



**Bolton Local Plan  
Interim Sustainability Appraisal Report  
(Stage B – Initial Assessment)**

**Contents**

Section 1. Introduction ..... 3

Section 2. A new Local Plan for Bolton ..... 5

Section 3. Sustainability Appraisal Framework..... 14

Section 4. Local Plan Objectives ..... 16

Section 5. Spatial Options ..... 21

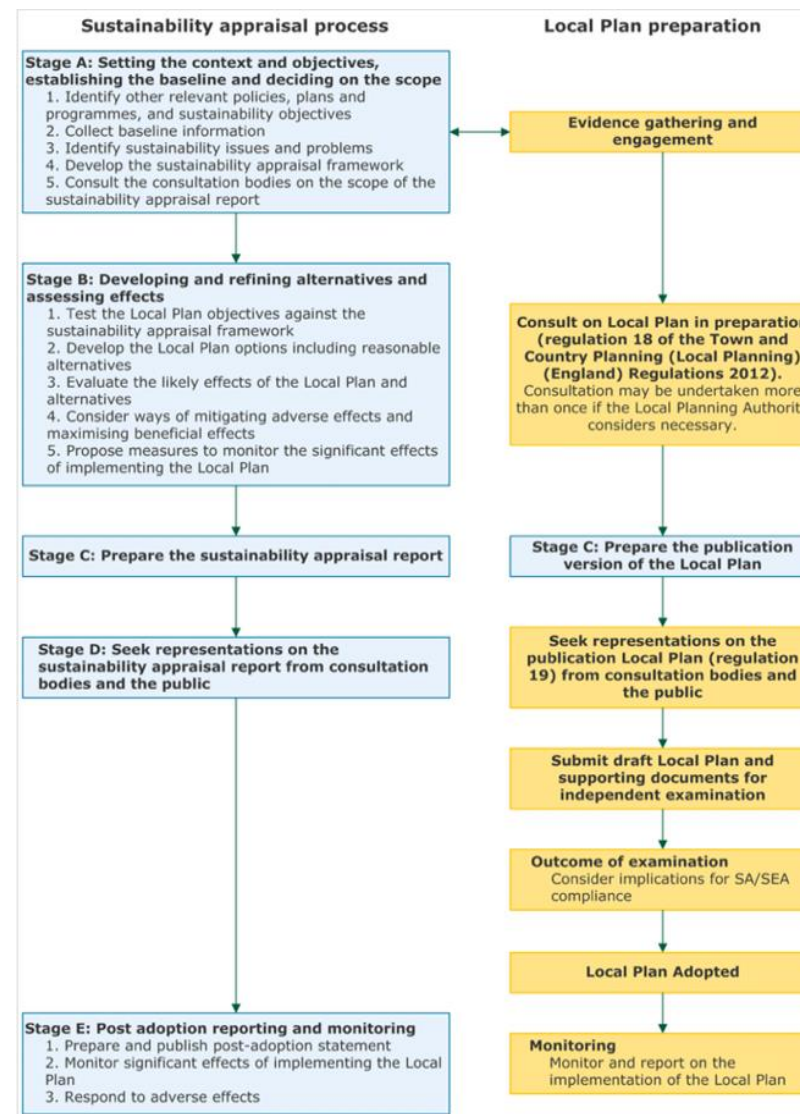
Section 6. Proposed Scope of Sustainability Appraisal Report.. 26

Section 7. Next Steps ..... 27

Appendix 1 Defining the Scope of the Appraisal..... 28

# Section 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Bolton Local Plan is the statutory development plan for the borough, setting out how Bolton will grow and change up to 2042. Once adopted, it will be the basis for making planning decisions. It will be used to determine what gets built, where, and on what terms.
- 1.2. Bolton Council is producing a Sustainability Appraisal of its Local Plan. A Sustainability Appraisal is a structured assessment to ensure economic, social and environmental effect are considered and addressed. The main stages of this assessment are shown in Figure 1.
- 1.3. The Council has appointed Arup to support this process and provide expert advice to:
  - help us define and finalise the scope of the assessment; and
  - undertake appraisals of strategic aspects of the Plan, including the initial assessment of the objectives and Spatial Options presented in this report
- 1.4. This interim sustainability report provides an update on our Sustainability Appraisal process and some of our early findings. This is not our final assessment. We expect to revisit this following further consultation on the Local Plan and updates to our evidence. We are sharing this at an early stage so you can understand our direction of travel with this assessment.



**Figure 1. Sustainability Flow Chart.**

Source: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal>

## Legal context

- 1.5. Section 19 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires every local planning authority to prepare a Sustainability Appraisal for its Local Plan. The Sustainability Appraisal must address the duties in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004, known as the “SEA Regulations”.
- 1.6. More information is provided in national planning guidance and is available here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/strategic-environmental-assessment-and-sustainability-appraisal>

## Main stages of the Assessment

- 1.7. We are integrating the stages of the Sustainability Appraisal process with our plan-making process as it is best practice to do so and will improve the quality of our plan.

Spring-Summer 2025  
**Scoping (Stage A)**

- 1.8. Earlier this year, we undertook a scoping exercise with bodies we were legally required to consult — Historic England; Environment Agency and Natural England — on the scope of our Sustainability Appraisal including our approach to assessing the Local Plan’s social, economic and environmental effects.
- 1.9. We undertook initial consultation under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. This was focused on what the Local Plan should aim to achieve – its broad ambition or visions and its

main objectives to help provide a focus for the development of plan approaches.

Autumn 2025

### **Developing Alternatives, Refining Alternatives and Assessing Effects (Stage B)**

- 1.10. We are now starting to consider our Local Plan approach and to develop initial policies for the plan which will all be subjected to a Sustainability Appraisal.
- 1.11. We are publishing our Local Plan ‘Direction of Travel’ document (November 2025) for consultation, under Regulation 18 of the Town and Country Planning Local Planning England Regulations 2012. It presents updated Local Plan objectives and a series of potential spatial strategy options to help guide conversations with our stakeholders and inform production of detailed local plan policies, including Site Allocations.
- 1.12. This Interim Sustainability Appraisal Report shows our ‘Direction of Travel’. It is not a statutory requirement at this for this stage of plan-making. However, we thought it important to share our initial assessments of the Local Plan objectives and options to ensure a robust approach to the later more detailed stages of assessment.

Summer 2026

### **Stage 3: Sustainability Report (Stage C and D)**

- 1.13. This process will culminate in the production of an accompanying Sustainability Appraisal Report of the Local Plan (Regulation 19). It will be published alongside the Local Plan.

## Section 2.

# A new Local Plan for Bolton

### About Bolton

- 2.1 Bolton is a metropolitan borough in north west England, about ten miles north west of Manchester city centre (figure 2). It is one of ten authorities within the Greater Manchester Combined Authority. The borough covers around 139 square kilometres and sits between the Southern Pennine uplands and the Greater Manchester lowlands.
- 2.2 Bolton Council is a unitary authority responsible for all local services. It is divided into twenty wards, each represented by three councillors. The borough is part of a devolved system for transport, housing, health and skills.
- 2.3 Bolton is formed of several towns and neighbourhoods. Bolton Town Centre is the civic and administrative centre. It contains the Town Hall, courts, Central Library, Albert Halls, Bolton Market and the University of Bolton. Surrounding neighbourhoods include Halliwell, Tonge Moor, Great Lever and Rumworth. Horwich, Farnworth, Westhoughton and Little Lever each have their own centres, services and community character.
- 2.4 The borough has ten railway stations and strategic road connections via the M61, A6 and A666. Bus services support everyday access across the authority area, and there are signs of a recovery in bus patronage levels since the peak of the Covid- 9 pandemic.

