

NIGHT VISION : WOLVERHAMPTON CITY CENTRE EVENING AND NIGHT STRATEGY 2025-2030



**CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON**

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FOREWORD

“Our city centre’s evening and night-time economy is a vital part of Wolverhampton’s identity, providing economic opportunities, cultural vibrancy and social connectivity. It plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences of residents and visitors alike, contributing to the city’s overall appeal and its economic resilience. From bustling cultural venues to a great array of pubs and bars, Wolverhampton’s evening and night-time economy reflects the character and ambition of our community.

This **Night Vision: Wolverhampton City Centre Evening & Night Strategy** represents our collective and unwavering commitment to ensuring that the Wolverhampton evening and night-time grows in a way that is inclusive, sustainable and reflective of our city’s vision for the future. It provides a comprehensive framework for collaboration, innovation and continuous improvement, aiming to strengthen Wolverhampton’s position as a beacon for evening and night-time activity in the West Midlands and beyond.

We recognise that realising Night Vision will require the collective efforts of a wide range of stakeholders. From businesses and cultural organisations to the police and transport providers, each has a critical role to play in fostering a night-time experience that is vibrant, safe and welcoming to all.

We are excited to continue working closely with our local partners to implement the priorities outlined in this Night Vision strategy, ensuring that the city centre evening and night-time remains a source of pride and opportunity for our city.”



Councillor Chris Burden

Cabinet Member for City
Development, Jobs and Skills

City of Wolverhampton Council

ONE

NIGHT VISION

WOLVERHAMPTON CITY CENTRE

EVENING AND NIGHT STRATEGY:

2025 - 2030

BACKGROUND

This **Night Vision: Wolverhampton City Centre Evening and Night-time Strategy** brings together all the research, engagement and collaboration that took place to develop Wolverhampton's first cohesive approach to our post-5pm city.

Night Vision also outlines the City of Wolverhampton's commitment to developing a **vibrant, inclusive and safe evening and night-time** city centre that enhances our cultural identity, generates social value and delivers economic success after 5pm.

It emphasises the importance of a new era in '**collaboration for the night**' among the city's post-5pm stakeholders. This means complimenting the City of Wolverhampton Council's role as community leader by working together with our dynamic night-time businesses, outstanding cultural organisations, respected educational institutions and essential transport providers, so that we can deliver our ambitious '**5pm till 5am Action Plan**'. (This can be found as an appendix to this Night Vision strategy).

WHAT IS IN THIS NIGHT VISION STRATEGY?

- 5pm to 5am **Vision and Principles** for Wolverhampton
- The **engagement process** that has guided the development of this Night Vision strategy
- The **evening and night-time issues** that the research revealed as most important to address
- An overview of the **most important evening and night-time actions**

LIGHTING UP THE CITY:

Wolverhampton has some wonderful examples of private and public lighting, but they do not yet form a cohesive after dark experience.



WHY 5PM TO 5AM?


Times are a-changing... literally. Large numbers of people, both nationally and in Wolverhampton, now regularly work evenings and nights (27%): from hospitality staff, to those cleaning offices, caring in hospitals, operating public transport and making 24-hour deliveries. Towns and cities should work for them too.

Likewise, how our residents and visitors use the traditional evening and night-time economy is also changing, with **the late-night economy facing significant structural changes**.

These range from young people drinking less alcohol and cost of living pressures to the adoption of healthier

lifestyles and the huge uptake in home streaming, gaming, social media and food deliveries. The night-time economy that many remember, sometimes through rose-tinted glasses, from the 1980s to the early 2000s, is now a distant memory... Something new is emerging...

In Wolverhampton, we want to take a **holistic view of what is possible after 5pm** and ensure that we create the right policies, public realm, transport and strategic support for existing post-5pm businesses so that something new and exciting can grow. It's time to plan our city centre both **spatially and temporally** too.



WOLVERHAMPTON PRIDE is huge event for the city and our LGBTQ+ community. It shows how we can animate spaces like the Market Square for all our communities.

