

Draft Greater Manchester Spatial Framework October 2016



Key Questions and Answers

There is already a strategic planning document for Wigan Borough called the Core Strategy. Why do we need another one?

The aim of the framework is create a strategic plan for the whole of Greater Manchester up to 2035. It will enable the building of 226,000 new homes across the city region so that owning a home is within the reach of people on average wages. If we don't take part then decisions will be imposed on the borough rather than us being in control. This is about ensuring Wigan Borough is fit for the future and can seize the opportunities that are coming to Greater Manchester as part of devolution and through economic growth.

Why do we have to be involved with a Greater Manchester plan?

Wigan Borough is part of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. It's therefore crucial that Wigan plays a full role in forming Greater Manchester's future and helps shape the spatial framework so it benefits the borough. This is an opportunity for Wigan Borough so we can deliver a better housing offer and improved connectivity to Manchester.

Why do we need more homes?

The overriding reality nationally is that as the population increases, more homes are needed. Older people are the biggest contributors to housing need. Around two thirds of new homes will be needed because of a big increase in households aged 65 and over. People are living longer and elderly people are choosing to live independently in their own homes for longer. Related to this in large part is a steep rise in single occupation, which increased by 17 per cent in the borough from 2001 to 2011 and is forecast to increase by a further 20 per cent to 2035.

With more housing will there be improvements to the roads and transport?

Wigan Council has a strategy to improve road connectivity from east to west across the borough. This is on-going and will develop over the coming decade. We are also prioritising securing investment in our railway stations with HS2 coming to Wigan. We will be proactive in securing any funding from the devolution agreement to improve transport in Wigan Borough so that people can be connected to opportunities in the borough and further afield, such as central Manchester and Manchester Airport.

But there are lots of empty homes across the borough. Why can these not be occupied instead of building new homes?

The council has had a long standing priority of bringing long term empty properties back into use. This has resulted in a continual reduction of long term empty homes in the borough from 2,498 in 2008 to 1,644 in 2015. This represents around only 1.15% of the borough's total housing stock, which is below national and regional averages.

Why can't all the housing be on brownfield land?

All brownfield sites in the borough that are suitable for housing with a reasonable prospect of delivery by 2035 have been included in the housing land supply. Also included is a

'windfall allowance' to take into account other sites that will come forward that we can't identify at present, as we can't be certain which ones yet. These will predominantly be brownfield sites. Unfortunately, however, there is an insufficient supply of brownfield sites in the borough to fully address housing needs. As such, greenfield land is needed, including some land to be released from the Green Belt. This is the case in all other districts in Greater Manchester, not just in Wigan.

Why do we need more employment land when there are are lots of vacant business premises in the borough?

New sites for high quality employment development are needed to attract new investment and enable Wigan Borough to compete for jobs at both the regional and national level. These will offer high quality accommodation and take advantage of the borough's strategic location and transport connections. While some of the borough's existing employment sites are successful and attractive to the market, many other sites are not for various reasons, including poor accessibility, low amenity and old accommodation that does not meet modern business needs.

Why is Green Belt land part of the proposals?

Less than one-fifth of the housing land supply in Wigan Borough for 2015-2035 is in the Green Belt. And only 4.7% of the borough's existing Green Belt is proposed for development. 95.3% of the existing Green Belt will remain. To achieve the required number of new homes and employment land, the framework proposes some sites in the Green Belt where developments will have to bring considerable local and environmental benefits.

Green Belt is not necessarily a green space or nature designation. The purpose of Green Belt is to prevent un-planned urban sprawl. The broad extent of the Green Belt in Greater Manchester, including Wigan Borough, was established in 1981 and detailed boundaries were agreed in 1984. These boundaries have been retained since that time. However, in order to meet the requirement for new homes, some Green Belt land is needed as part of the proposals. Businesses and developers are also now looking for sites close to the motorway network, which make viable and attractive employment sites. As a council and city region we have to respond to this demand to secure jobs for residents so we don't lose out to other areas.

What does the plan mean for jobs?

Greater Manchester is set to benefit from a huge increase in employment opportunities in the coming decades with forecasts suggesting up to 200,000 new jobs being created over the next twenty years in Greater Manchester. We have ambitious plans for Wigan Borough in terms of jobs creation so it is vital we seize the opportunities ahead. This includes identifying new sites for high quality employment development that can attract new investment to the borough and enable Wigan to compete for jobs at a regional and national level. We want residents in Wigan Borough to be highly skilled and able to access good quality jobs either in the borough or elsewhere in Greater Manchester through a joined up transport network. The Greater Manchester Spatial Framework will help us achieve that ambition.

What about school places, and access to health and leisure facilities?

Wigan Council continually monitors school places provision, the demand for places, population age profiles, birth rates in the borough and housing developments, to ensure that we are planning effectively for new schools places when needed. We know there is some capacity in our schools to develop more places by remodelling provision or expansion on school sites. However, where demand exceeds the capacity that will be available, it will be necessary to provide new schools.

What about our green spaces – will they be protected?

Our green space jewels will be protected and enhanced as part of the plan. The Lowland Wetlands covering the Mosslands in the south-east of the borough into Salford, and the Flashes from Leigh through to Wigan, the River Valleys including the valley of the River Douglas, and the canals – essentially our greenheart – take centre stage in the Spatial Framework alongside the development.

When will the sites be developed?

The sites will be developed over the next 20 years, with those on the East Lancashire Road Corridor at Astley and Boothstown and South of Pennington, held back until later in that period until a rapid transit scheme is secured, with connections into the city centre.

Do local people get a say on this?

It is crucial that people have their say on the draft plan. Details of how you can submit comments are on the GMSF consultation webpage via the council's webpage at www.wigan.gov.uk/gmsf. We will also be holding drop-in sessions for the public which we will publicise on this webpage, through site notices at key locations, and on social media.

Wigan Council, 28 October 2016

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