

# Levelling up places

A series of case studies  
demonstrating districts'  
power in place



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# Foreword

Much of the debate around economic growth and the role of district councils over the past few years has centred around the future of our high streets – and with good reason, as high streets have faced significant challenges, exacerbated by the pandemic. And, of course, our ability to maintain all our vital services for residents also hinges on the income we derive from business rates. Our pamphlet last year; ‘Championing our High Streets’<sup>1</sup> highlighted the potential for shaking up high streets, and reimagining their purpose, based on our learnings from a study tour to Roeselare in Belgium.

This new pamphlet builds on those learnings. It showcases how districts are reimagining town centres, but also looking more broadly at the breadth and scale of ambition we have for our communities – raising local skills and increasing employment, regeneration, housing, connectivity, improving the public realm, and more. And we showcase how collaboration and engagement is at the heart of the district DNA, as districts work across organisational and geographical boundaries, for local, regional and national impact.

We don’t have to look too far for inspiration – across the country, districts are doing great things. We’re the building blocks for growth with the levers to make it happen and the connections into economies. We’re the embodiment of the levelling up agenda, close enough to communities to understand them, large enough to effect positive change across much of this nation.

Taking just a couple of examples to set the scene – Broxbourne are developing a business start-up centre to provide local entrepreneurs, start-ups and growing businesses with a bespoke workspace, advice and support. Epping Forest are working across sectors and across borders in partnership to explore the opportunities of digital infrastructure, applications and innovations for the provision of health and social care. And in Broxtowe, reinventing a town centre with a boost to the entertainment and leisure experience.

Government is absolutely right to direct key funding streams such as the Towns Fund, Future High Streets Fund and the Levelling Up Fund to districts. We hold not just the statutory levers to drive growth and change, but the local insight, and can bring the right partners to the table.

But the picture isn’t completely rosy. There’s more that the Government can do to help us to drive the economic recovery.

There are too many different bidding pots, with short turnaround and artificially tight deadlines, pitting places against each other. We’d prefer to see local leaders empowered to determine priorities and take the decisions in partnership with local communities.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://districtcouncils.info/reports/championing-our-high-streets/>

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And when it comes to delivery, access to the right skills and having the right delivery capacity can be a real challenge. Government can help us by thinking more long-term. Change requires engagement, and engagement takes time. Certainty is key.

We hope you'll take inspiration from this set of case studies. Not all the lessons will apply equally in all places. But there is much in what these areas are trying to achieve that will be common to all.



Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen,  
Leader, Breckland District Council and  
Chairman, District Councils' Network

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# About the District Councils' Network

The District Councils' Network (DCN) is a cross-party member led network of 183 councils that provide 86 of the 130 most valued and visible public services in every street in non-metropolitan England. We are a Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association (LGA) and provide a single voice for district services within the LGA.

## CASE STUDIES

### Section 1: Collaboration and engagement for thriving businesses and communities

- **Breckland:** Future Breckland: Thriving People and Places
- **South Staffordshire:** A collaborative approach to the economic recovery
- **Forest of Dean:** Building bridges between the community, business and local government for sustainable growth
- **Epping Forest:** Crossing boundaries to drive digital infrastructure, applications and innovation across Essex and Hertfordshire

### Section 2: Levelling up skills, and removing barriers to the labour market

- **Boston:** Tackling low skills and raising aspirations: a new era for Boston
- **Rossendale:** Rossendale works – Improving life skills and confidence
- **East Staffordshire:** Boosting prosperity through skills, education and employment in Burton upon Trent
- **Newcastle-under-Lyme:** The WorkShop - Employment, Skills and Training Hub
- **Norwich:** Investing in our city's future

### Section 3: Tailored approaches for place-based growth

- **South Cambridgeshire:** Reigniting rural growth
- **Broxbourne:** Providing local entrepreneurs, start-up businesses and growing business with a bespoke workspace, with the added benefit of onsite access to business advice and support
- **Maidstone:** Innovation in healthcare - supporting businesses and entrepreneurs

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#### Section 4: Revitalising towns and cities

- **Broxtowe:** A model for community wealth building and a town centre being reinvented
- **West Lindsey:** Creating a thriving market town to attract housebuilders and tackle market failure
- **Exeter:** Liveable Exeter: community, culture and collaboration
- **Hatfield:** Breathing new life into a growing town centre

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## SECTION ONE

# Collaboration and engagement for thriving businesses and communities

## Future Breckland: Thriving People and Places

Our district is one of the largest in the country with a diversity of natural and physical assets, spanning five market towns and over 100 villages. We have formidable natural assets and nationally significant representation in the food and manufacturing sector. But we also face significant challenges: social mobility, infrastructure, skills, and investment; and our size creates its own challenges. Spanning multiple travel to work and housing market areas; with five Town Councils, 113 Civil Parishes Councils, a LEP, a County and two parliamentary constituencies, a single consensus on priorities does not exist organically.

In the context, therefore, the Future Breckland project is no smaller than starting a conversation with up to 140,000 residents and 6,000 businesses – plus the whole breadth of stakeholders and influencers – in a year-long dialogue about what matters most. The programme asks what the future could and should look like, and collectively defining the key steps that everyone needs to take to get there, complemented by blending the best external insight from economists to architects and spatial planners and providing the space for all views to be heard.

*The vision for the work is to step off the treadmill of chasing funding rounds and build a sustainable long-term investment plan constructed around the unique needs of our local places and people.*

This programme of work is intended to guide and secure resource through instruments like levelling up and community renewal, but also innovative local investment models and private sector contributions. Through this we believe we can create a legitimate line-of-sight on the pipeline figures we are building.