WHY THE CITY CENTRE?

The City Centre is a place for all Wulfrunians to call their own. Whether you are young or old, whether you were born in Wolverhampton or have chosen to live here, whatever your ethnicity, gender or sexuality... **the city centre should work for all of us, day and night.**

However, whilst this Night Vision strategy focuses on our city centre, it cannot be isolated from its surrounding neighbourhoods. For example, some of our key cultural and sporting venues are located just outside the ring road,

including Wolverhampton Arts Centre, KK's Steel Mill and our Premier League football club - Wolverhampton Wanderers. These need better integration into the city centre, particularly after dark, so that everyone benefits.

Finally, it is intended that, in due course, what we have learned during this process for the city centre can be utilised in our other centres to help them develop locally vibrant evening economies too.

WOLVERHAMPTON ARTS CENTRE is a crucial driver of the city's culture and community arts scene, but sits just outside the City Centre. Better integrating attractions like WAC into the city centre experience is a future priority.



WOLVERHAMPTON CITY CENTRE

The map below shows our main evening and night-time spaces and places, as well as the links to our outer-lying attractions. There are parts of the city centre that require 'after dark' investment to create a city centre that has distinct but connected night-time hubs.



TWO

NIGHT VISION AND PRINCIPLES FOR WOLVERHAMPTON CITY CENTRE

To develop our Night Vision strategy, a **Wolverhampton Evening and Night-time Working Group** was formed.

Members of the group represent a wide range of organisations from the business, cultural and community sectors.

Working with night-time economy experts, the Working Group created an ambitious **vision** and a set of **principles** that will underpin our new 'approach to the night' in Wolverhampton. This was based on:

- Wolverhampton's first evening and night-time online public survey (undertaken by the council for its parallel Scrutiny Task and Finish Group's review of the night-time economy)

- New evidence gathered specifically for this Night Vision strategy; and

- Global best practice in planning and managing the evening and night-time economy.

Our 5pm to 5am Vision first seeks to guide our next steps in creating an even better Wolverhampton City Centre in the evening and at night (as set out in the accompanying **Action Plan** - see Appendices).

But the Vision also sets out a new commitment from all partners to value the evening and night on a par with the daytime.

OUR WOLVERHAMPTON NIGHT VISION

“Our Night Vision is to transform Wolverhampton into a vibrant, inclusive and dynamic evening and night-time destination where residents, workers and visitors can thrive.

We aim to create a safe, welcoming and diverse environment that fosters economic growth, cultural enrichment and community engagement between 5pm and 5am.

By championing innovative uses of public spaces, supporting local businesses, artists and makers and prioritising the needs and voices of all community members, we will ensure that our city centre is a beacon of opportunity and enjoyment after dark.

Together, we will build an evening and night-time city centre that is resilient, sustainable and reflective of the unique character and spirit of Wolverhampton.”



**CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON**

OUR NIGHT VISION PRINCIPLES

Underpinning the vision, the partners in the Evening and Night-time Working Group have committed to six principles that will guide the improvement of the city centre between 5pm and 5am. These are:

- 1.** Making Wolverhampton City Centre safer (and feel safer), as well as cleaner and more welcoming after dark.
- 2.** Supporting, promoting and celebrating Wolverhampton's live music, culture, arts, sports, events and hospitality offer.
- 3.** Designing a comprehensive and cohesive lighting, public realm and wayfinding experience, so that Wolverhampton City Centre is attractive and fit for an 'after dark purpose'.
- 4.** Opening and lighting more of Wolverhampton City Centre's buildings after dark and using spaces imaginatively for evening and night-time activation.
- 5.** Ensuring Wolverhampton's transport, accessibility, movement and wayfinding is best in class... both day and night.
- 6.** Developing Wolverhampton's night-time leadership, partnership working, data and policies to drive forward the city centre after 5pm.



WOLVERHAMPTON GRAND THEATRE is one of the city centre's anchor evening economy attractions. But we need more family-friendly restaurants to keep showgoers in town before and after the main event.