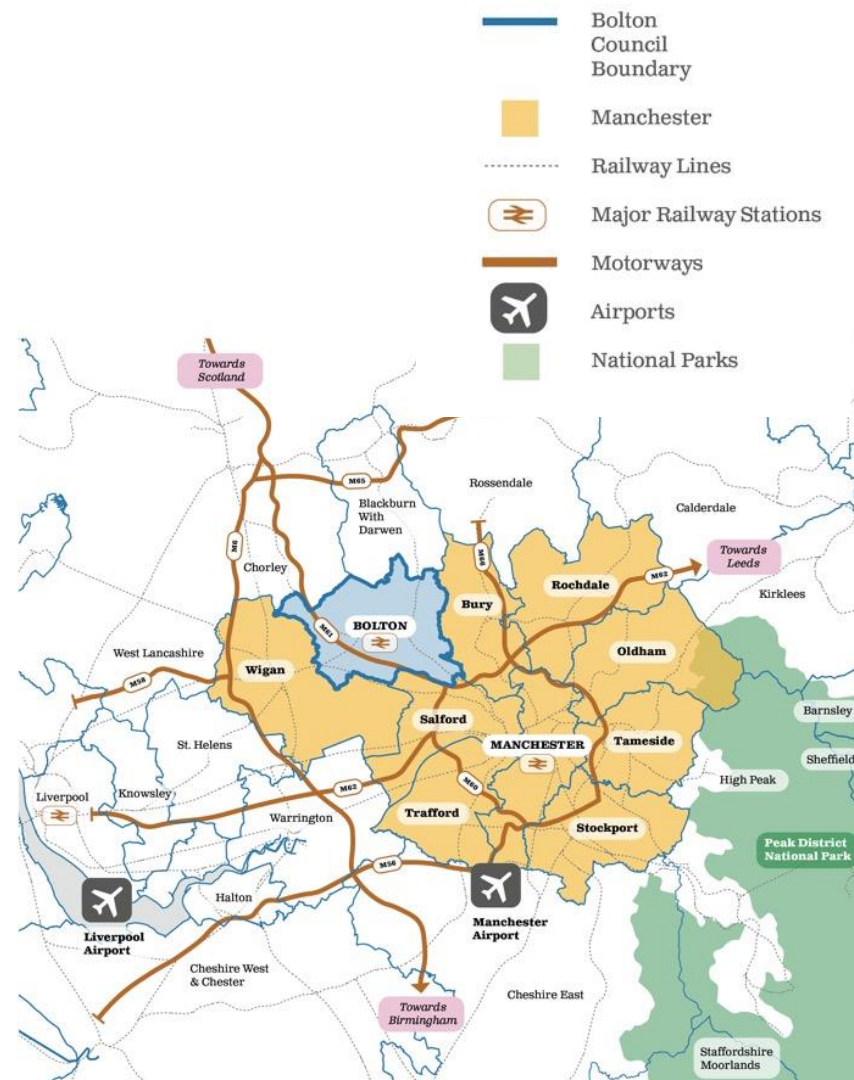


Figure 2 Bolton in Context

## Social Factors

- 2.5 This section summarises key social characteristics of Bolton and how they vary across the borough.
- 2.6 Bolton had a population of 310,085 in mid 2024 (ONS Mid-Year Estimate 2024). Harwood and Bradshaw have more older residents, while central and southern neighbourhoods have younger and larger households (Bolton JSNA, accessed 2025). The population is expected to rise by around 14,000 between 2025 and 2042 (ONS 2022). Older residents (age 70+) will increase by nearly 9,000, while the number of people aged five to nineteen is expected to fall by around 8,000.
- 2.7 Bolton is ethnically diverse. In 2021, 68.8 percent of residents identified as White British, and 20.1 percent identified as Asian. The largest groups were Pakistani heritage at 9.4 percent and Indian heritage at 8.9 percent (ONS Census 2021, accessed 2025). Other groups include Black African, Caribbean, Chinese, Eastern European and mixed-heritage communities.
- 2.8 Faith and community life are active. In 2021, 47 percent of residents identified as Christian and 19.9 percent as Muslim (ONS Census 2021, accessed 2025). A range of churches, mosques and temples support community activity across the borough. Community groups use libraries, neighbourhood hubs and youth centres (Bolton Council, accessed 2025, <https://www.bolton.gov.uk>).
- 2.9 Owner occupation remains the main tenure according to the ONS Census 2021, though private renting has grown. Bolton faces strong affordability pressures, with average

house prices now more around six times median incomes in 2025, ONS 2023. Bolton Homelessness Strategy 2020 to 2025. Demand for social housing is very high, with some properties attracting up to a thousand bids.

- 2.10 Health indicators include:
- Large gaps in life expectancy of over 10 years between neighbourhoods, with male life expectancy ranging 82.1 - 70.3 years, and female life expectancy ranging from 87.7 - 76.9 years (Life Expectancy Bolton – JSNA 2019 - 23)
  - High levels of adult obesity, with 71 percent of adults overweight or obese in 2023 to 2024 ([Bolton in brief – Bolton JSNA](#))
  - Significant levels of inactivity, with 29 percent of adults inactive ([Obesity, physical activity and nutrition – Data Fingertips, Department of Health and Social Care](#))
  - High levels of childhood obesity, with 37 percent of Year 6 children overweight or obese ([Obesity, physical activity and nutrition - Data | Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care](#))
- 2.11 Health and community infrastructure supports local needs. Bolton has nine Primary Care Networks (Bolton JSNA, accessed 2025). Royal Bolton Hospital provides acute and emergency care and opened a new elective care centre in 2024 (CQC, accessed 2025, <https://www.cqc.org.uk>). Bolton Central Library and nine branch libraries support learning and access to services. Ten youth centres support young people across the borough (Bolton Council, accessed 2025).
- 2.12 Education is provided by a wide network of schools, colleges and the University of Greater Manchester. In 2024



the borough had 146 education settings, including local authority schools, academies and free schools, independent schools, special schools, SEND colleges and two further education colleges (Bolton Children's Services, accessed 2025, <https://www.bolton.gov.uk>).

2.13 The borough has a defined retail hierarchy (Bolton Core Strategy 2011, accessed 2025, <https://www.bolton.gov.uk>):

- One sub-regional centre at Bolton Town Centre;
- Four town centres at Farnworth, Horwich, Westhoughton and Little Lever;
- Four district centres at Chorley Old Road, Astley Bridge, Brightmet and Harwood; and
- Eleven local centres at Deane Road, Derby Centre, Tonge Fold, Daubhill and St Helens Road, Halliwell Road, Tonge Moor Road, Blackrod, Bromley Cross and Kearsley

2.14 Some neighbourhoods have weaker access to fresh food shops and community facilities (Bolton JSNA Built and Natural Environment, accessed 2025, <https://www.boltonjsna.org.uk>). Access to green space varies. Many residents live more than fifteen minutes from a green space and only forty percent live within 200 metres of a space of at least 0.5 hectares (Draft Greenspace Strategy 2025–2040).

## Economic Factors

2.15 This section summarises the borough's economic profile and the factors that influence access to jobs and opportunity.

2.16 Bolton is home to about 10,600 businesses and has strong retail, logistics, education, healthcare and public services sectors (Bolton Economic Growth and Resilience Plan 2024). Logistics North is a major centre for distribution and warehousing. Bolton Town Centre supports civic, cultural and retail employment. Middlebrook Retail and Leisure Park is an important out-of-town destination.

2.17 The employment rate was 68.5% in the year to June 2025. Unemployment was 4.6% and economic inactivity was 29.3 percent, with 43.8 % of inactive adults reporting long term sickness (Nomis Labour Market Profile 2024, [Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistics](#)). The proportion of residents with higher level qualifications is below national averages. Only 37.2 percent of working age residents hold a Level 4 qualification and 11.7% have no qualifications ([Labour Market Profile - Nomis - Official Census and Labour Market Statistic](#)).

~~2.18~~ About 24.8 percent of households do not have access to a car or van (ONS Census 2021). However many parts of Bolton (particularly the more central areas, where deprivation is higher and car ownership is lower) have good access to local services by walking, cycling and public transport (Indices of Deprivation geographical barriers subdomain). Despite this, 77% of Bolton residents commutes were made by car, while 9% were walked and 10% by train or bus. ([GM TRADS 2023](#)).

## Environmental Factors

2.19 This section summarises some of the natural and built environment features of Bolton.

2.20 Bolton has a varied landscape shaped by landform, rivers, settlement and industrial heritage. The borough rises towards the West Pennine Moors and Winter Hill at 456 metres (Landscape Character Appraisal 2001). Landscape sensitivity levels are typically higher in the north of the borough near Smithills and northern Horwich

2.21 The northern and western areas around Egerton, Smithills and northern Horwich include rough grassland, moorland, stone walls, upland farms and reservoirs. These areas have a strong visual identity and long-distance views and typically higher landscape sensitivity (Landscape Character Appraisal 2001).

2.22 Valley landscapes in Bradshaw, Eagley and Tonge contain fast flowing brooks, mature woodland and steep cloughs. These wooded valleys support wildlife and offer public access. The River Croal flows through Bolton town centre and meets the River Irwell at Nob End (Landscape Character Appraisal 2001).

2.23 The south and east of the borough include mixed terrain and post-industrial land. Urban greenspaces such as Moses Gate Country Park, Leverhulme Park and Queen's Park form key features. Sections of the former Manchester Bolton and Bury Canal remain visible in Little Lever and Darcy Lever (Landscape Character Appraisal 2001, accessed 2025).