Given its scale, the expectations of the work are substantial. Over the next 12 months this work will deliver for us:

- A new vision, turned into tangible delivery and investment plans, which are constructed at town level and set out the blueprint for the future of the district;
- A consensus built from thousands of voices, which will have the power to coinvest and deliver this new ambitious agenda for positive change;
- An identified and costed circa 10-year development programme, expected to be worth around £750m of capital projects;
- The strength and commitment of partnership to bring forward, coinvest, and co-deliver for the future.

Beyond the 12-months, however, is where the substantial delivery starts. This will unlock significant new activity which will help tackle local skills and employment, regeneration, housing, connectivity, public realm challenges – and create the conditions for sustainable inclusive growth.

As the programme has progressed, the benefits of working in partnership with public and private stakeholders has become increasingly valuable and will be a key process in achieving the interventions identified to achieve our vision.

Through the programme to date, we have learnt that the most successful market towns of the future will be proactive and have a relentless focus on meeting the needs of current and future generations. This includes evolving the local offer in response to the trends associated with Covid-19, but also ensuring that it adapts to wider shifts relating to the future of the high street and local economies. Future Breckland aims to set out key interventions that will help enable our market towns to adapt and thrive to support local need.

“By creating a shared vision, local organisations can align their priorities and ensure we are all pulling towards the same goal. This will ensure Breckland’s success going forward and put us in pole position when it comes to bidding for national funding, which can be spent making the district even better for our residents and businesses.” – Cllr Paul Claussen, Breckland Council’s Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder responsible for the programme.

“We are truly excited about the potential of the Future Breckland project. We believe this won’t just be a roadmap for the success of our people and places, but it could be a blueprint for how Market Towns, and urban/rural economies, feature in future of the UK growth story.

*We know that no one body has the power, resource, or influence to make the kind of changes we need to see – which is why building a strong consensus, around a compelling shared vision for the future has to be the future for public sector leaders”.*

Maxine O’Mahony, Executive Director and Head of Paid Services at Breckland Council.



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## South Staffordshire: A collaborative approach to the economic recovery

We've developed a ten-point plan for the local economic recovery following the pandemic, prioritising those areas where the council can make a real impact over both the short and longer-term, and putting strong relationships with business and partners as the foundation. Immediate priorities being to build our intelligence on the economic impact of the pandemic, support business owner resilience, and provide business-friendly, flexible council services. As the Local Planning Authority, we're also prioritising providing sufficient land and premises suitable for investment and growth and working to secure the infrastructure to deliver sustainable growth.

At its heart, our ten-point plan has a real focus on building trusting relationships with our businesses to support economic growth, raising aspirations and skills among young people, building a partnership approach to reduce the district's carbon footprint, and seizing the opportunities to connect people, skills, and opportunity.

With this in mind, in June 2021 the council launched the South Staffordshire Business Place Partnership (SSBPP). The purpose of the SSBPP is to create a network of businesses across the district to share best practice, contacts, and business news. The partnership will also allow businesses and strategic partners to network effectively with the council and each other. This partnership will support public and private sector partners to identify issues, seek solutions and provide effective interventions to support businesses.

In developing the SSBPP, a number of public, private and voluntary sector organisations have joined the council to deliver on its pledges in support the business and wider community. Including Staffordshire County Council, Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire LEP, Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Growth Hub, Stoke and Staffordshire Careers Hub, Federation of Small Businesses, Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, Chase Chamber of Commerce and Support Staffordshire.

Whilst in the relatively early stages of delivering our ten-point recovery plan and developing the South Staffordshire Business Place Partnership, we have learnt that building trusting and constructive relationships with our businesses and partners is the primary factor in creating added value to every organisation. Through these existing and new relationships, the council can achieve more robust, intelligence-led outcomes through a combination of quantitative and qualitative information. For instance, we worked with county, borough, and district councils to pool funding from the government's Additional Restrictions Grant.

Government can help us achieve our ambitions with more flexible national funding schemes such as seen recently with the Community Renewal Fund and Covid-19 business grant funding to enable councils to support their communities and meet local need. We also need longer term certainty of grant funding.

*Increased lead time for the development of funding bids and sufficient time to spend the funding will provide the opportunity to be more proactive in developing a needs-driven pipeline of potential projects and enable the council to build longer-term relationships with potential investors.*

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## Forest of Dean: Building bridges between the community, business and local government for sustainable growth

Founded by the Forest of Dean District Council in 2018, the Forest Economic Partnership (FEP) is an award-winning voluntary community partnership with the vision of making the Forest of Dean a vibrant and thriving place to live, work, study and do business. Membership is open to anyone who lives, works, plays or studies in the Forest of Dean District or is interested in participating in FEP's activities.

FEP's mission is to deliver a thriving economy in the Forest of Dean District by connecting business, councils, people, ideas and resources. Chaired by a local business professional, there are over 230 organisations and individuals registered as stakeholders who can participate in the quarterly stakeholder group or sub-group meetings. In 2019, FEP became a Community Interest Company to create a distinct legal identity and help facilitate the development of projects put forward by its stakeholders.

The partnership's input is helping to put the Forest of Dean on the map as a sustainable economic location with a sizable manufacturing presence, working to influence and change perceptions that the Forest of Dean is primarily a visitor destination by shining a light on local industry and innovation.

