

North West Leicestershire Economic Growth Plan refresh 2022 – 2025

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This 2022 to 2025 Economic Growth Plan is a refresh of the council's 2019 Economic Growth Plan.

Since we published our 2019 Economic Growth Plan, we have experienced a number of macro-economic changes including Britain's exit from the European Union on 31 December 2020 and the global coronavirus pandemic. 2020 was an unprecedented year that brought about significant changes in how we all lived our lives which required significant changes to the way we, our customers and our businesses worked.

The global coronavirus pandemic meant that some industries had to close and most industries had to adapt to new ways of working through the pandemic. There were rapid changes made to how we work, communicate, socialise and shop. Workplaces have been modified, new working practices introduced and, in some cases, staff working remotely from the workplace.

Despite the disruption of the pandemic and the resulting economic hardship, the local economy remains diverse and resilient. Some sectors have struggled due to restrictions where as other sectors experienced tremendous growth in terms of sales and jobs.

Throughout the pandemic the council remains committed to maintain our frontline business support and economic development services to ensure that businesses continue to have access to support, funding and advice during these turbulent times.

Since the publication of the 2019 Economic Growth Plan, North West Leicestershire District Council has declared a Climate Emergency and has begun to develop our response to the need to reduce the council's and the district's carbon emissions. The Climate Emergency and achieving Net Zero Carbon emissions are fundamental to designing and delivering sustainable economic growth.

Despite the recent economic changes, there are still core strengths and opportunities in the district that are as relevant now as they were in 2019. In addition the emergence of the East Midlands Development Corporation and the region's Freeport will also have a significant role in driving sustainable economic growth for the district and the wider region.

This refresh of the Economic Growth Plan represents a forward plan of activity delivered by the council and our partners that will build upon its predecessor and also reflect upon, and continue the ongoing work of, the council's 2020 Coronavirus Economic Recovery Plan.

This plan uses the same structure as the 2019 Economic Growth Plan based on making the most of the areas' strongest assets in terms of 'people', 'place' and 'business' and ensuring that these three gears of the economy function effectively together. It is underpinned by the council's Delivery Plan, individual service plans and the council's Zero Carbon Roadmap, creating a pathway of activity to support post-Covid recovery growth and create a framework to deliver key priorities, objectives and to focus resources.

Furthermore, a baseline of the most recent available economic data has been collected to inform the refresh of this Growth Plan and is published online as appendices to the plan along with an updated investor prospectus. These supporting documents will be reviewed and updated annually to be a measure of the delivery of the Growth Plan and to indicate what further actions or adjustments are needed to support continued economic growth of the district.

This Economic Growth Plan doesn't stand alone. It has been prepared alongside the government's 'Build Back Better' plan for growth and also the emerging Leicester and Leicestershire Economic Growth Strategy to ensure that North West Leicestershire maintains a proactive role in contributing to and shaping the economic growth of the region and the country as a whole.

Chapter 2 - Our Location

North West Leicestershire has a diverse and prosperous economy, based in the heart of the National Forest with strong road, rail, air and digital infrastructure. Central to the three cities of Leicester, Derby and Nottingham and the M1, M6, M42 golden triangle, the district is home to East Midlands Airport and the Strategic Rail Freight Interchange at East Midlands International Gateway providing global links to facilitate growth across all sectors.

The emerging East Midlands Freeport will wrap around North West Leicestershire incorporating neighbouring strategic sites within the three counties of Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. These sites, including the East Midlands Gateway (incorporating East Midlands Airport and the SEGRO Strategic Rail Freight Interchange), Ratcliffe on Soar Power Station and the proposed East Midlands Intermodal Park near Toyota in South Derbyshire, are strategically located with strong infrastructure connecting them to them to the rest of the United Kingdom, Europe and onwards to the rest of the world.

In 2021, the proposed HS2 (East) was announced as part of the government's Integrated Rail Plan. When delivered, this will result in the construction of a new high speed railway through North West Leicestershire and it is planned to connect to the East Midlands Hub Station at East Midlands Parkway.

