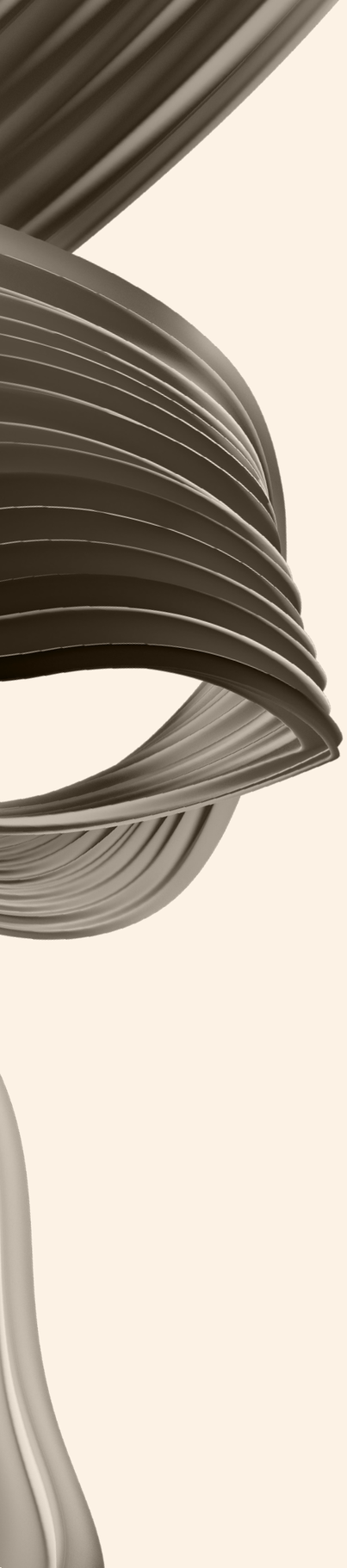
Bolton

VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY

2024-2030





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FOREWORD

Bolton is a proud borough, with a rich history and an exciting future. Its strategic location makes it an attractive destination to do business and its wide range of attractions and events already bring in visitors from across the UK and beyond.

Bolton played a significant role during the Industrial Revolution and this legacy continues to shape its identity, whilst easy access to spectacular countryside adds to its appeal.

Perhaps more than anything else, it is the people that make Bolton an attractive place to visit. The warmth and friendliness of Boltonians—including some of the country's most familiar celebrities—make it a welcoming place to live, work, study, and visit.

The launch of the Visitor Economy Strategy is opportune timing as Bolton has recently been named Greater Manchester's town of culture for 2024 and is set to develop a programme of cultural events and activities celebrating Bolton's heritage over the next 12 months.

These are exciting times for Bolton, as investment and development of our towns becomes ever more visible. The regeneration taking place across Bolton offers new opportunities to encourage new visitors, who will spend money and support jobs in our local communities.

Visitors are important for Bolton, and this strategy sets out how we can work together to encourage more of them. We know that visitors will receive a big Bolton welcome when they come to visit friends and relatives and do business, staying in our hotels and accommodation businesses, enjoying our events, attractions and cultural offer, and spending in our shops, restaurants, bars and cafes.



Sue Johnson
Chief Executive,
Bolton Council

"We all have a part to play in delivering this strategy. And it is down to us all to make sure it is a success. So please play your part, as I know you will, to grow our visitor economy which, in turn, will deliver continuous growth and employment for residents across the borough."



01

Introducing Bolton's Visitor Economy Strategy

Welcome to Bolton

Bolton is the largest town in the northwest of England, with a proud history of innovation dating back to the industrial revolution.

This legacy can be seen in the stunning architecture and facilities which set Bolton apart from other towns. But Bolton's story is more than just its urban industry, the town is bordered by the beautiful countryside of the West Pennine Moors and Rivington Pike. Bolton's strategically important location, on the border of Greater Manchester and Lancashire, places it within just 10 miles of Manchester City Centre while excellent transport links offer convenient connections to the rest of the UK. Bolton's pioneering spirit can be seen in a sporting, cultural and entrepreneurial legacy that few towns can match.

The Visitor Economy Strategy (2024 – 2030) provides a strategic framework for the development of the visitor economy sector in the borough to 2030, setting out a statement of our ambition to position the borough as an attractive visitor destination, leveraging our assets and opportunities to secure investment, drive visitor footfall and spend, enhance the quality of life of our residents and their positive perceptions and sense of pride in Bolton, and support vitality and growth in our business community.

The strategy has been developed by Bolton Council in consultation with stakeholders across the borough. The process has been guided by Marketing Manchester in their role as the city region's official Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) to ensure direct alignment with regional strategy.

A comprehensive evidence base underpins the strategy and has informed the effective targeting of issues and opportunities to realise the strategic potential of the sector.



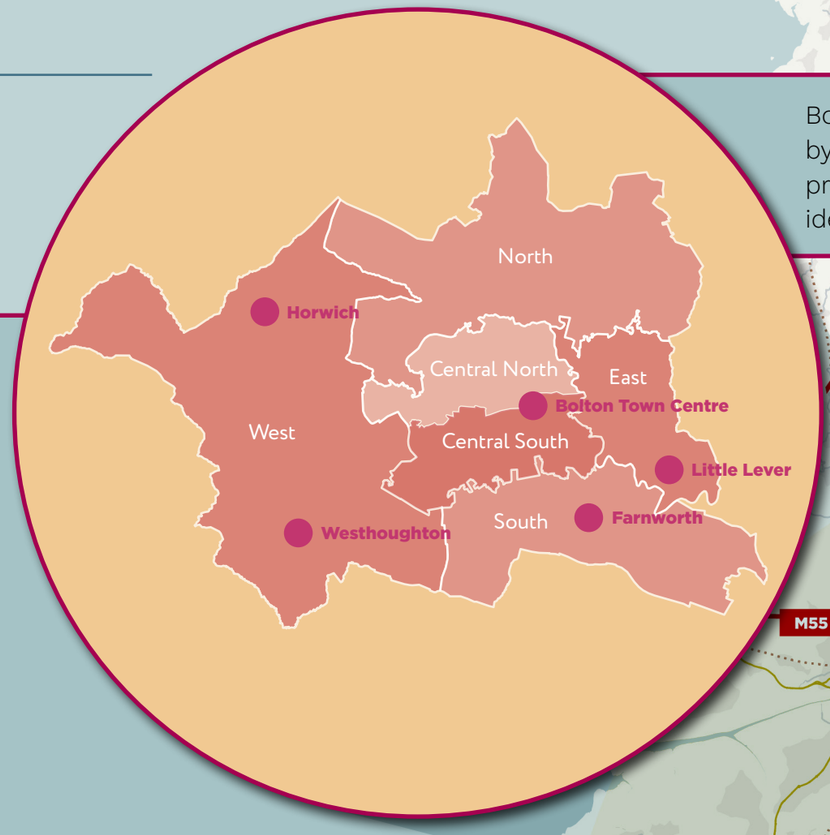
Visitor Economy Strategy

Bolton

Introducing Bolton's Visitor Economy Strategy

Bolton in Context

Bolton is strategically positioned within the Greater Manchester conurbation, providing easy access to a large population, urban amenities, culture and commerce. Simultaneously, Bolton's proximity to rural Lancashire offers a gateway to serene natural landscapes, including the West Pennine Moors. This geographic context and strategic positioning enables Bolton to capitalise upon a large potential visitor market with strong domestic and international connections.