Since inception the FEP has added value to several projects across the district, including:

- Acting as an accountable body to enable two local communities to access community broadband grants for faster broadband, targeting the final 3-4% of properties in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire that still need access to superfast broadband of +30Mbps.
- Working with the council to test the public's appetite for the Forest of Dean to become a Biosphere Reserve following a report commissioned by the partnership and published by ONS on the economic benefits of being a Biosphere.
- Building insight into rural transport locally, in partnership with Rural Technologies Ltd on a project funded by the Geospatial Commission.

The partnership, working with the council and others enables the environmental qualities of the area to be protected and for the needs of the community to be supported in a manner that can recognise and develop its economy.

The partnership has provided a voice where the wider community can be heard and influence priorities and policy within the district. It is also an arena where alliances are forged and developed for common good. It is a bottom-up approach that is paying dividends, for example in the development of our recent bid for Levelling Up funding, which has brought together Forest of Dean District Council, Hartpury University and Cinderford Town Council focussed on regeneration and culture investment themes. The Levelling Up collaboration combines three linked projects that together are seeking to improve social mobility, and raise aspirations and educational outcomes.

It's really important for rural areas to have dedicated investment over the medium to long-term, to help tackle embedded deprivation, rather than competing against other areas on an annual basis. "We need to thank our local volunteers who work tirelessly to maintain the profile of the FEP locally and across our borders. It is their energy that drives participation in the Stakeholder Group and the Sub-Groups who are connecting people and delivering real change on the ground." Mr Peter Williams - Head of Paid Service, Forest of Dean District Council.

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## Epping Forest: Crossing boundaries to drive digital infrastructure, applications and innovation across Essex and Hertfordshire

The Essex and Herts Digital Innovation Zone (DIZ), co-founded and led by Epping Forest District Council, is a cross-sector, cross-border partnership seeking to explore the opportunities of digital infrastructure, applications and innovations to future-proof local economies and the provision of health and social care. Working across five districts (Broxbourne, East Herts, Epping Forest, Harlow, and Uttlesford), within two counties (Essex and Hertfordshire) and involving partners from health, higher and further education, voluntary and community sector and the private sector, the DIZ has an ambition to be recognised as a 'beacon' area for place-based innovation.

Last year we were delighted when Digital Leaders included the DIZ in its #DL100 list and awarded it the 'Cross-Sector Digital Collaboration of the Year'. Three of our key priority areas include:

- **Infrastructure:** delivering a £1.7m DCMS-funded project to deliver a Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN) providing ultrafast broadband to 74 GPs across the five districts.
- **Inclusion:** delivering an innovative digital inclusion project funded by NHS Charities, to develop an online platform to raise up digital skills and address a lack of equipment and connectivity. The ambition is to develop a 'databank' for donating unwanted/unused mobile data.
- **Knowledge uplift:** delivering a series of Smart Place Seminars and online events that focus on specific digital issues – such as skills, infrastructure, health & social care, garden towns, digital exclusion, high streets, and place-based approaches in digital innovation.

Our work is intended to bring about real-life impacts and benefits for the residents and businesses of our districts. We're exploring with health partners how the LFFN can enable care to be moved closer to the patients, at times that are more convenient to them and in ways that give them flexibility over how to connect and access healthcare. The project also aims to uplift the general level of fibre connectivity available to the communities, enhancing their ability to access everything that our increasingly digital lives can offer. This also makes the area more attractive to businesses looking to relocate, providing the high-quality connectivity they need.

Our key learning from our experience to date is the fundamental value and importance of the partnership itself. We passionately believe that we would not have achieved the things that we have so far were we not acting together. We can achieve far more in collaboration than we can as individual organisations.

"Epping Forest is committed to making our district a great place to live, work, study and do business. Enabling digital delivery is central to our goal of more efficient and effective services tailored to the needs of residents, businesses and communities. The DIZ is designed to secure the critical infrastructure and new ways of working to deliver on that vision and to achieve our shared vision to be "the best-connected place of its kind in the country". It's a joint venture to enable all the partners to access funding and support that they would not secure on their own, to pool investment, align services, and share expertise on our common journey. Already acknowledged nationally for its approach and delivery, it goes well beyond local government to access investors and partners in health, business, education and the voluntary and community sector in its orbit'. Georgina Blakemore, Chief Executive, Epping Forest District Council.

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## SECTION TWO

# Levelling up skills, and removing barriers to the labour market

### **Boston: Tackling low skills and raising aspirations: a new era**

With a rich heritage, and packed full of potential, Boston has a substantial freight and logistics sector and is significant as a food processing and wholesale hub. The town's greatest challenge is low skills, ranking worst of all local authorities in England in terms of the skills domain within the 2019 English Indices of Deprivation. This tracks through into wages with the area having wage levels that are £130 a week lower than the England average (ASHE).

However in recent years, there has been significant investment in Boston College through the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GLLEP) and the college is now ranked in the top 5 in the country, with a national reputation for innovation and high-quality learning.

Our work with communities, business and partners on the Towns Fund Board has enabled us to identify the three key themes for the town to guide our strategy for renewal: raising skills and aspirations, sustainable economic growth and pride in place.

