton)  
[www.wigan.gov.uk/LeighRegenerationProject](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/LeighRegenerationProject)



## Fetters is on the up and up

A giant Fetters crane has been towering over Wigan town centre in recent weeks, signifying the works on the exciting redevelopment are gathering pace.

Big milestones have also been ticked off and now 2026 has arrived, we can say the new market hall will be open for business later this winter.

Keen-eyed visitors will have spotted that 100 per cent of the steel structure for the market hall is now in place. And at the time of going to press (in mid-February), the installation of the roof is underway.

As weeks go by, we can also see the striking new entrance to the market - opening up onto Market Gate - taking shape.

“It’s great to think that later this year, our residents will be doing their Christmas shopping in the brand-new market hall,” said Leader of Wigan Council, Councillor David Molyneux MBE.

“We’re pleased with the progress – you will see more of the structure of the hotel over the next few months – and we’re excited to see



all the phases of Fetters continue to come forward.

“Another big part of the development is the opportunities it is creating. There are loads of people on site at Fetters who live in this borough and students and apprentices from Wigan and Leigh

College are getting hands-on experience.”

The foundations have now been laid for the 144-bedroom Hampton by Hilton hotel, which will be six storeys tall and operated by Leaf Hospitality.

The hotel is scheduled to open in winter 2027, meanwhile, be sure to keep an eye out for further updates on all things Fetters because there is lots to come.

To follow the latest news from Fetters, visit  
Facebook: **Fetters Wigan**  
Instagram: **fetterswigan**  
Tiktok: **fetterswigan**  
LinkedIn: **Fetters**  
[www.fetters.co.uk](http://www.fetters.co.uk)



## Leigh’s Civic Square takes centre stage

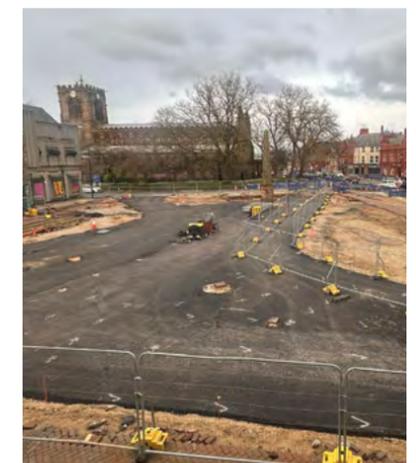
Eye-catching progress has been made at Leigh’s Civic Square.

Visitors to the popular town centre location will soon be able to enjoy new paving, seating, planting, trees, and an event space designed for community use.

Working alongside the Leigh, Atherton, and Tyldesley Heritage Group, a heritage timeline has also been designed to feature key events from the square’s past.

Additionally, the square’s Believe Stars will also be refreshed and local poet Louise Fazackerley has created a poem that will be carved into the new paving, reflecting on the area’s history.

This has been developed with input from local youth group ‘Leigh Young Writers’. Work is continuing at pace and is expected to be completed in the summer.





Warriors players and Believe Talent Fund athletes at the official grand reopening of the gym and studios at Robin Park

# Kicking off a new era at Robin Park

No more than a long throw-in or '40/20' from The Brick Community Stadium, Wigan's two professional sports clubs are making themselves a new home.

Yes, Latics' and Warriors' official charities have both moved in with their Be Well neighbours – and with all that's been happening here lately it's no surprise they want to be part of it.

A recent refurb, bringing fresh decor and the very latest fitness equipment, has the gym and studio spaces looking on point.

The old Café Life is having a much-needed makeover too; being rebranded and relocated to the main lobby to create the warmest of welcomes for visitors.

And at Robin Park, that's not just fitness fanatics or pickleball enthusiasts.

No, depending on the time of year, you might spot world champ Luke 'the Nuke' Littler or another big name from darts or snooker – when a professional tournament is on – or even Batman, Doctor Who or Darth Vader if Comic-Con happens to be in town.

More usually, it'll be someone here for a cardiac rehab class, a medical appointment (the local NHS trust have clinics here), a gymnastics lesson, or to head into The Zone – the fabulous day centre for adults with disabilities and complex needs.

"We've always wanted to be more than somewhere people come to get fit or enjoy a sport," explains the centre's general manager Gary Highton.

"So yes, we're super excited about our new gym and the feedback from customers has been amazing!

"But just as important to us is what's happening with Café Life, with The Zone, with the NHS and our successful health and wellbeing events, and now with Latics and Warriors too.

"We've had a really close relationship with them for a long time and now we're so happy to make a home for them here.

"So much goes on here every day at Robin Park," says Gary. "We like to see ourselves as the beating heart of our community, and now we're taking that to the next level."

For the clubs, Robin Park's community hub is the ideal new home for their charitable foundations.

And with such a good relationship already – and the same goal of making a difference to local residents – moving in together makes perfect sense.

"Having a dedicated space means we can deliver our key programmes in rugby development, education, health and wellbeing, inclusion, and athletics," explains Scott Rafferty of the Warriors Community Foundation, who've relocated from a smaller space over the road at the arena.

"We've really grown as a team over the last 18 months, so we needed a working space that reflects that growth. It provides a base for our staff to continue to develop.

"It also gives us the opportunity to work even more closely with local schools, clubs, and community groups, helping people of all ages get active, learn new skills, and connect with one another.

"We're also thrilled to share a working space with Wigan Athletic Community Trust, continuing to build relationships and work cohesively to support the whole community."

Latics haven't had to move far either, swapping offices next door to the centre for their new, better connected space.



Joe Adams and Joe Hungbo



“We’ve always had a strong relationship with Wigan Council, Be Well and the Warriors, but this move will turn Robin Park Leisure Centre into a hub for community collaboration where we can all work closer together,” says head of community Gareth Nolan.

“The facilities here will really enhance the programmes we deliver - whether it’s using the gym for health programmes, or the new classrooms for students on our Football and Education or University of South Wales programmes.

“These new facilities will help us to support people at the heart of our communities to improve their health and reach their full potential.

“We’re really excited to be here, and to continue our charitable work with Wigan Athletic FC towards equality in health, life chances and communities.”

Add in the revitalised Café Life, and Robin Park Leisure Centre is much more than ‘just a gym’ or sports venue. That said, if it’s fitness you’re into then you won’t be disappointed.

Here you’ll find all the latest gear you need to get or stay in shape – only without the obsession about body image.