Bolton's distinct character is defined by its district neighbourhoods, each providing a unique offer to the borough's identity and scope for visitation.



12 miles
from Manchester City Centre

1 million
people live within 45 minutes of Bolton

20 miles
from Manchester Airport

60% of UK businesses are within a 2-hour drive

Direct access
to major transport links including road and rail

Levering our Credentials

Bolton has strong credentials to lever and drive growth in its visitor economy.



Major national and international events including Bolton Food and Drink Festival – the UK's biggest food festival attracting some 500,000 people; host to IRONMAN UK and the world's largest IRONKIDS event; hosting the Rugby League World Cup 2021, including England v France as part of the Men's tournament, putting Bolton on the global map for sports tourism; international stadium touring artists; and the Bolton Film Festival.



Key attractions such as Smithills Hall, Bolton Museum and Central Library, Aquarium and Archive, Octagon Theatre, Albert Halls, and Stadium, home ground of Bolton Wanderers F.C.



Natural landscape and greenspace including Moses Gate Country Park, Smithills Country Park and Jumbles Country Park, with close proximity to Rivington Pike.



Strong Retail Offer including Middlebrook Retail and Leisure Park, the UK's largest retail park, and Market Place Shopping Centre.



Education assets such as the University of Bolton which supports visitation by family, friends and students.

Growing Bolton's Visitor Economy will:

- Support the creation of attractive and vibrant places to live, work, invest, study and visit where communities and businesses can thrive.
- Underpin the USP for Bolton, Bolton's 'brand position' and place narrative, comprising a set of key values that all partners can sign up to and support.
- Showcase Bolton's unique local identity, its rich diversity, and its unique assets to a regional, national and international audience, whilst strengthening residents' pride in place.
- Increase productivity in the economy through spend, job creation and business growth.
- Benefit local people through a vibrant visitor economy with greater facilities and offer, transport network and employment prospects.
- Help to conserve and enhance local heritage, cultural assets, natural landscapes, and green spaces.
- Deliver and build on local priorities including job creation, skills development, investment and regeneration and increasing the awareness of the place brand and profile of the Bolton borough.



The Vision for Bolton's Visitor Economy

The Visitor Economy Strategy complements aligned strategies including Bolton's Cultural Strategy, Brand Bolton Strategy, Economic Growth and Resilience Plan, Transport Strategy, and Greenspace Strategy. Collectively, these strategies provide a framework to deliver against the Bolton Vision 2030.

- Bolton 2030 provides the long-term vision to achieve an Active, Connected and Prosperous borough, setting out the following ambition:

Bolton will be a vibrant place, built on strong cohesive communities, successful businesses, and healthy residents. It will be a welcoming place where people chose to study, work and put down roots.

Vision 2030 is underpinned by six outcomes

BOLTON VISION 2030 OUTCOMES, METRICS AND MILESTONES

- **Start Well**
- **Live Well**
- **Age Well**
- **Prosperous**
- **Clean and Green**
- **Safe, Strong and Distinctive**

The Visitor Economy Strategy will support delivery of the following outcomes:

- **Live Well** – The happiness and wellbeing of our residents is improved so that they can live healthy, fulfilling lives for longer;
- **Prosperous** – Businesses want to work and invest in the borough, and through their corporate social responsibility, maximise social value opportunities whilst creating good, inclusive and sustained employment;
- **Clean and Green** – Our environment is protected and improved so that more people enjoy it, care for it and are active in it; and
- **Safe, Strong and Distinctive** – Stronger, cohesive, more confident communities in which people feel safe, welcome and connected.

The visitor economy has a vital role to play in realising this ambition. Many people already visit Bolton to access our rich heritage, leading cultural venues, major events, and stunning countryside. We want to enhance the visitor offer to maximise the potential of the visitor economy as a driver of economic growth and regeneration. Our action plan identifies how this can be achieved framed around six themes for intervention.

6 THEMES FOR INTERVENTION

- **THEME 1:** Diversify the Offer and Image of Town Centres
- **THEME 2:** Secure and Capitalise on Opportunities for Major Investment
- **THEME 3:** Lever Active and Nature Based Tourism
- **THEME 6:** Invest in Enabling Activity
- Bolton 2030
- **THEME 5:** Grow Visitor Products and Markets
- **THEME 4:** Enhance the Cultural Offer and Events Strategy

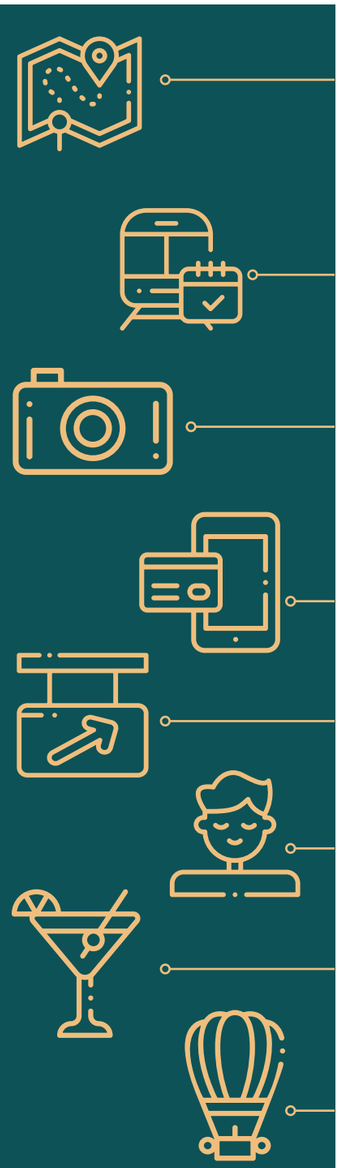


02

Responding to Drivers of Change

Drivers of Change

Bolton needs to be responsive to global and national drivers of change affecting trends in the visitor economy if it is to position itself to grasp opportunities and be resilient to change. These include:



Customisation and personalisation: visitors are increasingly seeking personalised experiences and the industry must respond to demands for individualised marketing, tailored itineraries, curated recommendations and personalised accommodation.

Sustainable tourism: consumers are increasingly aware of their travel footprint and seek to mitigate this where possible through sustainable travel, responsible tourism and selecting destinations which demonstrate green credentials.

Experiential travel: post pandemic there is growing evidence that people want to have more life rewarding experiences that take them out of their day-to-day reality and this is now embedded in travel planning, with visitors looking for different cultural experiences and to experience new places.

Continued digital transformation: tech innovation in the visitor economy continues to grow with increased use of digital booking, social media, personalised experiences etc.

Local authentic experiences: continued search for authenticity through ultra-localised itineraries and meaningful travel to 'live like a local'.

Health and wellness: personal wellbeing is a large and growing share of the visitor economy as visitors look to use their time to relax, rejuvenate, and self-discover.

Night-time economy: Bars, cafes, night clubs and restaurants are responsible for 42% of consumer spend after 6pm in the UK. Ensuring Bolton has an offer to attract this hospitality spend is key.

Active and adventure tourism: the UK offers the largest adventure tourism market in Europe accounting for 19% of the world's adventure travel tourists.

Visitor Economy Strategy

LOCAL POLICY

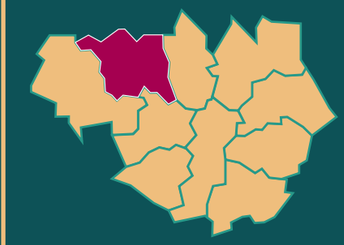
BOLTON



Brand Bolton Strategy; Cultural Strategy; Visitor Economy Strategy; Bolton's Economic Growth and Resilience Plan; Transport Strategy; Greenspace Strategy; Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy; Active Lives Strategy; Belonging in Bolton; UKSPF Plan; Night-Time Economy Strategy.

