

## 2. Spatial Portrait

- 2.1 The borough of Rochdale is located in the northeast of Greater Manchester, the major conurbation in the northwest region of England. It borders other Greater Manchester districts of Oldham, Bury and Manchester, as well as Rossendale, Blackburn with Darwen and Calderdale.
- 2.2 The borough is made up of four main towns, with Rochdale, Heywood Littleborough and Middleton as the main centres for amenities. The borough is split into five townships – Rochdale North, Rochdale South, Heywood, Middleton and Pennines - which are considered in more detail in the Spatial Strategy.

### Transport

- 2.3 Rochdale is well connected to both the city-region, West Yorkshire and the North of England, through its position on the Strategic Road Network, Rail Network and Greater Manchester Bee Network.
- 2.4 The M62 motorway runs through the borough, connecting Manchester and Rochdale towards Leeds. The M62 supports a variety of businesses in the borough and is at the centre of significant plans for economic development. In the south of the borough, the M60 motorway connects Rochdale to the neighbouring towns in the city-region, and connections to North Wales and the south of England via the M56 and M6. To the west of the borough, between Heywood and Bury, the M66 connects the borough to Rossendale and central Lancashire.
- 2.5 There are several railway stations in the borough, with direct links from Rochdale and Littleborough stations to Manchester Victoria and Leeds, and other parts of the North West and Yorkshire. Castleton and Mills Hill railway stations are also served between Rochdale and Manchester Victoria.
- 2.6 The Metrolink opened in 2014 and connects Rochdale through Oldham to Manchester city centre and South Manchester. This includes stops at Kingsway Business Park, a major employment centre, and the settlements of Milnrow and Newhey in the Pennines township. Plans are progressing to deliver further transport and connectivity improvements in the borough, with a tram-train pathfinder to link Heywood with Rochdale and Bury, and to extend the Metrolink from the centre of Manchester to Middleton.
- 2.7 There has also been significant investment in the buses in the borough, which are run by the Bee Network (TfGM). New Bee Network buses were introduced to Rochdale in 2024, many of which are zero-emission vehicles, in the recognisable yellow branding. Further investment in the public transport network is planned through several Quality Bus Corridors, which will improve linkages both within the borough and to neighbouring areas, including Bury, Oldham and Ashton-under-Lyne.

## Economy

- 2.8 The borough is home to several major existing employment sites along the M62 corridor, including Heywood Distribution Park, Stakehill Industrial Estate and Kingsway Business Park. This area is at the heart of plans for transformational change in the region as part of Atom Valley, spanning across three Local Authorities, with the potential to create up to 20,000 jobs. The Atom Valley Mayoral Development Zone (MDZ) was established in 2022 to accelerate the development process and align public and private investment. The area is expected to span a range of sectors such as manufacturing, materials and machinery, as part of an innovation cluster. On Kingsway Business Park, the Sustainable Materials and Manufacturing Centre (SMMC) is under construction, which will support these objectives and link research and business development.
- 2.9 Rochdale already has a high proportion of jobs in manufacturing, as well as a higher proportion of jobs in sectors such as retail, car repair and transport and storage. While plans for economic growth build on existing sectors in the region, they are also aimed at opportunities to boost skills and access high quality jobs and training for local residents.
- 2.10 The borough is home to several higher education institutions, with Hopwood Hall College located across two campuses in Rochdale and Middleton, as well as Rochdale Sixth Form College in Rochdale Town Centre.

## Demographics

- 2.11 Rochdale does have a relatively young population, with a higher proportion of children under 15 than the national and regional averages. An effect of this is that the population is expected to grow faster than the regional and national averages.
- 2.12 There are over 80 different spoken and written languages used in the borough of Rochdale, with approximately 10% not speaking English as their first or main language.
- 2.13 The demographics of Rochdale borough and within townships is mixed, with affluent parts but also some of the country's most deprived wards. In 2019 the borough was ranked as the 15th most deprived Local Authority in England, with 30% of the population being in the top 10% most deprived areas nationally.
- 2.14 The health needs of the borough are shaped by large areas of deprivation. Healthy life expectancy for female residents is 58.5 years and for males is 57.4 years, which is significantly lower than the national rates of 63.9 and 63.

## Housing

- 2.15 Rochdale has a need to deliver a greater number and mix of houses, to meet the needs of a growing population. Different parts of the borough have distinctive housing market characteristics, but all provide opportunities to deliver the range and quality of housing that the borough needs.
- 2.16 In the inner urban areas of Heywood, Middleton and Rochdale, land in and around town centres and close to railway stations can help to deliver regeneration and provide new

homes at a range of densities, including affordable homes. Other parts of the borough, particularly outer areas and the rural fringe, have the potential to deliver larger, higher value homes. This is important across the borough given the current higher than average proportion of homes in council tax bands A and B. In delivering these types of dwellings it will still be important to ensure a supply of affordable homes to meet local needs and deliver inclusive communities.

### **Historic Environment**

- 2.17 The borough has a rich historic environment, characterised by its industrial heritage and mill buildings, as well as grand municipal buildings, the most notable being the recently refurbished Grade-I listed Rochdale Town Hall in Rochdale Town Centre. In Middleton, there are a number of listed buildings designed by renowned local architect Edgar Wood. In total there are 28 Conservation Areas and 370 listed buildings in the borough.
- 2.18 There has been recent investment in these areas to improve the quality of the built environment, with a Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) established in Rochdale Town Centre and Drake Street receiving an Historic England grant for targeted regeneration. A Middleton Heritage Trail was also recently funded to showcase the town's impressive heritage assets.

### **Environment**

- 2.19 Rochdale has a number of protected sites for nature, with the largest being the South Pennine Moors Special Area of Conservation (SAC) on the eastern side of the borough, as well as the Rochdale Canal that runs through the borough. There are currently 50 designated Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs) which are located throughout the borough.
- 2.20 There are a range of water resources including several reservoirs in the northern and eastern parts of the borough, the River Roch which runs through Littleborough and Rochdale, and the River Irk which runs through Middleton before joining the Irwell in Manchester City Centre. Parts of the borough are at a higher risk of flooding from rivers and surface water.
- 2.21 Rochdale has 10 Green Flag parks located throughout the borough which are important for exercise and recreation, including Broadfield Park in Rochdale, Queen's Park in Heywood, Milnrow Memorial Park in Pennines and Truffet Park in Middleton.
- 2.22 In July 2019, Rochdale Borough Council declared a Climate Emergency and launched a Climate Strategy and Delivery Plan, as well as supporting the Biodiversity Emergency declared by the GMCA in 2022.