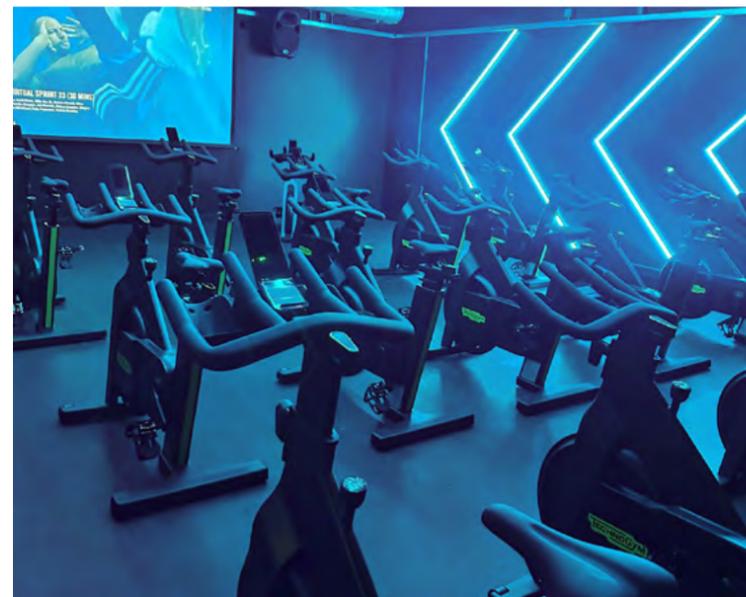
“For us it’s a lot more holistic,” Gary explains. “For instance, we particularly love our new Technogym Checkup machine, which tells you all sorts of things like your muscle mass, your mobility and your ‘wellness age’ so you can really track your health gains.

“That’s really important for our members, because at Be Well we’re not about fitness fads and physical appearances – we’re about being active, healthy and happy, and it’s more what’s on the inside that counts.”

And at Robin Park Leisure Centre, these days that’s a lot!



Warriors' Ethan Havard, George O'Loughlin and Kian McDermott



## Perks to being a Be Well member

Robin Park is the fourth Be Well leisure centre to get a makeover in the last year or so. Ashton, Howe Bridge and Leigh have also had the treatment, while Wigan and Standish have new gyms coming very soon and Hindley isn’t being forgotten either – with long-term options being explored there.

Be Well Fitness members get to use all seven centres so they can fit workouts around work or home life and try all there is to offer at the different sites.

Membership includes unlimited gym and swimming sessions, a full selection of group exercise classes and popular sports sessions like walking football, pickleball, netball and more... plus steam rooms and saunas to relax and recover.

Councillor Chris Ready, cabinet portfolio holder for communities and neighbourhoods, said: “Be Well is creating spaces where absolutely everybody – not just fitness fanatics – can move more and enjoy a whole range of activities to support their health and wellbeing.”

And right now there’s even better news for readers of BoroughLife! You can get one month **FREE** on a Be Well membership when you join using the exclusive promo code **BOROUGH LIFE26**

Visit [bewellwigan.org/membership](http://bewellwigan.org/membership) (t&cs apply, offer expires 31.05.26).

Follow Be Well on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok @bewellwigan



Karen and her yoga class

# Teeing up for a taste sensation in Shevy

It's the spring edition and we're back trying new places to eat and fun things to do.

This time, we have made our way to Shevington; a small village with strong vibes.

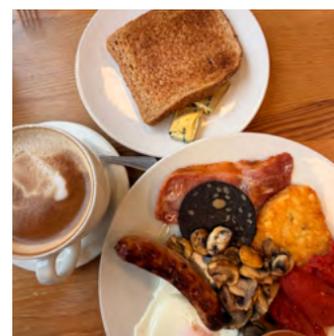
A quick delve into its history reveals its link to basket-weaving and in the present day cosy food and drink spots are interwoven with a strong community feeling.

First things first: breakfast, naturally. Over at Shevington Village Kitchen & Catering, the beauty is that breakfast is served all day.

The menu had everything, including vegan and gluten-

free options. There's even a slimmer's version of the full-English classic. We opted for the mini-breakfast (pictured below), but there was nothing 'mini' about the flavour.

It was packed with bacon, egg, sausage, mushrooms, black pudding, plum tomatoes and toast.



They have the breakfast experience absolutely nailed down and, accompanied by a cappuccino by the window, it's the perfect start to the morning.

"I decided to open here because I liked the size and feel of the place," explains owner Louise. "The community has been so supportive, and we've got many regulars now, which is great."

Speaking of great, did I mention the gluten-free options? A proper selection, including cakes. It would've been rude not to take a slice of the banoffee cake home with us... so of course we did.

The team at Juniper



Now, for a bit of a key change. Anyone for a spot of golf? Tucked in just after the Co-op you'll find Gathurst Golf Club, which for a non-golfer like us, it's a bit of a hidden gem.

The club dates back to 1913, and when you step inside, the sense of history hits you straight away. The walls are lined with proud captains from years gone by.

There's a bit of something for everyone, whether you're a long time member, fancy just turning up for a casual round, or want to get the girls involved, there's even a Girls That Golf club for women and girls looking to play.

And if golf isn't your thing, the club also offers a brilliant function room overlooking the course an unbeatable backdrop for any celebration.

From teeing off to tuning in, we headed over to Shevington Methodist Church for a calming yoga session. Karen has been teaching in the village for the best part of a decade.

Gathurst Golf Club



"You never regret doing a yoga class," she told us. And honestly, she's right. "A lot of people have been with me since the start, and seeing the commitment is amazing. I even run retreats up in the Lakes too."

The room was set up beautifully: mats arranged in a calming circle around candles and incense. Karen eased us in with gentle breathing and intention setting for the month.

And if you've never done yoga before, here's the nice surprise: it's not just about stretching or trying not to fall over. It's really about giving your mind a peaceful little holiday.

If you're sticking around Shevington after dark and fancy something a bit special, there's one place you have to try.

Just across from Shevington Park sits Juniper, a cosy little restaurant that packs more flavour than you'd think possible for somewhere tucked so unassumingly into the village. And let's be honest... if it's good enough

Gammon with all the trimmings



for the Michelin Guide, it's good enough for us.

Juniper is run by Chris, who wanted to create a place where people could relax with their mates or family without losing that high quality, modern dining experience.

We went in with the noble intention of just having a Sunday roast.