THREE

HOW WE CREATED THE NIGHT VISION STRATEGY

Working with globally recognised outside expertise, an extensive research and engagement process was undertaken to ensure this Night Vision strategy was based on solid foundations. This process is shown in the diagram below, whilst the full details can be found in the accompanying Evidence Base appendix.

Desk research

A review of all the city's relevant policies, data and plans was undertaken. They were tested to see if they were 'night-friendly' and how they could be changed to better support the city, post 5pm.

Overnight audits

Stakeholders from across the city, e.g., nightlife businesses, the police, cultural venues, the council and transport providers spent a 'night on the town' examining how Wolverhampton works (and doesn't) after 5pm. This supplemented technical night audits by the specialist consultants.

Public survey

As part of the City of Wolverhampton Council's 'Scrutiny Committee into the Night-time Economy', an online survey was undertaken. The 267 responses have been used to represent the voice of residents within the strategy.



Urban rooms

Funding was provided by the WMCA to support in-depth engagement. An empty shop was hired in the centre of Wolverhampton (an 'urban room') and engagement experts invited in shoppers, young people and office workers to give their views of the kind of Wolverhampton they would like to see after 5pm.

Stakeholder interviews

Over 30 in-depth interviews were undertaken with stakeholders about the challenges, assets and opportunities for Wolverhampton after dark. Many common themes emerged, and these were used to inform the strategy.

Action plan workshop

A workshop was held with the Evening and Night-time Working Group and other city stakeholders. As well as the challenges facing Wolverhampton after 5pm, positive solutions were brainstormed to feed into the Action Plan.

OUR STAKEHOLDERS

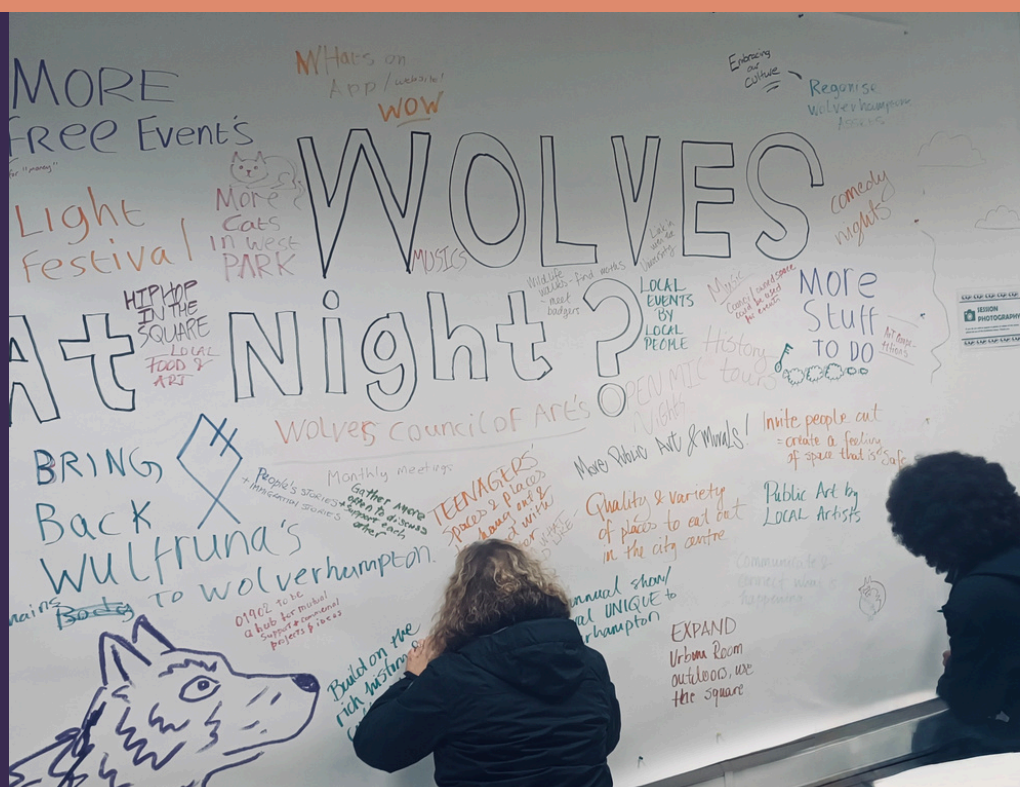
We would like to thank all those who have given their time, views and expertise in helping develop this Night Vision strategy:

- City of Wolverhampton College
- City of Wolverhampton Council
- Enjoy Wolverhampton BID
- The Halls, Wolverhampton
- University of Wolverhampton and Arena Theatre
- University of Wolverhampton Student Union
- West Midlands Combined Authority
- West Midlands Police
- West Midlands Railway
- Wolverhampton Arts Centre (formerly Newhampton Arts Centre)
- Wolverhampton City of Youth Culture
- Wolverhampton Cultural Compact
- Wolverhampton Grand Theatre
- Wolverhampton Pubwatch and night-life businesses
- Wolverhampton Wanderers FC
- Young people and wider community via the Urban Rooms and online survey

THE URBAN ROOMS

was an innovative community participation process that allowed anyone using the city centre to drop into a disused shop in Queen Square to tell us what Wolverhampton needs at night.

Thanks to Laura Alvarez for hosting the Urban Rooms and images.



FOUR

WHAT ARE OUR MAIN NIGHT-TIME CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES?

We wanted to ensure that no stone went unturned in our understanding of the main issues facing Wolverhampton City Centre between 5pm and 5am. To do this, we used the evaluation framework from the international ‘gold standard’ accreditation scheme for planning and managing the evening and night-time economy: [Purple Flag](#).

Originating in the UK but now operating globally from New Zealand and Australia to Ireland and Sweden, Purple Flag is backed by multiple governments. There are now almost a hundred Purple Flag accredited town and city centres around the world.

Purple Flag is the most sophisticated approach to analysing the performance of any evening and night-time place.

It comprises five themes, each of which has six individual criteria. Wolverhampton City Centre was evaluated independently by outside experts against these 30 criteria. So, how does our City Centre rate?

The five overarching THEMES within the Purple Flag accreditation scheme



THEME I: POLICY, STRATEGY & GOVERNANCE

A COMMON VISION FOR WOLVERHAMPTON CITY CENTRE FROM 5PM TO 5AM

It is vital that any place has strong leadership, the right policies for the night and outstanding partnership working. Wolverhampton already does well on many of these criteria, but there are areas for improvement...

- 90% of respondents to the Wolverhampton Night-time Survey 2024 agreed that “the night-time economy is important to Wolverhampton’s wider economic health”. This is a strong mandate for investing and supporting the city centre after 5pm.
- There is significant enthusiasm amongst partners to work together to deliver a new and cohesive approach to planning and managing the night-time.
- The city’s public and private partners are entrepreneurial, but could be more imaginative, take more risks and think bigger ‘after dark’.
- There needs to be a more meaningful engagement of young people and Wolverhampton’s many diverse communities in developing our future city centre post-5pm.
- Overall, city policies could be improved to give the night-time equal parity to the daytime, e.g. licensing restrictions and planning policies could better support live music and cultural venues.



THE WULFRUNA BUILDING (at the University of Wolverhampton) is an excellent example of lighting our buildings at night. There is room for more of this kind of architectural animation across the City Centre.

- After dark tourism and attractions have not historically been coordinated in a meaningful way, albeit this is changing with the new **Wolverhampton Destination Management Plan**.
- Post-5pm culture is critical to the city centre more than ever. Both culture with a capital 'C' (e.g. theatre, music, cinema, etc.) and with a small 'c', e.g. socialising at the pub, religious services or evening classes are crucial to social cohesion and community wellbeing. The new Wolverhampton Cultural Strategy is a major step forward here.
- Finally, there is a need to develop our evening and night-time economy workforce skills in the hospitality, events and creative industries by working more closely with the college and university.

