



BOLTON LOCAL PLAN
TOPIC PAPER: HEALTH INNOVATION BOLTON
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Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
01 PURPOSE	5
02 ALLOCATION AND POLICIES	6
03 STRATEGIC CASE	8
04 HEALTH INNOVATION	11
05 WHY HERE ?	13
06 PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY	16
07 OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES.....	17
08 EXCEPTIONAL CASE FOR GREEN BELT RELEASE.....	18
09 CONCLUSIONS.....	19

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through the Bolton Local Plan, the Council is promoting the allocation of 246 hectares of land for a development known as Health Innovation Bolton (HIB). The project includes a Green Belt boundary alteration, with changes from the 2014 Allocations Plan, removing 172 hectares of land from the Green Belt. 41 hectares of the proposed HIB development is designated as Other Protected Open Land in the Allocations Plan (2014).

The HIB project delivers key policy priorities for the Council, including the creation of high-quality jobs, the provision of employment land and the development of housing to meet need, including a substantive requirement for affordable housing. With its focus on investments in health facilities and services, the development proposals aim to enhance health related education and training and create the opportunity to attract health sector focused commercial businesses. Consequentially, and through partnership working, the HIB project can play a critical role in helping to improve the health and wellbeing of local and wider Bolton communities, closing the health inequality gap that currently exists.

The outcomes delivered by HIB are consistent with Combined Authority and national government agendas. The Greater Manchester planning policy document Places for Everyone (PfE) encourages the creation of high-quality employment and economic activity in the north of the conurbation and identifies the Wigan-Bolton Corridor (Northfold) as a geographic focus to achieve this. HIB sits in the Corridor. Health innovation linked to the Hospital is explicitly promoted in PfE (Policy JP-Strat8).

National government promotes economic growth and higher productivity through innovation partnerships and collaborations between academic research and innovation focused businesses. Health improvement and illness prevention are key national priorities, to be delivered by a changing health service (NHS): becoming more patient focused; delivering more in community settings; evolving the role of (hospital) acute services; and embracing new technologies and innovations. HIB, and associated activities that are enabled by it, address these health and economic agendas, as well as meeting local needs, to deliver “good growth in every postcode”.

HIB is the only site in Bolton that can deliver these policy ambitions. Critically, it builds on the proximity of the Royal Bolton Hospital and the University of Greater Manchester Medical School, and their existing collaborations. With infrastructure investment, the site becomes accessible by a range of modes of transport, from within Bolton and across the Region.

The Council has identified a need to release land from the Green Belt to meet housing and industrial and warehousing land supply requirements. HIB has been assessed alongside other sites. It is identified as the most appropriate site for development.

The Council and Peel Land are major landowners in the HIB area. Over a number of years, they have been working together and with other local partners (including the NHS Trust and University) and other landowners to develop proposals for HIB. Partnership working arrangements are formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and plans for the delivery of HIB and its ambitions are progressing (even ahead of the Local Plan outcome).

HIB is a major, long-term ambition. It will need public investment and a major focus and coordinated effort to attract private sector businesses and investment. However, the standing of partners and their established commitments, and the evolving partnership working, give confidence that the ambitions can be met.

The Council believes that the outcomes and outputs that HIB can deliver, which can only be achieved on this site, and the contribution made by providing adequate housing, and so maintaining a five-year supply of deliverable housing land, and by providing employment land in the interest of effective plan making, are justification for the release of green belt land. Discussions with Peel and partners, and the Council's own work and independent advice, have explored the scope and scale of HIB. As a result, the proposed allocation is reduced from that originally promoted. The reduced allocation takes account of the still substantial scale of the supported allocation, the evolving nature of the health innovation ecosystem and infrastructure currently at HIB and draws on comparisons with how other health innovation clusters have developed over time. The reduced scale of the allocation from the initial promotion, also acknowledges the significance of Green Belt designation; ensuring that the remaining Green Belt can still perform its strategic function.