*The Town Deal has been a platform to bring people together, and get our foot in the door, but our approach is all about getting out there, meeting people and connecting people. We've worked to understand the strengths of our partner organisations, and to connect them together to create projects, products and a vision that may not have come about without us facilitating those connections. And we've taken a bottom-up approach, using accelerator funding to deliver on those projects our communities most wanted to see.*

We're excited about the port of Boston as our gateway to growth, bringing together: The Port, University of Lincoln and Boston College around a consolidated training and business development programme. Through the Centre for Food and Fresh Produce Logistics, a partnership between Boston College, the National Centre for Food Manufacturing (NCFM) at the University of Lincoln and the food industry, this will spearhead the development of new skills and innovation in food chain logistics; directly supporting the 29% of jobs in this sector in the district. Our ambition is that Boston becomes a global centre for food logistics.

And through the Mayflower – our flagship project – we'll see the creation of a new learning environment at the heart of the town themed around its heritage, providing a place of sanctuary, hope and future prosperity, providing space for the town's economic relaunch, and tackling embedded low aspirations and skills through innovative living learning spaces, and enabling digital upskilling with on-hand support and tuition. For us, building back better and levelling up, have building back skills and raising aspiration at their core.



## **Rossendale: Rossendale Works – improving life skills and providing real work**

Rossendale Council's Corporate Plan – Our Place, Our Plan – lays out our vision for the borough over the next four years. Our vision is to have a thriving economy, creating a quality environment for all and improving the life chances of those living and working in the borough.

Our Rossendale Works initiative has been running since April 2018 and has placed over 100 local people into paid work. This project assists people who are out of work to complete training and activities that improve life skills and confidence. After a programme of between 10 and 20 weeks, candidates are offered a four-week placement with a local employer.

We have built a network of over 100 local employers and work with Active Lancashire to identify expanding and new businesses. Rossendale Works have strong existing relationships with local growing businesses who regularly work with the project by providing placement opportunities, and we are constantly engaging with, and expanding the number of businesses that are involved with the project to ensure a constant and steady pool of participating businesses.

This is a genuinely partnership approach. The council co-funds the programme with the DWP, allowing us to employ a dedicated project manager and a full-time equivalent project support officer, as well as providing a training and activities budget. Between April 2018 and August 2021, the project has successfully placed over 130 into paid work, with nearly 200 others going onto structured further training and qualifications.

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## East Staffordshire: Boosting prosperity through skills, education and employment in Burton upon Trent

Burton upon Trent is an historic brewing town, at the heart of the National Forest and on a key crossing point of the River Trent, the town still does what it is famous for, and more. With its favourable position along the A38, Burton has developed as a key logistics centre, which has seen major employers invest elements of their international operations in the town. Whilst the town has its existing strengths in the river, the town's heritage and in its position as the capital of the National Forest, it still has potential opportunities to enhance Burton's connectivity and to drive developments in enterprise and skills. This is a focus of the Burton Town Investment Plan, developed as part of the Towns Fund programme, which identifies three key projects for skills:

- Creating a University Regional Learning Centre co-located at the town's Brewhouse Arts Centre, enabling opportunities for higher education and adult lifelong learning.
- Relocating and modernising the Burton Library, which will see the service moved into the Burton Market Hall. This will not only provide state-of-the-art education facilities, but it will also protect and revitalise an historic building in much need of repair.
- Developing a specialist education offer at the Burton and South Derbyshire College, which will see the creation of a further education STEAM hub (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics), with four distinct facilities for creative digital learning, games development, mechatronics and cyber-security. This project will also introduce a Health and Social Care realistic working environment with specialist equipment.

The delivery of these projects is governed through the Burton Town Deal Board partnership, of which East Staffordshire Borough Council is the accountable body, with membership from the public, private and third sectors, along with service providers such as education engaged as project sponsors.

The Burton Towns Fund Programme will provide significant opportunities locally and regionally, but it will support the town in establishing a stronger identity nationally as it looks to create the conditions for market leading education and innovation. Bringing a Regional Learning Centre to the town, alongside additional specialisms at the college in partnership with Staffordshire University, will create new and exciting opportunities for higher levels of education attainment. Consequently, it will bridge the increasing skills gap in the town, particularly in the context of our growth industries. Beyond that, through the delivery of these interventions, the town will be able to cement itself as a place of learning and opportunity, inviting more education inflow from the region and beyond, rather than a continuous stream of outflow.

Accessing the Towns Fund for Burton was the first step in this journey, but it would be impossible to achieve this vision without working collaboratively with the appropriate partners, in this instance the universities, college and the county council. As the Accountable Body for the Towns Fund programme, the borough council can co-ordinate, facilitate and drive the regeneration of the town, but without taking an openly collaborative approach, it would almost certainly be in vain. *We cannot overstate the importance of collaborative partnerships in regeneration. Working across organisations, sectors and boundaries consistently presents opportunities to leverage greater public value to support Burton upon Trent in becoming a strong town for education and opportunity.*



## Newcastle-under-Lyme: The WorkShop – town centre employment, skills and training hub.

Newcastle-under-Lyme in North Staffordshire has a mix of urban and rural communities, with different demographic characteristics, including a number of areas among the 20% most deprived on the Index of Multiple Deprivation. The council serves a population of 130,000, with our vision being good local services, a prosperous borough, and safe and welcoming places for all.

The WorkShop was proposed by Newcastle Employment and Skills Group (NESG), a well-established local network of service and education providers jointly coordinated by the council and Aspire Housing. The group works to address specific local employment and skills issues, ensure that where possible a holistic approach is taken, raise awareness of the extent of worklessness in the local area and identify and implement good practice where appropriate.