The district lies at the heart of the National Forest which is rapidly developing as a tourism destination. The National Forest provides a unique natural environment of woodland and wildlife habitat that provides a beautiful backdrop for life within the district and contributes to economic growth, social inclusion and physical and mental wellbeing.

As a place to live and visit, the National Forest offers natural environments that enhance the quality of life and provides cultural, economic and environmental benefits to the area. The National Forest is a national exemplar of the interrelations between the economy, climate change mitigation and natural capital.

North West Leicestershire contains a number of leisure and visitor attractions and facilities such as Donington Race Circuit, 1620's House at Donington le Heath, Moira Furnace, Conkers Visitor Centre, Ashby Castle and a number of prestigious hotels and conferencing facilities.

Much of the district remains rural in character with attractive countryside in places. The principal town is Coalville, steeped in industrial heritage and a focus for regeneration. The district is also home to historic Ashby de la Zouch and the key local centres of Castle Donington, Ibstock, Kegworth and Measham.

Chapter 3 – Refresh - Journey from 2019, through 2020, 2021 and beyond.

This refreshed Growth Plan will create a clear pathway to support local growth and create a framework for delivery of key priorities, objectives and to steer resources.

In 2019 North West Leicestershire District Council published the 2019 to 2021 Economic Growth Plan. In 2020, the Growth Plan was then supplemented by the North West Leicestershire Economic Recovery Plan that responded to the immediate economic needs resulting from the Coronavirus pandemic.

Both of these plans resulted in outcomes and project delivery that contributed to economic growth, some of which were short term responses to an immediate need and others contributed to our long term vision for economic growth. This ongoing work is reflected in this refreshed Economic Growth Plan.

Despite only being launched 12 months before the Coronavirus pandemic, the 2019 Economic Growth Plan delivered a number of successful projects.

- Case Study: The delivery of pre-employment customer care training and introducing new logistics training at East Midlands Airport Academy.
- Case Study: Inward investment and recruitment support for new employers such as the Very Group, GXO, Games Workshop and Kuehne & Nagel
- Case Study: Continued support for sustainable transport to access employment through the EMEG Access to Work Partnership and the launch of the new Airline 9 bus service providing new connections to employment in the north of the district.
- Case Study: The launch and delivery of new business grants through the Enterprising Fund that made over £175,000 in grant payments to local businesses that generated £1.25million in private sector leverage and created over 70 new local jobs.
- A number of business support programmes such as NBV business start-up, WISE, Webinar – Creative Leicestershire, Jobs fairs, Timber Festival, LRS Wellbeing at Work Charter and the North West Leicestershire District Council apprenticeship programme.

Alongside the 2019 Economic Growth Plan, in 2020 the North West Leicestershire Economic Recovery Plan was adopted that set out the council's immediate plan of action for economic recovery in response to the Coronavirus outbreak and the realignment of resources to meet the challenges faced by our businesses and communities.

- Case study: Maintained front line 1:2:1 business support services providing a point of contact for over 1,000 businesses during the pandemic.
- Case study: The creation of a Community Hub and collaborating with food manufacturers and retailers to provide welfare packages to support vulnerable individuals during the pandemic.
- Case study: Maintained support for new inward investment and growing businesses such as Mars, Caterpillar and ongoing work with developers IM Properties for the Jaguar/Land Rover and DSV developments at Mercia Park.
- Case Study: Administered the delivery of a number of coronavirus business support grant programmes.
- Case Study: Provided advice and direct intervention to support businesses in need to access various different grant programmes through the pandemic.
- Case Study: Delivery of Digital High Streets training and grants to support high street business to improve their digital capacity.
- Case Study: Delivered a number of safety measures, events and support programmes through the Reopening High Streets Safely initiative and the Welcome Back Fund.
- Case Study: Researched and prepared numerous intelligence briefings that were used to inform decision making and shaping regional policy and strategy during the pandemic

- Case Study: Provided safe trading and compliance advice to businesses operating during the pandemic as well as advice and virtual support seminars targeted towards tourism and hospitality sectors,
- We also delivered virtual jobs fairs, supported the government's Kickstart programme, provided support to council tenants to access employment and to work from home, made prompt payment to suppliers a priority and we also delivered shop local campaigns and business start-up support.