2.24 A network of Sites of Biological Importance extends across the borough, with a recorded gain of around sixty hectares in recent years. The borough contains nationally-important ecological sites (Natural England Designated Sites Viewer, accessed 2025, <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk>):

- Red Moss SSSI
- Nob End SSSI
- Gale Clough and Shooterslee Wood SSSI
- West Pennine Moors SSSI

2.25 Four Local Nature Reserves, at Eatock Lodge, Seven Acres, Upper Bradshaw Valley and Moses Gate, sit within a wider network of parks, river corridors and moorland. Despite this, access to good quality semi-natural space remains uneven and some inner areas lack nearby provision. Fragmentation and pressure on habitats continue, particularly in areas close to growth and along river valleys.

2.26 Surface Water flood risk is a significant issue; it is estimated 9,971 properties have a 1 in 30 year risk of risk of flooding. Bolton lies within the Irwell and Croal, Douglas and Lower Mersey catchments (Environment Agency 2019, accessed 2025, <https://environment.data.gov.uk>). Climate change allowances require developers to plan for 30 percent to 45 percent higher peak rainfall by the 2070s (Environment Agency Climate Allowances 2022). Sewer capacity is under pressure. Storm overflows discharged 4,844 times in 2023 (DEFRA Event Duration Monitoring 2023, <https://environment.data.gov.uk>).



2.27 The built environment ranges from dense Victorian terraces to interwar housing, post war estates and newer developments. Historic buildings include mills, railway viaducts, stone chapels, public halls and market structures (Landscape Character Appraisal 2001, accessed 2025).

2.28 The borough contains 355 listed buildings, including two Grade I, twelve Grade II\* and 335 Grade II structures. Two conservation areas and nine listed buildings appear on the national Heritage at Risk Register, eleven assets in total (Historic England Heritage at Risk 2025). Historic mills, chapels and industrial buildings contribute to local character but are of varied quality. Non-designated heritage assets include buildings, monuments, sites, places, areas or landscapes identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, but which are not formally designated heritage assets. Bolton Council are currently preparing a list of non-designated heritage assets.

2.29 Land quality is variable and is shaped by its long industrial history. The Council's Contaminated Land Strategy notes that past industry, engineering and waste sites have left a legacy of possible contamination and some local effects on water quality. Bolton is working with partners across Greater Manchester to develop a clean air plan to meet legal limits for nitrogen dioxide on local roads in the shortest possible time and by 2026 at the latest.

## Relationship to National & Regional Planning Policy

2.30 Our Local Plan must respond to the specific opportunities and challenges of Bolton. But it is not created in a policy vacuum – we do not start from a blank piece of paper. Other

plans and policies must be considered as we develop the plan and as we carry out the Sustainability Appraisal.

2.31 The Local Plan must align with the National Planning Policy Framework (2024) and related guidance. These establish clear requirements for local plans to meet housing and employment needs, promote sustainable development, support climate action, and protect the built and natural environment. While these requirements apply nationally, the Local Plan translates them into local responses. In Bolton, this means addressing issues (see Section 4) such as:

- Reducing health and social inequalities;
- Supporting town centre renewal;
- Planning for climate adaptation and low-carbon development; and
- Protecting moorland, biodiversity and heritage assets.

2.32 Bolton is one of nine districts covered by the Greater Manchester 'Places for Everyone' (PfE) Joint Development Plan adopted in 2024. PfE provides the strategic planning framework for Greater Manchester, setting borough-level housing and employment land targets, growth locations, and shared priorities including net zero carbon by 2038.

2.33 PfE forms part of Bolton's statutory development plan. The Local Plan must be consistent with it, but has a distinct role. While 'Places for Everyone' (2024) sets the overall scale and direction of growth, the Local Plan:

- Identifies how Bolton's share of growth will be delivered in specific locations;
- Allocates land for housing, employment, infrastructure and green space;

- Sets out detailed local policies tailored to Bolton's places and challenges; and
- Provides more detailed transitional regional ambitions—such as decarbonisation, nature recovery, and improved accessibility—into local delivery at the local area and site level.

## **Relationship to International Commitments**

2.34 The Local Plan must also take account of international obligations that underpin national policy including those shown in Table 1.

2.35 While not implemented through the local plan alone, these commitments shape the national and regional frameworks that guide local decision-making.

**Table 1. Key Legislation and Plan Implications**

Topic	Relevant Legislation/Agreement	Local Plan Implications
<b>Climate and Energy</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – Paris Agreement (2015); Cancun Agreement (2010); Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC (1997); Directive (EU) 2018/2002 on Energy Efficiency; Directive (EU) 2018/2001 on Renewable Energy	Cut carbon emissions from housing, transport and public buildings, increase local renewable generation, improve home energy efficiency, and support climate resilience across vulnerable communities.
<b>Air, Water and Soil Quality</b>	Directive 2008/50/EC on Ambient Air Quality; Directive (EU) 2016/2284 on National Emissions Ceilings; Directive 2000/60/EC (Water Framework Directive); Directive 98/83/EC on Drinking Water; Directive 91/676/EEC on Nitrates; Directive 2010/75/EU on Industrial Emissions	Improve air quality along corridors like the A666, consider impacts of ecological and chemical status for the Croal and Irwell rivers,
<b>Noise</b>	Directive 2002/49/EC on Environmental Noise; WHO Night Noise Guidelines for Europe (2018)	Reduce the number of residents exposed to harmful road and rail noise, especially near the M61, A666 and railway corridors, and support quieter neighbourhoods and sleep-friendly environments.
<b>Biodiversity and Natural Heritage</b>	Directive 92/43/EEC (Habitats Directive); Directive 2009/147/EC (Birds Directive); Convention on Biological Diversity (1992); Bonn Convention (1979); Berne Convention (1979); Ramsar Convention (1971)	Although Bolton has no Ramsar Sites or SACs, protect and enhance sites such as Red Moss SSSI and Local Nature Reserves, increase habitat connectivity, and maintain conditions suitable for protected species including bats and wetland birds.
<b>Landscape and Cultural Heritage</b>	European Landscape Convention (2000); Granada Convention (1985); Valetta Convention (1992);	Maintain the character and openness of the West Pennine Moors within the borough boundary, conserve important views and valley landscapes, and reduce risks to heritage assets including buildings on the national at-risk register.
<b>Waste and Resource Use</b>	Directive 2008/98/EC (Waste Framework); Directive 94/62/EC on Packaging Waste; Directive 1999/31/EC on Landfill	Reduce household and construction waste, improve recycling rates and lower contamination, and support more efficient use and re-use of land, including through brownfield regeneration.
<b>Flood Risk and Marine Environment</b>	Directive 2007/60/EC on Flood Risk Management;	Reduce the number of homes and businesses at risk of surface water flooding, manage peak flows in the Croal and Irwell catchments, and support wider use of sustainable drainage and nature-based water management.
<b>Sustainable Development and Socio-economic Objectives</b>	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015);	Deliver more equal outcomes in health, income and access to green space, support thriving neighbourhoods in areas of disadvantage, and contribute to long-term environmental and social wellbeing.
<b>Legal Basis for SA</b>	Directive 2001/42/EC on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA Directive)	Ensure all spatial options and policy choices are tested for their long-term environmental, social and economic impacts, with clear consideration of alternatives and mitigation.

## Relationship to Other Local Strategies and Programmes

2.36 The Local Plan also acts as a delivery tool for wider local strategies and programmes at the Regional level such as the [Greater Manchester Strategy](#) (2025), [Greater Manchester Housing Strategy \(2019\)](#), and the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy (2025) as well as Council's other strategies including:

- Bolton Council Plan 2025 - 2028
- Bolton Transport Strategy (2024)
- Economic Resilience Action Plan (2024)
- Climate Change Strategy (2019 and 2021 delivery plan updates)
- Local Housing and Homelessness Strategies
- Draft Green Space Strategy (2025)

2.37 The Local Plan supports these by shaping land use and guiding infrastructure investment. For example:

- Better housing and access to green space support health and wellbeing;
- Employment land policies support inclusive growth and local jobs; and
- Building standards contribute to climate targets.

