

The case for releasing Green Belt land in Wigan for new employment development



The growth ambition

A significant level of economic growth is being planned for Greater Manchester through the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework (GMSF) over the next 20 years. Economic growth is a high priority in Wigan and the borough will play a significant role in Greater Manchester's economic ambition. Wigan Council is ready to take on the challenge. The [Wigan Economic Prospectus](#) identifies four approaches needed to deliver the borough's economic ambitions:

- Grow the economy, create jobs and attract investment.
- Upskilling local people to take advantage of the work opportunities around them.
- Ensuring the infrastructure is in place to support economic growth.
- Promoting Wigan as a key location for employment and people to make their home.

Wigan's business base

There are over 9,000 businesses supporting nearly 120,000 jobs in Wigan Borough. The majority are micro and small businesses but Wigan is also home to some major employers including Heinz, Wincanton and AB World Foods.

Wigan has a strong manufacturing base with a particular emphasis on food and drink, which will continue to drive economic growth. But the digital and creative, logistics, health, environment and professional services sectors are also important and set to grow.

Wigan's employment land supply

Wigan Borough has a land supply with capacity for around 630,000 square metres of employment floorspace. However there is considerable uncertainty about the availability of around one-third of this supply during the plan period. A further one-third is made up of small plots on existing industrial estates, most of which are only likely to be attractive to relatively low cost businesses serving the local area. Only 3 sites overall exceed 10 hectares in size. These are the South Lancashire Industrial Estate extension; Land at Smithy Brook Road, Wigan; and Land at Chaddock Lane, Astley. These are good sites and together they have capacity for the final one-third of the supply. However, they are unlikely to be able to compete for investment with the top tier of sites elsewhere in the region.

The changing employment market

The logistics and advanced manufacturing sectors are growing rapidly in the North West. Changes to the global supply chain mean that it is becoming more efficient and cost effective for international goods to enter the UK in the north of England rather than the south. The north is capitalising on this opportunity through its global

connections, including Manchester Airport and the new deep water port at Liverpool 2.

The knock-on effects are that new, large-scale, motorway connected employment developments have performed strongly at Omega in Warrington, Buckshaw in Chorley, Logistics North in Bolton, and Kingsway in Rochdale, for example. Further schemes are proposed at Parkside in St. Helens, Port Salford and Heywood Distribution Park near Rochdale, and land is being promoted at Leyland and Preston close to the M6.

In Wigan, the new Nice-Pak manufacturing facility in Westwood Park and the new Poundland regional distribution centre, currently under construction at South Lancashire Industrial Estate, are two examples of large-scale employment development that is achievable in the borough. But Wigan does not have anything like the large-scale employment developments that are being built in surrounding areas. As such we are at a competitive disadvantage. However Wigan does have huge potential to attract large-scale employment development if the right land in the right place is available.

The right conditions for economic growth

Wigan needs employment sites that are large, unconstrained and motorway connected, preferably with long visible frontages, to attract businesses in the key growth sectors, but also to retain existing businesses in the borough enabling consolidation and growth.

The M6 is a major business asset. It is the UK's most important strategic road for freight between the north and south of the country, and Wigan is the only district in Greater Manchester which has direct access to it. The M61 and M62 are also significant assets but are outside the borough.

There are four junctions on the M6 in the borough. Junction 24 at Ashton is built up. The other three are in Green Belt. To take effective advantage of this major business asset, land needs to be removed from the Green Belt to allow development.

Junction 27 is at Standish and Shevington. It is not a priority location for large-scale employment development due to its distance from Wigan and its road connections, and that it is an elevated location highly visible from surrounding areas.

Junctions 25 and 26 are adjacent to Wigan. Junction 25 is the main gateway from the south. Junction 26 is the access to the M58 Motorway, which provides a direct link into the Liverpool City Region and the new deep water port at Liverpool 2.

There is land adjacent to both of these junctions with long frontages to the motorway. Both sites are highly attractive to the market. The benefits of unlocking this land for employment development will be significant for the sub-region, not just Wigan.

If Wigan does not take advantage of these land and transport opportunities for economic growth, there is a real threat that the borough will miss out and businesses will invest elsewhere.

As noted, the M61 is outside the borough, to the north and east. Access to the borough from it is currently poor. Through development at West of Gibfield and further north in Bolton, there is a commitment to secure a new road link to connect the A579 Atherleigh Way to the M61 at Junction 5, Chequerbent. This will help make Atherton, Hindley and Leigh more attractive for economic development. An element of employment development is included at West of Gibfield to capitalise on the new road.

The A580 East Lancashire Road is a further significant infrastructure asset for the borough. It is a major east-west dual carriageway between the Manchester and Liverpool City Regions. The land at Pocket Nook, Lowton has a long frontage to the East Lancashire Road and is only 3 miles from Junction 23 of the M6 Motorway.

Jobs

A total of 15,000 jobs could be secured across these four sites, as follows:

	Area (hectares)	Floorspace (square metres)	Jobs
Junction 25	95	333000	7,652
Junction 26	43	150000	3,447
West of Gibfield	13	45000	1,034
Pocket Nook, Lowton	38	133000	3,056
TOTAL	189	661000	15,190

These would be likely to be a combination of jobs at companies new to the borough; jobs safeguarded at businesses relocating within the borough to ensure they remain competitive; and new jobs arising as a result of companies relocating within the borough that enables them to modernise, expand and grow.

The estimated number of jobs is taken from the Homes and Communities Agency's [Employment Density Guide](#) (2015) based upon 70% Logistics, 20% Manufacturing and 10% Offices.

Impacts on commuting

43% of employed residents in Wigan Borough commute out of the borough for work. Creating more job opportunities in Wigan would reduce the need to look elsewhere for work.

Jobs in the logistics sector

The average salary in the logistics sector is substantially above the average salary overall, nationally and locally. There is also a higher percentage of full-time employment opportunities than in the economy overall.

The impact of the recession on economic growth

The recession had a major impact on the uptake of employment land in Wigan. From 2005 to 2008 the average take-up rate was 11.38 hectares per year. From 2009 to 2014 only 4.35 hectares were developed, which is an average of 0.72 hectares per year. As the UK emerged from the recession, the take-up of employment land in Wigan increased. 20.25 hectares were taken up across 2015 and 2016. These figures indicate that confidence is returning to the employment market. However, if we are to continue to attract employment development of that scale and more, meeting the requirements of businesses in growth sectors, we need more high quality development opportunities.

Conclusion

Land adjacent to Junctions 25 and 26 of the M6 Motorway, West of Gibfield, Atherton and Pocket Nook, Lowton are Wigan Borough's best opportunities to attract large scale employment development including advanced logistics and manufacturing. The land needs to be removed from Green Belt to allow development to take place. We welcome your views on our proposals by responding to the consultation on the draft GMSF between 31 October and 23 December 2016. Details of how you can submit comments are on the GMSF consultation webpage via the council's webpage at www.wigan.gov.uk/gmsf.

Wigan Council, 28 October 2016

GREATER

MANCHESTER

SPATIAL

FRAMEWORK