Both the 2019 Economic Growth Plan and this refreshed version of the plan were prepared and aligned to the North West Leicestershire District Council Delivery Plan. The council's Delivery Plan retains the five key priorities of:

- Supporting Coalville to be a more vibrant family-friendly town
- Our communities are safe, healthy and connected
- Local people live in high quality, affordable homes
- Support for businesses and helping people into local jobs
- Developing a clean green district

The refreshed Economic Growth Plan will underpin the council Delivery Plan and will also feed into other local strategies such as the North West Leicestershire Visitor Economy Plan and the council's Zero Carbon Roadmap. The importance of a sustainable low carbon economy is vitally important today and for future generations. At the heart of the National Forest, North West Leicestershire District Council is committed to ensuring that growth is sustainable and in balance with the local environment.

Chapter 4 – Zero Carbon

In June 2019 North West Leicestershire District Council declared a Climate Emergency and appointed specialist environmental consultants to help develop the council's response to the need to reduce the council's and the district's carbon emissions.

This resulted in the publication of our Zero Carbon Roadmap in November 2019 which, along with the accompanying Action Plan, was adopted by the council on 31 March 2020. The Action Plan focuses on carbon emissions, their sources and how to reduce them and identifies recommended actions to achieve Net Zero Carbon status.

The Zero Carbon Roadmap targets a Net Zero Carbon council by 2030 and a Net Zero Carbon district by 2050. Details of the North West Leicestershire District Council's Zero Carbon Roadmap has been published on the council's website: www.nwleics.gov.uk/climate_change

The Climate Emergency and achieving Net Zero carbon emissions are fundamental to designing and delivering green economic growth. Through promoting sustainable economic growth it is essential that this refresh of the Economic Growth Plan recognises the urgency of climate change and these concepts will need to be continuously embedded across the entire plan and its objectives to ensure these challenging requirements can be met.

This refreshed Economic Growth Plan sits alongside the council's existing Zero Carbon Roadmap and provides the opportunity for the council and our partners, such as the National Forest and Leicestershire County Council, to demonstrate leadership in this area and to show how the connection between growth in jobs and homes and the natural environment are connected and how these can be enhanced to support clean growth.

It remains important that we all recognise the role of natural capital as a driving force for a healthy population and a sustainable economy and natural environment. This is woven through all three of the plans core challenges: people, place and business.

Working with partners we must strive to protect, and make positive contributions to, the district's natural capital and enable a transition away from practices that damage the natural environment and increase greenhouse gases. Through this plan we will continue to work with partner organisations to help the council to achieve its Zero Carbon ambitions and support our businesses and communities to adapt and mitigate climate change.

Chapter 5 – Key Sectors

Based on the analysis of Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) data and a range of other sources considered in the development of the Economic Growth Plan, there are five key sectors that will be prioritised for growth within the district. These sectors are:

- Business and Professional and Scientific Services
- Manufacturing
- Logistics and Distribution
- Construction
- Creative/Cultural/Tourism Sector

Despite some of these sectors being adversely impacted during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the sectors have demonstrated growth over a longer time frame and will continue to play a significant role in the continued recovery and growth of the North West Leicestershire economy.

Chapter 6 - Working in Partnership

To support the growth of North West Leicestershire, North West Leicestershire District Council will continue to work in partnership with local businesses, Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LEEP), Leicestershire Growth Hub, East Midlands Development Corporation, the National Forest, Leicestershire County Council, Leicester Employment Hub, East Midlands Chamber of Commerce, SMB Group, Department for Work and Pension, neighbouring authorities and other regional bodies.

This work will focus on the three core challenges of this Economic Growth Plan:

- People – skills, access to employment, entrepreneurial spirit, health and wellbeing
- Place – infrastructure, connectivity, quality of life, environment
- Business – business growth, investment, private sector jobs

The refreshed Economic Growth Plan contains a number of objectives across these three core challenges. Some of these objectives will be delivered directly by North West Leicestershire District Council and others through partnership working.

There are some objectives in the plan where the council may not have any direct influences or input to their delivery, however, in these scenarios the council will seek to lobby and support the delivery of these objectives where they contribute to the wider economic health and wellbeing of the district.