Just a roast; simple, sensible.

Naturally, we rolled out after three courses because we have absolutely no self-control when food is this good.

For those taking notes, we're talking wild mushroom and truffle baked tart, maple-cured roast gammon with all the trimmings, followed by apple and cinnamon crumble. Absolutely banging.

So, farewell, Shevington. Weaving together great food, fun activities and community spirit.

We'd love to know your favourite local food hotspot and where you'd like us to visit next! Fill in the online form for your chance to win! Terms and conditions apply. [wigan.gov.uk/boroughlifecomp](http://wigan.gov.uk/boroughlifecomp)

**WIN £200**  
to spend at Juniper!



# Breaking down barriers with a smile

Performance poet The Chubby Northerner on how the arts can change your life



You may be familiar with the work of Tom Stocks without realising it.

His pavement poetry project will have caused thousands to pause in the middle of the street and ponder over the inspirational – and wholly unexpected – words at their feet.

Under his performance name The Chubby Northerner, you may also be aware of his Positive Poetry Scrolls, given 100 were scattered across the region last year.

Or you may have spotted him on TV or his heart-warming PO-E-TEA videos on social media. Whatever the access point, Tom’s witty turn of phrase, engaging nature and enthusiasm shines through.

The borough-based performer is passionate about making the arts accessible and is on a mission to spread positivity; to make people feel happier and less alone.

“Taking part in something artistic, whatever that is, is proven to help people’s mental health and wellbeing. It makes you happy,” he explains to Borough Life.

“It helps with confidence and social skills. It might help you manage something that’s been difficult.”

Tom’s relationship with the arts – like some things in life – can be complicated. He’s convinced about its ability to change lives for the better.

But it can be frustrating, with the elitism often surrounding poetry, theatre, and writing, meaning it can be inaccessible for those who may stand to benefit the most.

“One of my aims is about breaking down barriers to spoken word and poetry and bringing it to places where you might not normally find it,” he says.

“I’ve been lucky enough to work in some beautiful theatres, but you find that the grandiose nature of the buildings or the perception of, ‘going to the theatre’ can sometimes put people off getting involved in an opportunity like that.

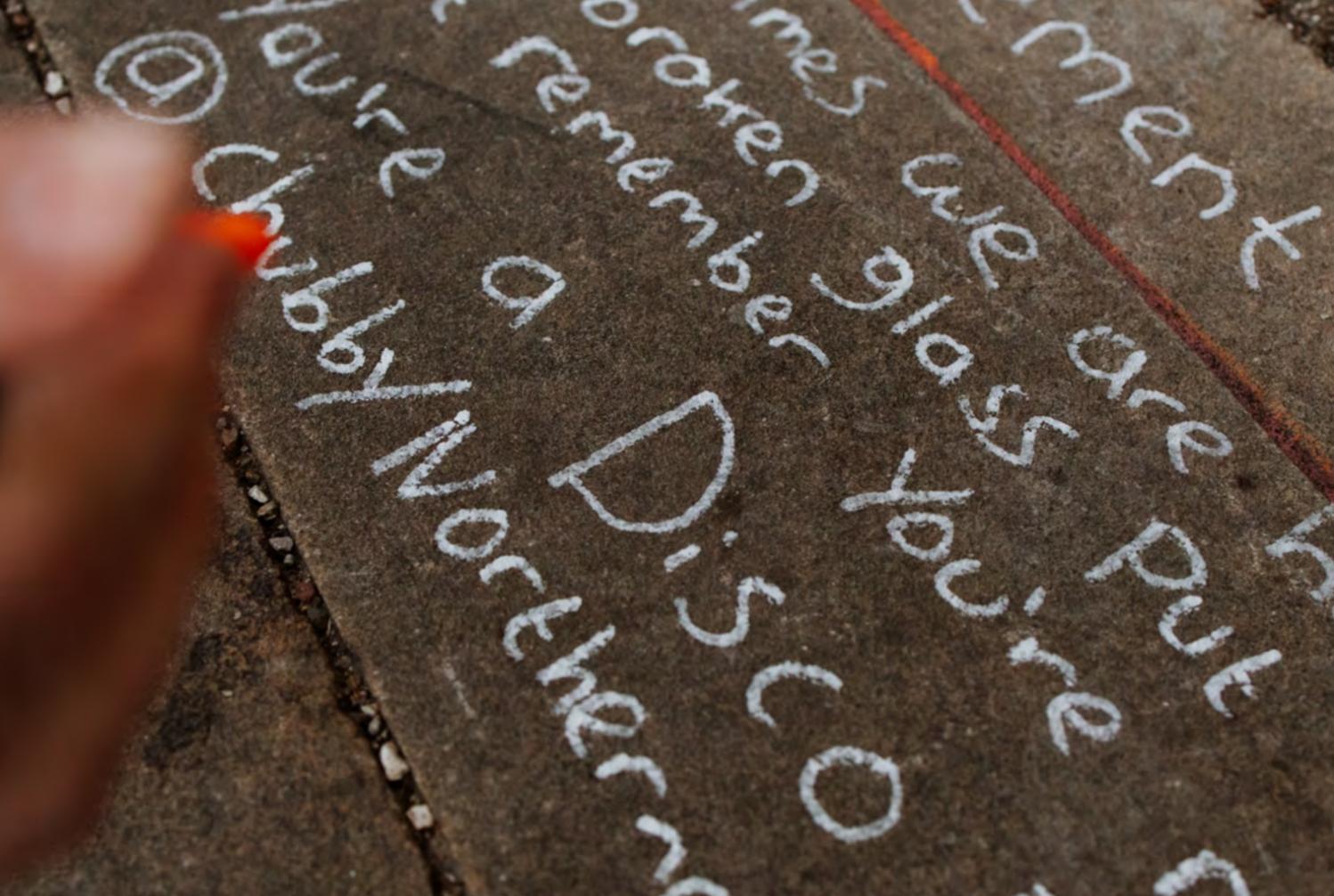
“I want to take arts to where people are already, to everyday places.”

He cites projects such as a recent display about Wigan Casino in the town centre, as an example of how to make the arts more accessible.

“People were reading the information and looking at the photography, but they weren’t thinking about the fact that this was art, I think because even the word, ‘arts’ has so much elitism surrounding it.”



Lucy and Hayley from the Borough Life podcast team meet Tom at Mesnes Park



This elitism can be a barrier not only to people getting involved, but to people believing that the arts have anything to offer communities at all, he believes.

