

## Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Date: 27<sup>th</sup> March 2026

Subject: Leigh: Proposed Mayoral Development Zone

Report of: Councillor Bev Craig, Portfolio Lead for Economy, Business and Inclusive Growth and Tom Stannard, Portfolio Lead Chief Executive for Economy, Business and Inclusive Growth

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### Purpose of Report

This report seeks approval in principle to the establishment of a Mayoral Development Zone (MDZ) in Leigh.

### Recommendations:

The GMCA is requested to:

1. Agree in principle the establishment of a Mayoral Development Zone in Leigh.
2. Agree that GMCA officers can explore with Wigan Council detailed options for a Mayoral Development Zone to be established in Leigh, with these matters to be decided upon by GMCA and the Council in due course.

### Contact Officers

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# Equalities Impact, Carbon and Sustainability Assessment:

## Recommendation - Key points for decision-makers

1. Agree in principle the establishment of a Mayoral Development Zone in Leigh.
2. Agree that GMCA officers can explore with Wigan Council detailed options for a Mayoral Development Zone to be established in Leigh, with these matters to be decided upon by GMCA and the Council in due course.

## Impacts Questionnaire

Impact Indicator	Result	Justification/Mitigation
Equality and Inclusion	G	Delivery of the projects within the Leigh Mayoral Development Zone (w/GMDZ) will provide access to homes across a range of types and tenures and high-quality employment opportunities to a part of Greater Manchester which has been relatively economically disadvantaged. The development will also enhance access to leisure, social and transport infrastructure for new and existing residents.
Health	G	The scheme will look to deliver a Health and Social Care Campus within Leigh and the development will support active travel schemes to support residents in improving their physical health.
Resilience and Adaptation	G	While the proposals are in early stages the development will look to improve the quality of housing and services within the area and create a thriving communities across Leigh.
Housing	G	This proposal will support the delivery of new homes across Leigh, a proportion of which will be affordable homes of various tenures. It will also support economic development with local employment benefits, enhancing access to and affordability of homes for local residents.
Economy	G	Leigh is a key town within Wigan located within the Northfold Growth Location. The transformative projects that will be delivered through the MDZ promises to dramatically enhance economic performance and quality of life for the region and beyond. It will deliver new housing and employment space with significant associated employment, GVA, and growth implications across key sectors including Health Innovation, Digital, Creative and Media and Clean Growth. Its strategic location has the ability to attract national and international inward investment.
Mobility and Connectivity	G	The Leigh MDZ will help bring significant investment in transport infrastructure through the rapid transit case. Alongside this will be enhancement of existing public transport provision and creation of new public transport options and sustainable travel modes serving the new developments. Modern businesses, require high-quality digital connections. The development will be underpinned by provision of this digital infrastructure for both employment and residential uses.
Carbon, Nature and Environment	A	Physical development has unavoidable impacts on local air quality but these will be managed and mitigated as much as possible and the most material impacts will be largely confined to the delivery phase. Mitigation against long-term environmental impacts will be incorporated into development proposals. Delivery of new low- and zero-carbon homes and commercial premises will improve the average efficiency of properties across Greater Manchester and contribute to the achievement of carbon neutrality by 2038. Detailed development proposals are not fixed but biodiversity enhancement is a mandatory requirement for all new developments.
Consumption and Production		
Contribution to achieving the GM Carbon Neutral 2038 target		Delivery of new low- and zero-carbon homes and commercial premises will improve the average efficiency of properties across Greater Manchester and contribute to the achievement of carbon neutrality by 2038.

**Further Assessment(s):** Carbon Assessment

<b>G</b>	Positive impacts overall, whether long or short term.	<b>A</b>	Mix of positive and negative impacts. Trade-offs to consider.	<b>R</b>	Mostly negative, with at least one positive aspect. Trade-offs to consider.	<b>RR</b>	Negative impacts overall.
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## Carbon Assessment

### Overall Score



Buildings	Result	Justification/Mitigation
New Build residential		Details of development proposals are to be determined, however there is an overarching commitment to deliver in accordance with requirements for biodiversity, energy efficiency, and carbon reduction set out in Places for Everyone and GMS.
Residential building(s) renovation/maintenance	N/A	
New build non-residential (including public) buildings		Details of development proposals are to be determined, however there is an overarching commitment to deliver in accordance with requirements for biodiversity, energy efficiency, and carbon reduction set out in Places for Everyone and GMS.
<b>Transport</b>		
Active travel and public transport		Details of public transport and active travel interventions are to be determined but will represent an enhancement over existing.
Roads, Parking and Vehicle Access		Details of development proposals are to be determined but principles of decreased personal vehicle use and increased sustainable transport modes as proportion of overall travel are agreed.
Access to amenities		Details of development proposals are to be determined but principles of decreased personal vehicle use and increased sustainable transport modes as proportion of overall travel are agreed. Allocations within Places for Everyone include local amenity uses alongside residential and employment development, improving access to these services by sustainable modes of transport.
Vehicle procurement	N/A	
<b>Land Use</b>		
Land use		The majority of the land being developed is land which has already had significant previous development including industrial use. New green spaces will be created

