BOLTON LOCAL PLAN
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
October 2026

Published alongside the Regulation 19 Publication Plan

Contents

01 ABOUT THE PLAN....3
02 HOW THE SITES WERE CHOSEN 8
03 GREEN BELT AND BROWNFIELD.... 9
04 HEALTH INNOVATION BOLTON 10
05 HOMES 12
06 JOBS....14
07 INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT AND GREEN SPACE....15
08 HAVING YOUR SAY 18

01 ABOUT THE PLAN

Why does Bolton need a Local Plan?

National policy requires housing and employment needs to be planned for, and planning applications keep coming whether or not the Council has a plan. Without one, decisions are led by national policy on sites the Council did not choose, and planning properly for infrastructure gets harder.

The plan is not a vote on whether building happens. It is how the Council decides where it goes, and on what terms.

What is the plan trying to achieve?

A Bolton that is healthier, fairer, greener and more prosperous by 2042. Everything in the plan should be read against those four things.

What period does it cover, and why does it run past Places for Everyone?

2022 to 2042. That is three years beyond Places for Everyone, the joint plan for nine of the ten Greater Manchester districts adopted in 2024, which runs to 2039. Chapter 1 of the plan explains the relationship between the two.

Which version of national policy is the plan being judged against?

The National Planning Policy Framework of 2021, the Government's statement of national planning policy, under the transitional arrangements set out in the 2026 Framework. The plan has also had regard to the August 2026 Framework, the version of national policy current when the plan was published.

Who decided how many homes Bolton has to plan for?

Places for Everyone sets Bolton's minimum housing figure and the broad pattern of growth.

How many homes, and by when?

A minimum of 787 net additional homes a year across the plan period to 2042, which is 15,740 in total. After the homes already built, the plan provides for 13,720. Around 3,600 of those already have planning permission, and the housing trajectory is at Appendix 2 of the plan.



Figure 1. Housing delivery trajectory 2022 to 2042 by source of supply.
Source: Bolton Local Plan, Appendix 2.

What about jobs?

The evidence identifies a need for 811,727 square metres of new industrial and warehousing floorspace to 2042. Existing supply covers 664,230 of that, leaving 147,497 square metres to be found through new allocations and by making better use of sites already in employment use. There is also a minimum need for 16,700 square metres of new office floorspace. This is met from sites with permission, town centre mixed use allocation BSA01 Crompton Place and mixed use allocation BSA06 Burnden Way, Middlebrook.

Where does the growth go?

Mainly to four places: Central Bolton, which is the first focus because residents asked for life to be brought back into the town centre; Health Innovation Bolton beside the Royal Bolton Hospital at Farnworth; the North Fold (Wigan-Bolton Growth Corridor) employment locations in the west; and Middlebrook.

