



Key Issues and SWOT Analysis

June 2026

INTRODUCTION

The Council published its notification of intention to commence a new Local Plan on 11 May 2026. On the same day, the Local Plan Timetable was published showing that first public consultation on the new Local Plan will be the Scoping Consultation starting on 15 June 2026 and ending on 27 July 2026.

As part of the scoping consultation, we would like to obtain feedback on a summary of key issues or SWOT (Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats) analysis. This exercise seeks to help understand the context of the local area and to identify factors which are likely to shape the direction of growth in the Borough. It will shape the vision for the new Local Plan.

The analysis has been divided into 3 sections to align with the strategic priorities of the Valley Plan 2025-2029, which are:

- Thriving Local Economy
- High Quality Environment
- Healthy and Proud Communities.

CONTEXT

Rossendale is located in the south east of Lancashire and shares borders with Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire. It covers an area of 138 sq km and has a population of just over 73,000.

The towns and settlements in Rossendale grew rapidly in the industrial revolution when the availability of water and coal power supported an economy focussed on textile production and the manufacture of shoes and slippers in particular. Employment and housing were concentrated in the valley floors and the pattern and character development today reflect this heritage: the main urban core is linear, stretching from Haslingden in the east to Whitworth in the west. Settlements are interspersed with and surrounded by attractive South Pennine countryside and there are some important areas for wildlife, including priority habitats such as blanket bog on the high moorland plateau.

Today the Borough has an east/west split. Generally, areas in the west enjoy greater affluence, benefitting from better road connections (A56) to Manchester and other nearby towns, bustling town centres and attractive landscapes. Areas around Bacup in the east have poorer connectivity and the perception of being more isolated and some parts have significantly higher levels of deprivation.

Development choices in Rossendale are constrained by the topography as there is a limited supply of flat available land. Other physical constraints include flood risk, geology, a road network which is often at capacity and public transport that is limited to buses. Brownfield sites, when available, often have issues that require resolution before the site can come forward. However, the area has significant natural and built heritage assets with potential to build on recent regeneration activities and investment. The Local Plan will help to support a more sustainable future for Rossendale with a higher quality of life for all.

THRIVING LOCAL ECONOMY

Strengths • Well qualified population (only 8% with no qualifications) • Many small to medium employers (not reliant on single large employer) • Low number of empty shops in Rawtenstall, Helmshore, Edenfield, Stackstead and Whitworth • Access to strategic road network in the west (A56) • Good access to broadband • Tourism offer (e.g. East Lancashire Railway, Whitaker Museum, Ski Rossendale) • Low proportion of NEETS (second lowest in Lancashire at 3%)	Weaknesses • High proportion of residents commuting out of Borough to work in neighbouring towns and cities • Poor accessibility to jobs via public transport • Low job density • Second highest rate of unemployment in the last quarter of 2025 in Lancashire (excluding Blackpool and Blackburn with Darwen) • Physical constraints for development (topography, flood risk) • Poor road transport infrastructure in East – not attractive to some businesses combined with vulnerable road networks (lack of alternative routes) 2 • Slow download speed for digital availability • Lack of commuter rail link
Opportunities • Burgeoning digital/tech and creative industries • Small businesses can revive vacant/old mills • Geographical location close to Greater Manchester and neighbouring towns • Improving offer for leisure and tourism • Good work / life balance – attractive environment for investment • Retention of existing businesses that are wanting to grow • Significant investment in town centres (Pride of Place) • A56 growth corridor • Employment land allocations available for businesses • Transforming the heritage rail link to a commuter line	Threats • Number of economically active people falling • Loss of manufacturing jobs • High proportion of jobs in retailing which is not a growing sector • Location of businesses within areas at risk of flooding • Investment to regenerate poor quality commercial properties (e.g. old mills)

HIGH QUALITY ENVIRONMENT

Strengths • Good access to countryside • Attractive and distinctive Pennine landscape character • Strong local identity • Built heritage (11 conservation areas and over 270 listed buildings as well as numerous non designated heritage assets) • Investment in town centres (Bacup, Rawtenstall, Haslingden) • High percentage of households with access to green or blue space within a 15-minute walk • High quality parks and other public open spaces • Low level of deaths attributable to particulate air pollution	Weaknesses • Flood risk in valley bottoms • Old housing stock – not resilient to climate change and difficult to retrofit • Strong reliance on cars for transport – only 18% of households in Rossendale do not have access to a car or van. • Overall Rossendale is more deprived than 92% of local authority districts in England for Living Environment (measures such as standard of housing, access to private outdoor space, pollution and traffic hazards).
Opportunities • Renewable energy (wind farms, solar etc) • Biodiversity net gain / nature recovery strategy – areas • Restoration of peatlands for carbon capture and climate change mitigation • High quality design of housing and other development which responds to local character • Brownfield sites to investigate for re-development	Threats • Climate change leading to increased flood risk to people and properties, increased likelihood of drought, wild fire in the countryside and intense heat events in the summer • High rates of illegal waste dumping / fly tipping • Impact of major developments on the local environment (e.g. congestion, air pollution, resource consumption, land take on greenfield sites)

HEALTHY AND PROUD COMMUNITIES

Strengths • Good network of community groups • Strong sense of local community • Generally well qualified population • Good education / local schools • Active outdoor leisure facilities (Lee Bank Quarry, Ski Rossendale) • Extensive Public Rights of Way network	Weaknesses • Poor health: low life expectancy - 1 ½ years lower than UK average and high childhood obesity - 24% of 4-5 year olds • Rossendale is more deprived Overall (IMD) than 80% of local authority districts in England. 43 LSOAs are in the 10% most deprived nationally. • Poor quality housing and high proportion of terraced housing • Access to local services (health etc) • Shortfall in leisure facilities provision (swimming pools and sports halls) • Limited further education provision in the borough
Opportunities • Relatively affordable housing in some areas • New housing development to meet local needs and more social housing • Facilitating right-sizing to provide more family homes • Progressing the delivery of the Valley of Stone and improving cycling links between towns	Threats • Ageing population • Maintaining leisure facilities • Disparity between neighbourhoods • Lower population growth than Pennine Lancs • Falling birthrate • Number of households projected to rise 18.2% from 2018 to 2043 • Increasing pressure on infrastructure (e.g. GP practices / primary health care services, schools, water supply and drainage, electricity)