The Council's conclusion is that the high-quality jobs; the requirement for industrial and warehousing land; the needed housing (of all tenures) with the need to maintain a five-year housing land supply; the support for a successful hospital and university; and the benefits achieved in health and well-being, represent an "exceptional circumstances" case for the quantum of land now supported for release. The policies linked to the allocation are to ensure that the specific health innovation led, mixed use Vision for HIB is delivered.

01 PURPOSE

- 1.1 This Topic Paper sets out Bolton Council's position on the allocation of land via the Bolton Local Plan to deliver Health Innovation Bolton (HIB). It will be presented as evidence to the Local Plan Examination. It draws on and references material produced by others, including the promoters of the HIB project. It represents however the Council position alone.

02 ALLOCATION AND POLICIES

2.1 The proposed HIB allocation is for a mixed-use development encompassing:

- Around 200,000 sq. m of mixed-use space for employment-led, health innovation and health and community uses. This is to include around 39,000 sq. m of health innovation office, or research and development floorspace, around 41,000 sq. m of health innovation industrial and warehousing floorspace and around 120,000 sq. m of other health innovation and health and community floorspace.
- Expanded health uses allied to the Royal Bolton Hospital
- University teaching, research and ancillary space related to healthcare and supporting the health innovation cluster
- 2,225 homes of which 1,895 are expected to be delivered in the Plan period. The housing mix will include at least 35% affordable housing and specialist housing.
- A mixed-use local centre to serve HIB and its residents only
- Community facilities including a new primary school and health facilities
- Supporting road and public transport infrastructure
- Quality and integrated public open space and recreational facilities

2.2 Figure 1 shows the current indicative masterplan vision from the site promoter for the allocation area.

2.3 The policy further seeks to ensure that:

- Commercial development is focused on the health sector.
- Projects support innovation, involving collaborative, entrepreneurial and business start-up activities in the health sector.
- Both the hospital and the university have access to land and floorspace to expand and/or redevelop and improve their estates and their related services as needed in an efficient manner.
- A significant proportion (35%) of homes built are affordable. It is acknowledged that further investigation is needed into the requirement for key worker housing linked to the Hospital.
- The allocation promotes good development and town planning principles, including accessible open space and the promotion of health and well-being.
- Development is phased to deliver a mix of activities with timing of infrastructure aligned to development programming

2.4 This is not a general employment site. It provides a particular opportunity to promote innovation and high value employment uses in the health sector. The proximity to the hospital and medical school are enablers of this, alongside the partnership of Council and Peel as major landowners. The allocation does contribute to the Local Plan's employment land supply but provides the

opportunity for additional high-quality jobs, not capable of delivery on other employment sites. Exceptional circumstances would not exist to bring the site forward for general employment uses.

- 2.5 The HIB site also contributes housing land to enable the five-year supply obligations to be met. Evidence indicates the need for Green Belt sites to achieve the supply needs; and sites have been assessed against a range of criteria, demonstrating the suitability of HIB for development.
- 2.6 The Council does not think purpose-built student accommodation is appropriate at HIB, although this has been promoted by Peel and partners. The Council sees student accommodation better delivered in the town centre, to support regeneration in the context of a wider range of support services. Transport improvements will enhance access from the town centre to HIB.



Figure 1: Indicative Masterplan Vision for the Allocation Area

(NB Diagram is indicative and supplied by site promoter)

03 STRATEGIC CASE

- 3.1 The Council has a number of strategic priorities. These include promoting new job creation (especially jobs relevant to the future economy); delivering additional housing to meet need (including a significant requirement for social and affordable homes); and supporting improved health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities.
- 3.2 The Council is committed to support and enable the success of key “anchor” institutions in the area. Critical amongst these are the Bolton NHS Foundation Trust (with its major facility at the Royal Bolton Hospital) and the University of Greater Manchester.