Chapter 7 Foundations – People

Principles - skills, access to employment, entrepreneurial spirit, health and wellbeing.

North West Leicestershire has a growing population of over 100,000. The availability of a diverse workforce with the appropriate skills for business is vital if the local economy is to be successful and resilient. Our residents will have greater employment and entrepreneurial opportunities available to them if they have higher levels of skills, educational attainment and healthy lives.

Growth in future productivity will rely on ensuring that local people can meet the challenges of changing employment needs in, emerging growth sectors, changing environmental practices, skills for a green economy and the efficiencies brought by artificial intelligence and increased automation. The continued development of local people is necessary to ensure that our residents can take up local job opportunities and that those who are not economically active are encouraged to participate effectively.

As this growth plan is being prepared the long term impact on the labour market of both the coronavirus pandemic and Britain's exit from the European Union hasn't yet been realised. The furlough scheme supported hundreds of businesses and thousands of workers throughout the district but there remain challenges to support residents back into the workplace. As industry and workplaces reopen it is clear that coronavirus hasn't fully disappeared.

The pandemic has brought about a digital revolution for how some businesses integrated home working, how we communicate and how consumers shop creating a greater need for digital skills within industry and the labour market.

The pandemic has seen an increase in the number residents out of work. The council and our partners will continue to work to match employers and jobs seekers together, however, it is important to acknowledge that those residents who were furthest from labour market pre-pandemic are potentially even further away from the labour market now. Therefore the need for pre-employment training and for employers to adopt flexible recruitment policies are still incredibly important to ensure employment for all.

The pandemic has also provided a stark reminder to every one of the importance of the health and wellbeing both at home and in the workplace. The pandemic resulted in isolation and uncertainty for many alongside stark economic challenges for businesses and those unable to work.

Objectives

- 1) Encourage entrepreneurial activity by delivering programmes of support including business start-up workshops with specific support to assist more young people and women to start a business or to consider self-employment
- 2) Help new and existing businesses to recruit local people. For example, by continuing to support the Airport Academy at East Midlands Airport and continue working with employment groups at SEGRO and Mercia Park
- 3) Work with partners to ensure that the workforce needs of businesses are met and help to raise skill levels and productivity
- 4) Work with partners to ensure that the skill and training provision can best meet the changing technological needs across different sectors

- 5) Encourage local businesses to become Disability Confident Employers and to adopt a more open recruitment policy so that those furthest from the labour market can access employment opportunities
- 6) Work with partners to ensure residents can access careers advice and relevant information on future employment opportunities with local companies in key growth sectors
- 7) Assist the LLEP and other partners to facilitate relationships between local businesses and schools and colleges. This will ensure that future employment needs are met and opportunities are highlighted, particularly in growth sectors
- 8) Maximise opportunities to get local people into work during the construction phase of development sites, alongside creating opportunities for apprenticeships and school visits to encourage new generations into the industry
- 9) Develop and enhance North West Leicestershire District Council's apprenticeship programme and provide volunteering and work experience opportunities within the organisation
- 10) Promote the employment and training opportunities provided by partner organisations, such as the Leicester Employment Hub, to support those furthest from the labour market into employment
- 11) Promote the use of leisure facilities and workplace health interventions and countywide sport and leisure initiatives to ensure that employees and employers are aware of the benefits of health and physical and mental wellbeing in the workplace and the impact this has on increased productivity
- 12) Monitor the progress of the proposed HS2 route and ensure that any resulting employment opportunities from both the construction and implementation phases of HS2 are promoted locally
- 13) Promote initiatives, including the Kickstart programme and self-employment and pre-employment training, to support residents back into the workplace.
- 14) Ensure the provision of robust support for residents and businesses impacted by any potential local redundancies.

Chapter 8 Foundations – Place

Principles - infrastructure, connectivity, quality of life, environment.

Our location and environment has been a considerable driver for the economy of North West Leicestershire in terms of natural resources, natural assets and the location of strategic, national and international transport links.