## Cross boundary impacts

2.38 Our initial assessment highlights the following potential cross-boundary issues:

- **Transport and traffic** – New development may increase traffic on strategic roads such as the M61, A666, A6 and M60, affecting congestion, air quality and connectivity across Greater Manchester. There may also be knock-on effects on rail and bus networks serving neighbouring districts.
- **Shared services** – Growth in housing and population can increase demand on hospitals, GP practices, schools, emergency services and utilities that operate across council boundaries. This includes the Royal Bolton Hospital, which serves a wider area, and education and health facilities accessed by residents from adjoining boroughs.
- **River catchments and water management** – Bolton sits within shared river catchments, including the Croal and Irwell. Development can affect water quality, flood risk and drainage patterns beyond the borough, so a coordinated approach to catchment management is needed.
- **Biodiversity and green infrastructure** – Wildlife corridors, river valleys, and Green Belt land often cross administrative boundaries. Loss or fragmentation of habitats in Bolton could affect ecological networks in adjoining areas. There may also be cumulative pressures on nature recovery, access to greenspace, and landscape character. This includes requirements for cross-boundary working and corporation on mitigation for internationally designated sites (already a requirement in Places for Everyone, 2024).

- **Strategic housing and unmet need** – While Bolton’s minimum requirement is established in the ‘*Places for Everyone*’ Joint Development Plan, housing impacts may still arise. These could result from changes in local capacity, infrastructure constraints, or delivery challenges that affect where development comes forward or if neighbouring unmet need could place additional pressure on Bolton. This will be informed by joint working and Duty to Cooperate statements.

## Likely Evolution of Current Conditions without a new Local Plan

2.39 If Bolton does not adopt a new Local Plan, the Places for Everyone will continue to provide a broad policy framework, but risks would remain:

- 1 **Uncoordinated Growth:** Without a clear local spatial strategy, development may occur in less sustainable locations, increasing pressure on infrastructure and contributing to inefficient land use patterns. This could undermine town centres, increase car dependency, and reduce environmental quality.
- 2 **Speculative and Imbalanced Housing Delivery:** PfE sets housing numbers but does not identify specific sites in Bolton. Without allocations or policies on tenure, type and location, speculative applications may dominate, with limited ability to plan for affordability, accessibility or design quality.

- 3 **Loss of Environmental Protections:** Without local policies and designations, it is harder to protect and enhance biodiversity and landscape character. Local policy is needed to achieve net gain, deliver nature recovery and protect ecological networks.
- 4 **Weaker Response to Climate and Public Health Challenges:** Local planning policies are essential to address flood risk, air quality, building emissions and overheating. The borough faces increasing heat and flood risks. Without tailored policies, new development may be less resilient and miss net zero goals.
- 5 **Infrastructure Mismatch and Service Shortfalls:** Without a Local Plan, the Council has fewer tools to coordinate housing and infrastructure delivery. This could lead to development outpacing capacity in schools, transport or health services. Local evidence shows rising pupil demand and GP service pressures in some parts of the borough.
- 6 **Loss of Influence Over Design, Heritage and Local Priorities:** A Local Plan enables Bolton to protect and enhance its distinct places—from heritage towns to the West Pennine Moors—while supporting investment in town centres and growth corridors. Without it, planning decisions may be less locally-responsive.

2.40 In summary, Places for Everyone sets the strategic framework, and the new Local Plan has an important role in shaping how growth is delivered in Bolton, ensuring it is well-located, well-supported by infrastructure and reflects local priorities.

## **Section 3.**

### **Sustainability Appraisal Framework**

3.1 The SEA Regulations provide an indication of the topics a sustainability appraisal must consider. These include biodiversity, population and human health, soil, water, air, climate, material assets, cultural heritage and landscape. Using this as a starting point, reflecting on current issues and on current and projected conditions in Bolton, we have defined a series of sustainability appraisal objectives which provide a framework for the assessment of the Local Plan as shown in Table 2.

3.2 The Regulations require consultation with specific bodies on the scope of the sustainability appraisal. We consulted the Environment Agency, Natural England and Historic England earlier this year, and invited comments from neighbouring local planning authorities. Their feedback has helped refine the scope and shape the sustainability appraisal objectives. More information about this is provided in Appendix 1.

3.3 Sustainability appraisal objectives set out what a sustainable outcome would look like for the plan. They translate the broad requirements of the SEA regulation and guidance on Sustainability Appraisal into practical set of objectives covering key environmental and social matters we must address.

3.4 Objectives of this type are widely used as the central component of a sustainability appraisal because they give a clear and consistent assessment method. Each policy, site

or spatial option can be considered against the same set of objectives. This helps identify likely positive or negative effects and whether any mitigation or changes are needed. It also allows different options and choices to be compared



Table 2: List of Sustainability Appraisal Objectives for Bolton

Sustainability Appraisal Objectives
1. Health and Wellbeing – Improve the long-term physical and mental health and wellbeing for everyone in Bolton by reducing health inequalities, improving quality and quantity and access to healthcare and green open spaces as well as promoting healthy and active lifestyles.
2. Housing – Provide everybody in the Borough with the opportunity to live in a decent, warm and affordable home that meets local needs and aspirations in terms of house types and tenures whilst also reducing homelessness.
3. Promoting Strong, Safe and Inclusive Communities – Promote the safety, inclusivity and connectivity of neighbourhoods so that everyone feels they belong, has equal opportunities to access local services and facilities, contribute to local life and thrive in Bolton regardless of their background or abilities.
4. Education and Lifelong Learning – Improve education, training and lifelong learning by increasing the quantity and quality of and access to such opportunities and facilities which will also help to raise aspirations and maintain a healthy labour market.
5. Local Economy and Employment – Develop a sustainable and diverse economy with higher levels of employment by creating more and better jobs that are easily accessible, supporting business expansion and promoting growth in key economic sectors.
6. Sustainable Transport and Reducing the Need to Travel – Enable a low-carbon transport system that boosts walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport use, improves safety, lowers emissions and cuts car use whilst promoting sustainable patterns of growth to reduce the need to travel.
7. Renewable Energy and Decarbonisation – Encourage the acceleration to a zero-carbon energy system by enabling the development and wider use of renewable energy as well as seeking to minimise carbon emissions and increasing energy efficiency.
8. Adapting to our Changing Climate – Reduce the risk of and from flooding and ensure new development and the existing built environment is resilient to climate extremes.
9. Biodiversity and Infrastructure (Green and Blue) – Protect and enhance Bolton’s biodiversity as well as strengthening its green and blue infrastructure to create well-connected and climate-resilient networks.
10. Landscape and Townscape – Conserve and enhance the quality and local character of Bolton’s distinctive landscapes and townscapes, protect key views, as well as regenerate of degraded urban and natural environments.
11. Heritage – Conserve and enhance Bolton’s historic environment in a manner that is appropriate to its cultural significance.
12. Air Quality – Reduce air pollution to provide a healthy environment for people and wildlife.
13. Land and Soil Quality – Ensure efficient use of land and minimising the loss of better-quality agricultural land, safeguard and improve soils, and conserve land resources.
14. Water Resources – Protect and maintain the quality of Bolton’s water resources by raising water quality and keeping water consumption and abstraction within local supply limits.
15. Waste Minimisation – Move towards a circular economy by generating less waste, designing out waste in new development, boosting reuse and recycling and aiming for near-zero residual waste.

## Section 4.

### Local Plan Objectives

- 4.1. Using the Sustainability Appraisal Objective Framework we have established, an initial assessment of the emerging Local Plan objectives has been undertaken.
- 4.2. Local Plan objectives, as distinct from the Sustainability Appraisal Objectives, are an important component of a Local Plan. They guide the overall direction of the plan and sit alongside national policy requirements.
- 4.3. It is good practice to appraise Local Plan objectives through the sustainability appraisal. This helps check that the objectives support sustainable development and that none of them conflicts with the environmental and social duties set out in the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive. Assessing the objectives also provides an early test of whether the plan is being steered in a sustainable direction before detailed policies and options are developed.
- 4.4. A list of draft Local Plan objectives was developed from Spring 2025 and formally published in the Issues and Options Document (August 2025). The initial high-level assessment of objectives is presented in Figure 3 and Table 3 below. followed by a commentary on the assessment.
- 4.5. **This shows that the Local Plan objectives demonstrate strong overall alignment with the Sustainability Appraisal framework, particularly in relation to health, housing, climate resilience, and employment. Although**

a degree of uncertainty or weakness was identified against more environmental Sustainability Appraisal objectives, this is not unexpected, given that these relate to more technical matters and are dependent on-site specific constraints and implementation.