THEME 2: WELLBEING

A SAFE, WELCOMING AND CLEAN WOLVERHAMPTON AFTER DARK

Safety, and even more importantly ‘feeling safe’, are the most significant barriers to community participation in any evening and night-time economy. It is the foundation of everything else in this Night Vision strategy. This is currently a significant challenge in Wolverhampton.

- A significant number of respondents to the Wolverhampton Night-time Survey 2024 felt unsafe in the city centre at night. This was higher for women. Respondents highlighted antisocial behaviour, low lighting and a lack of visible policing as the reasons why they felt this way.
- Cleanliness of the city centre public realm is acceptable by national standards, but could be improved further, particularly as the night goes on.
- Lighting is not a ‘silver bullet’ to safety. Overall, there are some great examples, but there are ‘dark spots’, so the experience of moving safely around the city centre is not joined up.
- CCTV coverage needs to be upgraded with certain ‘dead spots’ being addressed and the ability for security staff to liaise with the police.



WOLVERHAMPTON SAFE HAVEN is a successful joint initiative between City of Wolverhampton Council and Enjoy Wolverhampton (the city's Business Improvement District). Operating it on more nights across the year would increase its positive impact on night-time safety.

- The Safe Haven provided by the Council and BID is an excellent initiative, but it needs more funding to extend its impact.
- Vulnerability reduction schemes, such as Ask for Angela, are present in the night-time economy, but do not operate consistently across the city centre venues.
- There is a significant opportunity to use incoming urban design and public realm investments to reduce risks to users and promote 'natural surveillance'.

THEME 3: MOVEMENT

A WOLVERHAMPTON THAT'S EASY TO GET TO, FROM AND AROUND AFTER FIVE

As is true for most UK cities, transport for the evening and night is a significant challenge in Wolverhampton. Personal vehicles dominate and a lack of reliable late-night public transport deters some visitors from staying on (e.g. after a show at The Grand or The Halls).

- Residents want improved late-night bus services, which are currently limited.
- We now have some first-rate public realm, but it is not yet joined up and there is a need for safer walking routes, particularly between the city centre's various quarters and to the peripheral attractions, such as our arts venues, university accommodation, hotels and Molineux.
- Wayfinding needs to be significantly improved. Clear signage and 'visual cues' (such as distinctively lit buildings) are missing, and new solutions need to be adopted that work cohesively to help visitors navigate the city at night.
- Car parking remains a significant issue, not primarily in terms of capacity, but in terms of quality, location and the security of sites for evening and night-time users, as well as the cost.



JOINED UP MOVEMENT. Wolverhampton has an excellent mix of public transport options, including trams, buses and trains, alongside uniquely impressive taxi provision. However, it does need later services, and the city centre's 'after dark' car parking quality and affordability should be reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of evening and night-time visitors.

THEME 4: APPEAL

CREATING A WOLVERHAMPTON WITH A RICH MIX OF ATTRACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES IN THE EVENING AND AT NIGHT

Wolverhampton's cultural venues (e.g. The Halls, The Grand Theatre, Arena Theatre, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, WAC and KK's Steel Mill) are first-class attractions and regional-scale assets, but coordination, critical mass and their visibility (beyond their current patrons), remain challenging.

- Survey respondents wanted more family-friendly activities and restaurants, and diverse cultural programming.
- Enhanced promotion of what's on and better connectivity between venues, transport provision and movement around the city centre are needed.
- There is a significant opportunity for the city to use public spaces for temporary night-time events and creative activations, e.g. Market Square.
- Key evening 'anchor attractions', such as a cinema and 'experiential leisure', are currently missing from the city centre (though they are 'coming soon').
- The city centre hotel and accommodation offer is currently significantly under-powered for a city of Wolverhampton's size and cultural venue offer.



SUPPORTING OUR LIVE MUSIC ECOSYSTEM. Wolverhampton has outstanding musicians, promoters, recording studios and venues, but investment is needed to make them ‘more than the sum of their parts’.