SUB-REGIONAL POLICY

GREATER MANCHESTER



GM International Strategy; GM Night Time Economy Strategy; GM Visitor Economy Strategy; GM UKSPF Investment Plan; GM Strategy for Culture and Creativity

REGIONAL POLICY

NP11 Place Strategy; Places for Everyone



NORTH OF ENGLAND

NATIONAL POLICY

UK Tourism Recovery Plan; Levelling up the UK



UNITED KINGDOM

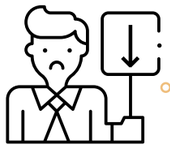
The Bolton Visitor Economy Strategy is responsive to national, regional, sub-regional and local policy.

Bolton

Responding to Drivers of Change

Policy Issues

There are a number of policy issues which set the context within which the visitor economy operates, including:



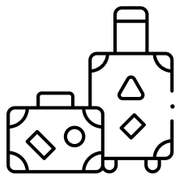
Labour shortages: a long term policy challenge which continues to impact the sector, hampering business competitiveness due to skill shortages and gaps. Attracting and retaining talent to the sector is key to improving competitiveness.



Seasonality: seasonal demand can impact on staff recruitment, retention and productivity issues. Smoothing out seasonal demand through an offer which attracts visitors throughout the year will support growth in the sector.



Cost of living crisis: reduced disposable income is impacting on expenditure on hospitality and leisure. A broad and accessible offer can cater for different household budgets.



Over tourism: the concentration of tourism in some areas can have negative social, economic and environmental impacts. Effective dispersal strategies can spread the economic benefits of tourism whilst mitigating the negative effects.



Uncertain and unstable global operating environment and economic context: pandemic recovery, the Ukraine conflict, rising energy costs, inflation and low levels of investment in the visitor economy are all impacting on the growth and prosperity of the sector. Effective government intervention can support the place and businesses to be resilient and prosper and grow.



This strategy is responsive to these drivers and disruptors and seeks to position Bolton to be resilient to change and grasp opportunities for growth. Bolton has an exciting future ahead, and major capital investment is taking place which will drive spend, visitation and footfall in the borough. This strategy seeks to capitalise on this investment to facilitate growth in the visitor economy.

Successful Funding

Bolton has secured and delivered significant investment in recent years including a £3.8m refurbishment of the Museum, a £12m refurbishment of the Octagon Theatre, a £48m Bolton Interchange transport hub, and £6m on public realm improvements across Bolton Town Centre. Looking ahead and working in partnership with the private sector, Bolton Council has developed a £1bn regeneration programme which will drive growth in the population and business base and encourage wider visitation.

Wigan and Bolton Growth Corridor will provide new sustainable residential and business communities. Potential growth areas include health innovation, advanced manufacturing, a proposed Ryder Cup standard golf course at Hulton Park and improved transport connections between the M61 and M6 motorways



Rivington Chase development a £200m regeneration of the former Horwich Loco works including 1,700 new homes either side of a new £12m link road connecting Horwich with Middlebrook

Significant regeneration in Bolton Town Centre with the potential to deliver over 5,000 sqm community and leisure uses; up to 14,000 sqm food and drink space; and over 300 new hotel beds and serviced apartments, in addition to new residential developments such as Moor Lane, Deansgate Gardens and St George's Road leading to 5,000 additional town centre residents

£3m refurbishment of the Central Library, alongside the £11m Wellsprings Innovation and Incubation Hub, the Market Food Hall (part of the £5.59m transformation of Bolton Market) and Elizabeth Park

£5m GM Mayor's Cycling and Walking Challenge Fund to facilitate walking and cycling into the town centre and the proposed GM Beeline Cycle Network

National Heritage Lottery Fund including £4m to support renovation of Rock Hall at Moses Gate Park

£13.3m Future High Street Fund to transform Farnworth Town Centre complemented by £20m Long Term Plan for Towns funding

Farnworth Green including 97 residential units, a range of food and beverage options and a new community space

Regeneration projects in Westhoughton, Horwich and Little Lever District Centres

Bolton Institute of Medical Science, backed by the Levelling Up Fund. £42m project creating jobs and driving innovation and enterprise

This place-based investment is complemented by borough wide initiatives such as the £2.8m UK Shared Prosperity Fund investment which includes specific programmes to support the visitor economy, and the GM Culture Fund boosting arts, culture and creativity.

Visitor Economy Strategy

Bolton

Responding to Drivers of Change



03

Bolton's Visitor Economy Assets and Opportunities

Bolton's Current Position

Bolton's visitor economy currently provides a significant contribution to the local economy, directly supporting 10,000 jobs and 1,100 businesses.

Putting this into context, this accounts for 8% of total jobs in Bolton, and more than 10% of total businesses. The visitor economy generated £83m in economic output in 2021, accounting for 1.4% of total GVA. The sector was heavily exposed to the impact of the pandemic, in line with national and international trends. As such, it is helpful to reflect upon the pre-pandemic position to highlight the scope for recovery and further growth.

Bolton has a healthy sized working age population (61%) that is well placed to respond to the current and future employment needs in the visitor economy. Home to just under 300,000 people – around 10% of Greater Manchester's population – Bolton has a young and family centred population. Its culturally diverse population presents demand for a varied culture and leisure offer, while a particularly strong and well-established calendar of events – including the Bolton Food and Drink Festival, IRONMAN UK, and more – draws visitors into Bolton from far and wide.

In 2021, Bolton had 3.4 million visitors, compared to 7.3 million in 2019. This accounted for a growing share of visitors to GM, at 6% of total visitors to the city region. While there is evidence of a start of a recovery in visitor numbers since the pandemic – and growth in the number of visitor economy businesses in Bolton which far exceeded both the regional and national averages for the period 2017 to 2022 – Bolton does face some challenges in attracting visitors back to its town centre with the loss of several retail anchors in recent years, which can also be seen across other GM towns.

Bolton has excellent transport connectivity to the regional centre of Manchester, easy to reach capital assets, and is the only GM town with its own university which helps to develop and retain talent in the region, Bolton has a strong basis upon which to further develop its visitor economy.



