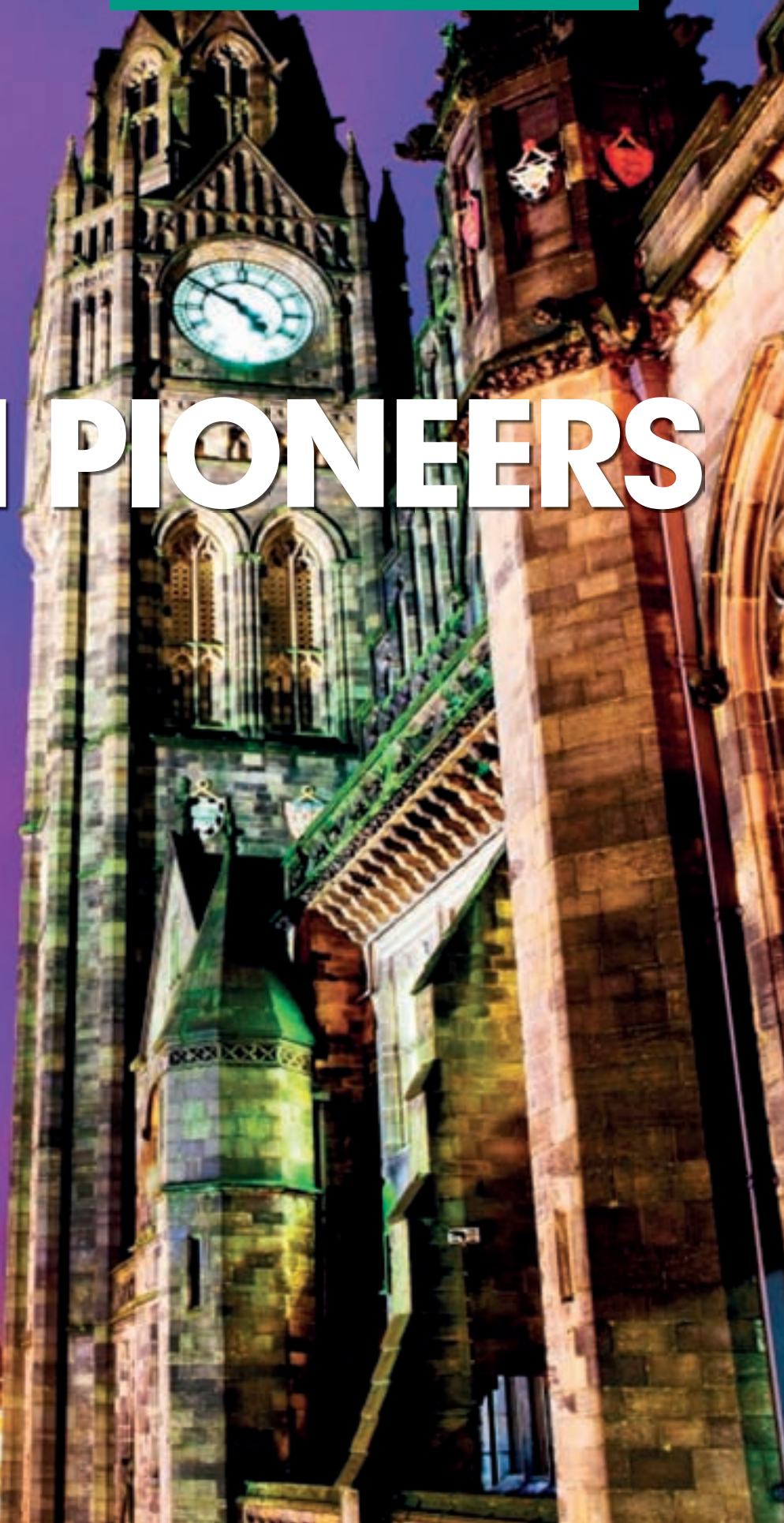




ROCHDALE
BOROUGH COUNCIL

GROWTH PIONEERS

Rochdale's transformation
and why it's becoming
Greater Manchester's
hotbed for investment





Transforming fortunes

Rochdale is changing fast and ambitious development plans are set to create a future to match its illustrious past

History has a tendency to repeat itself and there are few places where that's more evident than Rochdale. The trams are back, the River Roch has re-emerged after decades in darkness and now this powerhouse of the industrial revolution is preparing to play a pivotal role in the next economic renaissance.