The district lies at the heart of the National Forest and much of the district remains rural in character with attractive countryside. Our historic market towns and business parks sit at the centre of a national transport network, hosting East Midlands Airport, the Strategic Rail Freight Interchange at SEGRO, East Midlands Parkway station and are served by the A42/M42, A50 and M1 corridors.

Providing the necessary environment for businesses is essential in order to support continued sustainable economic growth and competitiveness. The local business environment needs to continue to offer access to suitable premises and land with good transport links, effective digital connectivity, appropriate housing provision for the workforce and access to excellent quality of life facilities including town centres, leisure and open space.

Balancing economic growth and reducing emissions and pollution is vital. The council will look to support sustainable developments and make best endeavours to reduce negative impacts that contribute to pollution, carbon emissions and adversely impact biodiversity.

Our market towns and local centres are hubs of social and commercial activity. Sustained investment and renewal of our towns will ensure they prosper and meet the needs of current and future businesses, residents and visitors.

North West Leicestershire District Council's adopted urban design and planning principles look to drive quality and sustainability through development and renewal ensuring quality homes, quality environments and improved quality of life.

Objectives

- 15) Support the work of the Coalville Project and the Coalville Regeneration Framework including the renewal of Marlborough Square, support for the Newmarket, deliver aspiration for a new cinema, ongoing support to increase occupancy and footfall on the high streets
- 16) Develop a framework of opportunities for the land adjacent to the new Leisure Centre, the Hermitage Recreation Ground and the existing Hermitage Leisure Centre Building
- 17) Support the work of the Ashby Project and support the emerging Ashby Business Improvement District to maximise new investment in the market town.
- 18) Continue to support and develop our smaller local centres to be vibrant hubs for their communities, businesses and visitors and to encourage residents to shop local
- 19) Support proposals for increased inward investment within North West Leicestershire and the National Forest to develop the sustainable tourism offer and support the visitor economy and rural diversification
- 20) Collaborate with the National Forest to deliver the Heart of the Forest Masterplan
- 21) Facilitate the development of the wider East Midlands International Gateway including investment in infrastructure, such as transport links and utilities, and support the continued development and use of the Strategic Rail Freight Interchange
- 22) Work with public transport operators to encourage the transition from traditional vehicles to more sustainable options such as electric or hydrogen.
- 23) Through the substantive review of the Local Plan consideration will be given to how the planning process can support the increased use of renewable energy, energy efficiency standards for new buildings and provision of electric vehicle charging points for residential and employment developments.
- 24) Ensure there are sufficient employment sites and premises in the district and help to identify gaps in provision by working with developers and partners, particularly for incubation, and follow-on space
- 25) Work with developers, agents and partners, such as Invest in Leicester and the Department for International Trade, to promote North West Leicestershire as a destination, to attract new inward investment into the district and to assist with indigenous business expansions
- 26) Through the planning process, continue to encourage quality sustainable design, sustainable construction methods and materials, green infrastructure and public realm within the setting of the National Forest and across the district
- 27) Support the continued roll out of Superfast Leicestershire to improve digital connectivity of homes and businesses across the district
- 28) Deliver the south east Coalville and Money Hill developments and ensure that the people living in these new homes have relationships with their town centres and local services
- 29) Explore opportunities to provide better public transport connections to major employment areas and encourage the take up of car share solutions to reduce the number of private vehicles on the road
- 30) Work with a range of partners to maximise the provision of affordable housing within North West Leicestershire to ensure that residents have access to good quality affordable homes
- 31) Continue to contribute to the work of the East Midlands Development Corporation to facilitate landmark developments including the emerging East Midlands Freeport.

- 32) Support aspirations to open and restore the Ashby Canal
- 33) Support aspiration for the reinstatement of the Ivanhoe Line led by the Campaign to Re-open The Ivanhoe Line (CRIL) and align to improved walking and cycling networks.

Chapter 9 Foundations – Business

Principles - business growth, investment, private sector jobs.

Businesses are the engine of growth and local opportunity and a varied resilient economy helps ensure that opportunities are maximised. Growth is generated by new business start-ups, indigenous business expansions, increased productivity and efficiency and new businesses locating to the area.