It can also be problematic in terms of ensuring creative art projects and organisations have enough funding to reach everyone.

“It frustrates me so much when people say they don’t believe in the arts,” he says.

“The arts doesn’t have to be about creating Shakespeare. I’ll say, ‘How can you not believe in art? Do you never watch telly? Do you never listen to the radio?’ If you had to live without any of the arts in your life, you wouldn’t last long.”

He is particularly keen that young people are given opportunities and is working with Curious Minds (a borough-based national charity that helps bring artists and young people together).

“It’s amazing when you give children permission to be fun and silly in a world where they are so quick to be told to grow up. Poetry can help them to find that playfulness again.”

Tom’s mission to breaking down barriers reflects his own occasionally turbulent journey with the arts and in education.

His first poem was written aged 11: “I’d forgotten all about this poem, my grandma found it recently, it was about Christmas, and it got put into a book,” but he was predicted to leave school with no qualifications. He went on to get an A-grade in drama and later secured a place at a drama school but couldn’t afford to accept the place.

“I knew I had the talent, but the financial barriers stopped me.”

Undeterred, he moved to London and set up a movement called #ActorAwareness to protest barriers to working class artists, launching his own theatre company, securing performance

spaces for free or minimal costs, and recruiting actors from working class backgrounds to perform.

The movement was supported by high profile actors who had originally come from working class backgrounds themselves, including Julie Hesmondhalgh and Sir Ian McKellen.

In London, whilst working in a call centre to support himself, Tom started writing sketches and began his first play but still hadn’t considered pursuing poetry until he discovered the Northern spoken word artists JB Barrington and Aargh Kid.

“Hearing poetry in a northern accent, about subjects I could relate to, helped to make it all more accessible for me, I’d never heard anything like that before.”

In 2020, Tom moved back up north, finished the play he’d been writing in the call centre, and won an award from the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester. Inspired by the

everyday themes of the northern spoken word artists he’d discovered in London, he gave performance poetry a go, with his first gig at an open mic night at The Pear Tree in Wigan.

He hasn’t looked back since, touring, writing more plays, having his poems broadcast on TV, and publishing his book, ‘Lovely Chubby’.

“For someone who had been predicted to get no GCSEs, having my own book felt like a massive achievement,” Tom says.

His poetry covers everyday life from bins, to football, to male mental health and body positivity, which is a subject he feels strongly about.

“The name, The Chubby Northerner actually came about when I was working in the call centre, and I would use any spare time I had to email agents and introduce myself. I used to give my emails the title, ‘Chubby Northerner’ to get their attention.

“It is a little self-deprecating, but I see it as reclaiming that term, to make it affectionate. Body positivity isn’t often spoken about in terms of men, even though body image and appearance are a massive contributing factor to male mental health.”

So, what’s next for Tom? The answer, like almost everything about him, is unexpected.

“I’ve just started magnet fishing. I’ve set up a group where we go magnet fishing in the canals around Leigh and write poetry about whatever we find.”

Despite his unquestionable success, Tom admits that he sometimes still struggles with imposter syndrome.

“I’ve only just gone full time as a freelance poet and it is so weird if anyone asks what I do. I also know that there are certain areas of the arts where my work wouldn’t be accepted, more elite worlds where maybe it wouldn’t be classed as poetry.

“But I also tell myself that I could go into almost any pub and perform spoken word. I would be nervous at first but I could turn most audiences around and they would be appreciating poetry, without even realising it.”

Tom’s latest book called, “Chubb Actually” by local Wigan publisher Maddison Press, comes out later this year.

Find Tom on social media @TheChubbyNortherner



Listen to the BoroughLife podcast with Tom

linktr.ee/wigancouncil

“ I was blown away on my first visit ”

Even with an impressive career history at well-known cultural venues across the UK, Kate Brindley was still dazzled by the unique draw of Haigh.

That rousing feeling will be familiar to regular visitors to Wigan’s ‘Jewel in the Crown’.

But for this relative newcomer, it has brought with it a sense of excitement and anticipation of what’s to come.

Kate, who has recently taken up the post as head of cultural programming, told Borough Life: “I was pretty blown away by the scale and the potential.

“At that point I hadn’t even been inside the hall itself. The potential of transforming these buildings is something else.

“And it’s just an incredible landscape (the woodland park). It’s just so impressive.”

Kate has already made big inroads when it comes to mapping out the cultural ambitions of the site.

The ambition is for the hall to appeal to wider audiences once



its transformation is complete, and for the wider site to provide opportunities for everyone.

“That’s the aspiration, to give those opportunities. Haigh is for the young, the old and everyone in between,” she says.

“We want to offer a high-quality destination that is accessible, diverse, welcoming, and leaves people feeling inspired.

“From visual arts, immersive experiences, and even film or performance-based exhibitions, it’s an exciting mix.”

Kate joins the team having worked as an expert consultant within the arts and culture sector, following successful tenures at the iconic Chatsworth House in Derbyshire and the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA) amongst others.



Creative arts have been a passion throughout her life, and her new role is much more than just another job.

“Working in the arts is a vocation, not a career, because I think it takes huge commitment and passion, and that’s something that I have been driven by for 30 years,” she says.

“Growing up, I was very creative. I was really interested in creative subjects and was a talented artist as a youngster.

“Then I started school, and they started taking us to museums, that’s when this whole new world opened up for me. It really opened up my imagination.”

With work on the Haigh transformation continuing at pace, it’s clear that the future of the site – and its cultural offer – is bright.

People, culture and horticulture are all central to the project and there’s so much opportunity that comes with its future.

And given Kate’s impressive background, it’s no surprise her summation of Haigh’s potential comes in the form of an arts and culture metaphor.

“The great thing about the hall and the park is they’re massive canvasses, aren’t they?

“Not only is Haigh a beautiful, amazing park, but we’re soon going to have an incredible new cultural venue and incredible new gardens.

“It’s a really great project for Wigan Borough; the scale of it, the opportunity it’s going to bring.

“I think everyone is in for a real treat.”

To stay up to date with all of the projects at Haigh, follow Haigh on Instagram: [@haigh.hall](https://www.instagram.com/haigh.hall)

## Haigh 2026, a year to look forward to



**Landing in 2026** is an exciting, comet themed play trail! Located at various points around the site, the celestial structures are due to descend in the summer.