Some would argue the key ingredients of the borough's former glories never went away. Even in the depths of post-industrial decline, it was still a place of innovation and production, which is why it now boasts a booming manufacturing sector.

The sense of fairness that continues to shape Rochdale's identity and ways of working can be traced back to the fact that it's the birthplace of the co-operative movement – a fact proudly announced across the side of a railway bridge as you enter the town.

Nevertheless, the borough's local authority has its feet firmly planted in the 21st century and the stark challenges it faces. Rochdale town centre, which had been starved of investment for many years, is undergoing a £250m transformation to create a stylish new heart to match anywhere across the city region. (Read more, opposite)

But the ambition is even greater when it comes to tackling the borough's skills issues. The workforce is under-skilled and employment levels lag behind the Greater Manchester average and Rochdale therefore needs more jobs and housing to turn around its fortunes.

The council recently submitted its new core strategy development plans to cabinet. It will release 200ha of land for employment and accelerate housing growth from 400 to 460 homes a year. Those plans alone would help to bring 8,000 new jobs to the borough – enough to bring it up to the Greater Manchester average.

However, they barely scratch the surface when compared with the ambition of further proposals that are now out to consultation and which have the potential to deliver 19,000 jobs and 16,000 homes. (Read the full story, overleaf)

They form part of the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework, the backbone of the city region's plans for a step change in economic growth over the next 20 years. The fact that the single biggest site sits within Rochdale

speaks volumes about the scale of the borough's ambition, its potential and its excellent connectivity by road and rail.

'One of the big advantages in Rochdale is we have a lot of land,' says council leader Richard Farnell, who is also the combined authority's lead for housing and planning.

'We are working to turn Greater Manchester on its head. All the growth has been in the south of the conurbation. Those areas are filling up and the opportunity now is in the north of the conurbation that has lagged behind.'

'This has to happen otherwise as a city region we will stagnate. We want to be a world-class city region competing with Barcelona and Munich. That's a real ambition. But we have to equip Greater Manchester for that.'

Rochdale factfile

- Home to more than 7,000 businesses
- Birthplace of the co-operative movement
- 170ha Kingsway Business Park is one of the largest developments in the UK
- Has a workforce of 750,000 people all within an hour's drive
- One of the north west's best connected locations by road, rail and tram – 40 minutes to Manchester and Leeds and an hour's drive from Liverpool

Preparing for growth

Opening up the borough to unprecedented levels of development and economic growth will bring numerous opportunities. That's why the last few years have seen a great deal of investment that is designed to ensure local people and businesses are ready to make the most of them.

Education has been a key focus, both in terms of physical assets and in improving the standards of teaching and leadership in schools. The investment is paying off. Rochdale Sixth Form College, opened six years ago, is rated by Ofsted as one of the best in the country and the proportion of students across the borough achieving five good GCSEs is now at the national average. The borough is also ranked as one of the best in Greater Manchester for



'We are working to turn Greater Manchester on its head'

Richard Farnell, leader of Rochdale Borough Council

apprenticeships provision with the council itself recently taking on 30 new trainees.

The influx of new employers expected over the coming years via new development sites will complement a growing trend across the borough. The council and its inward investment company, Rochdale Development Agency, have worked hard to create the conditions for growth. Two of the borough's major business parks – Heywood Distribution Park and Stakehill Industrial Estate – are nearing capacity and Kingsway Development Park, one of the UK's largest developments, is filling up fast.

Advanced manufacturing, logistics and biosciences are all areas of strength and homegrown success stories are commonplace, such as Zen Internet. One of the UK's original ISP firms, it was set up by a local entrepreneur 21 years ago in a back bedroom and now employs more than 400 people.

One area Rochdale Borough Council has become synonymous with is practical business support. It takes



Centre of attention

Bit by bit, the award-winning £250m transformation of Rochdale town centre is creating a new destination for Greater Manchester

many forms. For example, to support retailers during the regeneration of Rochdale town centre, it has used cleared sites awaiting development as car parks with free parking for the first three hours.