THEME 5: PLACE

CREATING A FUNCTIONAL AND BEAUTIFUL CIVIC REALM FOR WOLVERHAMPTON POST-5PM

The physical environment of Wolverhampton City Centre is improving and there has been significant investment in first class public realm. However, the overall experience of moving around at night is inconsistent and there are missed opportunities to light our amazing buildings and spaces after dark.

- The city centre has some wonderful historic buildings, and the recent public realm investment has been a ‘game-changer’ for users on these streets that have received these improvements, both day and night. However, poorly lit routes and ‘dark voids’ remain.
- Inactive shopfronts are frequent and underused spaces, like Queen Square, negatively impact the public realm user experience, particularly after dark.
- Repairing and reopening the station underpass to improve pedestrian routes into the city centre from the north-east would make a huge impact for station users, football fans, students and hotel guests alike.
- Residents who were surveyed suggested that better maintenance, surface cleanliness and use of ‘meanwhile spaces’ would attract them into the city centre after 5pm.



GREAT 'DESIGN FOR THE NIGHT'. Recent public realm investment - surfacing, seating, greening and uplighting - have transformed some streets into places that feel both safe to move through and to dwell in - great 'after dark placemaking'. The challenge is to repeat this excellence across the whole City Centre.

FIVE

OUR FIVE-YEAR NIGHT VISION

ACTION PLAN FOR

WOLVERHAMPTON CITY CENTRE

The separate **5pm to 5am Evidence Base** provided ample intelligence and a clear direction for developing a detailed 5pm to 5am Action Plan to deliver the evening and night-time Vision and Principles for the kind of Wolverhampton's city centre after 5pm that residents and stakeholders said they wanted.

The **Night Vision: Wolverhampton City Centre Evening and Night-Time Strategy ACTION PLAN (2025–2030)** sets out an ambitious roadmap to transform the city into a vibrant, inclusive, and resilient destination after dark, building upon detailed consultation, night audits, policy reviews and engagement with over 30 stakeholders.

Our actions are structured around the five Purple Flag themes:

- **Strategy, Policy & Governance**
- **Wellbeing**
- **Movement**
- **Appeal**
- **Place**

Our action plan sets out over **40 specific interventions**.

Each action is mapped onto one of the six **Core Principles**:

1. Improving safety
2. Boosting culture and hospitality
3. Redesigning public space for night-time use
4. Activating building use
5. Transforming movement and accessibility
6. Embedding long-term leadership and coordination



THE HALLS: EXCEPTIONAL PROGRAMMING WITH NATIONAL APPEAL.

We need to support our evening and night-time attractions by investing in both our accommodation offer (i.e. new hotels and other accommodation formats), alongside more family-friendly restaurants.

THEME I: POLICY, STRATEGY & GOVERNANCE

A COMMON VISION FOR WOLVERHAMPTON CITY CENTRE FROM 5PM TO 5AM

The action plan foregrounds governance as the foundation for long-term change, alongside the effective integration of thousands of incoming residents who will live in the many new city centre developments currently under construction. Key actions include:

- Strengthening coordination via a new **Evening and Night-Time Delivery Group**, linked to more inclusive representation and clear accountability.
- Ensuring the new **City Centre Masterplan** is a genuinely 24-hour masterplan that integrates night-time needs into spatial planning, including public realm, imminent residential growth and space for cultural activation.
- Removing the current licensing Cumulative Impact Area (CIA) to reduce barriers to investment and support the new type of operator seeking to open venues in the evening and night-time economy.
- Launching a **Wolverhampton Licensing Charter** to raise standards while offering, in return, more flexible licensing conditions. (Supporting the Best Bar None scheme operated by the BID).
- Applying for the Purple Flag accreditation by 2026 to benchmark progress against national and international standards.

ACTION PLAN

THEME 2: WELLBEING

A SAFE, WELCOMING AND CLEAN WOLVERHAMPTON AFTER DARK

The action plan features a suite of measures focused on crime prevention, reducing vulnerability (particularly for women and girls and other at-risk groups) and building community confidence.