Bolton's Visitor Economy: Current Position

Sources:
Population and Demography: Census, 2021
Visitor Numbers: STEAM, 2009-2021
Businesses: UKBC 2021, Jobs: BRES 2021
GVA (Accommodation & Food Services Only): ONS 2021

BOLTON'S DEMOGRAPHY IN 2021

296,041 Population

10%
of GM population

65%
of Bolton households with children

28%
Ethnic minority population
(24% in Greater Manchester, 19% in England)

EMPLOYMENT TREND IN BOLTON'S VISITOR ECONOMY

2017	9,000
2018	10,000
2019	9,000
2020	9,000
2021	10,000

GROWTH IN THE NUMBER OF VISITORS ECONOMY BUSINESS 2017-2022

35%	Bolton
22%	Greater Manchester
14%	England

BOLTON'S VISITOR ECONOMY IN 2021

10,000
Jobs

1,100
Businesses

£83m
GVA (1.4%)

VISITORS TO BOLTON

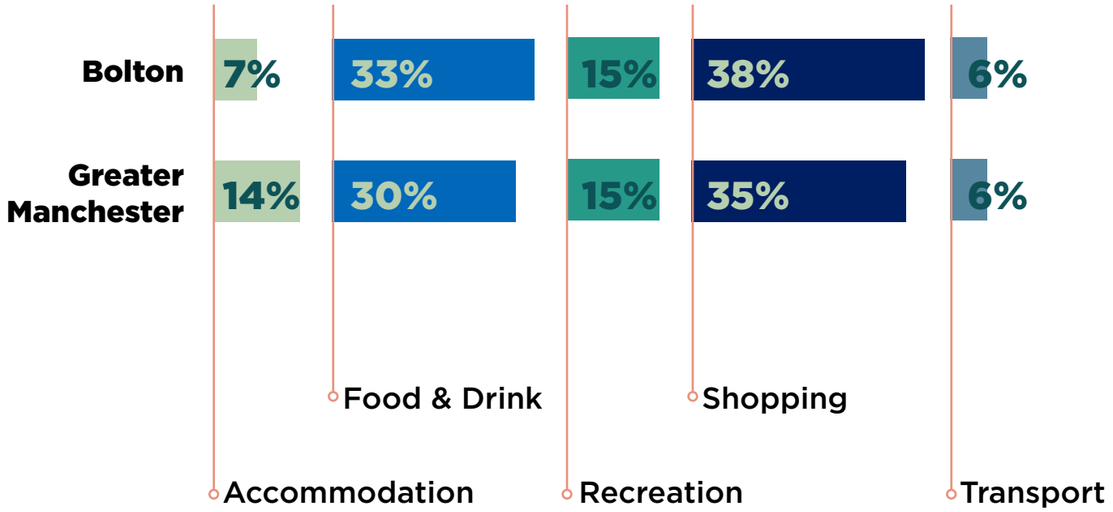
IN 2021
3.4M
6.1% of GM

IN 2019
7.3M
5.8% of GM

Visitor economy spend

Visitor spend data shows that shopping currently accounts for the largest visitor economy spend in Bolton, followed by food and drink and recreation. In comparison to Greater Manchester, Bolton equals or exceeds the proportions under each category of visitor economy spend apart from on accommodation. In this area, Bolton (7%) is under-represented relative to the Greater Manchester region (14%).

SHOPPING ACCOUNTS FOR THE LARGEST ECONOMY SPEND



In 2021, 61% of visitors stayed with friends or relatives while only 38% stayed in serviced accommodation. In comparison, 60% of visitors stayed in serviced accommodation in Greater Manchester. Consideration should be given to increasing the number of visitors staying in serviced and non-serviced accommodation in order to allow for greater economic impact per visit in the borough. Bolton's excellent calendar of events and broader visitor economy needs to be supported by a greater range of quality accommodation in order to attract and retain more potential visitors.

Bolton has an especially strong food and drink scene through its annual Food and Drink Festival, attracting 500,000 people in 2023. The festival is a pivotal event supporting pride in place and can be leveraged to drive a message of a modern and attractive destination for a diverse range of visitors. More widely, the number of early evening dining establishments in the centre of Bolton is limited and an area of priority focus having regard to support for the visitor economy.

Analysis of the business base found that restaurants, event catering activities, and other food service activities were all among the top visitor economy sub-sectors for growth between 2019 and 2022. Overall, there was recovery across most visitor economy sub-sectors in terms of numbers of businesses in 2022 compared to before the pandemic. When looking at employment, the sub-sectors which saw the biggest job losses between 2019 and 2021 included travel agencies, hotels and gambling activities. In contrast, public houses and restaurants in Bolton have seen significant growth in the number of people employed over the same period.

Visitor Economy Strategy

Bolton's Visitor Economy Assets and Opportunities

Key Assets and Events

Bolton has a strong collection of visitor economy assets, with particular strengths around cultural venues.



Bolton's award-winning **Octagon Theatre** has attracted over 3.5 million people through audiences since 1967 and, in 2020, completed on a £12m renovation programme which will secure the venue's future. It is one of only a few producing theatres across the UK. The Octagon is a fundamental community asset, providing food and beverage facilities, family festivals, and community workshops.



Bolton's all-round live entertainment venue **The Albert Halls** is a grade II listed building, located within the historic **Town Hall**, housing a 673-seat theatre, four bars and restaurant facilities, offering live entertainment including comedy, music, drama, dance and pantomime performances, and meeting and conferencing suites.



Meanwhile, the **Bolton Central Library and Museum** – which recently benefitted from a refurbishment programme totalling £3.8m– attracts over 300,000 visitors a year to its engaging exhibits, including its large, and world renown, collection of Egyptian artefacts.



Bolton Market and Food Hall sits at the heart of the town centre and has undergone a significant, £5.59m refurbishment and expansion, including a new food hall and expanded outdoor area. Continued regeneration of Bolton town centre with an enriched and diverse offer is a key opportunity for increasing visitor numbers to the borough.



Events play a key role in Bolton's visitor economy, both in attracting visitors and delivering economic impact. As well as the leading **Bolton Food and Drink Festival**, Bolton is also home to **IRONMAN UK** and the world's largest **IRONKIDS** event. The annual **IRONMAN UK** and **IRONKIDS** events in Bolton are pivotal to driving visitor footfall and spend and provide a platform for global reach.



Bolton is home to heritage gems including **Smithills Hall**, a Grade I listed manor house that provides insight into the area's rich history.

Visitor Economy Strategy

Bolton

Bolton's Visitor Economy Assets and Opportunities



These events shine a light on Bolton's visitor potential, and there is significant scope to support the visitor economy to grow through developing the enabling visitor infrastructure offer such as accommodation and the food and beverage offer around these events. The development of enabling visitor infrastructure can also support Bolton's other assets, such as **Bolton Wanderers' Stadium** (which has also hosted a number of leading music industry performers) and **University of Bolton**, to drive inbound visitation in the borough.



Bolton's place-based assets such as **Le Mans Crescent** put Bolton on a global stage as an excellent film location offering both period and contemporary locations. Bolton facilitated 141 filming days in 2023, hosting productions shown on major broadcasters and motion pictures, benefiting the local economy and inspiring local people and students to work in film and production.



Bolton has fantastic countryside with untapped potential. Made up of over **50% greenspace** it offers excellent opportunities for visitors and locals alike from parks, multiuse outdoor trails to fishing spots and moorlands.

Visitor Economy Strategy
Bolton
Bolton's Visitor Economy Assets and Opportunities

Planned and Proposed Investments

Significant investment and regeneration is planned in Bolton, and much has already taken place over recent years. A variety of planned and proposed investments in local assets and supporting infrastructure will be key to supporting the next stage of growth in Bolton's visitor economy.

As part of Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Bolton has received **UK Shared Prosperity Funding** (UKSPF) with the purpose of "Building Pride in Place and Increasing Life Chances" through the pillars of 'community and place', supporting local business, the people and skills agenda, and a range of environmental enhancement initiatives. Several UKSPF interventions will feed into the development of Bolton's visitor economy in the short term.



For example, **Light Up Bolton** will see the introduction of architectural lighting of civic buildings and the replacement of street lighting columns along key gateways. This will be complimented by the creation of **Digital Wayfinding** navigation to improve the town centre visitor experience. Public perception of safety is a key issue and will be supported through these town centre developments.



Investment is also planned for **Creative Bolton**, a project that will deliver exciting and accessible projects that ensure that culture, heritage, and the arts are fully embedded across the social and economic development of the borough.