NESG partners are experts in their field, have an in-depth knowledge of the local area and the associated employment and skills issues that need addressing. The Group had long standing aspirations to establish a town centre space where all partners could deliver advice and support for people seeking training and work, enabling access to all the information needed in one place in a highly accessible informal setting.

A long-term vacant shop in the Grade 2-listed Lancaster Building in the heart of the town had proven uneconomic for the council to refurbish for commercial use. Accelerated Town Deal Funding transformed it into a bright and welcoming space, conveniently placed in the town centre, which is friendly and accessible for people at the start of their employment and skills journey. Realise Charity the project lead has a lease on a peppercorn rent.

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The shop refurbishment is merely the catalyst for services to be brought together. Realise Charity agreed to fully fund a full-time coordinator and have attracted European Social Funds to cover running costs. A range of local service providers have realigned resources and committed to provide services from the WorkShop, which was formally launched in September 2021.

The WorkShop is one of a number of linked projects that are shaping a new way forward for Newcastle town centre as we respond to the move away from a traditional retail focus to other ways of bringing our community together. Over the initial three-year project, 200 people will be encouraged into volunteering, training and employment, targeting those who are furthest away from the labour market. Learning from previous experience of delivery in a nearby community demonstrated the benefit of a holistic approach to moving people closer to employment and overcoming barriers to participation. Our key message is that partnership working along with in depth local knowledge is essential for the effective delivery of services with our communities.

A challenge remains in attracting long term funding to provide ongoing support to those who need it most. *Actions to level up access to employment need longer-term funding to tackle complex and challenging local issues. Local delivery and consistency of approach is what builds trust and confidence in our ability to meet community needs.*

Council Leader Cllr Simon Tagg commented: "One of the council's key priorities is growing people and places; building a strong and sustainable economy to ensure opportunities and support are available to everyone so that they can improve their lives.

"Through our work with partners to develop an investment plan for Newcastle's Town Deal – and respond to growing challenges during the pandemic – it became clear that there is a real need for something like this in Newcastle. Together we've made this happen and I'm delighted the WorkShop is now open. It is a fantastic addition to the town centre.

"Residents can access advice, direct support and sign-posting to help them access or move towards employment through skills development, training and retraining. It's also fantastic to see a long-term vacant shop being brought back into use."

## Norwich: Investing in our city's future

Norwich City Council was awarded £25m at the end of 2020 from the now Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities, to deliver eight key projects. Developed in partnership with the Norwich Vision Group, local communities, partners and public/private investors; these projects will provide a highly significant boost to deliver major regeneration alongside skills, infrastructure and jobs.

The ACE Centre: This new centre, delivered by City College Norwich, will have a critical impact on local sector skills plans, providing new T levels in construction and engineering, helping to broaden the apprenticeship offer, and support study at HNC/HND level. The facilities will also be able to support adult learning opportunities, including upskilling of existing employees or the re-skilling required to provide new skills to those seeking new careers.

As we bring the ACE centre to life, we will be updating and refurbishing a dedicated teaching lab for automated engineering and manufacturing practices where efficiency and sustainability are key concerns. And providing modern facilities for computer designed mills and lathes, as well as the enhanced ability to teach Industry 4.0 aligned processes. We'll also be creating the first motor vehicle training facility in the region specifically designed to support hybrid and electric vehicles. This will help tackle the urgent need for current training in motor vehicle engineering to have the tools they need to be ready to support the creation of a low carbon transport infrastructure.

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East Norwich regeneration: We've also got ambitious plans to create a sustainable and ambitious new urban quarter for the city with the potential to create up to 4,000 new homes and 6,000 new jobs - potentially making it the largest development opportunity in the east of England.

Critical to moving forward with regeneration is the creation of a masterplan, jointly funded by the Towns Fund, landowners, Homes England and the city council, which will lay out a future vision and provide a framework for comprehensive development. The preparation of the masterplan is being steered by the east Norwich partnership – a public-private sector group.

Leader of Norwich City Council, Cllr Alan Waters, said: "We are proud to be among the first of 101 councils to receive business case sign off to move ahead with all eight of our ambitious Town Deal funded projects. This is testament to the work of the Town Deal board who have helped to ensure each project feeds into our Norwich 2040 Vision of a city which is creative, fair, liveable, connected and dynamic."



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## SECTION THREE

# Tailored approaches for place-based growth

### South Cambridgeshire: Reigniting rural growth

At South Cambridgeshire we are focusing on helping our local businesses and wider local economy build back bigger, bolder and better. From developing two large Enterprise Zones through to launching a district visitor economy brand, we now have a dedicated team to drive business support, economic development, and inward investment. During the past 18 months, we've interacted with well over 3,000 local businesses, with over 1,000 of those visits being in person, and for us, this is just the start.

**Boosting the visitor economy:** Through our dedicated 'Visit South Cambs' online presence, we have just launched the district's first ever bespoke tourism website, supporting businesses in this sector. The aim of the new website and associated marketing is to help visitors explore, discover and enjoy what South Cambridgeshire has to offer in terms of activities, places to eat, cultural attractions and green spaces. The new website also provides B&B, camping, hotel and self-catering listings, making it easier for visitors to the area to find a place to stay to make the most of the district. The website has been steered from inception to launch by South Cambridgeshire's Business Support and Development Team.