**Plantation Gates and Lodges** will be open after a sympathetic restoration. One lodge will be a customer information point, the other will showcase an artistic installation. Opening in summer.



**A new space for outdoor adventure** activities and a coffee kiosk will be opening in Haigh’s historic woodland this year. The woodland hub will open for exploration in the summer.



**The Woodland Railway** will be carrying passengers again during 2026. Part of the railway will be in operation following the restoration to take visitors on a scenic journey through the woodland once more.

Thank you to our funding partners:



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Children's Services at their end of year celebration

# Children's voices at the heart of what we do

Outstanding practice in children's services is making a positive difference to the lives of young people across Wigan Borough, according to a key inspection report.

Ofsted – the independent government regulator – visited Wigan Council in October.

The result followed in November, with the authority receiving a 'Good' rating. In particular, the council's "exceptional support" for care leavers and the "outstanding service" for children in care were highlighted.

For our teams – who work tirelessly day-in, day-out – it was a ringing endorsement of their approach.

'Exceptional', 'outstanding' and 'significant strength' were just some of the ways the inspector described how services are delivered.

For example, children's voices and perspectives are central to decision-making and there is a strong, family-focused and child-centred culture, they added.

The report is available to read in full, and we would urge you to have a look.

But here we have picked out some of the standout sections and asked those involved in the services for the inside track on what it means to them.

“

Children in care receive an outstanding service that significantly enhances their daily experiences and life opportunities

The report outlined how meaningful relationships with social workers goes a long way to help children thrive in difficult circumstances. Helen, a local social worker, said: "Relationships are the foundation of everything. When our children and young people trust us, they grow in confidence, resilience and hope.

"The approach to social work at Wigan Council is focused on the child, and using the Family Safeguarding Model we work with families to support them to stay together and take parents with us on the journey. Supporting children in care isn't just about plans and processes, it's about connection. Every child deserves someone who sees their strengths, listens to their story and believe in their future."

“

Senior leaders in Wigan Borough provide ambitious and effective leadership that has progressed improvement across children's services

"Throughout my first three years as a social worker, I have felt supported by my colleagues, managers and senior management.

"I feel that Wigan Council have really invested in me as a social worker and I've had access to lots of training opportunities that have helped to improve my knowledge and practice," says Jen, a local social worker.

"There is a really friendly, helpful and kind culture, I have always felt that I can seek out support when I need to in order to improve my practice and provide the best service to the families that we support.

“

Children's voices are central to decision-making and they have influenced key decisions and service design

Special focus is given to listening to different perspectives and experiences of young people to help inform how the service operates.

"From social workers and early help practitioners, to housing teams, health partners and education colleagues, we listen to children's voices and never stop striving for better," explains Colette Dutton, director of children's services.

"Inspectors found that we have created a stable, skilled and motivated workforce underpinned by kindness, accountability and high aspiration.

"The participation of children in decision making is a hallmark of good practice in Wigan Borough. That makes me very proud."



“ Political and corporate commitment to children remains strong, with continued investment despite financial pressures. This has created a stable, skilled and motivated workforce underpinned by kindness

“The dedication, skill and passion of our entire workforce shines through the pages of this report and I would like to thank our officers for delivering consistently high outcomes for children and families in our borough,” says Councillor Dane Anderton (pictured below), cabinet portfolio holder for children and families.

“The improvement journey the service has been on is something to be proud of and we will ensure - in line with our Progress With Unity values - that we continue to deliver excellent services and make further progress in areas where we know we have more to do.

“It confirms what we already know; that our borough is ambitious for its children, and we have a strong culture of kindness, inclusion and high expectations.”



“ Care leavers receive exceptional support from personal advisors who demonstrate genuine care, commitment and pride in the young people

The team ensures young adults leaving care are supported as they take those first steps to living independently. Aaron (pictured above at the Car Leaver Awards), who is the 2025 Care Leaver of the Year, has just completed a degree in professional policing and has the support network of his own advisor and his foster family.

“I’m proud to work to be the best person I can be,” he explains.

“You really feel that you have someone behind you, with your PA and foster carer. It goes to show that anyone can do anything.

“I’ve finished my degree and joined the police. Along with social workers, the police were the people that really made a difference when I was young and my life changed from there.”

To read more about the Ofsted report visit: [www.wigan.gov.uk/News](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/News)



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## Karen's amazing journey to success out on the ice

If someone asked you to name a sport you'd associate with Wigan Borough, it might very well be bottom of the list.

But thanks to a post-lockdown hobby that got out of hand, our unlikely new obsession is... curling! It's all thanks to Standish-born Karen Aspey (pictured), a former wheelchair basketball player who was bored of being stuck at home after Covid.

When a friend asked if she might fancy heading up to Stranraer for a go at a game more synonymous with Scottish housewives, she literally had nothing better to do.

Five years on she's now taking on the world with Team GB at the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Paralympics (6-15 March).

"To be honest it was just an excuse to get out," Karen tells Borough Life. "I never expected it to lead to this. I only did it out of boredom, so to make it all the way to the Paralympics is amazing!"

Yes, it's an unlikely tale all-round; a born and bred Wiganer with no previous curling experience, rising through the ranks of a niche winter sport dominated (in the UK at least) by players from north of the border.

And although, at 58, she's older than most of her teammates and opponents, Karen's ascent has been astounding.

After quickly catching the bug at that first taster session, she started playing at club level – first for Preston, then Northumberland's Northern Ice and, finally, up in Lockerbie.

It's there she was spotted by British Curling's eagle-eyed scouts, who offered her the chance to join a 12-week Paralympic performance camp in Stirling. There was just one problem.

"I worked out it'd cost £200 a week, minimum. I remember thinking 'how on earth am I going to afford this?'"

That's when she got a little helping hand from Be Well's Believe Talent Fund – the same pot for aspiring athletes that set Keely Hodgkinson on her way to Olympic gold.

Combined with money raised by family and friends, who held a fundraising day and raffle at a local pub, it was enough to give her a well-deserved shot at selection.

From there, it's all been down to Karen, who now lives in Pemberton, to earn her spot as the only woman on the five-person team.

"The next minute I'm playing for England, I'm in the British Curling squad... and now the Paralympics! It's taken a lot of commitment to get here. Every week I drive to Scotland on a Tuesday and I don't come home until Friday.