Visit Bolton will act as an essential platform to profile the borough with the creation of a place narrative and place strategy for the Bolton place brand. In addition, the development of visitor economy themes and plans to provide a strategic framework to support hospitality, cultural venues, and public outdoor spaces.



To encourage a greater number and variety of events in Bolton, the introduction of critical **Events Infrastructure** to host events and activities across Bolton will enhance and deliver community engagement, support hospitality and the local economy.

Investment in our **Film Partnership** will enable the enhancement of a rapidly growing area of economic and cultural development within the town.





There are 'once in a generation' opportunities available to Bolton in the form of the **Hulton Park** development, and the opportunity this will bring to deliver a state of the art championship golf course and secure the **Ryder Cup**.



Exploiting existing green space assets whilst bringing forward new investment in greenspace such as a new urban park in Bolton town centre at **Elizabeth Park** which includes performance space, and the planned renovation of **Rock Hall** at Moses Gate Park, builds on the potential for event and active tourism.

Opportunities to harness digital technologies as a driver of creativity and business tourism include the provision of business/incubation space at **The Wellsprings Hub** for digital and creative businesses and start-ups.





Continued investment by Network Rail, Highways England and other transport bodies can support the development of new businesses and connectivity in Bolton, and subsequently support the growth of the visitor economy. Recent developments include the rollout of the **Bee Network** and the successful implementation of the first phase of bus franchising across Greater Manchester in Bolton, supporting easier access to public transport for those travelling around Bolton and Greater Manchester.



04

Addressing Barriers to Growth

There are a numbers of intervention areas which will address existing barriers to growth in Bolton's visitor economy.



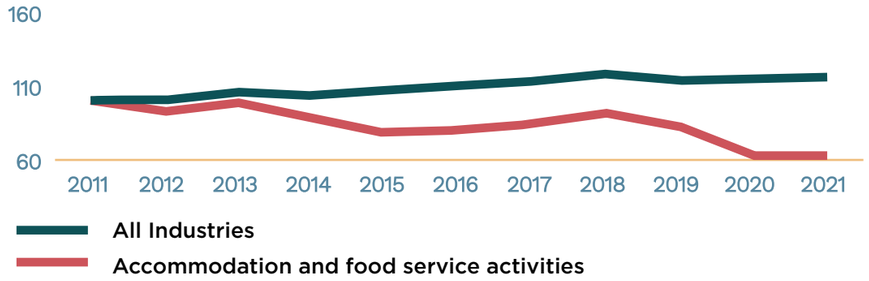
Visitor Economy Strategy

Supporting Resilience in the Sector

The current context in which Bolton's visitor economy finds itself is likely to be one of the most challenging periods in recent years. Coming out of a pandemic that all but shut down the sector and into a period of economic uncertainty characterised by growth in inflation, high interest rates and constrained business and consumer spending, presents a barrier to the recovery of the visitor economy. This underlines the need to support the sector to be diverse and resilient in the face of these drivers and disruptors of change.

The visitor economy in Bolton has experienced challenging conditions historically, with falling levels of economic output since 2011. This was accelerated by the pandemic, with a significant contraction in GVA in 2020, and slow recovery since.

GVA INDEX CHANGE, ACCOMMODATION & FOOD AND ALL INDUSTRIES IN BOLTON (2011=100)



Efforts to support the sector to recover, strengthen resilience to change and increase productivity are key. National policy interventions led by UK Tourism Recovery Plan (2021) and the De Bois Review (2021) can support here, complemented by greater collaboration at the regional level such as the Greater Manchester Night Time Economy Strategy (2021) and Greater Manchester Visitor Economy Strategy (2024) enabling tailored interventions at a local level.

Bolton

Addressing Barriers to Growth

Improving Perceptions of Bolton

Positive perceptions of place will support visitation in Bolton. **The Brand Bolton Strategy** revealed both positive and negative stakeholder perceptions of Bolton which has an impact on the success of the visitor economy.



STRENGTHS IDENTIFIED BY STAKEHOLDERS

- ↑ **Attractive public realm and architecture in Bolton town centre**
- ↑ **Plentiful event space and a good mix of culture and sporting assets**
- ↑ **Regeneration and development activity**
- ↑ **Ethnically diverse population supporting culture and offer**
- ↑ **University presence providing a diverse and youthful vibe**
- ↑ **Green space including moors and countryside**
- ↑ **Good quality of life supported by affordable housing and proximity to employment opportunities**

WEAKNESSES IDENTIFIED BY STAKEHOLDERS

- ↓ **Poor retail and food and drink offer with a lack of evening economy**
- ↓ **Poor sense of arrival at key gateways**
- ↓ **Visually apparent struggling town centre with tired offer which has seen better days**
- ↓ **Concerns about crime and safety in town centres**
- ↓ **Underutilised cultural and historic assets**
- ↓ **Lack of a clear identity and distinctive appeal**



There are a number of initiatives underway to tackle these issues. For example, in response to perceptions of crime and safety the UK Shared Prosperity Fund programme **‘Light Up Bolton’** is underway.

PROJECT: LIGHT UP BOLTON

The project will see the introduction of architectural lighting of our Civic building and replacement of Street lighting columns along key gateways.

Addressing gaps in enabling infrastructure

The provision of high quality, reliable and efficient enabling infrastructure will support growth in the visitor economy. Bolton attracts a significant number of visitors through its extensive events calendar. However, attendees to these events often report a lack of reasons to stay in the town after the event has ended. Providing enabling infrastructure to capture footfall and spend will support local economic benefits for residents and businesses in Bolton. This includes:

- Improving inter and intra borough connectivity to support movement into and within the borough.
- Ensuring a broad accommodation offer for visitors to choose from.
- Providing reasons for visitors to stay and spend for longer including the provision of vibrant town and district centres with a quality food and beverage offer.

Mitigating labour market shortages and gaps

Labour shortages have emerged as a persistent and challenging national policy issue, casting a shadow over the effective operation of the visitor economy. Stakeholder consultation points to the rising cost of labour across the whole economy, with many businesses in the visitor economy struggling to retain and recruit talent due to already tight operating margins. The Economic Growth and Resilience Plan can support positive intervention in the labour market.





Developing Civic Pride in Place

Bolton already has a strong sense of identity, with a proud heritage evoked in its assets and its people. Bolton is capitalising on this sense of pride with an events programme that utilises key event infrastructure such as The Albert Halls and the Stadium at Middlebrook, home to Bolton Wanderers F.C. as well as programmes developed by Bolton's Clean and Green Partnership which will create and inclusive and welcoming town centre.

Joining Up Activity

There is a lot of potential to grow specific visitor specialisms if better links between assets and attractions were forged. For example University of Bolton offers a potential source of friends and family visitors, while businesses such as Bolton Wanderers at their stadium will provide capacity for hosting significant events that draw visitors to Bolton. Linking key attractions such as the Bolton Market and Octagon Theatre, Bolton Library and Museum and Smithills Hall through collaborative marketing could further enhance the ability of these attractions to draw more visitors and increase the reach of cultural and heritage experiences to a wider audience.

Providing a Shared Vision and Clear Direction

The success of the Visitor Economy Strategy depends on effective collaboration. This includes stakeholders in business, the Third sector, education sector, development partners and the local community. Bolton is home to engaged and enthusiastic stakeholders who have a real desire to change things for the better. Providing a Visitor Economy Strategy which responds to stakeholder needs and aspirations and has a clear sense of direction and momentum for change will support deliverability and impact.