South Cambridgeshire District Council's Lead Cabinet Member for Business Recovery and Skills, Cllr Peter McDonald said: "Visit South Cambs has come about as a result of the council's commitment to encourage local people to use their shops and food outlets, so that high streets are retained – but people can only support these local businesses if they know they exist. There really is so much on offer but, without one major 'high street' on which to discover our independent cafés or boutiques, or with our best days out being hidden away in countryside locations, people may not be aware of everything available to us. I'd encourage local people to visit the website and explore, discover and enjoy what's on our doorstep." Find out more at <https://visitsouthcambs.co.uk/>

**Investing in local jobs:** green space and active travel: We've made a multi-million-pound investment in the growing new town of Northstowe, to create new local jobs, green spaces and facilities built around pedestrians and cyclists. This is through the purchase of land that has been allocated as the Local Centre, and the Northstowe Enterprise Zone.

The Local Centre is a fantastic opportunity for the council to help shape and bring forward retail and commercial development. It will create an important meeting place and feature local facilities such as shops for residents, linking employment and residential areas. The vision is to create an area made up of shops, restaurants, cafes and buildings that are active, vibrant, and safe. A community building will provide a central focus point for this area. The council envisages that the Enterprise Zone will become an attractive northern gateway to Northstowe, taking advantage of the Guided Busway's links to Cambridge, St Ives and surrounding villages. The Zone will contain buildings set within a green landscape, providing green links, connections, and places for people to enjoy.

Now the purchase of the sites has been completed, work is already underway help local residents, businesses and local business networks to shape the emerging plans, with the ambition for construction work to begin on site in the summer of 2022.

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South Cambridgeshire District Council's Lead Cabinet Member for Business Recovery and Skills, Cllr Peter McDonald, said: "We're doing everything we can to help create and shape a thriving, healthy community in Northstowe. We're making sure that local people and businesses have every possible chance to help us bring forward the plans; after all, those are the people that already know the area best. This is proof of our commitment to helping bring forward local facilities and jobs at Northstowe – benefiting local residents and businesses too. We hope that the Enterprise Zone will in future be home to many new and growing local businesses."



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## **Broxbourne: Providing local entrepreneurs, start-up businesses and growing business with a bespoke workspace, with the added benefit of onsite access to business advice and support.**

With £5million of financial support from the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), the council is developing a business start-up centre on the Theobalds Business Park that has been acquired by the council. The whole site will provide high quality premises suitable for a range of users, including offices, workshops and engineering facilities. This business centre will be the first to be constructed on the site and will be the gateway to the business park.

The location is ideal for embryonic start-up companies, expanding the opportunities for skills development and the creation of high value jobs in Broxbourne, tackling the shortage of local jobs.

The new business park and training facilities at the business centre will help support local residents with the necessary skills to enable them to engage in these jobs when they become available.

The entire site is a key element of the Council's strategy for employment growth as set out in the adopted Local Plan. It sits in an important employment section of the A10 between its junction with the M25 and College Road.

The business start-up centre itself will comprise 2,322.5m<sup>2</sup> of high-spec sustainable office space for generic use, but with an emphasis on attracting creative and tech companies. It is due for completion in early 2023. Broxbourne Council has a proven track record for this type of centre, having already developed the highly successful Ambition Broxbourne Business Centre (ABBC) incubation model in Hoddesdon. This too was built with financial support from the Hertfordshire LEP. The new centre provides a greater opportunity to capitalise on its location close to the film television and digital production studios.

The council is aiming for a high sustainable build, with platinum level digital connectivity. Research suggests that there will be high demand for the facility, and local estate agents report there are not enough vacant sites. The aim is to capitalise on migration away from central London which is expected to increase the demand for smaller offices and workspaces.

During the construction phase, the council will ensure jobs for local people, with a proportion of jobs to be advertised through the Job Centre at nearby Waltham Cross; recognised as one of the most deprived areas of Hertfordshire.

A programme of increased training will be available for tenant businesses at the centre as well as for the wider business community in Broxbourne which will be delivered at or from the centre, drawing on learnings from the ABBC model. And as the business centre grows its tenants, high-tech training will follow. An objective of the Centre will be to foster collaborative working within the locality both in and outside of the business Centre.



(Conceptual drawing of the new Business and Technology Centre)

## Maidstone: Innovation in healthcare – supporting businesses and entrepreneurs.

Building on the success of the successes of the Business Terrace, an award-winning business hub that has successfully helped Maidstone turn round a high rate of business failure locally, Maidstone Borough Council continues its commitment to supporting the private sector and local businesses with the announcement of the Maidstone Innovation Centre.

The Innovation Centre will enable the borough's economy to diversify, harnessing the MedTech and Lifescience sector, Kent Medical Campus (KMC) and the Enterprise Zone, to provide higher-growth skilled job opportunities.

Maidstone Innovation Centre offers the unique opportunity to locate in the Kent Medical Campus with its existing active academic and Health Science network environments. The centre will provide sector specific support for businesses in the MedTech, Lifescience and Medical sectors, through providing flexible office space and access to business support. The campus is part of the North Kent Enterprise Zone, offering business rates discounts to occupiers worth up to £55,000 annually for five years. Maidstone Borough Council will aim to reinvest the retained business rates from the North Kent Enterprise Zone back into the Innovation Centre and wider Kent Medical Campus.

Building work began in 2020 on the £13.3m Innovation Centre, which is part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund 2014 - 2020 (ERDF) with £5.7m, while Maidstone Borough Council is lending the remaining £6.8m towards the project. And key partners have supported the funding, design and support offering. In 2018, The South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) provided a grant of £156,000 to support with the architectural and design costs for the centre.