"It costs a lot of money, but now I get an APA (Athlete Performance Award) that covers it, which is funded by the National Lottery. But I couldn't have done it without the Believe Talent Fund, I really couldn't."

Since making her international debut with England in 2023, Karen's represented her country in Norway, Switzerland, the Czech Republic and Canada.

She's also rubbed shoulders with royalty – recently meeting Prince William and Princess Kate (pictured) when they popped into camp to wish the squad good luck ahead of their Paralympic quest.

"It was great meeting them," she says. "It was all very informal. We got to have a chat and they even had a go at curling themselves!"

Karen's no stranger to international competition. Far from it, actually. Back in her 20s she was a promising wheelchair track star, winning more than 100 medals – including gold at the Oita International Wheelchair Half Marathon in Japan.

She also once won a world weightlifting title in Oklahoma, setting a world record, and even represented GB at basketball, too. But as incredible as all that sounds, the Paralympics will surpass it all.

"You've got to remember it was very different back then," she says of her early disability sports 'fame'.

"Even with the Paralympics, there wasn't the coverage that there is now. It was more about enjoying it.

"It wasn't like it was today... and the cost of it back then, too. Most of it you were funding yourself.

"It's on another level now. It's going to be on Channel 4 and everyone's going to be watching. We're professional athletes, and there's expectation on us."

So, how will Karen cope with the eyes of the world on her?

"I'm just going to try and shut all that out to be honest, and concentrate on the job at hand and not think about that – because it's more pressure, isn't it?"

Not that she's too shy about setting expectations.

"We're looking for a medal," she admits, even if competition will be fierce from the likes of Canada, Norway and favourites China.

"China are very strong. But Scotland beat them last year at the World Championships, and we (England) nearly beat them, too. So, they are beatable, it just all depends on the day."

Find out more about the talent fund at [BeWellWigan.org/](http://BeWellWigan.org/) [BelieveTalentFund](http://BelieveTalentFund)



**Watch Karen in action as part of the Mixed Team event, starting Saturday 7 March and culminating with the semi-finals and medal matches on 13 and 14 March. Watch coverage of Milano Cortina 2026 on Channel 4 and All4.**



Locations across Platt Bridge, Marsh Green and Leigh

**What is the Pride in Place programme?**

It's a government plan to help local communities improve the places where they live. It gives money and support to neighbourhoods so local people can decide how to improve their local community.

**How were the areas in Wigan Borough chosen?**

Leigh was selected in 2023 as part of the then Government's Long Term Plan for Towns and is now part of the Pride in Place programme. Platt Bridge & Spring View and Marsh Green & Laithwaite were chosen through data that identified communities where the need for community renewal was deemed to be vitally important.

**What is the programme trying to achieve?**

It is designed to help people feel proud of where they live. How the money will be spent will be up to local people through Neighbourhood Boards. It will

bring communities together, encourage volunteering and create more opportunities for people to develop new skills and interests together. In short, it hopes to build stronger and safer communities, thriving neighbourhoods, and more control for local people.

**Who decides how the money is spent?**

Each area will set up a Neighbourhood Board, which includes residents, local businesses, community groups, the council, and the local MP. These boards will talk to the community and decide what changes matter most. This means people who live in the area have a real voice in shaping their neighbourhood. The idea is to let communities "take back control" of local improvements.

**What kinds of things can the money be used for?**

The money can be used for any improvements that help the community. This might include bringing empty buildings back

into use, improving community centres, parks or making streets safer. Communities can also choose to improve culture, sports, and green spaces. The goal is to make neighbourhoods nicer places to live, shop, and spend time and improve social mobility. All decisions depend on what local people say they need most.

**What are the timelines for the programme?**

The programme runs for 10 years, starting from 2026, with funding released in phases. This long timeline will give communities time to plan and make lasting changes.

**Why is the government doing this now?**

The government wants to show it is giving power and money back to local communities. It hopes the programme will bring hope, pride, and new life to areas that have felt left behind. This is part of a bigger plan to tackle deprivation and revive local neighbourhoods.

# Pride in Place: power to the people

Residents will oversee the investment of millions of pounds to improve their local communities in an ambitious national project.

Two neighbourhoods in Wigan Borough are to receive £20m over the next 10 years to help improve their local area and opportunities for residents.

The communities of Platt Bridge & Spring View and Marsh Green & Laithwaite were selected by the Government as Pride in Place areas in the second wave of the programme.

It follows on from Leigh town centre being selected in its first phase. Residents will

decide how the money will be spent through Neighbourhood Boards.

The aim is for the long-term funding to bring residents together, improve the local area and create better opportunities for local people. Leigh Neighbourhood Board is already up and running and the boards for Platt Bridge and Marsh Green & Laithwaite will be formed by the summer.

Here is a run-down of everything you need to know on Pride in Place.

If you or your organisation would like to be involved, please register an interest: [PrideInPlace@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:PrideInPlace@wigan.gov.uk)



**The Leader of Wigan Council, Councillor David Molyneux MBE, said:**

"Our Progress With Unity missions are all about creating a fairer and more prosperous borough, addressing inequalities and supporting communities to fulfil their potential.

"Giving residents a bigger say in what happens in their neighbourhoods is in line with this approach and we're committed to working in genuine collaboration with residents, businesses, community organisations and other stakeholders to achieve our ambitions.

"By working together, we can harness and build upon our existing strengths and rise to the challenges we face to create thriving, resilient and welcoming communities of which we can all be proud."





## ‘It made me feel better to talk about it’

**B**rave testimony from a victim of domestic abuse has been at the forefront of a thought-provoking campaign.

Vital support services are available across Wigan Borough for those who have experienced domestic abuse, and for those like Ruby there is now a hopeful future to look forward to.

As part of Wigan Council’s Love Is Not Abuse (LINA) campaign, Ruby has waived her anonymity to share her story, forming the inspiration for a new ‘Be Like Ruby’ call to action.

We want to thank Ruby for sharing her story and her powerful artwork (pictured) - after all, it could save a life.

“He threatened to kill us both.”

Ruby may not have thought she would ever say those words about anyone; let alone someone she was in a relationship with.

She first met her ex-partner in 2023 through Facebook, and to begin with the relationship “felt good”.

“As time went on, it just got worse. I didn’t really speak to anyone about how bad the relationship had got, not even my mum.”

At the start, Ruby says her ex-partner talked a lot about his mental health.

“At first, I thought he just needed support, but then things started to change rapidly.”

