Manchester happening

14/09/2025 by Matthew Curtis

Opinion

Manchester felt like it could be the centre of the universe this summer. Thousands of tourists flocked to the city largely to witness and celebrate one of its greatest products: the legendary rock band, Oasis. Unable to get a ticket, instead I spent a day popping around a few favourite pubs to soak up some of the atmosphere. I was pleased to see plenty of visitors were also experiencing another of the city’s greatest products: its beer. In fact, the arrival of Oasis and the five shows it played over the summer of 2025 reportedly put an extra £1bn into the city’s economy, largely via its hotels, restaurants and pubs. Manchester is no stranger to hefty investments shoring up its economy at the moment. One glance at its changing skyline – now pockmarked with high rises – is evidence of this. This is a city of growth, and indeed a city of change, with a new, younger generation flocking to the it thanks to its high potential for employment, education, and not to mention its exceptional nightlife. Although it’s not good news for everyone. Many of the new high rises that seem to spring up almost overnight have had the negative effect of dwarfing some of its existing, and indeed most significant buildings. One of them is the Marble Arch on Rochdale Road, a short stroll from the city centre. At present it looks a little like the home occupied by the character Carl Frederickson in Disney’s Up. Joking aside, it's not been great news for its owners, Marble brewery, who spoke to me about the adjacent construction's impact on its trade. “While we recognise the importance of regenerating brownfield land within Manchester city centre, we are increasingly concerned that the Marble Arch is often treated as an inconvenience rather than an asset,” said sales director Paul Ploughman. “We believe regeneration should enhance, not diminish, the city’s heritage. The Marble Arch deserves to be protected as part of Manchester’s future, not pushed aside by it.” On the subject of heritage, one brand looking to capitalise on the city being the national centre of attention this summer is the iconic Boddingtons. Brand owner AB-InBev has decided to return the brand to cask production after it was discontinued in 2012. The news follows hot on the heels of reported investment in another of its heritage beers, Bass, which has had a brand refresh and is becoming an increasingly common sight in pubs across the country. Unlike Bass, which is produced under licence by Carlsberg in Burton-upon-Trent, Boddingtons is to be produced in Manchester (well, Rochdale if you’re being pedantic) by family-owned brewery JW Lees. The 4 per cent ABV beer will also be distributed via Lees, and available throughout its own estate, and to the free trade. “When I joined JW Lees in 1994 Boddingtons was ‘the Cream of Manchester’ and we were in awe of their position in leading the cask beer revolution,” MD William Lees Jones said via press release. “We are planning to put Boddingtons back where it rightly deserves to be as one of the leading premium UK cask beers particularly in our heartland of the North West.” It wouldn’t be surprising if a few nines of the refreshed cask Boddington’s made their way a few miles south to Stockport, and to the reopened Crown Inn on Heaton Lane. Situated directly below the Greater Manchester town’s historic viaduct, the pub is now under the tenure of Alan and Chris Gent, who also run the multi-award winning micropub (and current Stockport CAMRA Cider Pub of the Year) the Petersgate Tap. The reopening spells more good news for the residents of Stockport, who are blessed with a thriving hospitality culture and some of the best pubs in the North West. Although part of an estate of 200 pubs owned by the Ipswich-based Red Oak Taverns, the Gents have undergone what they describe as “intense negotiations” to ensure the majority of the Crown’s 22 lines remain free of tie. Visiting on a quiet Monday evening, I found the renovations to the pub to have been done with great care and sympathy. Despite the city going through so much change, an opening like this also demonstrates its great resilience. That, and the fact its residents' capacity for good beer seemingly knows no bounds. “It’s become apparent during this time that the Crown holds a special place in a lot of peoples’ hearts, so we hope the renovation is considered sympathetic and appropriate,” Alan Gent said in an announcement of the pub's reopening. Initial signs are promising, and we have already sold three casks of our house beer, Draught Bass, in the first three days. Who knows, with Boddington’s Bitter being revived, we may be able to feature that beer on the bar once again!”