North West Leicestershire is the chosen location for a number of diverse businesses of all shapes and sizes across a broad variety of sectors. Our businesses include regional, national and global headquarters for blue chip companies, indigenous SME's, local supply chains, high growth businesses and successful start-ups.

Strong business productivity is reliant on many factors including a good supply of skilled workers, but it also relies on availability of suitable premises, efficient supply chain links, transportation links and access to finance.

Entrepreneurs who are committed to developing businesses will also require advice and support, particularly in the early stages of their ventures when the risk of business failure for start-ups is at its highest.

Objectives

- 34) Work with partners to provide local businesses with advice and support, with particular focus placed on high growth businesses and those in priority growth sectors
- 35) Continue to provide support to businesses providing key local services within our towns, highstreets, rural communities and markets
- 36) Enable programmes of support specifically relevant to the growth and development businesses in the creative sector.
- 37) Explore and promote external funding opportunities to enable local businesses to access grants and funding that assist business growth, to increase productivity and boost local employment
- 38) Ensure there is sufficient workspace and support for new enterprises and business start-ups
- 39) Promote tourism and sustainable tourism businesses that support forestry, agriculture, land based rural diversification and outdoor leisure and promote the area as a sustainable tourism destination.
- 40) Facilitate programmes that assist businesses in staff recruitment and upskilling. For example, hosting jobs and skills fairs with particular emphasis on those furthest from the labour market and promoting a more open recruitment policy.
- 41) Increase innovation activity amongst the wider SME and business base through initiatives such as the MIT Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program
- 42) Ensure there is a "soft landing" package for potential investors to make informed decisions about locating to North West Leicestershire
- 43) Continue to collaborate with IM Properties to facilitate the Employment Partnership throughout the construction and occupation phase of Mercia Park

- 44) With the Leicester Employment Hub, encourage local businesses to get the most from their apprenticeship levy to create new apprenticeship opportunities and upskill their existing workforce
- 45) Help local businesses and education providers to collaborate on upskilling workforce and readying future generations for work within the local economy.
- 46) Provide advice and support to existing businesses to cut energy costs, reduce and off set carbon emissions, reduce waste, recycle more, increase efficiency and promote a circular economy.
- 47) Engage with organisations on key business parks in North West Leicestershire to discuss potential for photovoltaics, electric vehicle charging points and another carbon reducing measures
- 48) Encourage local businesses to reduce the carbon intensity of their operations and improve energy efficiency in a Local Business 'Carbon Action' group.
- 49) Promote opportunities for exporting and global trade to support business growth post EU Exit.
- 50) Provide specialist advice such as environmental health, planning, building control and licensing to local businesses to ensure that they are compliant with regulations.

Delivery

The success of the refreshed North West Leicestershire Economic Growth Plan will be monitored by the extent to which the objectives set out in the document are achieved, but also by considering the outcomes they bring.

From experience, this refreshed Economic Growth Plan has to be flexible to adapt and respond to changes in government policy and external events and global pressures.

Strong local governance is required. The refreshed Economic Growth Plan will be underpinned by the Council Delivery Plan and a number of Council Service Plans that bring together expertise from various disciplines to deliver the council's key business facing services.

Furthermore, a baseline of the most recent economic data has been collected in the Economic Growth Plan – Evidence Base. This evidence will be reviewed, updated and reported annually to be a measure of the delivery of the Growth Plan and to what further actions or adjustments are needed to support continued economic growth.

Progress on the delivery of the strategy will be overseen by the Economic Development and Regeneration service area and reported to the Portfolio Holder for Business and through the North West Leicestershire District Council's reporting framework.

The successful implementation of this plan will be enabled through strong partnerships and require input from North West Leicestershire District Council, local businesses, the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership, the Leicestershire Growth Hub, the East Midlands Development Corporation, the National Forest, Leicestershire County Council, Leicester Employment Hub, East Midlands Chamber of Commerce, the SMB Group, Department for Work and Pension, Leicester-Shire and Rutland Sport, neighbouring authorities and other regional bodies.

North West Leicestershire District Council will also continue to play our supporting role in working with our partners to deliver their own strategic plans for economic growth.