Specific recommendations include:

- Embedding the **West Midlands Women's Night Safety Charter** locally in more businesses and organisations.
- Expanding and further embedding the Ask for Angela scheme whilst introducing next-level bystander intervention training. Work with representatives of the local deaf and hearing loss community to make all vulnerability training sign language compatible.
- Establishing new levels of 'capable guardianship' through ambassadors and volunteers, supplementing the existing police presence.
- Expanding CCTV coverage and operational oversight for faster response times and coordinated venue-police communication.
- Extending the existing Safe Haven to run additional Saturdays (and if possible, Fridays), rather than just at peak weekends.
- Continuing to reduce street homelessness at night through comprehensive outreach and integrated rough sleeping support, whilst increasing our focus on tackling anti-social behaviour and aggressive street begging.

THEME 3: MOVEMENT

A WOLVERHAMPTON THAT'S EASY TO GET TO, FROM AND AROUND... AFTER FIVE

Connectivity and navigation are central to revitalising Wolverhampton after dark. The following are the most important next steps set out in the action plan to achieve this:

- Developing a city-wide wayfinding approach (physical and digital) integrated with lighting, transport and the new **City Centre Masterplan**.
- Improving links between peripheral assets (e.g. Premier Inn, Novotel, Molineux, Wolverhampton Arts Centre) and the core evening and night-time economy through safe routes and lighting.
- Piloting extended taxi marshals and car park upgrades to manage dispersal at peak hours (1am–4am).
- Auditing and enhancing car park quality and access, including identifying incentives for evening use.

ACTION PLAN

THEME 4: APPEAL

CREATING A WOLVERHAMPTON WITH A RICH MIX OF ATTRACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES IN THE EVENING AND AT NIGHT

Wolverhampton's cultural and hospitality sectors are central to its after-dark future. The Night Vision strategy proposes:

- A family-focused approach to programming cultural activities and investment in experiential leisure and restaurants.
- Launching a Wolverhampton Night Market and enhancing the city's existing Meanwhile Use Strategy to further support evening pop-up arts, food, and culture.
- A campaign to promote existing offers and improve visibility through a unified 'Visit Wolverhampton' platform and associated social media and content strategy.
- Expansion of 'Lates' programming at Wolverhampton Art Gallery and new music ecosystem initiatives, such as expanding Sound City and offering grassroots music venue support.

ACTION PLAN

THEME 5: PLACE

CREATING A FUNCTIONAL AND BEAUTIFUL CIVIC REALM FOR WOLVERHAMPTON POST-5PM

The Night Vision strategy seeks to turn the city into a ‘theatre for after dark play’ through creative and inclusive public realm design.

This includes:

- Reimagining Market Square as a future-proof, programmable civic space for both day and night-time activation
- Using the recent leisure investment success story (e.g. Superbowl UK, the Lockworks Cinema and the climbing wall), to show Wolverhampton is ‘open for after dark business’. These can form the basis of a **‘Wolverhampton Evening & Night-time Investment Prospectus’** to attract other post-5pm investors to the city centre.
- Developing a cohesive lighting plan that supports wayfinding, safety and placemaking.
- Animating dead frontages with colourful shutters, murals and light installations.
- Maximising council-owned assets and encouraging weatherproof outdoor performance infrastructure in new developments.