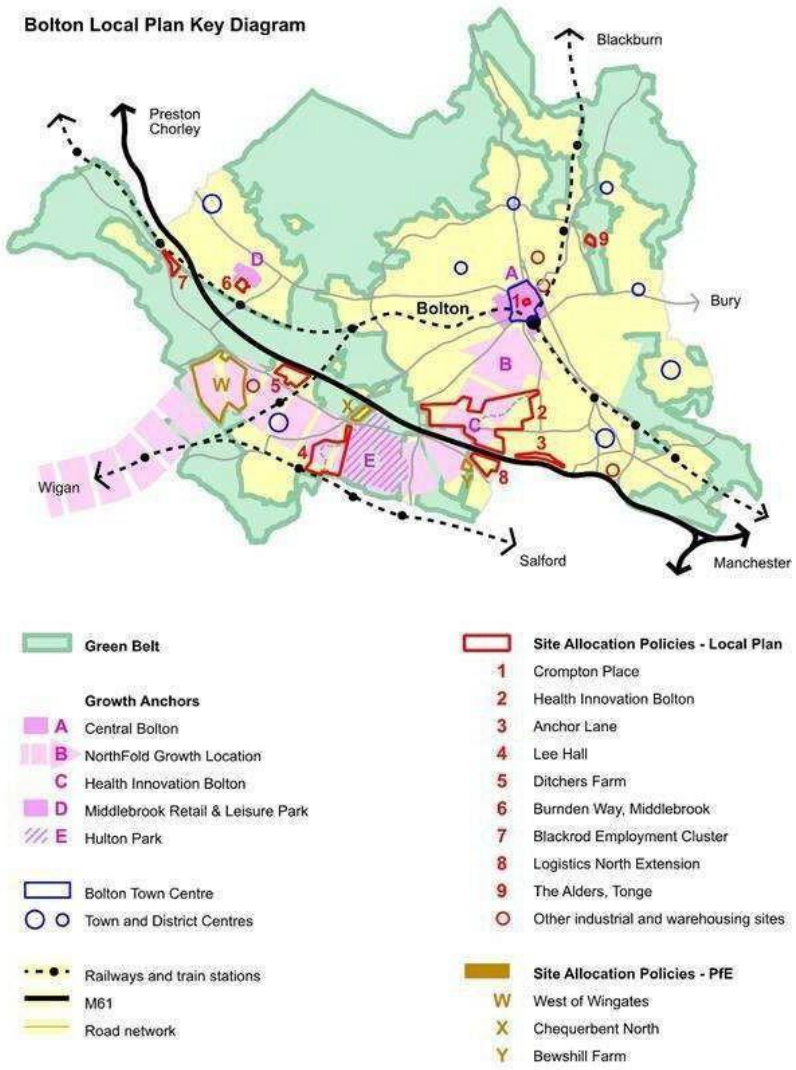

Figure 2. The spatial strategy for Bolton (Key Diagram).
Source: Bolton Local Plan, Figure 5.

What is planned for the town centre?

Policy SP1 makes Central Bolton the first focus for growth: a residential neighbourhood with market and affordable housing, the location for University of Greater Manchester uses and for new offices, with civic, retail, leisure, food and drink and cultural uses focused on the Town Centre. Policy SP3 directs 2,154 new homes to Central and Inner Bolton.

Crompton Place, Policy BSA01, is allocated for a minimum of 340 homes and around 10,500 square metres of offices in a new street layout between Bradshawgate and Victoria Square. Planning permission for demolition of the former shopping centre, and for temporary uses of the site while redevelopment is prepared, was granted in August 2025, for completion in 2027.

My area seems to be taking more than its share. Is the distribution fair?

Policy SP3 distributes new homes across seven parts of the borough and explains the reasons for each share. Growth is concentrated in the most sustainable locations, where infrastructure capacity is, or can be made available, and each site allocation sets out what its own development needs.

Growth beyond the allocations is directed to existing settlements, favouring locations near railway stations and centres so that access to jobs and services reduces the need to travel by car.

The distribution was tested against alternative ways of sharing growth out and judged an appropriate strategy.

What happens to planning applications in the meantime?

Until this plan is adopted, applications are decided against the current development plan: Places for Everyone (2024), the Bolton Core Strategy (2011), the Site Allocations Plan (2014), Greater Manchester Joint Waste Plan (2012), Greater Manchester Joint Minerals Plan (2013) and the Blackrod Neighbourhood Plan (2020). This plan is a consideration in those decisions from now on, and the weight given to each policy grows as the plan moves through the examination, depending on the stage reached, how far objections to the policy remain unresolved, and how consistent it is with national policy.

How do I find what the plan says about my street?

The Policies Map, published with the plan on the Council's Local Plan webpage, shows where each policy applies including the site allocations, the Green Belt, the centres, the parking zones, and the conservation areas and nature sites the plan protects. Chapter 10 sets out the policy for each site allocation and the character policies for Central Bolton.