The council has also taken the greater freedoms afforded to local authorities around business rates to another level. Firms occupying empty high street units are offered 80% relief in their first year, tapering off to 50% and 30% in the second and third years. It's already halved the vacancy rate in its main shopping street, garnering national headlines and brought in a new restaurant and wine bar to add to the retail offer.

The council also stepped in to partner with developer Wilson Bowden to bring forward plans to create 216,000 square feet of speculative employment space at Kingsway Business Park – ensuring the borough has a pipeline of premises for employers to move into. Similarly, some £30m is being invested by the council to develop the capacity of industrial estates and there are plans to build 40 small business units across the borough over the next four years.

On top of that, a rolling £1m business grants scheme is helping firms – predominantly SMEs – to grow by offering financial assistance to buy, for example, key equipment. It's a key intervention, as the council's chief executive Steve Rumbelow explains: 'We know growth is going to come from SMEs, which are rich and diverse in the borough and need to be supported. We can work with local businesses and create opportunities and conditions for investment. We certainly have a way of working which is about bringing the place and places together.'

He adds: 'We know Rochdale has a very big role in a successful Greater Manchester. The reality is the aspirations set out by Greater Manchester – improving productivity, being a net contributor to UK plc – will only be achieved if we maximise our potential in Rochdale.'

'We have a distinctiveness and identity and want to differentiate ourselves. We know we can't rely on trickle down and must have some intervention. But we can use the power of the GM brand to benefit Rochdale and our unique offer to benefit the city region.'



If you come back in four years' time you won't recognise Rochdale,' says council leader Richard Farnell.

The chances are, anyone who's not seen the town recently probably wouldn't recognise it now.

Cllr Farnell proudly describes the transformation of Rochdale as 'one of the biggest town centre regeneration projects in the country'. Over the last five years it has seen municipal carbuncles razed to the ground and stunning new architecture take their place. Most notable among them is Number One Riverside, a winner of multiple awards and home to the council, a new library and customer service centre and other public sector agencies.

It enabled the local authority to make substantial savings by decanting staff from 20 offices and co-locating them in one central building. But more than that, its high design standards have raised aspirations – and investor confidence – and its riverside location marked the first step towards the resurrection of a major natural asset.

Having been culverted a century ago to allow for the arrival of trams, the River Roch has been reopened – complete with medieval bridge – using investment from the council, Environment Agency, Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and North West Regional Flood and Coastal Committee.

The project has already won an award from the Royal Town Planning Institute with more expected to follow.

The irony is it's happened just as trams have returned to Rochdale with the extension of Greater Manchester's

Metrolink. The tram stop sits next to the town's new £12m bus interchange, which along with new taxi ranks and a shop mobility scheme has created a modern transport hub.

The next piece of the development jigsaw is Rochdale Riverside, which will bring shops, restaurants, leisure units and a cinema to the heart of the town. Subject to planning permission, work will begin in 2017 with an opening date pencilled in for 2019. It is expected to boost the borough's economic output by £17m a year and send it rocketing up the league table of shopping destinations.

As part of the wider regeneration plans, the town's market will be relocated to new indoor and outdoor spaces at the heart of the new public realm under the control of an external operator, who will be appointed in the next few months.

Completing the transformation, the grade I listed Victorian town hall is the subject of an HLF bid to restore the parts of the building and open it up to new community uses. Regarded as one of the finest municipal buildings in the country, the work will include the creation of education and community areas, a restaurant and bar.

An overhaul of town hall square has already been unveiled, complete with a statue of one of Rochdale's most famous daughters, Dame Gracie Fields.

'Town centres can't exist as just shopping centres anymore, there's too much competition,' says Cllr Farnell. 'This regeneration project will make the most of our unique offer of heritage, shopping and nightlife.'

Exciting new plans
will place Rochdale at
the heart of Greater
Manchester's economic
agenda – opening the
door to major investment

Gateway to growth

Twenty years from now devolution may well be seen as a major turning point in the fortunes of Rochdale and its neighbouring boroughs.

