

Portfolio Report

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Arooj Shah, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Growth.

This report provides an update on the main activity since the last Council meeting relating to portfolio responsibilities.

Growth: The Greater Manchester Strategy 2025-35 was published in July 2025, which is the GM collective vision for the next decade is to see a thriving city region where everyone can live a good life, and where economic and social progress continue to go hand in hand. This refresh includes a commitment for Oldham to benefit from a Mayoral Development Zone for our key growth areas to help accelerate regenerations and realise benefits for residents sooner. The five key priority areas within this MDZ are: Atom Valley-Stakehill, Oldham Town Centre Living, SportsTown, Northern Roots, and Chadderton Plan for Neighbourhoods.

Creating a Better Place: As part of our ongoing commitment to retain, invest and ensure future sustainability of historic buildings for local communities, the town and future generations it was a great privilege to open the refurbished Old Library. On Saturday 16 August, hundreds of people joined us at the special open day for Oldham's much-loved Old Library now named the J.R. Clynes Building – honouring one of Oldham's most important sons. John Robert Clynes started work in a cotton mill at just 10 years old and went on to become a Member of Parliament, Leader of the Labour Party, Leader of the House of Commons and Home Secretary. His story of ambition, determination and social justice has inspired generations.

The day was a real celebration, with guided tours of the stunning restoration, live music, performances, children's activities, and a first look at the new community garden that will host public events moving forward throughout the year.

The Grade II-listed building is now fully reopen as a vibrant civic and cultural hub – home to the Council Chamber where we will hold our next Council meeting in November, Mayor's Parlour, Oldham Theatre Workshop's new studio, and art gallery. The approach is another step to vacating the Civic Centre enabling the site to be repurposed for much needed new homes within the town. Just as the Old Library inspired and educated so many Oldhamers over the decades, The J.R Clynes Building will now stand as a symbol of ambition for the town.

This significant development is one of many being delivered as part of the council's Building a Better Oldham programme, transforming historical buildings and key sites across the borough to create jobs, provide opportunities to learn and gain new skills, grow local businesses and improve health and wellbeing.

Alongside the investment in our historic buildings, we are making it easier, safer and more enjoyable to travel around the town centre – especially for cyclists and pedestrians through our Accessible Oldham scheme which is transforming streets around Oldham, by improving roads, footpaths and public areas.

The scheme is already making a huge difference to the look and feel of our town centre, complimenting the wider regeneration works underway. The Accessible Oldham public realm improvements programme is currently in various stages from design through to delivery. The first phases, Albion Street and Henshaw Street, West Street, Cheapside and Fountain Street are now complete with Market Place currently underway and other sites starting soon.

The scheme will progress throughout the Town Centre, creating new rain gardens, seating areas and quality clean public space that will complement the other projects planned and already underway, including the new paving works in Parliament Square complimenting the works in creating the new Market, Event Space and Archives.

Housing Delivery: With regards the town centre living partnership with Muse, following the granting of planning permission to the six applications submitted by Muse (as reported at July Council), Muse held a successful supplier event with local businesses on 14th August and are continuing to progress

the Prince's Gate site, with enabling works commencing this Autumn in readiness for a start of the actual development in early 2026.

On wider housing delivery projects across the borough, following on from our above target housing completions last year (578 homes, compared to the 404 home target in PfE), as we step up in the requirement this year (to 680 homes a year), I'm really pleased to share that our forecasts for this year are indicating we will exceed our target again, seeing completions of around 750 homes. This is only a forecast, and a lot can happen between now and the end of March, but I'm so pleased to see developers and our various partners stepping-up to build these much-needed homes in the borough.

Crucially, around a third of the completions last year, and of the forecast completions this year, will be on council-owned or council-facilitated housing sites, such as the ongoing developments at Fitton Hill, Broadway Green, the sites in Derker, Vaughan Street and Foundry Street. In particular, these sites are making a major contribution to the increased levels of affordable and social housing delivery in the borough. We're on target to exceed the 500-home target I set for new social homes in 2024-2029, with a massive jump set to be seen from only 7 social homes delivered last year, to 120 being delivered in 2026/7.

Place Making: The town centre shop front grant scheme was launched with budget from the Shared Prosperity Fund in June and to date 45 applications have been submitted from businesses keen to jointly invest in improving their premises in the town centre. Works should start from late Autumn once grants have been approved and plans agreed. This will further enhance the works and investment already underway in key parts of the town centre.

The Evening and Nighttime Economy group, made up of local town centre businesses, launched the Oldham Bar Hop at the start of August with 14 venues taking part including a pop-up beer festival in Billingtons. This built on the success of Oldham Live throughout June which saw local musicians performing live in venues across the town centre.

The Ale Hop is one of a series of trails that people can take part in, others include a coffee trail, food trail, activity trail, and the augmented reality Time Trek adventure launched in June for families to enjoy. All these trails show just how much our town centre has to offer from independent businesses to fantastic entertainment and our rich heritage, and this is all supported by the High Street Accelerator funding, led by a partnership of local businesses.

Saturday 27 September see the return of Nostalgic Oldham which took place for the first time last year and was hugely successful. Our winter events programme will be launched in the coming weeks, with the ever-popular Halloween Trail and the Halloween Half, the Christmas Switch-On and brand new this year is a spectacular fire festival taking place in Parliament Square.

Strategy, Policy and Performance: I was proud to chair the latest Leading Oldham Board meeting on 5 September, where we focused on the vital issue of community cohesion. Oldham is a diverse borough, and our strength lies in the way we bring people together. The Board discussed how we can build stronger, safer, and more connected communities, making sure that everyone feels a sense of belonging. It was inspiring to hear the commitment from partners and community leaders to work with us in creating a more cohesive Oldham.

Finally, I am delighted to report that Oldham Council has received the Armed Forces Gold Award – the highest level of recognition for our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant. This is a huge achievement for our borough and a clear signal of our dedication to supporting service personnel, veterans, and their families. It reflects the hard work of colleagues across the Council and our community partners in ensuring that the Armed Forces community is valued and supported in Oldham.

Recommendations: Council is requested to note the report.