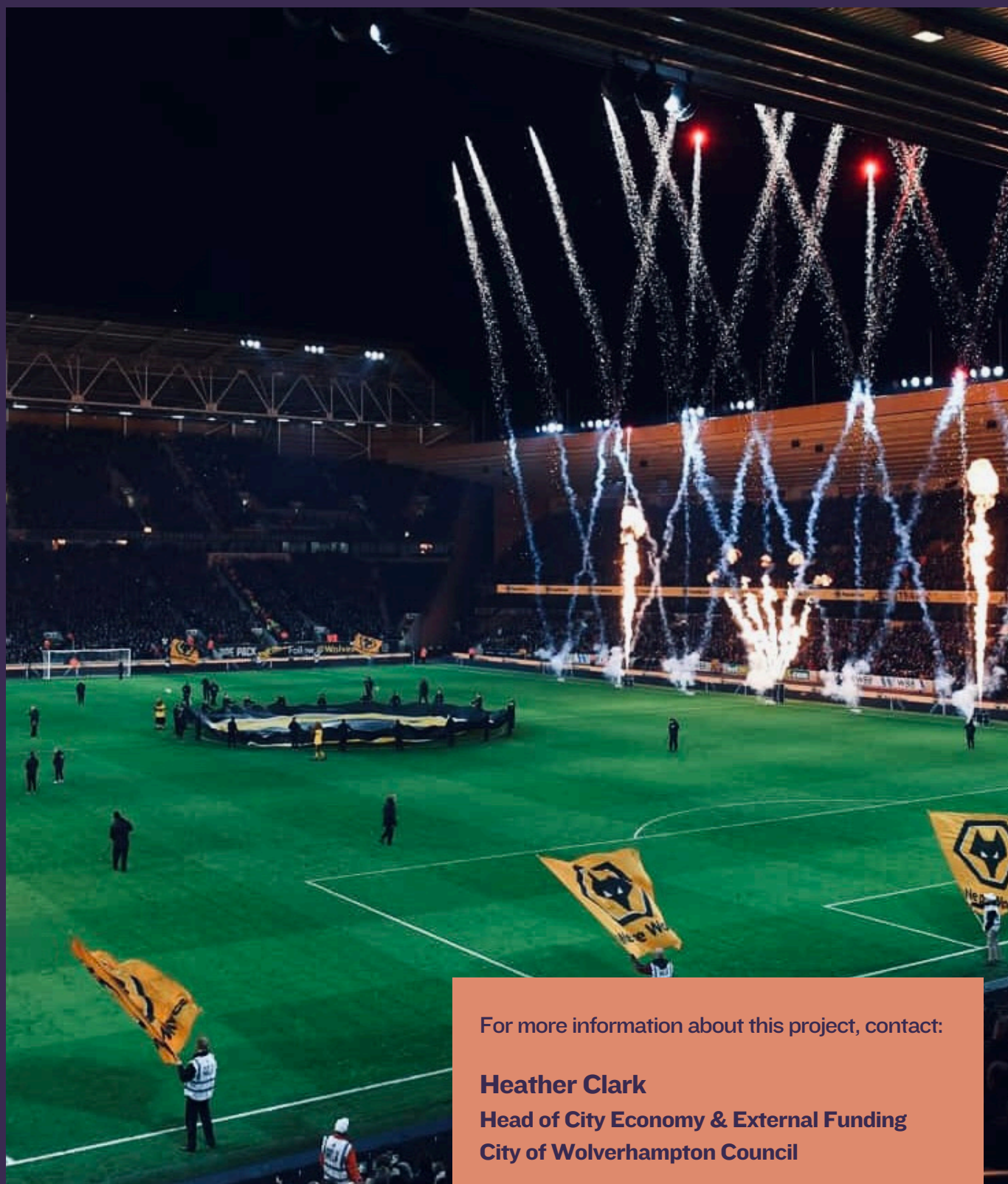
CONCLUSION

Night Vision: The Wolverhampton City Centre Evening & Night-time Strategy 2025-30, alongside its underpinning **Evidence Base** and detailed **Action Plan**, reflects Wolverhampton's desire to think big, act boldly and centre community voices in shaping a more vibrant evening and night-time future for its city centre.

By combining governance reform, cultural investment, safety innovation and infrastructure enhancements, Wolverhampton's first Evening and Night-time Strategy provides a framework for inclusive growth that positions the city as a regional leader in harnessing its evening and night-time economy for the collective good of all our residents, visitors, communities and businesses.



GET IN TOUCH...



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