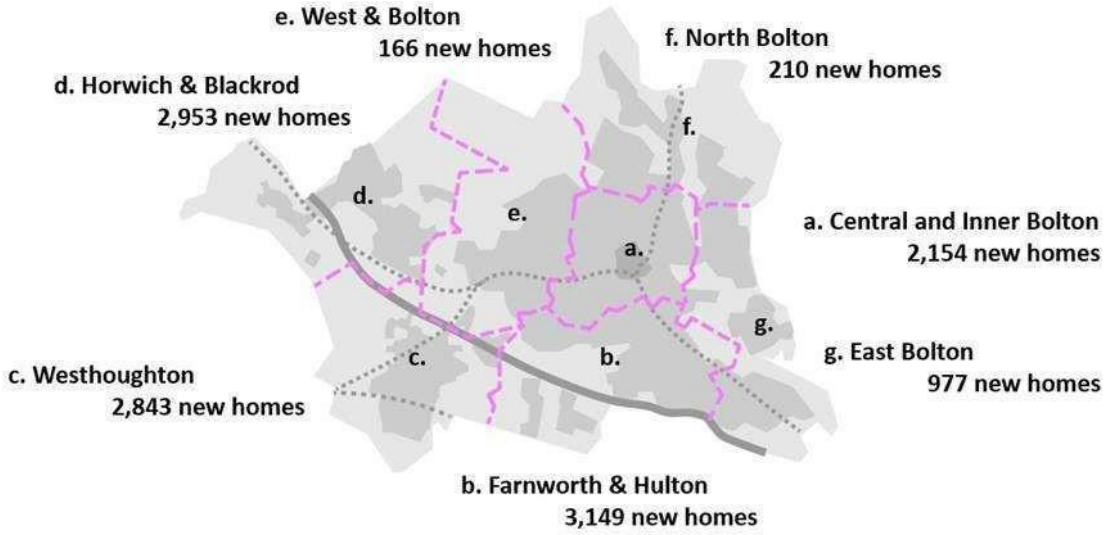

Figure 3. The spatial distribution of housing growth across the borough.
Source: Bolton Local Plan, Figure 7.

02 HOW THE SITES WERE CHOSEN

How did you choose the sites?

Every site put forward, whether through the Call for Sites, the Council's invitation to landowners to put land forward, or already known to the Council, was assessed against the same criteria and in the same order.

The first question is whether the site is suitable: its location, access, flood risk, heritage, ecology, contamination, and what it would mean for the character of the area. The second is whether it is available: whether the owner is willing and there is a realistic prospect of it coming forward. The third is whether it is achievable: whether it can be built and sold or let, at the scale proposed, within the plan period.

Sites that passed were then tested against the strategy: brownfield and Central Bolton first, then greenfield in sustainable locations. Discussions with neighbouring Councils on whether they could help meet some of our needs took place and only then, where the need could not be met any other way, land in the Green Belt was considered.

The Site Selection Paper sets out the assessment site by site. It is published with the evidence base, under Supporting documents on the Council's Local Plan webpage.

What is the difference between a site allocation and the SHLAA?

They do different jobs, and being in one does not mean being in the other.

The Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, the SHLAA, is an evidence document. It is a list of land that might in principle be capable of delivering housing development. It is kept and updated by the Council so that it knows what is out there. Inclusion is not a decision, it does not grant anything, and it does not mean the Council supports development there. Many sites in it will never be built on.

A site allocation is a policy in the plan. It says this site is to be developed, for roughly this much, with these requirements attached, and the Council has decided that.

Allocations are chosen from the sites assessed, they are consulted on, and they are tested at the examination.

03 GREEN BELT AND BROWNFIELD

Why can't everything go on brownfield land?

Brownfield first was the previous plan's approach and it did not deliver: completions fell short year after year. All available sources of housing land supply have been explored and tested, and the homes Bolton needs cannot be delivered on brownfield and other non-Green Belt sites alone.

Many brownfield sites need cleaning up, cost more to develop than the finished homes are worth, or are in several ownerships. The Council is working to unlock them, and they are expected to be built later in the plan period, with the early years relying on sites that can be built now, so that the Council can show a five-year supply of housing land at every point.

Why is the Green Belt changing?

The Green Belt boundary was established by Places for Everyone. National policy allows the boundary to change only in exceptional circumstances, meaning that the need cannot be met in any other way. This plan alters the boundary on that basis, and only after neighbouring authorities confirmed that they are unable to accommodate any of Bolton's development needs.

Land is removed at four locations: Health Innovation Bolton at Farnworth, the Blackrod Employment Cluster, the Logistics North Extension, and land off The Alders at Tonge Moor for Travelling Showpeople.

Does anything come back the other way?

Yes. Where land is released, development has to secure compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of the Green Belt that remains nearby, proportionate to the scale of the release, including any specific measures set out in the site allocation policy.

Land within or released from the Green Belt also carries a higher affordable housing requirement.

Will more Green Belt be released later?

Wider review of the Greater Manchester Green Belt is a matter for the Greater Manchester Spatial Development Strategy. This plan makes the case for its four changes only.

04 HEALTH INNOVATION BOLTON

What is Health Innovation Bolton?