- 4.6. **Recommendations for re-wording of Local Plan objectives are proposed as a result of the Sustainability Appraisal and are reflected in The Draft Local Plan Direction of Travel (November 2025). It is nevertheless acknowledged that individual Local Plan objectives do not and should not incorporate the full range of social, economic and environmental Sustainability Appraisal objectives as they are to be read 'as a whole' to give the policy direction of the emerging Local Plan.**

		Plan Objectives				
		Jobs & Business	Homes & Neighbourhoods	Transport	Local Services & Infrastructure	Natural Environment & Historic Environment
SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL OBJECTIVES	1 - Health and Wellbeing	+	++	++	+	+
	2 - Housing	+	++	+	0	?
	3 - Promoting Strong, Safe and Inclusive Communities	+	+	+	+	+
	4 - Education and Lifelong Learning	+	?	+	+	?
	5 - Local Economy and Employment	++	+	+	+	+
	6 - Sustainable Transport	?	+	++	+	?
	7 - Renewable Energy and Decarbonisation	-	+	+	+	++
	8 - Adapting to Our Changing Climate	?	?	?	?	++
	9 - Biodiversity and Infrastructure (Green and Blue)	-	?	?	+	++
	10 - Landscape and Townscape	-	?	?	+	++
	11 - Heritage	?	?	?	?	++
	12 - Air Quality	-	?	+	+	+
	13 - Land and Soil	-	+	?	0	+
	14 - Water Resources	?	?	0	?	+
	15 - Waste Minimisation	0	+	0	?	0

The appraisal matrix is colour coded to show a scale of 6 impacts, as follows:

Key	
Very Positive Effects	++
Positive Effects	+
Neutral	0
Uncertain	?
Negative Effects	-
Very Negative Effects	--

Figure 3 Draft Local Plan Objectives Sustainability Appraisal Assessment Matrix

**Table 3 Draft Local Plan Objectives Sustainability Appraisal Commentary**

Local Plan Objectives	Commentary	Proposed Mitigation or Enhancement
<p><b>Grow and diversify the economy to improve access to skills and good jobs, so that all residents can find secure, well-paid work close to home, supporting mental wellbeing and reducing poverty-related health gaps.</b></p>	<p>This objective, which focuses on jobs and businesses, supports inclusive economic growth and contributes positively to employment, education, and health-related Sustainability Appraisal Objectives. It promotes secure, well-paid jobs and access to skills, which can reduce poverty-related health gaps and improve mental wellbeing. The emphasis on local employment also supports the vitality of the local economy and reduces the need for long commutes, though this benefit is not guaranteed without spatial targeting. However, the environmental compatibility is less certain. Economic growth may increase energy consumption and emissions unless low-carbon industries are prioritised. There is also potential pressure on land, biodiversity, and air quality depending on the location and nature of employment development. This objective could therefore be strengthened by expanding its scope to reflect the economic performance of the whole Borough, improving access to training and employment opportunities, and supporting low-carbon industries.</p>	<p>To secure more positive impacts, avoid adverse and provide a greater degree of certainty of environment impacts it is recommended that the local plan objective is reworded as follows:</p> <p><b>"Grow and diversify the economy to improve the Borough's economic performance by creating more and better jobs, improving local people's access to training, raising aspirations, supporting vitality of Bolton Town Centre and other centres, reducing unemployment, increasing household incomes and demand for local goods and services."</b></p>
<p><b>Enable delivery of at least 13,379 high-quality, energy-efficient homes at a range of price points prioritising brownfield land first and, where required, carefully chosen sustainable sites elsewhere, creating safe, comfortable neighbourhoods that support physical and mental health.</b></p>	<p>This objective aligns well with Sustainability Appraisal Objectives relating to housing delivery, health, and accessibility to services. The commitment to delivering energy-efficient homes in safe, comfortable neighbourhoods supports physical and mental wellbeing, while prioritising brownfield land contributes positively to land use efficiency and local air quality. The inclusion of a range of price points indicates an intention to support housing accessibility and equality. Most environmental objectives are uncertain as it depends on where housing is located. However, it is recognised that the approach of utilising brownfield land will contribute to land remediation and potentially minimise waste.</p> <p>However, the objective does not explicitly address inclusivity of communities and ensuring housing delivery meets a range of local needs (e.g. accessible, adaptable, mixed tenure, size, type of homes). It is also considered that the quality/ quantity and potential re-use of existing housing stock should be mentioned as this could help secure a range of positive effects.</p>	<p>The positive effects of this objective could be enhanced across and more positive effects secured against the Sustainability Appraisal Framework if the scope was expanded to emphasise safe and secure neighbourhoods, reuse of existing housing stock and wider inclusivity. It is recommended that the local plan objective is reworded as follows:</p> <p><b>"Enable delivery of at least 13,379 new high-quality, energy-efficient homes that meet people's needs in terms of both cost and types, in sustainable locations, prioritising brownfield land, while making the best use of and improving the quality of the existing housing stock to create safe and inclusive neighbourhoods".</b></p>

Local Plan Objectives	Commentary	Proposed Mitigation or Enhancement
<p><b>Make active travel on foot and by bike the easy choice, and prioritise fast, reliable and low-carbon travel by bus and rail, reducing risk of air-pollution-related illness.</b></p>	<p>The Transport objective is likely to have very positive effects on health, sustainable travel, and air quality, as it explicitly promotes active travel and prioritises low-carbon modes such as bus and rail. The focus on reducing air-pollution-related illness further supports public health and wellbeing. Positive effects are also anticipated for access to education, employment, and services, supporting inclusion and community cohesion. Given the nature of the local plan objective, environmental objectives remain broadly uncertain as effects will depend on implementation (such as if new infrastructure is required, its scale/ nature, and location).</p>	<p>To strengthen alignment with the sustainability Appraisal Framework, the objective could be expanded to emphasise the inclusivity of improvements, and the intention to make them safe and attractive for all to use (i.e. well connected) as well as low carbon. It is recommended that the local plan objective is reworded as follows:</p> <p><b>"Support inclusive and accessible travel, making walking and cycling the easy choice and improving public transport where possible to provide safe, reliable and low-carbon travel and an integrated transport offer that connects within, across and beyond the Borough".</b></p>
<p><b>Provide timely health, education, open space, cultural and digital facilities that keep pace with growth, reduce inequality and support lifelong wellbeing.</b></p>	<p>The Local Services and Infrastructure objective is closely aligned with Sustainability Appraisal Objectives relating to health and wellbeing, education, social inclusion, and sustainable communities. The commitment to timely provision of health, education, open space, and cultural facilities supports lifelong wellbeing and reduces inequality. The inclusion of digital infrastructure also contributes to economic resilience and access to services. While the objective supports climate adaptation and environmental quality indirectly, it does not explicitly reference energy efficiency, low-carbon infrastructure, or waste minimisation, which limits its contribution to those areas. Expanding the objective to reflect the full range of infrastructure needs would improve its alignment with environmental and equalities objectives.</p>	<p>It is recommended that the objective be expanded to focus on enabling the delivery of necessary infrastructure and services that meet the needs and ambitions of both new and existing communities across the Borough. This would ensure a more comprehensive and future-facing approach to infrastructure planning. To enhance positive effects identified is recommended that the local plan objective is reworded as follows:</p> <p><b>"Enable the delivery of local services and infrastructure needed to support new and existing communities and keep pace with growth across the Borough: including local transport, health, education, youth, and cultural services alongside green, digital and low-carbon energy infrastructure."</b></p>

Local Plan Objectives	Commentary	Proposed Mitigation or Enhancement
<p><b>Reduce carbon emissions, manage flood and heat risks, and expand connected green and blue corridors that offer clean air, preserve habitats and biodiversity, provide restorative spaces for people, and protect and enhance heritage in the natural and built environment.</b></p>	<p>This objective is aligned with environmental and health-related Sustainability Appraisal Objectives. Its focus on reducing carbon emissions, managing flood and heat risks, and enhancing green and blue infrastructure supports climate resilience, biodiversity, and air quality. The inclusion of heritage protection and restorative spaces also contributes positively to wellbeing, landscape character, and cultural value. The objective supports multiple indirect benefits for housing, employment, and education through improved environmental quality and placemaking. Its comprehensive scope ensures that it is likely to deliver environmental, social and health benefits.</p> <p>However, it is considered that as written this objective does not give enough clarity and weight to Bolton's historic environment.</p>	<p>For clarity on the policy direction and to strengthen the alignment with the sustainability appraisal Framework, it is considered that this objective is split and re-worded as follows:</p> <p><b>"Natural Environment - Conserve and enhance the Borough's landscapes, habitats and species, expand green and blue corridors, make effective use of land and resources, minimise carbon emissions, manage flood risk and increase resilience to weather extremes".</b></p> <p><b>"Heritage - Protect and enhance the Borough's historic environment, conserving heritage assets and their settings, and using high-quality design to sustain and strengthen local distinctiveness and sense of place.".</b></p>