Economic Growth

- 3.3 The HIB allocation lies to the south of Bolton Town Centre and to the west of the town of Farnworth. Bolton suffers from relatively high levels of deprivation (the 30th most deprived of 296 local authority areas in England on the 2025 IMD). Within Bolton, Farnworth is amongst the most deprived communities. Challenges are multi-faceted but include low skills, lack of access to high pay employment, poor quality housing and the linked consequence of poor health outcomes and life expectancy. Addressing the challenges of deprivation is a critical Council priority.
- 3.4 Promoting economic growth is a national, Greater Manchester and Bolton imperative. The government’s Industrial Strategy prioritises sectors including Life Sciences and Advanced Manufacturing. It is noted that health innovation can straddle both these areas.
- 3.5 Greater Manchester similarly supports Life Sciences and Health Innovation and Advanced Materials & Manufacturing. Arrangements in place to deliver the ambitions include Innovation Greater Manchester and Health Innovation Manchester, with inward investment into GM being driven by Invest Manchester. Engagement with the GMCA and Invest Manchester has confirmed the need for additional land allocation for health innovation developments; and recognises the role that a site such as HIB can play within GM’s portfolio of development sites to support the sector in the conurbation. For example, HIB can play a role to provide grow on space for start-up and small businesses located in the Oxford Road Innovation Corridor in Central Manchester.
- 3.6 Locally, Bolton needs to grow a more innovative and competitive economy, providing sites and buildings suitable for modern businesses, allied to an education and skills strategy to provide a pipeline of qualified staff. The University of Greater Manchester, Bolton College and local schools will need to respond to this need. Bolton’s wider economy must become more entrepreneurial and promote innovation. HIB aims to deliver high quality, high value adding jobs but also to contribute to establishing Bolton as a more innovative local economy.
- 3.7 While focused on a specific sector and targeting high value adding businesses and employment, the allocation of HIB also supports forecast employment

need whilst ensuring that future occupiers and jobs are tailored to higher value economic activity than general employment premises.

- 3.8 The construction activities at HIB over the lifetime of the development will create construction jobs. Through planning policy, partnership working and engagement with local education and skills providers, the Council will aim to ensure local communities benefit from the employment opportunities generated, both in construction and as a result of business location, investment and growth.
- 3.9 It follows that the ambitions for HIB align to national, GM and Bolton economic growth aspirations. The proposed allocation provides a vital additional element to the evolving group of innovation focused employment clusters in the conurbation.

Support “Anchor” Institutions

- 3.10 Royal Bolton Hospital (and the wider NHS Trust) and the University of Greater Manchester (the University of Bolton prior to 2024) are critical “anchor” institutions in the Town. The Local Plan supports the service ambitions of these institutions, and its policies need to support change and enhancements, including of their physical estates.
- 3.11 Bolton Hospital is addressing changes in service arrangements, including the delivery of more services in community settings. There are challenges to re-modelling the existing hospital site and the NHS Trust has made the case for a whole new hospital. This would be subject to funding availability. However, the Council and the Local Plan needs to make provision for a new or substantially re-modelled hospital. Even in the short term, changes are possible within the existing land holding to enhance service efficiency, including improving car access and parking as well as using land to deliver some early projects consistent with the ambitions of HIB.
- 3.12 The University has developed the Greater Manchester Medical School and has attracted its first cohorts of students. The School works closely with the Hospital and Trust, including a role in developing a local workforce of healthcare professionals. The University has plans to grow student numbers which will require additional capacity for the School. The Vision for HIB would also see the University explore new provision in health-related areas. There is scope for joint working aligning research, hospital practitioners and health sector businesses. There is also opportunity to engage with other universities and research institutions across Greater Manchester and beyond.
- 3.13 Advisors to Peel have identified a number of potential university, health and related research facilities that could be developed and attracted to HIB, consistent with the site’s Vision and subject to funding and business cases. Critically, HIB will provide the land assets to allow such projects to proceed.
- 3.14 It follows that in allocating land for HIB, the Council is supporting the future redevelopment, enhancement and potential growth of the hospital and university. These objectives cannot be delivered solely within existing Hospital or University estates or other landholdings. Whilst ambition and timeframes will be funding dependent, it is critical to the wider objectives of

the Council that the policies of the Local Plan support the two institutions. Some of the physical development of the estates of both may be delivered in partnership with one another but also in partnerships with others, including commercial businesses and private sector developers and investors.