His behaviour began to escalate. “He would drive very erratically when we were both in the car, and during arguments, he threatened to kill us both.

“He would say horrible things about my dad, who died when I was 13, the horrible comments just didn’t stop.”

Ruby said her ex-partner could be kind and supportive, encouraging her to attend university, but later used this against her.

“He’d say things like, ‘I helped you get to uni, and now you treat me like this.’ The emotional blackmail and pressure made me feel guilty towards him.”

The abuse then became physical. “He used to hit me on my head multiple times. When I went to hospital on one occasion, he came with me and told the nurse he did it because of his PTSD.”

Police were made aware of Ruby’s experiences following a separate assault, which was closely followed by another police incident involving stalking harassment, and a breach of bail conditions.

Ruby said he showed “no remorse”, and she contacted the borough’s support services.



Wigan Council’s cabinet backing the Love Is Not Abuse campaign

She was put in touch with an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) and was able to open up.

“It made me feel better to talk about it. I hadn’t really spoken about it before, and it gave me confidence to give a statement to the police, especially when I was placed in refuge as I felt so alone and isolated.”

In the last financial year, 6,111 calls were made to Wigan’s Domestic Abuse Helpline - a helpline Ruby also used. But getting to that stage was not an easy task.

“I was anxious about the investigation. I didn’t want to get him into trouble because of his mental health and sometimes I blamed myself.”

But Ruby’s strength to keep going was spurred on by her sense of purpose and support from her family.

“Studying art at university was my dream, and I didn’t want to let myself or my mum down. It has been so painful (a journey) and at times I didn’t think I would get through.”

Thanks in part to the support from DIAS and her independent domestic violence advisor, Ruby has come so far on her journey.

“Without them I don’t think I would be where I am today. I can see how far I’ve come, and I know I should be so proud of myself.”

**Ruby’s artwork in her own words:** “The scars represent the physical pain and damage caused. The butterfly represents transformation and growth. This painting means growing stronger through the pain endured; it’s about learning to love yourself and making a beautiful life after trauma.”

**LOVE IS NOT ABUSE**

WIGAN BOROUGH  
COMMUNITY  
SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

**Love Is Not Abuse**, developed alongside victims, highlights the warning signs of domestic abuse and encourages people to seek help and support.

A dedicated helpline was set up in 2021 as part of the partnership work with the Wigan Borough

Domestic Abuse service. This helpline is available for victims, family and friends with concerns about a loved one, and professionals seeking advice.

The Wigan Borough Domestic Abuse helpline is available on **01942 311365**.



Wigan Borough  
**family hubs**

**Our Family Hubs offer:**

- Midwifery, health visiting and antenatal support
- Activities for children and young people
- Help for families with SEND
- Housing and homelessness advice
- Support with debt, money and food access
- Physical and mental wellbeing support
- Parenting guidance
- Digital access for jobs, housing and appointments
- A friendly space to meet others

Family Hubs bring together all the support a Wigan Borough resident may need so that children, young people, and adults can get the right help at the right time.

Working together to support families



[www.wigan.gov.uk/FamilyHubs](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/FamilyHubs)



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3 Simply tick the E-Billing signup box to confirm your switch to E-Billing.



[www.wigan.gov.uk/CouncilTaxEbilling](http://www.wigan.gov.uk/CouncilTaxEbilling)



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# What's on in Wigan Borough?

**Haigh Woodland Park**  
[www.facebook.com/haighwoodlandpark](http://www.facebook.com/haighwoodlandpark)



**Stables Gallery**

Every Thursday  
 from 22nd January  
 1.30pm–4pm

Card making lessons for all ability levels.  
 📍 **Location:** Above the Courtyard  
 🎟 **Tickets:** £6. 01942 831831 or email [mojdavies1@virginmedia.com](mailto:mojdavies1@virginmedia.com)

**Artisan Markets**

Third Sunday monthly,  
 April–December

Artisan food, crafts and gifts.  
 📍 **Location:** Haigh Woodland Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** None required.

**Foodie Friday**

Last Friday monthly,  
 March–October  
 6pm–10pm

Street food, DJs and live music.  
 📍 **Location:** Haigh Woodland Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** None required.

**Park Run**

Every Saturday  
 8.45am brief, 9am start

Weekly 5k community run.  
 📍 **Location:** Haigh Woodland Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** Register before first run.  
[www.parkrun.org.uk/haighwoodland](http://www.parkrun.org.uk/haighwoodland)

**Nature Walks with Discover The Wild**

Various dates

Discover wildlife across Haigh's grounds.  
 📍 **Location:** Haigh Woodland Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** Eventbrite

**Woodland Spa Days**

Various dates  
 11am–1pm and 2pm–4pm

Mindfulness in nature.  
 📍 **Location:** Haigh Woodland Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** £15. Mindful Me Events

**Picnic Brass**

Check Visit Wigan for full details  
 1pm & 2.30pm

Family-friendly brass concerts.  
 📍 **Location:** Haigh Woodland Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** None required.

**High & Low Ropes**

Every day

Low ropes (ages 5+), high ropes (ages 8+).  
 📍 **Location:** Haigh Woodland Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** From £11 / £17. Book on the *Be Well Wigan* app.

## Sporting fixtures



**Leigh Leopards**  
[leighsportsvillage.co.uk](http://leighsportsvillage.co.uk)



**Wigan Athletic**  
[wiganathletic.com/matches](http://wiganathletic.com/matches)



**Wigan Warriors**  
[wiganwarriors.com/fixtures](http://wiganwarriors.com/fixtures)



## Community



**Run Wigan Festival**

Sunday 15th March  
 9am

Half marathon, 5k, Family Mile.  
 📍 **Location:** Mesnes Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** [runwiganfestivals.co.uk](http://runwiganfestivals.co.uk)

**Tyldesley Little Theatre**

Theatre production.  
 📍 **Location:** Lemon Street, Tyldesley  
 🎟 **Tickets:** [tlt.org.uk/tickets](http://tlt.org.uk/tickets)

84 Charing Cross Road  
 17th – 21st March

Communicating Doors  
 12th–16th May

**Wigan Little Theatre**

Theatre performance.  
 📍 **Location:** Wigan Little Theatre  
 🎟 **Tickets:** [www.ticketsource.co.uk/wigan-little-theatre-box-office](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/wigan-little-theatre-box-office)

Zack – 18th–28th March

Ladies Who Lunch: 29th April–9th May

The Woman Who Cooked Her Husband: 10th–20th June

Bleak Expectations: 15th–25th  
 July Sleuth: 26th August–2nd September

**Winstanley Park Easter Egg Hunt**

3rd–5th April

Sand art, trails, bouncy castle.  
 📍 **Location:** Winstanley Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** Pre-booking required.  
[www.winstanleyparkevents.co.uk](http://www.winstanleyparkevents.co.uk)

**Leigh Pride**

Saturday 25th July  
 12pm–9pm

Community celebration of diversity.  
 📍 **Location:** Pennington Hall Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** None required.