## Section 5. Spatial Options

- 5.1. Using the Sustainability Appraisal Objective Framework<sup>1</sup> we have undertaken an initial assessment of the emerging Local Plan spatial options as presented in the Draft Local Plan Direction of Travel (November 2025). This is shown in Figure 3 and Table 4 below.
- 5.2. A high-level approach was taken towards this assessment, which is proportionate to the Local Plan stage, with the following broad assumptions made:
- Access to services/ facilities and employment will be better in Bolton town centre and other centres;
  - Where accessibility is poorer (i.e. greater distance or not as well connected by active/ sustainable travel options), there are likely to be detrimental impacts on health, carbon emissions, and air quality;
  - Loss of greenfield land has the potential to have adverse environmental impacts without mitigation;
  - A precautionary approach to potential harm to heritage assets has been taken at this stage, as it is dependent on implementation; and
  - There is a high degree of uncertainty regarding potential resilience of new development, its impact on water resources and waste minimisation.
- 5.3. The Sustainability Appraisal assessment revealed differences in how the spatial options could perform. Options that reduce car dependency, notably Option C and to a lesser extent Option E, were considered likely to perform better on health, air quality and climate because they support more sustainable travel patterns. Options that rely on dispersed or car-led growth, Options A, B and D, were likely to perform poorly on these outcomes because they increase reliance on private cars. Options involving greenfield development, including Options C, D and E, tended to predict stronger social and economic benefits, particularly for housing and employment. However, this came with potential environmental costs for heritage, landscape, biodiversity and green and blue infrastructure.
- 5.4. The brownfield-only and dispersed options, Options A and B, are likely to perform least well when viewed across the full set of Sustainability Appraisal objectives. This is because they are likely to protect more greenfield and Green Belt land, which explains their better performance for land, soil, landscape, heritage and biodiversity. However, they scored poorly on most social, economic and transport objectives, including housing delivery, access to services and jobs, air quality, carbon emissions and health, and these effects are considered difficult to mitigate at a strategic level. This means that although Options A and B performed better on some environmental

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<sup>1</sup> The Local Plan Direction of Travel (2025) includes an indicative assessment of the options against the Local Plan objectives. This uses a different methodology to that of the Sustainability Appraisal, which is more narrowly focused on significance of effects.

themes, they are less suitable overall when assessed against socio economic objectives.

- 5.5. Option E presents a balanced performance against the Sustainability Appraisal objectives. There are clear potential positives for housing, meeting needs more effectively than Options A and B and with less likely deliverability uncertainties compared to Option C. It was likely to perform well on communities and education, as concentrating growth in areas with existing centres and services supports access, inclusive growth and opportunities to improve local facilities. The potential for Option E to perform strongly on the local economy, reinforce regeneration priorities and strengthen labour market access was also noted.
- 5.6. Option C was considered to be the next strongest in this assessment. It has clear potential advantages for transport, health, air quality and carbon reduction, although there is still the chance to have environmental downsides for landscape, heritage, biodiversity and green and blue infrastructure, reflecting the level of greenfield release required. Although it is noted in the Local Plan 'Direction of Travel' as beyond the scope of the Sustainability Appraisal, this Option relies on a broader public transport package and that there is potential for some misalignment with site availability and deliverability impacting on housing delivery. It was therefore considered positive social and economic impacts identified were less likely to be as significant compared to Option E.
- 5.7. **Taken together, the assessment shows that no option performs well across all sustainability objectives. Each**

**has different social, economic and environmental trade-offs. On balance, Option E offers a rounded performance, with strong social and economic benefits and moderate transport outcomes, and environmental effects that can be managed through mitigation.**

		Spatial Options				
		A: Brownfield-only	B: Dispersed	C: Public Transport-led rev	D: M61 Corridor-led	E: Anchored
Sustainability Appraisal Objectives	1 - Health and Wellbeing	-	--	+	--	+
	2 - Housing	--	-	+	+	++
	3 - Promoting Strong, Safe and Inclusive Communities	--	-	+	--	+
	4 - Education and Lifelong Learning	-	--	+	-	++
	5 - Local Economy and Employment	--	--	+	+	++
	6 - Sustainable Transport	-	--	++	--	+
	7 - Renewable Energy and Decarbonisation	-	-	+	-	+
	8 - Adapting to Our Changing Climate	?	?	?	?	?
	9 - Biodiversity and Infrastructure (Green and Blue)	+	-	-	-	-
	10 - Landscape and Townscape	+	-	-	-	-
	11 - Heritage	-	-	-	-	-
	12 - Air Quality	-	--	+	--	+
	13 - Land and Soil	+	-	-	-	-
	14 - Water Resources	?	?	?	?	?
	15 - Waste Minimisation	?	?	?	-	?

Key	
Very Positive Effects	++
Positive Effects	+
Neutral	0
Uncertain	?
Negative Effects	-
Very Negative Effects	--

Figure 4: Spatial Options Sustainability Appraisal Assessment Matrix

**Table 4 Spatial Options Sustainability Appraisal Assessment Commentary**

Option Summary	Commentary	Proposed Mitigation or Enhancement
<p>Option A This option tests what would happen if all growth were directed only to previously developed land such as mills, vacant plots and redundant employment sites.</p>	<p>Options A performed poorly against social and economic objectives. Despite opportunities for regeneration of vacant plots, there is a risk this spatial distribution is unlikely to lead to improving the quality/ quantity of local services/ facilities, public transport infrastructure, and jobs as well as access to them. It is also likely to increase the need to travel/ carbon emissions and reduce air quality (increase carbon emissions) and potentially worsen health issues. This is primarily because it is considered that housing could be located on less accessible sites (e.g. former industrial estates further from centres with limited sustainable/ active transport options). Critically this option is unlikely to provide enough new homes to meet local demand. There is the potential to protect species/ habitats, green/ blue infrastructure and greenfield/ Green Belt sites, and so positive effects were identified. However, there could be pressure on heritage assets concentrated in town centre and across the Borough and therefore a precautionary approach has been taken at this stage because it is dependent on implementation. Flood risk/ climate resilience of development, impact on water resources and waste minimisation is unknown as it is more dependent on information which is currently unavailable.</p>	<p>Site-specific mitigation incorporated into emerging local plan policies and site allocation design briefs would enable environmental benefits could be harnessed and harm avoided/ mitigated.</p> <p>No mitigation identified for negative social and economic effects. Potential for residual adverse effects.</p>
<p>Option B This spreads growth thinly across all towns and villages, regardless of their size, role or transport connections.</p>	<p>Option B performed poorly against social, economic and environmental objectives. It is considered this option is likely to exacerbates the negatives of Option A in terms of quality/ quantity and access to local services and jobs, increasing the need to travel by unsustainable means (and increasing air pollution/ health/ carbon emissions) with potentially limited means to upgrade transport infrastructure. There is also greater potential for harm to the character of local villages across Bolton as well habitats/ species due to the wide dispersal of development. Housing numbers/ type unlikely to be located in appropriate locations related to local need. There will also be loss of greenfield sites (require Green Belt release) and potential pressure on heritage assets. A precautionary approach to potential harm to heritage assets as a result of this spatial option has been taken at this stage because it is dependent on implementation. Flood risk/ climate resilience of development, impact on water resources and waste minimisation is unknown as it is more dependent on information which is currently unavailable.</p>	<p>Site-specific mitigation incorporated into emerging local plan policies and site allocation design briefs could help to minimise environmental harm.</p> <p>No mitigation identified for negative social and economic effects. Potential for residual adverse effects.</p>
<p>Option C This focuses growth around train stations, town centres and bus corridors, supported by investment in walking, cycling and public transport.</p>	<p>Option C has the potential to secure positive social, economic, and environmental impacts by promoting and improving healthy/ active/ public transport options, upgrading existing infrastructure which could contribute to housing delivery and improve access to local services/ facilities and jobs. This combines with a reduction in need to travel (by car) and improvement in air quality, reduction in carbon emissions and positive health impacts. This option will involve greenfield (require Green Belt release) and so there is potential for negative impacts on landscape, townscape, heritage, species/ habitats and blue/ green infrastructure. A precautionary approach to potential harm to heritage assets as a result of this spatial option has been taken at this stage because it is dependent on implementation Flood risk/ climate resilience of development, impact on water resources and waste minimisation is unknown as it is more dependent on information which is currently unavailable.</p>	<p>Site-specific mitigation incorporated into emerging local plan policies and site allocation design briefs would enable environmental harm to be avoided/ minimised and potentially secure enhancements (e.g. maximising connectivity/ access/ sustainable transport options and creating attractive places to live, work and invest).</p>