Housing and Health

- 3.15 The Council has a need to provide additional land for housing development within the Local Plan. It needs to provide for, and maintain, a minimum five-year supply of housing land. This requires release of Green Belt. Potential sites have been carefully assessed against a range of relevant criteria and HIB is considered a preferred site to support the supply need. Bringing this housing land alongside the commercial, hospital and university aspirations for HIB allow a mixed-use development to be delivered.
- 3.16 Delivering high-quality housing will make the Vision for health innovation more achievable; and higher value jobs will create demand for local housing. Further, a mixed-use approach enhances deliverability and supports the implementation of site wide infrastructure.
- 3.17 Bolton has a housing need and housing quality problem; and this is especially severe in the Farnworth area adjoining HIB. New quality housing will help to ameliorate this challenge. It will be critical that a significant proportion of the new housing is affordable, consistent with local need and with the Local Plan policy.
- 3.18 The provision of a Local Centre, of appropriate scale, will serve local existing and new communities and the requirements of new businesses and related activities. Limits on the scale of any Centre are included to ensure no adverse impact on established centres.
- 3.19 New housing, designed to high standards, and with health and wellbeing at its core, will help to address some of the negative links between poor housing and poor health. There are however wider health benefits to be achieved through the delivery of a health innovation cluster in this location. Research and business investment and innovation can support the local communities (in Farnworth but also more widely) in areas such as enhancing prevention of poor health outcomes and new ways to deliver community and personalised health and well-being services.

04 HEALTH INNOVATION

- 4.1 The ambition for HIB is to create a regionally, nationally (and potentially internationally) significant health innovation cluster, defined as:
- “A health innovation cluster is a geographically concentrated network of organisations that work together to develop, test, commercialise and adopt new healthcare products, technologies and services.”*
- 4.2 There are some specific features of such a cluster that can be delivered at HIB given its context.
- 4.3 Future economic growth will be best achieved and most significant if driven by innovation activities and related business investment. Areas of Life Sciences and Advanced Manufacturing are national targets and also Greater Manchester priority areas. Both are relevant to Health, including with the manufacturing link to medical devices.
- 4.4 HIB has the potential to attract health sector businesses for local and conurbation wide reasons. Locally, proximity to Hospital and the University (particularly the Medical School) means that businesses can collaborate with practitioners and researchers/academics. There are opportunities for new business formation and the promotion of start-up and SME growth. The University and Hospital, with the support of the Council, are working to develop proposals and arrangements to develop these activities.
- 4.5 HIB should be seen in the context of the wider health sector and health innovation economy of Greater Manchester. This includes both the strong Life Sciences reputation and that for Advanced Manufacturing. Life Sciences has a current focus in the Oxford Road Corridor in Manchester. However, and as noted by Peel’s advisors, through engagement with Invest Manchester and the GMCA, there is an expected need for growth on space, including development sites and larger footprint buildings, as a result of activities in the Corridor and elsewhere. Providing such space is critical to retaining quality jobs and value adding businesses within the conurbation.
- 4.6 The Partners to HIB, including the Council, are starting to develop thinking about how the foundations for the creation of a health innovation cluster can be progressed and expanded at HIB. This will need workstreams beyond only preparing for physical development. There need to be activities in business support, access to finance and funding (including public funding), inward investment, education and skills and marketing and branding, as well as resource commitments from the University and Hospital stakeholders.
- 4.7 It is envisaged that the commercial and partnership developments at HIB will be varied in nature but consistent with successful health innovation clusters. These will include further research facilities, publicly accessible health services, collaboration spaces, laboratory spaces and advanced manufacturing buildings. The Plan policy promotes development of this nature and would not allow development of general employment or warehousing space, not linked to the health sector or innovation.

Warehousing space linked to health businesses may be acceptable but a justification would need to be made.