Several key stakeholders felt more could be done to link up the network of businesses operating in, and adjacent to, the visitor economy in the borough, including a greater level of collaboration on events and marketing.



05

Action Plan

Delivering Six Key Themes

Bolton Council can play a clear role in the delivery of the Visitor Economy Strategy through strong leadership, catalysing the conditions for growth and prosperity in the sector and working with partners and key stakeholders to deliver and coordinate activity.

The following actions are framed around six themes, with Council's role identified as lead or influencer.

Lead On

Work with partners to deliver (influence)

Unlocking higher productivity in the visitor economy will drive growth potential. This includes getting visitors to spend more when they visit through converting day visits into overnight visits, increasing the duration of overnight stays, increasing dwell time through an extended offer, and attracting more business tourism. The offer and image of Bolton town centre and its district centres will play a key role in achieving this.

THEME 1: Diversify the Offer and Image of Town Centres

Council Role	Action
	Deliver town centre and district centre masterplans and associated projects – work in partnership with investors, developers, the business community and owners/occupiers to realise the potential of Bolton town centre and district centres as vibrant centres with a diversified offer to attract footfall and spend from visitors and residents.
	Support interventions which can make the borough an attractive and safe place to visit – encourage and deliver interventions which enhance the attractiveness and animation of town and district centres including improved public realm, increased signage, affordable parking, creative lighting, CCTV, proportionate regulation and more visible policing to ensure centres are attractive to investors, visitors and people who live and work in the area to support footfall and spend.
	Establish and develop themed markets – develop the market offer across Bolton to strengthen the draw and appeal to visitors and residents with consideration of arts, crafts and food to increase footfall.
	Leverage the profile of major attractions – Bolton Museum and Smithills Hall Museum are some of the most visited attractions in Greater Manchester. Build on this to expand the profile of a range of Bolton attractions on sub-regional, regional, and national platforms to raise awareness – such as Visit Bolton and Visit Manchester – and drive visitation and increase dwell time in the borough.
	Champion local products – champion local products, independent retailers and restaurants across different promotional tools including visitmanchester.com, marketing campaigns and social media.
	Utilise empty or underutilised space in town centres to support growth in the visitor economy – pilot activity through meanwhile uses to test demand, diversify the offer and support growth in the visitor economy i.e. pop up shops, food and drink, exhibition space, makers markets etc.
	Develop the Night Time Economy and Early Evening Economy in Town and District Centres – support development of the night-time economy and early evening economy through the development of a strategy to realise an inclusive and diverse offer which caters for residents and visitors alike. This action needs to celebrate diversity through delivering events and a sustainable food and beverage offer which reflects Bolton's diverse communities and encourages entrepreneurship and creativity through a community-led approach to realising potential.

THEME 2: Secure and Capitalise on Opportunities for Major Investment

There is significant investment already secured in Bolton which will create a step change in the borough's offer. Capitalising on existing and potential investment in new and established events and visitor attractions will provide a rich arts, culture and leisure offer, attracting visitors and spend and raising the profile of Bolton as a place to visit.

Action

Delivering Major Investment in Bolton Town Centre through Levelling Up Funding – Deliver the £20m Levelling Up Fund project in Bolton Town Centre North to strengthen the town centre as an attractive destination to live, work and visit - a project that includes a premium hotel in the former Magistrates Court building, a reimagined Marketplace Shopping Centre and enhancements to Mawdsley Street and Nelson Square to create a new gateway into the Mawdsley Street Conservation Area.

Secure flagship events – realise the ambition to secure the Ryder Cup at Hulton Park in 2035 through the proposed investment in a new international championship golf course and venue, placing Bolton in the global spotlight by hosting the world's premier golf event and enhance the perception and profile of Bolton on a world stage. This game changing opportunity requires buy in from key stakeholders and the community at large and a comprehensive package of support.

Secure further investment in the Aquarium – secure investment to improve facilities at the Aquarium to realise its full potential including the introduction of flexible creative, educational and community space.

Refurbish Rock Hall – develop the Grade 2 Listed Rock Hall as a multi-use community hub. Rock Hall Revival will preserve the heritage of Moses Gate in Farnworth by redeveloping the hall and enhancing the natural environment of the Moses Gate Country Park. £4m from the National Heritage Lottery Fund has been awarded to support the development phase of this project with further funding sought to support delivery. This project can support growth in active and adventure tourism.

Feasibility of new music venues – develop feasibility and associated investment case to develop a large music venue or network of smaller venues in Bolton to encourage developments in the night-time economy.

Creative Improvement District – creative improvement districts (CIDs) are being developed by GMCA to develop the cultural, creative and night time economy led town centre and high street regeneration. Bolton could participate in the CID programme which provides a focus on safety, environment, creative spaces, events, diversity, business engagement, development and attraction, marketing, branding and reputation. The CID report will provide recommendations to consider.

Council Role

THEME 3: Lever Active and Nature Based Tourism

Bolton has the potential to capitalise on the presence of sporting infrastructure and green and blue natural assets to grow the visitor economy through investing in the active and nature based tourism offer. This includes securing major sports events, new businesses and attracting visitors seeking to participate in physical activity, adventure and to engage with nature. Enhancing this offer will also support quality of life for Bolton residents.

Council Role

Action

Scope the Active and Nature Based Tourism Offer – including sporting infrastructure such as the Bolton Arena, Bolton Wanderers' Stadium, as well as venues such as Party & Play in Westhoughton. Green space such as Rivington Pike and access to the West Pennine Moors, Moses Gate Country Park, The Hive at Moss Bank Park, Queens Park, Hall I'th Wood, Smithills Open Farm, heritage walking trails with destinations such as Barrow Bridge Village, Curley's Dining and Fisheries, proposed outdoor events at Rock Hall in Farnworth, outdoor pursuits, kayaking etc to build product and promote a clear offer by working with partners such as National Trust, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and Groundwork. This includes working with partners in adjoining areas to maximise proximity to assets such as the Anderton Centre, an Outdoor Learning Centre offering experiential learning and adventure-based activities, and attractions such as Go Ape Rivington.

Secure Major Sport Events – maximise the presence of sports infrastructure including Bolton Arena and Bolton Wanderers' Stadium to secure major events and capture spend within the borough through joining up enabling infrastructure such as accommodation and food and drink provision.

Develop Digital Walking Tours – secure investment to facilitate a series of digital tours encompassing filming locations, natural capital and heritage assets including historic houses and heritage centres.

Realising the Bee Network for Cycling and Walking – complete planned and under construction improvements in Bolton to connect the borough to GM as part of the plan to deliver the UK's largest cycling and walking network.

THEME 4: Enhance the Cultural and Major Events Strategy

Bolton will further capitalise upon Greater Manchester's prowess as a leading destination for events, culture, sports and business events. Its recent naming as Greater Manchester's town of culture for 2024 helps to place culture at the heart of Bolton. Events provide a reason for visitors to come and experience Bolton and showcase the borough as a tourism and events destination to a national and international audience. They also support liveability through animating the borough and creating a sense of vibrancy, enable residents to engage in events and feel a strong sense of citizenship and pride in place. Benefits to the economy include an increase in job creation, visitor spend and supply chain development. Bolton needs to be proactive in identifying and prioritising events and build capacity in the resident voluntary, and business community to support delivery.