  

No associated carbon impacts expected.	High standard in terms of practice and awareness on carbon.	Mostly best practice with a good level of awareness on carbon.	Partially meets best practice/ awareness, significant room to improve.	Not best practice and/ or insufficient awareness of carbon impacts.
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## Risk Management

There are no formal risks as costs will be covered through existing budgets. Further risks to be assessed through a business plan.

## Legal Considerations

A MDZ is not a legal entity and there is no statutory process that must be followed to establish one. There may be legal implications arising from projects being delivered. Legal implications relating to individual projects will be considered on a case by case basis.

## **Financial Consequences – Revenue**

Progressing the growth opportunities in the MDZ is likely to require further support from the CA revenue funding surpluses such as Evergreen, Retained Business Rates and Housing Surpluses. Approvals will be sought for the allocation of funding through appropriate revenue allocation processes.

## **Financial Consequences – Capital**

Delivery of these projects will require significant investment of public and private sector funding from a range of sources. Approval will be sought for any investment of GMCA funding.

## **Number of attachments to the report: 0**

## **Comments/recommendations from Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

N/A

## **Background Papers**

- Greater Manchester Strategy

## **Tracking/ Process**

Does this report relate to a major strategic decision, as set out in the GMCA Constitution

No

## **Exemption from call in**

Are there any aspects in this report which means it should be considered to be exempt from call in by the relevant Scrutiny Committee on the grounds of urgency?

No

## **Bee Network Committee**

N/A

## **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

N/A

# 1. Introduction/Background

- 1.1 In July 2025, GMCA launched the Greater Manchester Strategy 2025-35 (GMS), which is the collective vision for the next decade to see a thriving city region where everyone can live a good life. It provides the strategic framework and overarching narrative for the city region, enabling GM to develop and capitalise on the opportunities of the coming decade. To accompany this, a GMS Delivery Plan was approved by the Combined Authority in November 2025. This Delivery Plan underpins the GMS and outlines the 7 workstreams and priority actions to be taken across the GM system to achieve our growth and prevention ambitions, supporting the realisation of the GMS vision and the fulfilment of our pledges.
- 1.2 The Integrated Pipeline represents these ambitions spatially, focusing on unlocking six Growth Locations, regenerating town centres, and delivering critical transport infrastructure aligned with the Local Transport Plan. To support delivery of our Integrated Pipeline, we are developing and advancing a range of delivery models that enable effective collaboration to accelerate delivery of our shared placemaking and growth ambitions. In some instances, this includes the setting up of Mayoral Development Zones (MDZs) to unlock regeneration ambitions of a place.
- 1.3 Leigh is part of Northfold, one of GM's six Growth Locations and extends across the Wigan and Bolton authority areas. In recent years it has seen significant investment committed, through the Local Regeneration Fund (formerly Levelling Up) and the Pride in Place programme. Key aims for both these programmes have been to: i) bring about direct improvements in the place and in outcomes for residents; and ii) create the conditions for private investment. These have and are continuing to create positive impacts, however Leigh's strategic location and assets, along with the changing perceptions arising from the current investment, mean that there is scope to go further and faster. The potential for Leigh was recognised as part of the Local Pledges set out alongside the GMS which included the ambition:

*To create a Mayoral Development Zone for Leigh and the surrounding area, including the development of a University Campus for Health and Social Care and*

*the development of the case for rapid transport connectivity to Leigh including Metrolink.<sup>1</sup>*

- 1.4 This report sets out the strategic intent and anticipated key building blocks for an MDZ in Leigh and seeks GMCA's approval to progress the next steps necessary to formally establish the MDZ and related governance.