The largest allocation in the plan, on land beside the Royal Bolton Hospital at Farnworth. It is expected to provide 1,895 homes and around 200,000 square metres of employment, health and community space, together with a care facility for older people of up to 75 bedspaces, a new primary school and a contribution to health facilities.

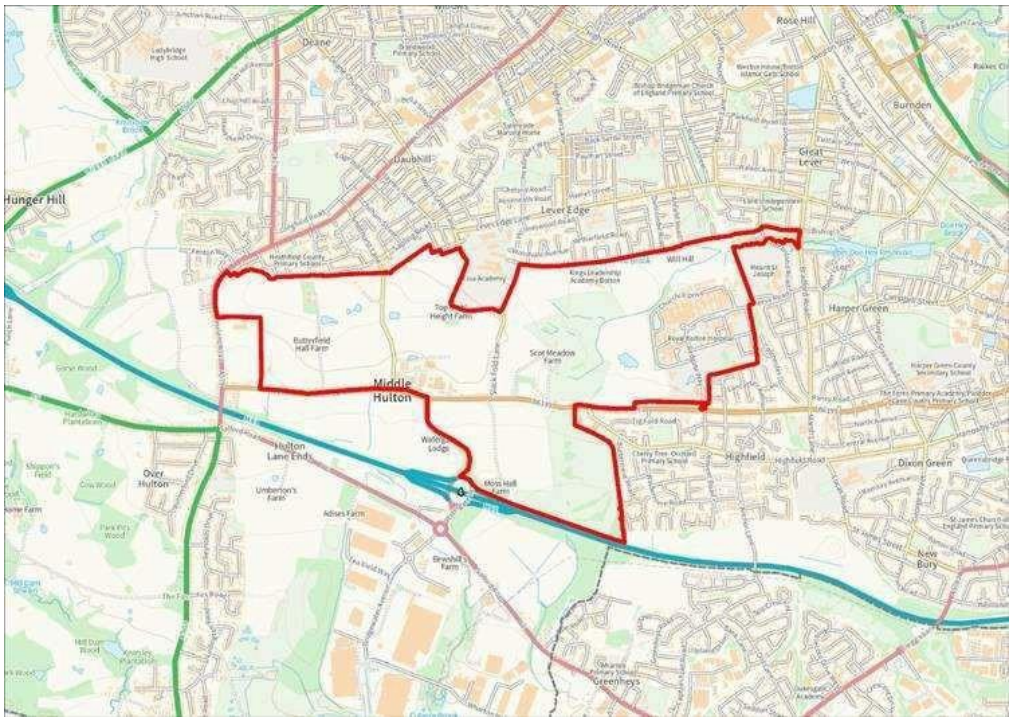

Figure 4. Health Innovation Bolton.
Source: Bolton Local Plan, Policy BSA02.

Why there?

Because of the hospital. The intention is a place where health services, research and the businesses that work with them sit alongside new housing, rather than a housing estate that happens to be near a hospital. Nowhere else in the borough has that anchor.

Why is it in the Green Belt?

It is one of the four Green Belt changes explained under Green Belt and brownfield. The case for the site, and for the alternatives that were rejected, is set out in the Site Selection Paper.

What about traffic, and access to the hospital?

Policy BSA02 requires a new road through the site, built to an adoptable standard and designed for bus services and active travel, and a contribution to a 15 minute bus service to Central Bolton by extending the existing 501 service into the development. The Transport Assessment and travel plan requirements in Policy INF1 apply, as explained under Infrastructure, transport and green space.

When will it be built?

Not at once. A site of this size comes forward in phases across the plan period, and the site policy sets out what has to be in place at each stage, including the school and the health contribution.

05 HOMES

Will there be homes people can afford?

Policy HS1 sets the percentage of affordable homes required on each site according to house prices in the area, in three value zones, at a level informed by evidence on what development can afford, with a higher requirement on land within or released from the Green Belt. Social rent, the tenure of affordable housing that Bolton most needs, is the priority of the policy.

Central Bolton has no set requirement, because house prices there are too low for schemes to fund affordable homes and still be built, and a requirement that stops development delivers no affordable homes at all.

What mix of homes will be built?