05 WHY HERE ?

5.1 There are several important reasons why the HIB location and the proposed allocation is appropriate.

- The PfE strategy promotes growth at Northfold, including through policies JP-Strat6 (Northern Areas) and JP-Strat8 (Wigan-Bolton Growth Corridor) as part of an objective to promote economic activity and higher value adding employment in the “north” of GM. Figure 2 puts HIB into the context of the wider sub-regional context and the Wigan/Bolton Growth Corridor (Northfold). Figure 3 places HIB in the Local Plan Key Diagram, which further enforces the focus on the Growth Corridor.
- Health innovation is a national and regional/GM priority. At HIB, an innovation ecosystem can be grown around the existing facilities and services of the Hospital and University Medical School. The site is unique in enabling development to co-locate with the Hospital and Medical School.
- Land is in relatively few ownerships with the Council having material interests. The major private landowner, Peel Land, is a willing party and core promoter of HIB and its ambitions.
- Transport improvements will make the site accessible to both the Town Centre and wider community, and the economy of the conurbation and wider region.
- Land is available at scale to deliver the ambitious vision of HIB, whilst also enabling a mixed-use approach.
- The Council has prepared a Site Selection Paper which considers the need for an adequate supply of employment and housing land over the Plan period, including a requirement for a minimum of five years’ supply of housing land. This analysis concludes that there is need for a Green Belt boundary amendment to achieve the Plan’s aims. Sites have been assessed against a range of criteria, including economic and regeneration contribution, sustainability, transport and impact on the role of the Green Belt. This work concludes that the HIB allocation is preferred for release given need and the assessment of alternative sites.
- The overall spatial plan set out in the Local Plan and set out in the Key Diagram (see Figure 3) shows a corridor of development from east to west linking through the Town Centre. HIB lies central to this spatial vision.

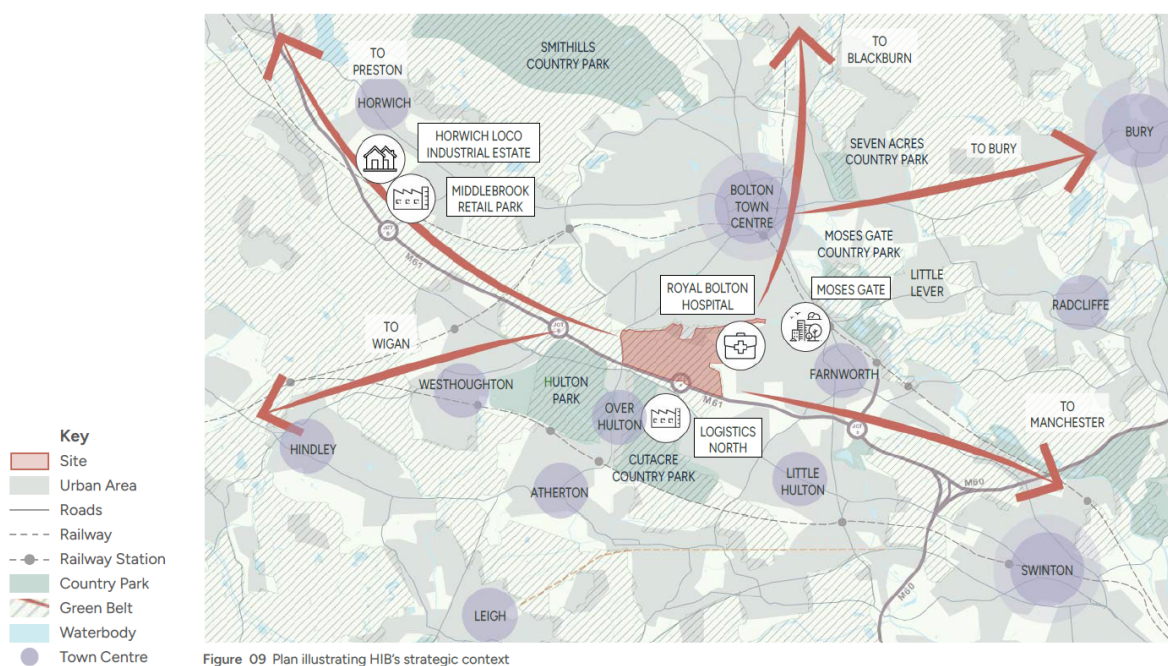


Figure 2: Sub-Regional Context for HIB and the Wigan-Bolton (Northfold) Growth Corridor

(NB Diagram is indicative and supplied by site promoter)