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Another key partner of the Innovation Centre is NCL Technology Ventures (NCLTV), who deliver the South East Innovation Programme (SEIP) on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council. This is a package of support for entrepreneurs in the target sector with a view to gain investment by the end of the programme. It aims to support over 150 businesses over three years to develop an investment plan, raise finance and commence trading. This programme is managed by Maidstone Borough Council and delivered by NCLTV not just across the borough, but the whole South East LEP area.

In August 2021, the SEIP helped secure £21 million in Venture Capitalist investment to develop a treatment that could change the lives of those with autoimmune diseases. And the centre is 14% pre-let before practical completion.

One of the confirmed tenants is a company called Creation.Co; a health strategy consultancy business. Having begun their journey in The Business Terrace, they will become the first business to enter the Maidstone Innovation Centre. Creation CEO Dan Ghinn said that "Having been a Maidstone-based company for over 20 years, we are really excited to be part of this new development at the Kent Medical Campus. Moving to the Innovation Centre has allowed us to expand and welcome four new members of the team, we hope by Easter 2022 to have increased our team from 20 to 30."

Maidstone Borough Council's Leader, Councillor David Burton, said "It's really exciting that the work of the Maidstone Innovation Centre and SEIP are at the cutting edge of medical research. We are delighted to be supporting the businesses that are coming to MIC and carrying out that great work. The aim of the SEIP is to support and promote innovation in healthcare that has a real impact on people's lives and this is a great example of that."

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## SECTION FOUR

# Revitalising town centres

## **Broxtowe: A model for community wealth building and a town centre being reinvented**

Hailed as a model for the post-Covid revival of the UK's town centres for playing its part in "community wealth building" and shortlisted for design and construction awards at this year's East Midlands Property Awards, Broxtowe Borough Council have this year launched the "Beeston Square" regeneration development. Starting with the official opening of the 700 seat Arc Cinema complex, the next phase of the project will see three new food and drink retail outlets followed by a large-scale 132 apartment residential development alongside.

Part of Broxtowe Borough Council's long-term £50million plans to boost Beeston town centre, The Arc Cinema complex is backed with funding from Broxtowe Borough Council, sale of the residential site, and the Local Enterprise Partnership. The new Beeston Square in the centre of the town is set to attract more and more people to stay local and support both the visitor and night-time economy. Once the development is fully operational, it is expected that over 100 new jobs will be created for local people.

Ruth Hyde, Chief Executive of Broxtowe Borough Council, explained: "In the cold light of Covid and climate change, we have thought long and hard about the future of our town centres, both in terms of the short-term support we can secure for our communities and the local economy and in the long-term need to help them recover and evolve but remain attractive. There is no one-size-fits-all solution and the important thing is to understand the reality of the challenges our towns face, focus on their particular strengths, and keep a dialogue going with the businesses based in them and the communities who use them about how we can progress".

Councillor Greg Marshall, from Broxtowe Borough Council's project board, said: "It's fantastic to see these great local businesses investing in Beeston. Our Town Square redevelopment is not only helping to bring new and exciting entertainment and leisure facilities to our town, but also helping local businesses to expand and thrive, and creating lots of new jobs too. This is community wealth building at its best, which has always been one of the most important aims of this project."

Beeston Square has been master-planned and designed by Leonard Design Architects led by director John Morgan, who says the approach taken by Broxtowe Borough Council stands out because of its willingness to adapt to changing circumstances. "The key is to recognise that while consumer behaviour continues to evolve, the desire for leisure experiences continues to grow. What this scheme acknowledges is that whilst you can't reinvent the past in terms of retail, you can embrace a future which avoids some of the unnecessarily gloomy predictions about the viability of town centres.

Nick Ferris, from joint agents JLL, said: "Much has been said about the challenges facing town centres. What we have here is a local authority and a place that's actually come up with a coherent proposition to turn those challenges into renewed vitality viability with a gateway development." Will Torr, of joint agents HEB, added: "This is a town centre reinventing itself and we're expecting to make announcements very soon now about the cinema being joined by food and beverage operators. Once the residential element comes on stream, this could be a really significant success story." The team behind the development also includes main contractor Bowmer+Kirkland and project manager Faithful+Gould.



## West Lindsey: Creating a thriving market town to attract housebuilders and tackle market failure

Our vision is to tackle market failure in Gainsborough, one of the most deprived towns in the country, and create a self-sufficient and thriving market town. Our priority is to rebuild an attractive market town in order to attract, rather than incentivise house builders to deliver housing in this principal settlement, which we envisage will deliver 12% of all growth across Central Lincolnshire.

We're using a three-pronged approach, creating an attractive historic town centre and public realm; stabilising the existing community and addressing deprivation; and creating a new and differentiated housing market.

Our achievements so far include:

- A successful Housing Infrastructure Fund bid from Homes England to unlock its Southern Sustainable Urban Extension, which had been stalled since receiving planning permission in 2011 due to heavy upfront infrastructure cost and significant market failure.
- Carried out site assembly and flowed down funding from Single Local Growth Fund to create 135 dwellings at a low value area of Gainsborough.
- Achieved one of the first Local Development Orders to kick start development at Riverside Gateway (up to 245 dwellings).
- Created a Joint Venture company with Dransfield Properties to bring empty commercial and residential units back into use.

- Created a 'Living Over the Shop' grant to create new residential units in town centre to generate footfall.
- Created a 'Shop Front' grant to encourage owners to restore shop fronts to reflect the town's medieval heritage.