**Wigan Pride**

Saturday 8th August  
 11am–5pm

Music, entertainment and parade.  
 📍 **Location:** Mesnes Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** None required.

**Wigan 10K**

Sunday 6th September  
 9am

Annual 10k race.  
 📍 **Location:** Mesnes Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** [wigan10k.co.uk](http://wigan10k.co.uk)

**Sunday Jazz Club**

Last Sunday monthly  
 12.30pm–3.30pm

Live jazz performances.  
 📍 **Location:** Whelley Ex Servicemen's Club  
 🎟 **Tickets:** [wiganjazzclub.co.uk](http://wiganjazzclub.co.uk)

**Afternoon Classic Film Club**

Last Friday monthly  
 1pm

Classic film screenings.  
 📍 **Location:** Turnpike Gallery  
 🎟 **Tickets:** Free, donations welcome.

**Unlocked**

First Thursday monthly

Showcasing musicians and creatives.  
 📍 **Location:** Bailiff Bar  
 🎟 **Tickets:** [www.facebook.com/bailiffwigan](http://www.facebook.com/bailiffwigan)

**Open Mic Poetry**

Second Thursday of the month

Wigan's longest running poetry open mic.  
 📍 **Location:** Bailiff Bar  
 🎟 **Tickets:** [www.facebook.com/bailiffwigan](http://www.facebook.com/bailiffwigan)

## Events spotlight

**Armed Forces Day: Wigan & Leigh**

27th June

Show your support for the men and women who make up the Armed Forces community, past and present at our annual event.  
 📍 **Location:** Wigan Town Centre  
 🎟 **Tickets:** None required.



**Flashes Festival of Nature**

19th July

Explore the Flash, one of the borough's fantastic National Nature Reserves, and learn about its inhabitants with a range of fun and family-friendly activities.  
 📍 **Location:** Pennington Flash  
 🎟 **Tickets:** None required.

**Proms in the Park Wigan**

Check Visit Wigan for full details

📍 **Location:** Mesnes Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** Eventbrite

**Proms in the Park Leigh**

Check Visit Wigan for full details

📍 **Location:** Pennington Hall Park  
 🎟 **Tickets:** Eventbrite



**Pier 4 at Wigan Pier Presents: The Jade Assembly**

Friday 27th March  
 6pm–9pm

In partnership with The Early Doors Club, join us for the band's first full gig since 2023.  
 📍 **Location:** Wigan Pier  
 🎟 **Tickets:** Eventbrite

## Museums, Archives & Libraries

### Drumcroom Collection

**Until 17th April**  
**10am–4pm Tue–Fri**  
**10am–2pm Sat**

The most significant exhibition to date of over 50 works from the collection.

📍 **Location: Turnpike Gallery**  
 🎟️ **Tickets: Free, drop in**

### Wigan's Voice

**Until 25th July**  
**10am–4pm Tue–Fri,**  
**10am–2pm Sat**

Be wowed by installations and contemporary reflections on Wigan's heritage, culture and landscape.

📍 **Location: Wigan Museum**  
 🎟️ **Tickets: Free, drop in**

### Every Community Needs a Stage

**Tue–Fri 10am–4pm,**  
**Sat 10am–2pm,**  
**closed Tue–Fri 1–1.30pm,**

This exhibition delves into the rich tapestry of communities within Wigan Borough. Discover the stories that connect us and celebrate shared heritage.

📍 **Location: Archives: Wigan & Leigh**  
 🎟️ **Tickets: Free, drop in.**

### Craft With Company

**Every Monday**  
**10am–11.30am**

Bring any craft project and enjoy a friendly chat and brew while working on it.

📍 **Location: Marsh Green Library**  
 🎟️ **Tickets: Free, drop in.**

### The Reader Reading Group

**Every Thursday**  
**2pm–3pm**

Join in with reading and conversation, or simply listen with a cuppa.

📍 **Location: Wigan Library**  
 🎟️ **Tickets: Free, drop in.**

### Children's Craft Club

**Every Friday**  
**3.30pm–4.30pm**

Craft session suitable for all school age children.

📍 **Location: Ashton Library**  
 🎟️ **Tickets: Free, drop in.**

### Relaxed Mornings at the Archives

**Last Saturday of each month**  
**10am–12pm**

A dedicated time for visitors with special needs. A SEND friendly environment with limited numbers and staff support.

📍 **Location: Archives (not specified)**  
 🎟️ **Tickets: Free, drop in.**



### Easter Craft Activities

**4th April**  
**11am–12.30pm**

Bring your little bunnies and chicks for themed crafts, trails, face painting and more.

📍 **Location: Wigan Museum**  
 🎟️ **Tickets: Free, drop in.**

### The Rise of the Cotton Industry in Wigan; 1800–1880

**18th April**  
**12pm–1pm**

Explore the interaction between coal, canals and steam power on textile manufacture. By Ken Scally

📍 **Location: Wigan Museum**  
 🎟️ **Tickets: £3.50 (inc. fees)**

### Make. Believe.

**9th May–19th December**  
**Tuesday–Friday 10am–4pm,**  
**Saturday 10am–2pm**

Interactive artworks created with local artists, with visitors invited to add their own DIY creations.

📍 **Location: Turnpike Gallery, Leigh**  
 🎟️ **Tickets: Free, drop in.**

## Find out what's going on in Wigan Borough

at [eventbrite.co.uk](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk) and search Wigan Council

- ◆ Outdoor Activities
- ◆ Haigh
- ◆ Museums
- ◆ Archives
- ◆ Turnpike
- ◆ And much more



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## Find out what's going on at Wigan Libraries

at [eventbrite.co.uk](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk) and search Wigan Libraries

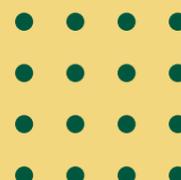


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