Action	Council Role
Implement the UKSPF Investment Plan – deliver Communities and Place interventions in line with the plan intended to deliver new and improved public spaces and amenities, and new and improved cultural venues and programmes. This includes Light Up Bolton, Albert Halls Cultural Community Hub, Visit Bolton, Events Infrastructure, Clean and Green Bolton, and Creative Bolton.	
Build upon the success of present annual events and create a Cultural and Events Programme, with a balanced programme of large-scale and community-based events throughout the year such as IRONMAN UK, Bolton Food and Drink Festival, Bolton Film Festival and Put Big Light On. This will prioritise the major events and support them to scale up and increase international and domestic visitor impact. This prioritised approach will make best use of public funding and ensure significant economic value and profile for the borough is delivered through high impact, high profile statement events that deliver significant impact and reach and reflect the vision and ambition of the borough.	
Maximise International Events – work closely with Marketing Manchester and wider organisations to maximise opportunities created by international events to capture opportunities for hosting in Bolton and secure a legacy from participation. This includes lobbying and raising the profile of Bolton amongst decision makers and proactively identifying opportunities which align strongly with Bolton's particular expertise and strengths as a destination.	
Animate Town Centres - hold more frequent cultural events and festivals in town centre venues and outdoor spaces to drive footfall and spend. The diversity of Bolton's population provides an opportunity to leverage multi-cultural tourism and Bolton's vibrant diverse identity. Food, festivals and events provide a positive means to support community cohesion and attract interest from wider audiences.	
Extend capacity for delivery – refocus the role of council away from programming of events towards a more enabling and capacity building role. This will support delivery of an extended events programme. This includes work with local cultural organisations, community groups, the Third Sector and independent event organisers to increase capacity for taking on a greater role in the organisation and delivery of events, including continued development of high quality events to increase visitors and deliver an increased sense of place and pride, as well as identification of new events. Investing in enabling events infrastructure can support the capacity of partners to deliver, providing a springboard to extend existing events as well as catering for new events.	
Widening Participation in Events - provide more participatory programmes for schools, young people and community groups, and more opportunities for local businesses and hospitality to benefit. Ensure accessibility is central to event strategy [considering faith, background, disability] to ensure an inclusive offer.	

THEME 5: Grow Visitor Products and Markets

Extending and diversifying the visitor offer through product and audience development will attract new visitors, encourage repeat visits, extend dwell time and retain spend within the borough. There are a number of identified opportunities which present an opportunity to grow Bolton's visitor offering and extend to new markets. Additionally, by utilising Bolton's relationships within Greater Manchester, and optimising the town's proximity to Manchester, growing the visitor products and experiences will enable Bolton to be included in itineraries of UK and oversees tourists visiting Manchester as their primary destination.

Action	Council Role
Bolton Film Office – establish a film office partnership which can be used as a central hub for commercial filming opportunities; delivering Bolton Film Festival, raise the profile of Bolton as a destination for film, and as a place to provide experience and skills development for students. Develop a product to support visitation to film locations in the borough.	
Business Tourism Scoping Study – work closely with major employers to identify the potential for business tourism in Bolton and existing barriers to realising this potential. This includes close working with the University of Bolton to explore potential for academic research strengths and overseas students to attract national and international visitors, providing an opportunity for accommodation and conference business, and leverage local spend opportunities from the visiting friends and relatives market.	
Large Scale Music Events – leverage the presence of potential traditional and non-traditional music venues including Albert Halls and Bolton Wanderers' Stadium to leverage proximity to Manchester's established music scene and secure regular and high profile music events to build the music tourism offer.	
Family friendly portfolio – set the ambition for Bolton to be the most family friendly destination in GM and secure investment to attract and develop a portfolio of family friendly attractions (building on the existing offer to secure additional investment, attract new investment, and develop effective promotion for the target market). This offer can leverage TfGM improved connectivity which can enable opportunities to drive visits from Manchester by providing a clear offer to attract visitation.	

THEME 6: Invest in Enabling Activity

Investment in enabling activity which can support growth in the visitor economy is vital to ensuring that Bolton has the supporting infrastructure and proactive partnerships in place to deliver and succeed.

Action	Council Role
Launch 'Brand Bolton' – to provide a strong overall narrative for Bolton that leads the direction for a clear and coherent place-brand identity covering key areas of live, work, study, visit and invest, using the strategic signature pieces. This will ensure the unique attributes that make Bolton distinct are shared to wider stakeholders, investors and visitors. Key attributes identified by Brand Bolton include 'friendly' and 'welcoming' which need to be brought to life to support targeted activity.	
Develop a Place Partnership Bid – develop a targeted Place Partnership bid and associated Expression of Interest to the Arts Council to realise the potential of Cultural Communities and Creative People in Bolton.	
Strengthen presence and profile on the Local Visitor Economy Partnership for Greater Manchester – leverage Manchester's success as a visitor destination and continue to work closely with Marketing Manchester to deliver marketing and promotion of principal town centres in Bolton and ensure Bolton's offer is appropriately differentiated to increase profile and offer.	
Better connected, affordable, integrated and inclusive public transport – work with partners to improve public transport links both into Bolton and within Bolton to connect residents/visitors to visitor attractions and town centres and allow them to move seamlessly between modes and services. This includes working with Network Rail, TfGM, other transport providers and operators and neighbouring districts and exploiting opportunities that will emerge from the GM Devolution deal and Network North.	
Shared Box Office and Marketing Platform – establish a shared box office and marketing platform for the borough's cultural venues and events to reach target audiences through presenting a more targeted cohesive offer, including a 'clash diary' to ensure venues are not competing for audiences.	
Enhanced Visitor Information – deliver an excellent visitor information service across Bolton maximising digital and mobile technology, effectively linked to visitbolton.com and visitmanchester.com. This can include tailored marketing to support growth in target markets e.g. film, nature, sports, food and drink etc. Consider scope for positioning attractions/discounts in Bolton on the newly launched Manchester Visitor Pass. This action includes extending volunteer programmes to improve visitor welcome. The 'Discover' App is currently in place.	

Council Role	Action
	Consider the potential for town centre partnerships – bring together the public and private sector to plan and invest in town centres to drive footfall, spend and vibrancy. This will allow key organisations to have a say in how the town centres are developed and contribute to their future. This includes the development of an Economic Alliance and consideration of the feasibility of a Business Improvement District (BID).
	Strategic Account Management – close engagement with major employers, including anchor institutions in the borough such as the university and enabling infrastructure such as hotels, to understand how an enhanced visitor offer can support their business growth (i.e. the attraction of talent, students, investor perceptions etc), and put in place mechanisms to respond to these requirements to ensure major employers are retained in the borough, can grow, and contribute towards a positive image.
	Implement the Bolton Cultural Strategy – to include strengthening and diversifying the Bolton Cultural Partnership to enable the delivery of key cultural projects and support growth in the visitor economy.
	Continue to invest in skills for the visitor economy – deliver the Greater Manchester Local Skills Improvement Plan in Bolton which includes a sector focus on creative, culture and sport. Work with partners to attract and retain talent to fuel growth in the visitor economy, ensuring skills supply meets current and forecast demand, and that tourism businesses have the skills they require to thrive in Bolton. This includes working closely with skills providers, the University of Bolton, and working with key partners to deliver Bolton's Economic Growth and Resilience Plan.
	Improving the visitor accommodation offer – work closely with existing providers and hoteliers and prospective investors to raise awareness of the opportunities for growth in the visitor economy in Bolton and drivers of change to secure investment in existing and new stock to deliver quality provision. Opportunities to attract premium hotel brands in to Bolton will strengthen the existing offer to work alongside general hotel stock and Airbnb.