## **2. Mayoral Development Zones**

- 2.1 An MDZ is an area designated by Local Authorities and the Mayor's office for focused development efforts. This designation allows for coordinated investment and planning, often aimed at economic growth, housing, and infrastructure improvements. MDZs are managed within the new governance framework of Local Authorities and the Mayor's office.
- 2.2 Unlike Mayoral Development Corporations (MDCs), MDZs are non-statutory, and are a policy tool available to the city region to support growth ambitions. There is flexibility to design an arrangement that responds to the requirements of the place and aligns to existing activity.
- 2.3 MDZs provide a powerful opportunity to convene stakeholders and generate focus around a joint agenda. If approved further work will be needed to confirm governance arrangements and participants in Leigh, but the typical structure comprises a dedicated Board bringing together senior representatives from the local authority (officer and member), GMCA, TfGM, Homes England, and key partners engaged in the core projects.
- 2.4 As a non-statutory creation an MDZ does not need to have a strictly defined boundary, but a clear geographical extent of responsibility and influence is important.

## **3. Proposed MDZ in Leigh**

- 3.1 The GMS pledge relating to an MDZ in Leigh references two key strategic interventions:

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<sup>1</sup> [Wigan | Our vision and priorities](#)

- The development of a higher education presence in the town in the form of a health and social care campus,
- the development of a case for a rapid transit connection, which would improve links between Leigh and the Regional Centre as well as other key destinations including Salford Quays and Old Trafford.

3.2 These would form key projects in the MDZ, alongside existing regeneration and development activity which there is scope to expand. The following sections provide some further context on the scope and strategic intent of each of the projects, and a commentary on how it is expected they would align under an MDZ.

### 3.3 **Health and social care campus**

In 2023 Wigan Council, along with Wigan and Leigh College and Wrightington, Wigan and Leigh Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (WWL), entered a Civic University Agreement with Edge Hill University. This has delivered outcomes in relation to pathways to employment in health and social care sectors, and the partners now believe that a physical presence in the east of Wigan Borough is an important next step in growing the size of the cohort and maximising opportunity for communities. As a capital project developed and delivered under the collective umbrella of the University Agreement and the proposed MDZ, the provision of a health and social care university campus in Leigh would both enable the delivery of training locally and generate a wider regeneration impact through the presence of a higher education institution in the town.

### 3.4 **Rapid transit case**

Although served by the Leigh-Salford-Manchester Guided Busway, Leigh continues to see comparatively slow journey times to the Regional Centre and destinations around it, and pockets of transport-related social and economic exclusion. Wigan Council and TfGM have initiated work on a business case appraising options to improve rapid transport connectivity to the town. In parallel to this, TfGM are initiating a project to replace the town centre's bus station (which opened in 1983) with a new interchange. The current site, even if reused for a bus interchange in the same location, also offers opportunities to bring forward new residential and commercial floorspace in the heart of the town centre, and to act as a catalyst for further investment. The parallel development of the rapid transit business case provides an

opportunity to consider more fundamentally the future relationship between bus and rapid transit infrastructure in the town centre, to ensure both the best outcomes for transport and connectivity and the maximisation of development opportunities.

### **3.5 Leigh Sports Village**

A mile south of Leigh town centre is Leigh Sports Village, a campus home to the town's sports stadium, Wigan and Leigh College and a range of leisure and retail uses. The Sports Village is also the gateway to Pennington Flash, part of the first National Nature Reserve to be designated. These are major assets for the town, and yet currently function quite separately from the town centre and bring limited value to it. There is an opportunity for an MDZ to reimagine the functional connection between the town centre and this area and create a unique offer, both through development at the Sports Village itself and a range of wider interventions.

### **3.6 Additionality to wider regeneration programmes**

There is already a high profile programme of regeneration activity in Leigh town centre, including the Local Regeneration Fund programme, Pride in Place, and a range of complementary interventions such as one of the first High Street Rental Auction projects. An MDZ will be an opportunity to complement this activity, and to accelerate the growth in confidence and private sector interest that is already being seen. The MDZ may also provide an opportunity for direct investment through a range of potential vehicles – details of this would be developed during the life of the Zone and subject to further formal decisions as required.

## **4. Next Steps**

4.1 Subject to the in-principle approval of GMCA and corresponding in-principle approvals from Wigan Council, GMCA officers will work with Wigan colleagues to develop:

- A confirmed geographical extent for the MDZ, expected to be similar to that established for the Pride in Place Programme but potentially taking in additional key development sites.
- A more detailed business plan for the MDZ, setting out in more detail the initial set of activities and interventions envisaged, along with any funding and / or flexibilities being sought.

- A proposed governance model for the MDZ, including details of proposed Board membership and any shadow / transitional arrangements that are envisaged.
- A programme for the implementation of the MDZ, including indicative timeframes for subsequent reporting / approvals in GMCA and Wigan Council.

## **5. Recommendations**

5.1 Recommendations are set out at the beginning of the Report.