The creation of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and the advent of an elected mayor equipped with strategic planning powers have brought the city region's economic ambitions into sharp focus.

For the first time, the conurbation can plan for the future across all 10 boroughs in a joined up way to deliver homes and jobs and rebalance the economy.

Every council was asked to submit possible development sites for inclusion in the first Greater Manchester spatial framework – a blueprint designed to pave the way for 225,000 homes and around 200,000 jobs over the next 20 years.

Rochdale has put together proposals for the Northern Gateway – a collection of sites along the M62 corridor that will be one of three major growth areas of the city region. By extending existing business parks and creating urban extensions, the plans would create 19,000 jobs and 15,500 homes in Rochdale alone. That equates to 775 homes a year – close to double to current rate.

The spatial strategy effectively represents a once in a lifetime opportunity to accelerate the borough's economic recovery. It's an ideal fit for Rochdale – the borough has an abundance of land, it has great connectivity and a core strategy focused on boosting growth and prosperity.

'It's a massive opportunity and something we have been working on for some time,' says chief executive Steve Rumbelow. 'It really is a potential game-changer

Northern Gateway vital statistics:

Area - 700+ha

Employment floor space - 1m+ sqm

Jobs created - 15,000+

GVA - £600m per annum

Business rates - £15m per annum

Housing - 6,500 units

New Homes Bonus - £55m (calculated over six years)

Council tax - £8m+ per annum

for the borough which will shift the economic focus to the north of the Greater Manchester conurbation. We have the space to grow and we need to grow.

'We sit very firmly within the Greater Manchester family but we are our own place. We know Rochdale's got the potential for a very positive future. We fully intend for this to happen by making the most of opportunities created by the spatial framework.'

Due to the scale of the wider city region strategy, green belt boundaries will have to be redrawn to accommodate growth. To put Rochdale's capacity into perspective, even if every single site identified was developed, 58.2% of the borough would still be green belt.

According to the council, much of the green belt that's being proposed for development is poor quality agricultural land, often disused and wasted. Also, the focus will be on creating sustainable developments which in many cases will create new parks and green spaces.

There's also a compelling business case. It is estimated the Northern Gateway will generate an extra £11m in council tax and £15m in business rates a year in Rochdale – money that can be reinvested in local services.

'Like a lot of former mill towns with a rich industrial past, we have had a massive problem over the last 50 years as traditional industry has declined,' says council leader Richard Farnell. 'It has been very difficult to find new industry to replace them, although we do have a very strong manufacturing base and we are diversifying.'

'We have a below average employment rate and these proposals will take us substantially above it. It will also help to bring in better quality jobs.'

'The Northern Gateway is a gear change, not just a step up the ladder.'

What businesses say about Rochdale

'We moved into Rochdale very recently, primarily because of all the support we were given by the council, who were enthusiastic from the off. They gave us a grant, the first time in our history we've ever received one, which enabled us to buy new cranes which have transformed our operation.'

Rochdale is a great hub. It was at the heart of the industrial revolution, so bringing the old fashioned engineering tradition back here where it all began makes perfect sense. We've already taken on four new members of staff, we have ten apprentices recruited through the local college Hopwood Hall, and we're already planning to expand into the 6,000 square feet unit next door, which will allow us to diversify and start producing engines for more modern trains. Engineering is in decline in England, but Rochdale Borough Council has helped us bring this important tradition back to their borough and give it a modern edge.'

Colin Green

Director of Riley & Son (c) Ltd, which has just restored the iconic Flying Scotsman.

'I wanted to be near the river site as it creates a type of café culture and the council's business rates sale was crucial in getting me on my feet. The three hours free parking is also great, as my customers feel they can enjoy their food without feeling they have to rush.'

In the two months since I opened, I've had about double what I would have expected in revenue and footfall. We've now started serving afternoon tea and antipasti and will extend our lunch offer soon. I'm now looking into opening something similar elsewhere in the town centre.'

Michael Howarth

Who has just opened a new wine bar, Viccolo Del Vino, close to the reopened river in Rochdale town centre.



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Be part of Rochdale's success story

If you would like to find out more about the opportunities on offer in Rochdale, please contact

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