Option Summary	Commentary	Proposed Mitigation or Enhancement
<p>Option D This focuses on large greenfield and Green Belt sites close to motorway junctions, with housing and logistics growth along the M61 corridor.</p>	<p>Option D has the potential to provide new homes and jobs/ training opportunities quickly to meet local need as it is market-led. Despite these positive effects, this option performed poorly against several social and environmental objectives. Critically, by focussing development along the M61 Corridor it could limit regeneration opportunities, potentially accelerate decline of Bolton town centre, and deprive communities to the north of improvements to their local services/ facilities and access to them as well as wider sustainable transport improvements. It will require substantial upgrades to highways infrastructure, likely increase car dependency and therefore carbon emissions, air pollution, and waste. It will also require significant land take of greenfield land (require Green Belt release), could result in harm to local landscape/ townscape, habitats/ species, and blue/green infrastructure. A precautionary approach to potential harm to heritage assets as a result of this spatial option has also been taken at this stage because it is dependent on implementation. Flood risk/ climate resilience of development, impact on water resources and waste minimisation is unknown as it is more dependent on information which is currently unavailable.</p>	<p>Site-specific mitigation incorporated into emerging local plan policies and site allocation design briefs could help to minimise environmental harm.</p> <p>No mitigation identified for negative social effects. Potential for residual adverse social and environmental effects.</p>
<p>Option E This option anchors development in Bolton Town Centre, the Hospital area in Farnworth, and the Wingates/M61 Corridor, with supporting roles for Middlebrook and Chequerbent, and smaller-scale growth in other town and district centres and near train stations.</p>	<p>Option E performed well against social and economic objectives, with the potential to secure some significant positives. This is because this option looks to direct development to areas where it can not only support regeneration, vitality of Bolton town centre and other centres, improve quality/ quantity of local services/ facilities as well as access to them, but also secure the needed housing and jobs across the Borough in appropriate locations. It is nevertheless recognised that large areas of greenfield (Green Belt release) will be required with this option and therefore have potential negative impacts on the quality/ quantity and integrity of landscape/ townscape, heritage, habitats/ species, green/ blue infrastructure. A precautionary approach to potential harm to heritage assets as a result of this spatial option has been taken at this stage because it is dependent on implementation. Flood risk/ climate resilience of development, impact on water resources and waste minimisation is unknown as it is more dependent on information which is currently unavailable.</p>	<p>Explore integrating the sustainable transport priorities of Option C with Option E would enable further significant positive effects to be secured - e.g. encourage sustainable/ active travel, improve access to all, reduce air pollution, carbon emissions and improve health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Site-specific mitigation incorporated into emerging local plan policies and site allocation design briefs would enable environmental harm to be avoided/ minimised.</p>

## **Section 6.**

### **Proposed Scope of Sustainability Appraisal Report**

- 6.1. The full Sustainability Appraisal Report will be published for consultation alongside the Local Plan (Regulation 19 Version) in Summer 2026. It will then be submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination next summer.
- 6.2. The assessment will consider the likely significance of effects, positive or negative. It will set out whether effects are direct or indirect, temporary or permanent, and the area and population affected. It will also assess the likely duration of effects, short term (zero to two years), medium term (three to ten years), or long term (over ten years). Any mitigation measures will also be identified.
- 6.3. The indicative structure and scope of the Sustainability Appraisal Report is set out below.

#### **Non-Technical Summary**

##### **Introduction and Plan Context**

Purpose and legal basis.

Scope and objectives of the Local Plan.

##### **Description of the Plan Area**

Summary of Bolton's environmental, social and economic profile.

Key sustainability issues supported by baseline evidence.

Links to other plans and strategies.

#### **Appraisal Methodology**

Explanation of the approach.

Summary of baseline trends and any data gaps.

#### **Appraisal of Local Plan Objectives and Strategic Options**

Assessment of refined spatial options following consultation on Draft Plan Direction of Travel (November 2025). This will update and expand the assessment included in this Interim Report.

Reasons for selecting or rejecting each option.

#### **Appraisal of Local Plan Policies and Site Allocations**

Assessment of draft policies and sites.

Appraisal of reasonable alternatives.

Summary of significant effects and mitigation.

#### **Appraisal of the Local Plan as a Whole**

Cumulative and cross cutting effects.

Overall performance of the plan.

#### **Mitigation and Enhancement Measures**

Measures to avoid or reduce adverse impacts.

Opportunities to enhance positive outcomes.

#### **Monitoring Proposals**

Suggested indicators and approach to monitoring and review.

#### **Annexes**

Matrices of results.

Summary of consultation feedback and responses.

Compliance checklist showing how SEA Regulations have been met.



## Section 7.

### Next Steps

7.1. As set out in Section 3, the road map to adoption has moved through several key steps and now looks like this:

- **Spring to Autumn 2026:** The Council published the draft plan and invited early views.
- **Summer 2026:** A full Publication Local Plan and Regulation 19 Sustainability Appraisal will be prepared, setting out all policies and sites in detail together with mitigation and monitoring.
- **Late 2026.** The Council will submit the Local Plan, Sustainability Appraisal and evidence to the Secretary of State and respond to any issues raised during examination.
- **During 2027:** Subject to approval, the Council will adopt the Local Plan and final Sustainability Appraisal and continue to monitor outcomes through the Authority Monitoring Report.

7.2. For more information, contact:  
[ldfconsultation@bolton.gov.uk](mailto:ldfconsultation@bolton.gov.uk)

## **Appendix 1 Defining the Scope of the Appraisal**

- 1) We consulted the statutory bodies and neighbouring local planning authorities on the scope of the Sustainability Appraisal earlier in 2025. Responses were received from Historic England and Natural England.
- 2) Supported by expert advice from Arup, these submission have been reviewed, and the framework has now been simplified and strengthened to improve clarity, remove duplication and ensure each objective reflects the evidence and the context for Bolton.
- 3) Several social objectives have been merged into a single 'communities' objective. Education and skills now have their own place rather than sitting under the economy. Health is widened to reflect access to services, green space and active lifestyles. Transport now includes reducing the need to travel. Environmental objectives have been streamlined by merging biodiversity with green and blue infrastructure, broadening flooding into climate adaptation and adding townscape to landscape. Objectives outside planning scope, such as energy affordability, have been pared back. The remaining environmental resource objectives stay in place but are expressed more tightly.
- 4) Historic England asked for clearer recognition of the historic environment, local character, townscape and setting. They stressed the need to reflect both designated and undesignated heritage, conservation areas, heritage at risk, archaeology and historic landscape character. These themes now sit more clearly within the strengthened heritage objective and the combined landscape and townscape objective. Historic England also asked for a fuller and more consistent baseline. This includes a clearer description of the historic environment, better reference to undesignated assets, archaeology, historic landscape character, conservation areas and heritage at risk, and clearer signposting to the data sources used. These points are being addressed through the baseline update.
- 5) Natural England asked for stronger treatment of biodiversity, ecological networks, peat, soils, designated sites, nature recovery and climate resilience. Merging biodiversity with green and blue infrastructure responds directly to this. The widened health objectives also reflect comments from Natural England points about access to natural green space, health inequalities and inclusive access being part of this health dimension. The shift from a flooding objective to a broader climate adaptation objective reflects their concerns about wider climate pressures.
- 6) Natural England also asked for expanded baseline evidence on designated and priority habitats, ecological networks, peat, soils, air and water quality, and climate risks. They requested clearer mapping of green and blue infrastructure, ecological networks and nature recovery areas, and stronger links to the draft Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy and landscape sensitivity. These matters are being taken forward through the baseline update.
- 7) Some Natural England comments were while helpful broader than Sustainability Appraisal process. These include detailed design standards, green social prescribing, nature-based solutions and wider Local Plan interventions. These matters will be considered addressed through plan preparation rather than through the Sustainability Appraisal Objectives.
- 8) The updated baseline will then be used to refine the prompt questions and indicators that sit alongside the Sustainability Appraisal Objectives. These updates will feed into the Sustainability Appraisal Report, which will be published alongside the Regulation 19 Local Plan.