Policy HS2 requires developments of ten or more homes, or sites of half a hectare or more, to provide a mix of home sizes for both market and affordable homes, drawn from the Local Housing Needs Assessment. No more than 40 per cent of market homes may be one bedroom, and at least 30 per cent of affordable and social rented homes must have fewer than three bedrooms. A different mix is permitted where the need in the local area differs from the borough-wide profile, and self-build and custom homes are supported on sites that come forward without being allocated in the plan.

What about homes for older and disabled people?

Policy HS3 requires every new home to meet the accessible and adaptable standard, Building Regulations Part M4(2), so that it can be adapted as the needs of the people living there change. On developments of ten or more homes, or sites of half a hectare or more, 4.7 per cent of homes must meet the wheelchair adaptable standard, M4(3).

Purpose-built housing for older, vulnerable and disabled people, such as supported housing for working age adults, extra care and retirement housing, is supported within walkable neighbourhoods which maximise independence. Residents should be within walking distance of primary healthcare, a convenience shop and greenspace, or live within 800 metres of public transport that reaches them.

Communal and outdoor space must be usable by residents with limited mobility.

What about houses in multiple occupation?

Policy HS5 does not permit houses in multiple occupation in the areas of highest concentration. Elsewhere it controls the proportion in the surrounding area and prevents a family home being left with one on either side, and it sets space and amenity standards for the accommodation itself.

It builds on the Article 4 direction made in 2025, which removed the right to convert a house into a small house in multiple occupation without planning permission, so every proposal is decided under the policy.

What is planned at The Alders, Tonge?

Policy BSA09 allocates land off The Alders, between Tonge and Breightmet, for up to 50 plots for Travelling Showpeople. Around 40 of the plots are expected to meet relocation needs from existing plots in the borough that are unsuitable, leaving 5 to 10 net additional plots. The site is one of the four removed from the Green Belt.

Proposals have to be supported by a Transport Statement for access from Thicketford Road along The Alders, noise and lighting assessments, a landscape scheme with a 15 metre buffer to the Castle Croft and Bradshaw Brook Site of Biological Importance, and a drainage strategy that keeps caravans away from the areas at surface water flood risk.

Policy HS7 identifies a need for a minimum of 30 Travelling Showpeople plots and 13 Gypsy and Traveller pitches over the plan period. Gypsy and Traveller pitches are provided for through the criteria in Policy HS7, which apply to proposals on any site, and opportunities to meet the need at a strategic scale will be explored through the Greater Manchester Spatial Development Strategy.



Figure 5. The Alders, Tonge.
Source: Bolton Local Plan, Policy BSA09.

06 JOBS

How much employment floorspace is needed?

Places for Everyone is the joint plan for nine of the ten Greater Manchester Districts (all except Stockport). Policy JP-J3 states that at least 2,019,000 sqm of accessible new office floorspace will be provided in the PfE Plan are up to 2039, and policy JP-J4 states that at least 3,513,000 sqm of accessible new industrial and warehousing floorspace will be provided in the PfE Plan are up to 2039. PfE does not provide district specific requirements, so does not provide floorspace requirements for Bolton.

The Iceni (2026) Bolton Employment Needs Study EVE01.1 identifies Bolton specific requirements up to 2042 of 811,727 sqm of industrial and warehousing floorspace and 16,700 sqm of office floorspace.

What about the PfE allocations?

Places for Everyone allocates three sites for industrial and warehousing development in Bolton as set out below.

Allocation Reference	Allocation Name	Floorspace (sqm)
JPA4	Bewshill Farm	21,000
JPA5	Chequerbent North	25,000
JPA6	West of Wingates	440,000

PfE was adopted in March 2024. The current local plan regulation 19 consultation does not relate to the principle of industrial and warehousing development on these sites. This has already been established through Places for Everyone.

Planning applications at these allocations will need to demonstrate that they meet the detailed criteria listed in Places for Everyone policies JPA4, JPA5 and JPA6. At JPA6 the West of Wingates Sytrategic Masterplan Supplementary Planning Document is also a material consideration.

Taking these PfE allocations into account there is a shortfall of 16,700 sqm of office floorspace, and 325,727 sqm of industrial and warehousing floorspace. This shortfall is met through existing planning permissions and allocations in Chapter 10 of the Regulation 19 Local Plan.

07 INFRASTRUCTURE, TRANSPORT AND GREEN SPACE

Will the infrastructure actually arrive?