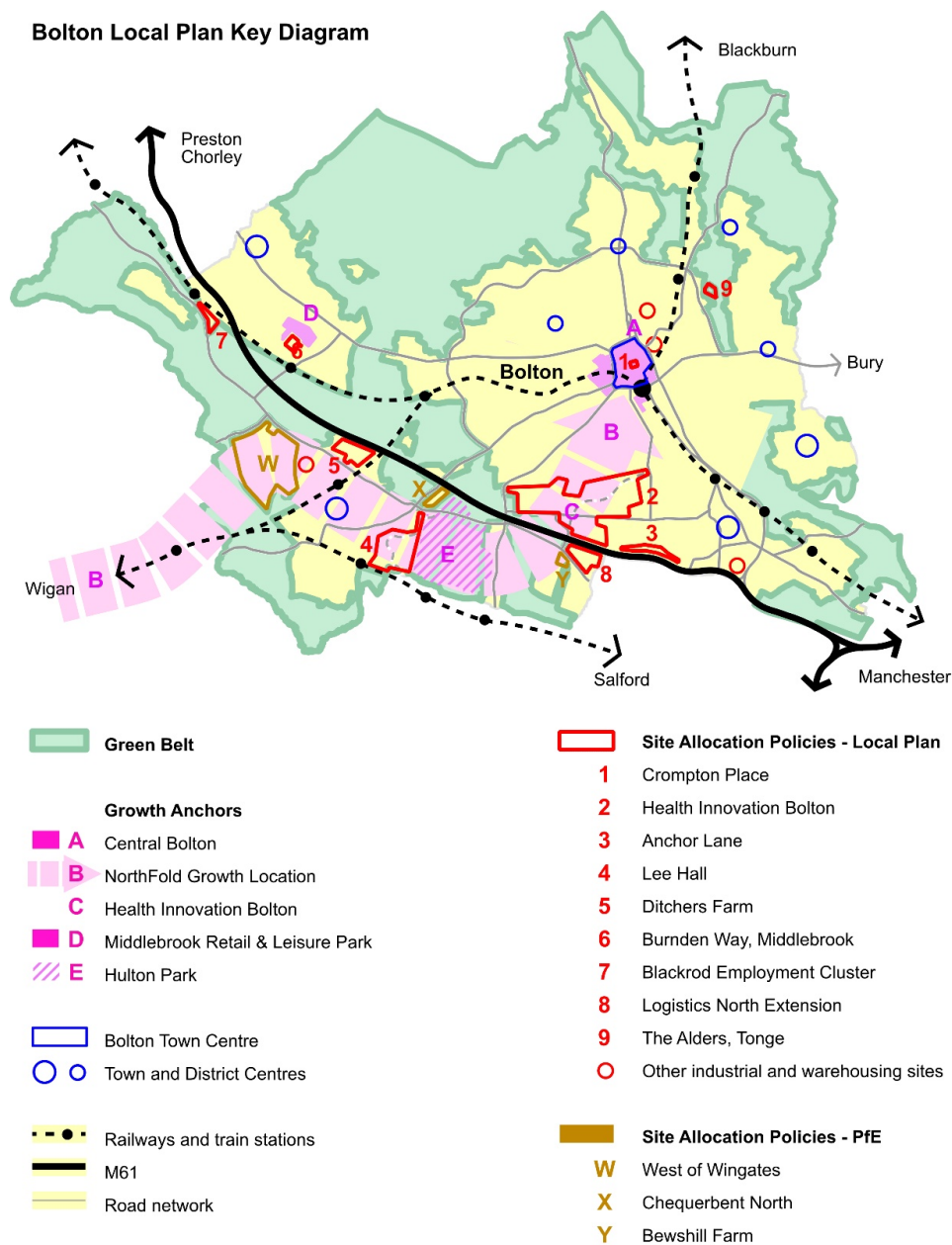


Figure 3: HIB and Local Plan Key Diagram

Source: Bolton Local Plan

06 PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY

- 6.1 The proposals for HIB have been progressed over a five-year period. There is a strong alignment of partners including the Council, Peel Land, the Hospital and the University.
- 6.2 A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed. A project governance structure has been established. This includes an overall steering group and there are a series of working groups established to address the delivery needs of the site. Key themes for the groups include land and property, infrastructure, marketing and branding, and health.
- 6.3 A Delivery Strategy has been produced to consider how landowners work together, including in the design, funding and construction of key infrastructure.
- 6.4 There is a recognition that allocating land is not of itself sufficient to deliver the ambitions for HIB. Local partners are working together to put in place a comprehensive approach to secure the Vision and will widen this to include the GMCA and national government support as well as positioning HIB for private sector investment.