Sustainability Appraisal Objectives (Sustainability Appraisal Framework)	Scoping Stage Draft Sustainability Appraisal Objective (with original numbering)	Reason for Change
<b>1. Health and Wellbeing – Improve the long-term physical and mental health and wellbeing for everyone in Bolton by reducing health inequalities, improving quality and quantity and access to healthcare and green open spaces as well as promoting healthy and active lifestyles.</b>	1 –Improve physical and mental health for everyone in Bolton, cutting the life-expectancy gap between neighbourhoods.	Broadened scope to include access to healthcare, open spaces and active lifestyles. Access to GI taken from Objective 9 and added here, as this is the social element of GI. Reflects Bolton evidence: wide life-expectancy gaps (up to 15 years), high adult inactivity, high child obesity, uneven access to nature and strong inequalities in wellbeing. Aligns with Natural England's comments on unequal access to green space, nature connection and health inequalities. Life expectancy differentials will continue picked up in key questions supporting the objectives.
<b>2. Housing – Provide everybody in the Borough with the opportunity to live in a decent, warm and affordable home that meets local needs and aspirations in terms of house types and tenures whilst also reducing homelessness.</b>	2 –Provide affordable, well-designed homes of the right size and type and reduce homelessness.	"Well-designed" removed – better covered by other objectives on place-making and townscape. Focus now on decent standards (warmth, healthy environments, adequate size), fuel poverty, variety of types and tenure. Reflects evidence of persistent under-delivery, rising rents and prices, very high demand for family homes, a rapidly ageing population needing accessible and extra-care housing, and chronic shortages of adapted homes.
<b>3. Promoting Strong, Safe and Inclusive Communities – Promote the safety, inclusivity and connectivity of neighbourhoods so that everyone feels they belong, has equal opportunities to access local services and facilities, contribute to local life and thrive in Bolton regardless of their background or abilities.</b>	5 – Make sure everyone can reach everyday services by safe, sustainable travel, supporting healthy, inclusive and resilient neighbourhoods.	Rationalisation of Objectives 5, 6 and 7. These dealt with overlapping themes and used similar evidence. Social infrastructure is now picked up through health, education and housing.
	6- Support the safety, inclusivity and connectivity of neighbourhoods, so that everyone feels they belong and can join in local life.	Rationalised with Objectives 5 and 7 to avoid repetition. Creates a single, focussed objective on community wellbeing, connectivity and inclusion. The plan will be subject to an equalities impact assessment under the public sector qualities duty
	7 – Embed equality of opportunity and inclusive design so everyone, whatever their background or ability, can live, work and thrive in Bolton	Equalities merged for a more wide-ranging objective covering inclusion, safety, crime prevention and accessible local environments. Subsuming equalities avoids duplication and strengthens the holistic treatment of inclusion.
<b>4. Education and Lifelong Learning – Improve education, training and lifelong learning by increasing the quantity and</b>	(No original number – previously embedded within Objective 3)	Added because skills and education were missing from the objectives, yet are vital social determinants and highly relevant in Bolton context. Baseline shows lower NVQ4+ attainment, higher no-qualification rates, pockets of

Sustainability Appraisal Objectives (Sustainability Appraisal Framework)	Scoping Stage Draft Sustainability Appraisal Objective (with original numbering)	Reason for Change
<b>quality of and access to such opportunities and facilities which will also help to raise aspirations and maintain a healthy labour market.</b>		low aspiration and strong demand for digital, engineering, health and green jobs. Separating this from the economy objective avoids overloading and allows focussed assessment of learning access, skills pathways and aspiration.
<b>5. Local Economy and Employment – Develop a sustainable and diverse economy with higher levels of employment by creating more and better jobs that are easily accessible, supporting business expansion and promoting growth in key economic sectors.</b>	3 – Create more and better-paid jobs, raise skills and productivity throughout the borough, and help more residents into work.	Skills element removed and placed under Objective 4. This objective now focuses on job quality, job quantity, access to jobs and support for key economic sectors. Reflects Bolton's lower employment rate, high inactivity and lower wages relative to national standard. Job growth, sector support and accessible employment locations are appropriately captured here.
<b>6. Sustainable Transport and Reducing the Need to Travel – Enable a low-carbon transport system that boosts walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport use, improves safety, lowers emissions and cuts car use whilst promoting sustainable patterns of growth to reduce the need to travel.</b>	4 – Transport Enable a low-carbon transport system that boosts walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport use, improves safety, lowers emissions, and cuts car use.	Adds the key missing concept of reducing the need to travel, plus ensuring development is supported by appropriate transport infrastructure. Reflects evidence of high car dependency for short trips, rising traffic volumes and the need for spatial patterns that reduce emissions. Aligns with Natural England's concerns about traffic emissions near designated sites.
<b>7. Renewable Energy and Decarbonisation – Encourage the acceleration to a zero-carbon energy system by enabling the development and wider use of renewable energy as well as seeking to minimise carbon emissions and increasing energy efficiency.</b>	10 – Speed the transition to a zero-carbon energy system by reducing need, expanding local renewables and heat networks, and keeping energy affordable and secure.	Removing "affordable and secure" – outside planning scope. Broadened to cover reducing the causes of climate change, consistent with planning's remit. Supports renewable energy and energy efficiency.
<b>8. Adapting to our Changing Climate – Reduce the risk of and from flooding... and ensure new development and the existing built environment is resilient to climate extremes.</b>	11- Reduce flood risk to people, homes and infrastructure, promote natural flood management and SuDS, and ensure new development is safe and does not increase risk elsewhere.	Expanded to cover wider climate related risks such as hotter summers, not just flooding. Aligns with Natural England's concern about broader climate resilience.
<b>9. Biodiversity and Infrastructure (Green and Blue) – Protect and enhance Bolton's biodiversity as well as strengthening its</b>	8 – Nature and Biodiversity Protect, link and enrich habitats and species at every scale.	"At every scale" removed as unclear. Keeps objective open to designated sites, local species, nature recovery networks and climate resilience. Note that access to green space is elsewhere. Aligns more effectively Natural

Sustainability Appraisal Objectives (Sustainability Appraisal Framework)	Scoping Stage Draft Sustainability Appraisal Objective (with original numbering)	Reason for Change
<b>green and blue infrastructure to create well-connected and climate-resilient networks.</b>		England comments on biodiversity, designated sites and ecological connectivity.
	9 - Create a connected, biodiverse and climate-resilient network of green and waterways that residents can enjoy and that supports nature recovery.	Combined with Objective 8 as themes were closely connected. Avoids duplication and allows assessment of nature recovery, GI networks and climate resilience together.
<b>10. Landscape and Townscape – Conserve and enhance the quality and local character of Bolton’s distinctive landscapes and townscapes, protect key views, as well as regeneration of degraded urban and natural environments.</b>	15 – Conserve and enhance Bolton’s distinctive landscapes, safeguard key views, restore degraded areas and reinforce local character	Townscape added as it was not sufficiently covered elsewhere. Reflects HE emphasis on local character, design quality and distinctiveness. Appropriate to include both rural and urban landscape elements.
<b>11. Heritage – Conserve and enhance Bolton’s historic environment in a manner that is appropriate to its cultural significance.</b>	16 – Conserve and enhance the historic environment – including heritage assets, their settings and local historic character.	Wording refined to focus more clearly on significance. Aligns with HE comments about the need for a sharper emphasis on significance, setting and cultural value.
<b>12. Air Quality – Reduce air pollution to provide a healthy environment for people and wildlife.</b>	12 – Air Quality Reduce air pollution to provide a healthy environment for people and wildlife.	Objective remains fit for purpose.
<b>13. Land and Soil Quality - Ensure efficient use of land and minimising the loss of better-quality agricultural land to development, safeguard and improve soils, clean up and prevent land contamination, and conserve and enhance land resources.</b>	13 – Ensure efficient use of land, safeguard and improve soils, clean up contaminated sites, and conserve and enhance land resources.	Refined wording. Peat to be addressed through key questions. Aligns with Natural England’s concern about soils, BMV land, contamination and peat as a critical nature-based solution.
<b>14. Water Resources – Protect and maintain the quality of Bolton’s water resources by raising water quality and keeping water consumption and abstraction within local supply limits.</b>	14 – Water Resources Protect our water resources by raising water quality and minimising demand.	Adds maintaining levels as well as quality. Agreed wording. Reflects water-supply pressures and river quality issues.
<b>15. Waste Minimisation – Move towards a circular economy by generating less waste,</b>	17 – Move towards a circular economy by generating less	Objective remains fit for purpose.



Sustainability Appraisal Objectives (Sustainability Appraisal Framework)	Scoping Stage Draft Sustainability Appraisal Objective (with original numbering)	Reason for Change
<b>designing out waste in new development, boosting reuse and recycling and aiming for near-zero residual waste.</b>	waste, designing out waste in new development, boosting reuse and recycling and aiming for near-zero residual waste.	