Chapter 4 requires on-site provision at certain scales of development and contributions towards off-site provision, covering transport, school places, health facilities, open space and play, utilities and digital infrastructure. The site allocations in Chapter 10 set the specific requirements and phasing for each site, informed by engagement with the infrastructure providers. The Infrastructure Delivery Strategy (2026), published with the evidence base, sets out the infrastructure the plan depends on, who provides it and when.

What development can be expected to fund is informed by an assessment of what development across the borough can afford to pay. Land is safeguarded for two new primary schools, at Lee Hall and Health Innovation Bolton.

What about congestion, particularly around the M61?

Residents described the M61 junctions, Plodder Lane, Chequerbent, the roads out of Westhoughton and the routes to the Royal Bolton Hospital as congested today, and asked for a credible strategy before growth is fixed.

Policy INF1 gives priority first to walking, cycling and wheeling, and second to public transport, and requires development to be designed so those are realistic choices.

Strategic-scale development has to be laid out so buses can run into and around the site, with bus priority and, where necessary, pump priming of new services, agreed with Transport for Greater Manchester.

Development above 50 homes needs a Transport Statement, and development above 80 homes a full Transport Assessment, which tests the traffic the development will add against future scenarios agreed with the Council and Transport for Greater Manchester. Larger sites have to monitor whether their travel plan targets are being met, and provide more support for active travel if they are not.

What are the parking rules for new development?

Policy INF2 sets car parking standards for new development in Appendix 3, with four zones shown on the Policies Map. Zone 1 is the centre of Bolton. Zone 2 is the area within 400 metres of Zone 1 and the centres of Horwich, Westhoughton, Farnworth, Little Lever and Blackrod. Zone 3 is the area between 400 and 800 metres from Zone 1, the area within 400 metres of those five centres, and railway stations and the area within 400 metres of them. Zone 4 is the rest of the borough. Where a site straddles a boundary, the zone holding the greater part of the site applies to the whole site.

For houses and flats the standard is the same in every zone: 1 space for a 1-bedroom dwelling, 2 spaces for a 2 or 3-bedroom dwelling, 3 spaces for a 4-bedroom dwelling and a further 0.5 space for each bedroom above four. Houses in multiple occupation require 0.5 spaces per bedroom, with no rounding down, and purpose-built student accommodation 0.33 spaces per bedroom, in every zone. The standards for non-residential development vary by zone.

Provision at the standard is acceptable in every zone. In Zone 1 the standard is a benchmark and the level of parking is determined through site-specific evidence; provision below the standard must be supported by a Parking Demand and Capacity Assessment. In Zone 2 the standard is the starting point, and a departure from it must be supported by evidence that the level proposed is appropriate having regard to accessibility, parking demand, parking capacity and local travel behaviour. In Zones 3 and 4 the standard is the minimum normally required, and provision below it is supported only where robust and compelling site-specific evidence shows it would not cause overspill parking, displacement of parking onto surrounding streets, harm to residential amenity, unacceptable pressure on existing parking, obstruction of active travel routes or harm to highway safety. A higher level is acceptable in Zones 3 and 4 where the nature and operation of the development justifies it.

Parking for people with disabilities and secure, covered cycle parking are minimum standards in every zone. The standards themselves are in Appendix 3.