Visitor Economy Strategy
Bolton
Action Plan



06

Delivering the Strategy

Partnership and Collaboration

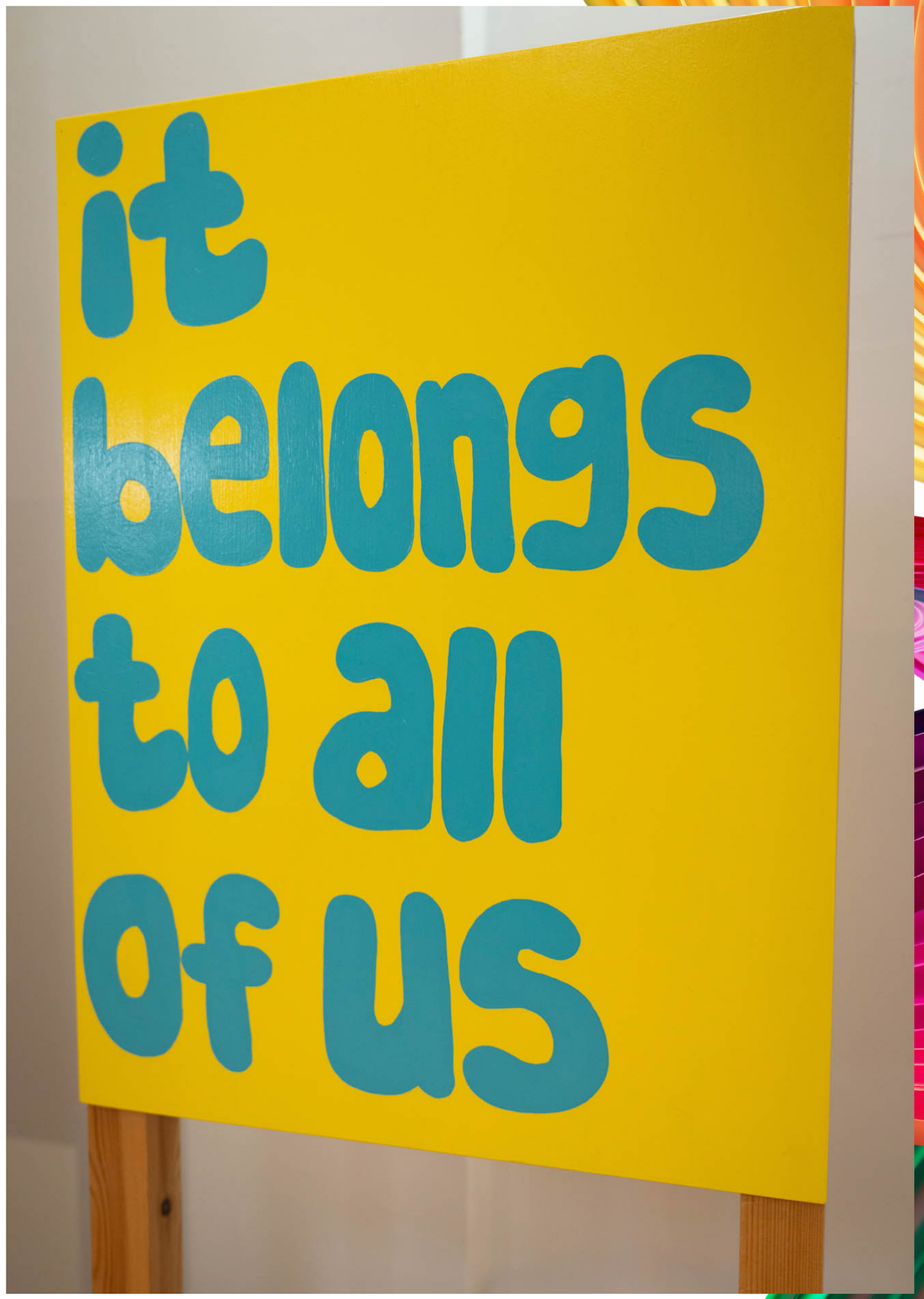
There is a strong desire to develop Bolton as a visitor destination, but currently there are no mechanisms for the different businesses within the visitor economy to come together with each other and with the public sector.

Collaboration will be a key part of the improvements needed to lead Bolton towards becoming a more successful and higher performing destination. Deeper business engagement, developing partnership and showing that there is real leadership to drive forward the visitor economy agenda will demonstrate commitment to improving Bolton as a visitor destination.



The Role of Bolton Council

The role of Bolton Council is critical to success: working with private sector businesses, a senior lead officer should be responsible for ensuring that the strategy is being delivered. By bringing together the various delivery departments of the council, along with local stakeholders such as the University of Bolton, private sector businesses and other Greater Manchester partners (GMCA, Marketing Manchester), a partnership approach will create a common sense of ambition and generate opportunities for collaboration.



Funding

This is a strategy for the Visitor Economy in Bolton and as such, its success will depend on delivery and funding from a range of partners. Bolton Council, for example, is already investing in major events like IRONMAN UK and the Bolton Food & Drink Festival to drive benefits such as spend, footfall, and improved perception. Funding for development is also in progress through the Government's Levelling Up and Shared Prosperity Funds. Bolton Council established a £100m fund to support the delivery of the Town Centre Strategy with the aim of leveraging further private sector funding and investment to regenerate Bolton town centre for the benefit of the wider Borough, its residents and business community. Arts Council England and the National Lottery are also supporting programmes across the borough.

This strategy should join up funding investment to deliver the shared ambitions of this strategy and give confidence to lever private sector investment. There will however be a need to fund the management, oversight and coordination of the Strategy delivery, ensuring that progress is made, projects are coordinated and progressed, and outputs are monitored.



Monitoring and evaluation

As the strategy is implemented, it should be allowed to evolve and respond to new data, opportunities and challenges as they emerge. An annual delivery plan which is informed by the strategy and owned by a wide group of stakeholders, should detail short-term actions and be reviewed and updated on an annual basis. Success will be measured through key performance indicators including:

- Increase in footfall at events
- Increase in footfall in town centres
- Decrease in vacancy levels in town centres
- Increase in visitor numbers to the borough and to visitor attractions
- Increase inward investment (£)
- Increase in economic impact (£)
- Increase in marketing reach
- Improved life satisfaction amongst residents
- Number of upgraded visitor attractions
- Number of new visitor attractions
- Increased level of engagement with community, business and Third sector groups

IN CONCLUSION

This document provides an ambitious vision for supporting and developing the visitor economy across the borough. It asserts that Bolton means business: a thriving visitor economy can provide benefits for business and communities and will encourage further inward investment. Through collaboration and partnership, we can create the catalyst for Bolton's cultural and leisure renaissance, building on some already strong foundations.

Bolton's Visitor Economy Strategy compliments the Bolton Brand, the Cultural Strategy, the Economic Growth and Resilience Plan which all have the shared aim of providing a framework for driving forward Bolton Vision 2030.

Bolton's people are the key to its success. By working together, we can create the partnerships and develop the networks to deliver our shared ambition for Bolton. Every resident and every business has a part to play and everyone will reap the rewards of success.



Funded by
UK Government

FIND OUT MORE

Please get in touch with us to find out more about our Visitor Economy Strategy

Email us:

marketingeventsteam@bolton.gov.uk

Visit our website:

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