

## Appendix 2: IPW...aspirational look back on achievements from 2028 perspective

### **Wolverhampton 'Event City 2028'**

By 2028... ...people will think differently about the city...

The annual **Summer in the City festival**<sup>1</sup> in West Park has played a part in that since 2024 – showcasing the city's offer as well as its pulling power to attract major musical talent. But also, people became more aware of what the city has to offer and the authentic, unpretentious way it goes about its business.

### **The small city with the big heart**

Marketing has played its part in the turnaround of perceptions, there's no doubt about it. A consistent and collaborative approach to both messaging and application of the city brand have played well to the national audience who'd never been, or previously thought of coming to Wolverhampton. And **positioning the warmth of the population and their welcome as its biggest selling point really resonated** with residents who were able to demonstrate the civic pride they've always felt in tangible ways, particularly through an upsurge in volunteering.

The *Wolverhampton Welcome Crew* – a **team of volunteers** regularly come out to greet event-goers with their distinctive black and gold livery and their advice on where to go, how to get there, and how to get the best out of the city, have become the city's most distinctive feature, particularly on big event days and during the themed months.

2028 will see the third **Welcome Night** – an event that has grown each year and is set to involve over 120 local businesses, cultural and community organisations. This **open-door city-wide free event** has started to attract visitors from nearby towns and cities as well as pulling in over 15,000 local people for its 6-hour duration. The street-food festival that started alongside it in its second year will return, and organisers are currently looking for further dates during the year.

The reopening of The Halls in 2023 was a major turning point. The music offer in the city got bigger and better overnight. The city was once again on the map for major touring bands. And for audiences. Wolverhampton Wanderers' partnership with Warner Records – Wolves Records – reawakened the local music scene giving a platform to new local bands. CWC built on this with the **Bands in Bars support scheme for local pubs** that in its third year saw over 40 local bands playing 300 gigs annually across the city.

The **focus on retaining families in the town centre between 5 and 7pm at weekends** began paying dividends when the focus moved to Queen Square. The *Life's a Beach* project, part of *Summer in the City* month, has become a regular and loved part of the seasonal offer. While the Autumn circus skills fortnight is beginning to spread into neighbouring streets. Two new family-friendly cafés have opened in the area, each of which has a small performance area that feature a variety of kids entertainers.

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<sup>1</sup> A major annual music festival run by external partners

Sport of all sorts, indoor and outdoor, continues to provide the city's pulse. The Grand Slam of Darts, has been retained in the city – despite fierce competition from other cities and towns - with enhancements to the Aldersley Stadium venue to improve the visitor experience.

Wolverhampton was founded by a woman, Wulfruna, so it was appropriate when the FA, Molineux, and CWC signed an agreement in 2025 to **host three England women's football international matches annually** in the city for 3 years. Women's football's coming home.

In 2025, the city hosted the UK Road Race Championships agreeing a two-year deal. The annual GB time trials have reignited interest in cycling at community level and the second *Wolves in the Saddle* family day of cycling is scheduled for later this year.

Wolverhampton Wolfpack continue to dominate the British Kabaddi League (BKL), formed in 2022, and a city-wide league has been formed featuring 8 community teams from the Black Country. With the rapid rise of the sport in the UK, the Council agreed a 3-year deal with BKL which has seen the **UK finals being held in Wolverhampton for two of the three years** along, with the World Cup in 2025. A TV deal with the between BKL and BBC has been extended with international rights now sold to 18 broadcasters. The estimated TV reach is 145m annually which means that the profile of the city is growing globally through this continuing relationship with BKL.

The opening of a 4-star Pop hotel in early 2028 was hailed by one national newspaper as, '*yet more evidence that this is a city that's prepared to confound your expectations – who knew that one of the UK's greatest pop art collections was hidden in the Black Country?*

The **Box Space** has been a huge success for almost four years. The combination of flexible programming – from fanzone to family, from cutting edge to comfort food – has proved popular with a range of locals and visitors. And the visuals continue to be amazing – the commissioned projections, data-mapped onto the adjacent buildings – provide a free 20-minute show every day at sundown that still has people gathering to watch. That has led to more projection-mapping commissions being planned for other unexpected city centre sites.

Visitors still remark on how easy it is to get to the city from elsewhere in the UK, and e-bike stations have improved how folk can get around the city centre. Ease of access has been one of the factors that's seen a **ten-fold increase in the number of national corporate events that take place in the city** now. The Halls remain a destination of choice for conferences, but an increasing number of mid-scale seminars and gatherings are taking place at the University, and a bespoke small events programme – such as music nights and food festivals - that accompanies them is regularly highlighted by delegates as one of the reasons they would come back.

The **creation of Visit Wolverhampton** in 2024 - a **Destination Management Partnership (DMP)** based on a formal partnership between city visitor economy anchor institutions – has made a huge difference in coordinating the various visitor offers in the city, as well as providing a focus of consistent messaging and marketing. Based in the CWC offices and led by a senior Council officer, the organisation is planning a further 5-year plan that will see the corporate market extend further into the city, using more venues and locations.

One of the benefits of location next to the UK's second city continues to be the opportunity to pick up elements of much larger events Wolverhampton would be unable to afford by itself. Hosting training camps, an educational and cultural programme linked to the 2028 Euros later this year is

one of those. The **Three Cities Initiative continues to explore ways the city works together with Birmingham and Coventry to mutual benefit.**

Negotiations to create a **single box-office digital entry point for visitors** finally bore fruit in 2027. This follows the 2025 major revamp of the city's online marketing offer, which now makes it easy to navigate the complete events programme of the city at a glance. Smaller community event promoters are now beginning to use this portal to host and advertise their own events and they too are set to benefit from being part of the single box-office presence.

Following several years of internal review and external partnership discussion, the 'Promoters Gateway' was launched in 2027, through Visit Wolverhampton. This **enables external promoters to approach a single portal for guidance on how to establish an event in the city**, including advice for community groups. Significantly, the service provides up to the minute data on current audiences including their origin, demographic breakdown, likely dwell time, and the areas of the city they prefer to visit. This data began to come online in 2024 following a partnership with the West midlands Growth Company (WMGC).

The steady growth in events has begun to find its way to the job market where an estimated 200FTE jobs are believed to have been created in recent years. Projections from independent economic impact analysis forecast this could grow by 10% year on year over the next decade. To meet this demand for jobs, which has been focussed primarily on young entrants to the job market, **a new 'Events Academy' - vocational course in Applied Events Operation and Management- is in development** and is due to take its first course entrants in 2029.