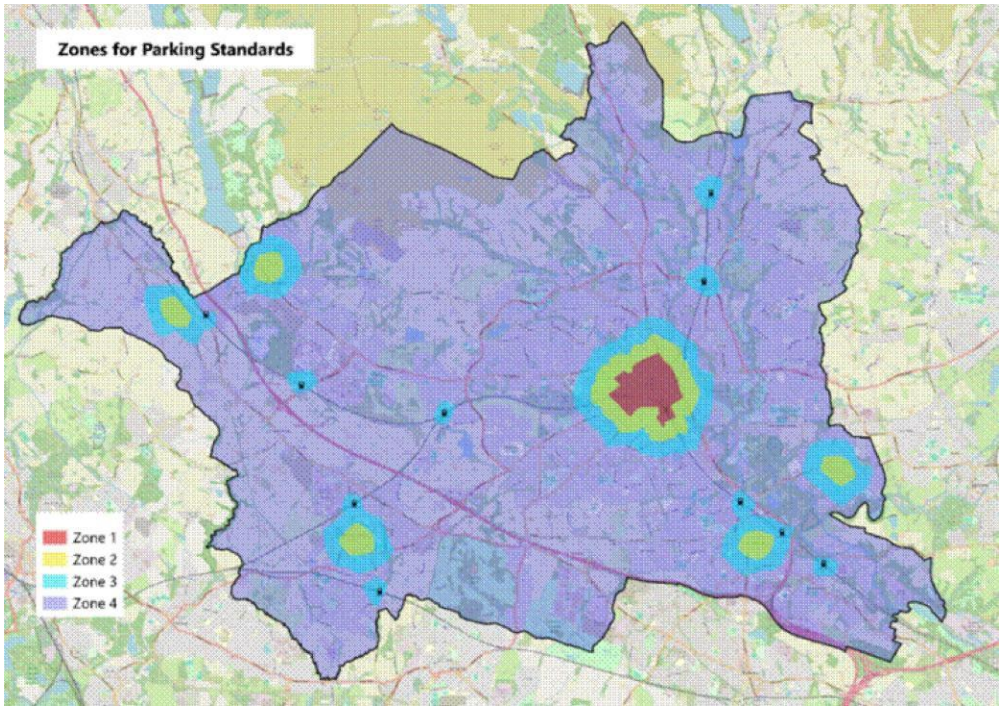

Figure 6. Parking zones in Bolton (illustrative).
Source: Bolton Local Plan, Figure 8.

What about green space?

Specific standards are set for new development in the Local plan drawing on up to date evidence.

What about flooding and climate change?

Policy ENV2 requires development to be safe from flooding for its lifetime, allowing for the Environment Agency's climate change allowances, to add no flood risk elsewhere, and to manage surface water through nature-based sustainable drainage that reduces pressure on the combined sewer network.

Policy ENV1 requires major development to apply the energy hierarchy, to maximise renewable energy and low carbon heating, including solar panels and connection to heat networks where practicable, and to manage overheating through orientation, shading and ventilation before mechanical cooling is relied on. Every new dwelling is limited to 110 litres of water per person per day.

What about ecology and biodiversity?

Ecology and biodiversity are a key issue addressed by the Local Plan, which identifies conserving and enhancing habitats and species as one of its objectives. Chapter 4 of the Local Plan addresses this including Policy ENV4 which requires development amongst other things to:

- Avoid harm to Sites of Biological Importance, Local Nature Reserves and protected species;
- Protect and, where possible, enhance protected habitats;
- Avoid harming the connectivity of Bolton's strategic ecological network.

08 HAVING YOUR SAY

How did you consult before this?

The earlier stages of consultation, known as Regulation 18, ran as one continuous process: a Call for Sites in spring 2025, Issues and Options from 21 August to 2 October 2025, and the Direction of Travel from 27 November 2025 to 22 January 2026, extended to eight weeks to allow for Christmas. There were a range of drop in events and meetings.

I commented before. Do I need to comment again?

The Council considered earlier comments when preparing this version of the plan. But only comments made at this stage go to the independent Inspector who examines the plan. People who only replied to the Regulation 18 consultation will not be able to appear at the public examination. We encourage you to view the latest version of the plan and make comments.

How do I comment?

Comments are made in writing through the Council's Local Plan webpage, which sets out how to comment.

What should I say?

Say whether the plan has been prepared lawfully, and whether it is sound. Sound is not a general judgement about whether the plan is any good. It means four things:

- Positively prepared: does it plan for what the borough needs?
- Justified: is it the right strategy, on the evidence, against the alternatives?
- Effective: can it be delivered, and have matters that cross the borough boundary been agreed with neighbouring councils?
- Consistent with national policy: does it follow national policy?

Name the policy or site you are writing about, and say what change you want to see and why that change would make the plan sound. The comment form includes guidance on what to say.

What is the examination?

After the consultation closes, the Council reviews every comment and decides whether to submit the plan to the Government. If the Council does submit the plan an independent planning inspector, appointed by the Government, then examines whether the plan has been prepared lawfully and whether it is sound. Every comment made at this stage goes to the Inspector in full.

When does the consultation close?

11.59pm on Thursday 26 November 2026. Comments after that cannot be considered.

Where do I find the plan?

Go to: www.bolton.gov.uk/planning-policy-strategy/local-plan

The same page has details of drop in events, how to speak to a planning officer and you can find the plan document at local libraries and the Town Hall.