07 OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

- 7.1 Development of HIB is forecast to bring significant benefits to Bolton. Key economic benefits include:
- 4,500 direct jobs
 - Estimate of 2,500 of these direct jobs for Bolton residents
 - 2,500 net additional jobs supported in the Bolton economy
 - £160 million gross value added per annum directly contributing to the local economy
 - 225 direct construction jobs
- 7.2 At a GM economy level, the GVA contribution is £310 million and 5,200 net additional jobs.
- 7.3 Wider outcomes will include a healthier population, enhanced skills, education and health service provision and addressing of the challenges and causes of multiple deprivation. The Local Plan includes policies (BSA02 and EC3) to ensure local people benefit from construction job opportunities and wider employment creation.
- 7.4 In addition, the HIB proposals include significant potential transport benefits across modes. These include:
- The new Primary Movement Corridor between the M61 and Bradford Road. This will reduce congestion around Bolton Royal Infirmary by providing an alternative route for traffic and more highways capacity. The Primary Movement Corridor will also provide high-quality and segregated cycling and walking facilities to enable active travel (whole corridor estimated cost of £28.7m at 2024 prices)
 - A package of junction upgrades on the local road network to relieve congestion where the additional traffic from HIB increases delays and queueing. This includes an enhancement to M61 junction 4 (whole package costs of £20.3m)
 - Active travel routes within the site and improvements to existing public rights of way and the offsite walking and cycling network (package cost of £33.8m)
 - Enhanced bus services across the site and to the Hospital (estimated value of £10m over 10 years), generally improving bus services in south Bolton.
- 7.5 Separately, the Council is investigating the potential for an autonomous vehicle system linking the Hospital and HIB which would further reduce car use to the development site if it were delivered.

08 EXCEPTIONAL CASE FOR GREEN BELT RELEASE

- 8.1 The Council has given careful consideration to the requirements and potential results of allocating Green Belt land for HIB. It recognises the “exceptional case” argument that needs to be sustained. On balance, the Council believes that the exceptional case is made because:
- It enables strategically important development for both economic growth and housing; and for health service and education uses.
 - The site supports provision of land to meet the forecast need for industrial and warehousing and meets the requirement to establish and maintain a five-year supply of deliverable housing land.
 - Proximity to the hospital and medical school mean that this is a unique location to promote health innovation and business collaboration. There are no suitable alternative locations.
 - With open space provision and enhanced transport infrastructure and a local centre, HIB is a sustainable location.
 - The indicative masterplan provides for a future defensible green belt boundary and supports a quality landscape context for HIB.
- 8.2 The proposals represent effective planning for the sustainable development of Bolton and for the site. They contribute to meeting strategic priorities for the Council, for GM and for national economic and development objectives.

09 CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 The Council has examined the merits of allocating land for the HIB development in serious detail. It has worked closely with landowners, including the site promoter (Peel Land) and with key local partners, notably the Hospital/Trust and the University.
- 9.2 The scale of initial proposals has been reduced to reflect the expected development programme and demand; recognising the high bar for releasing Green Belt land and the importance of strategic Green Belt functions.
- 9.3 A strong and formalised partnership is in place which brings confidence that the ambition for HIB can be delivered. There is recognition of the strands of work and resources that are needed to turn the allocation into high-quality development and the achieve the Vision and targeted outcomes for HIB.
- 9.4 The proposed development and green belt release meets the need for sound plan making, ensuring provision of adequate housing and employment land. HIB is a unique opportunity to support economic growth, support key anchor institutions, meet housing need and address health inequality challenges.