We're currently working towards incentivising a cinema operator to develop a derelict town centre site to create an evening economy for the town. And through the Employment and Skills Board we're working with local employers to create new apprenticeship opportunities, working with local colleges and schools to raise aspirations.

The town centre public realm improvements focus on restoring its historic town centre into a thriving centre, full of footfall and activities and reflecting its medieval heritage. An attractive and prosperous town centre, along with Gainsborough's other existing lifestyle offers - excellent schools, high level of skilled employment opportunities, access to countryside and accessibility to Lincoln and Sheffield - will make Gainsborough an attractive place to live.

Our key message is that due to its location in rural Lincolnshire, the land value is incredibly low compared to projects in the South East, and yet several of the housing grant funding sources strongly focus on land value uplift. Any land value uplift will pale in comparison to other parts of the country in terms of value but not in terms of percentage. We ask the government to reconsider using land value uplift as a primary indicator of success as it will disadvantage projects located in lower value areas. And while the council can make steps forward, ongoing investment will be essential to secure a sustainable future for other 'left behind' towns.

Chief Executive Ian Knowles said: 'West Lindsey District Council has an ambitious plan for Gainsborough, we seek to achieve our vision for a self-sustainable historic market town which currently faces market failure and substantial deprivation. We are working closely with various agencies to create a thriving historic town centre, stabilise the existing community and to create a new housing market.'



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## Exeter: 'Liveable Exeter' - community, culture and collaboration

Liveable Exeter is an ambitious 20-year programme of transformational change that will deliver major benefits to residents, the region and the environment by addressing the major challenges of infrastructure, renewal and low carbon development, as well as drawing together the core threads of the city's vision for 2040. This includes our commitment to becoming a carbon neutral city by 2030, delivering 12,000 new homes on brownfield sites, and weaving culture into the heart of the city's development, based on an inclusive economy as the foundation. And as the economic backbone of the region, positive transformation for Exeter will support the wider South West region.

Exeter was given Garden City designation in 2019 and funding from Homes England has been secured to progress work on the delivery of 12,000 new homes in the city. These homes will be built in new urban communities on existing brownfield sites to meet the city's demand for housing. Building on brownfield sites allows the city to create a network of urban communities that encourage active travel, and to protect green spaces and landscapes.

Exeter is a beautiful, historic city. Its existing wards are distinct in character and community, and through Liveable Exeter, we'll work with local communities and partners as we build new places, giving our residents, students and businesses space to have their voices heard.

More than just a housing development programme, the work of the Liveable Exeter programme involves taking a holistic approach to place-making in the city – building on the best of what the city already has to offer and creating a city ready for the future. The Liveable Exeter programme represents nothing less than an ambitious and long-term renewal of the city's fabric to meet people's needs for homes, jobs and services in the 21st century.

To help support such an ambitious programme, the Liveable Exeter Place Board brings together the city's leading public and private sector organisations to collaboratively and proactively plan for the city's future.

Sir Steve Smith, former Vice Chancellor of Exeter University said "The Liveable Exeter Place Board is a most inspiring group to Chair. There is a sense of a single purpose between members to drive towards a common goal which seeks not only sustainable long-term growth for Exeter and the surrounding region, but to do so with people and place at the heart of plans and continue to build a resilient city which is ready for the future."

To deliver our vision for the future, we need Exeter to continue to be a success – and we need to be prepared to work differently to deliver structural changes. Business as usual won't be enough to tackle the challenges we face.

Cllr Phil Bialyk, Leader, Exeter City Council, said "Exeter's success over the last decade has put pressure on housing – we are a place where people want to live and work, and the city is growing fast. That's why our Liveable Exeter plans are so important. It will see the creation of around 12,000 homes over the next 20 years, without adding extra pressures such as congestion to the city".

"Clearly, work of this kind cannot be done by one organisation alone. Exeter is known for its collaborative and community spirit. And this is why we've taken a unique partnership approach in the city and brought different organisations and individuals together to form the Liveable Exeter Place Board. I am confident that by working together Exeter will continue to succeed".

Find out more: [www.liveableexeter.co.uk](http://www.liveableexeter.co.uk)

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## Hatfield Town Centre: Breathing new life into a growing town centre

Following the closure of British Aerospace in Hatfield in 1994, the local economy saw a rapid decline with high levels of unemployment. Increased unemployment coupled with ambitious failed redevelopment plans and the world financial crisis of 2008 left Hatfield Town in a very sorry position with boarded up shops, flats in disrepair and public confidence in the local authority at an all-time low.

Following the failings of the previous redevelopment plans in partnership with an external property investment and development company, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council recognised that urgent intervention was required, and the council, having now parted company with the investment and development company, had to re-evaluate how they could safeguard the town centre.

In 2019, The Hatfield Renewal Framework was published, showing opportunity sites to be developed in the future, across the town. Rather than a detailed masterplan, principles of development and approximate time scales outlined the council's vision and strategy for the town's next 30 years. Key to these proposals was consolidating the town's surface level car parks into one location through a multi-storey car park (MSCP). Partly funded by the Herts LEP, the award-winning car park provides a new link into the town centre, through the newly refurbished town square. The MSCP has enabled development to take place on now-redundant surface car parks. By July 2021, the council had completed construction of its MSCP, and construction commenced onsite for a large residential development on one of the car parks.



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The 2017 award of One Public Estate (OPE) funding provided financial support to resource the council's development team and expert consultancy advice to deliver a new mixed-use development of the eastern quarter of the Town Centre. Further funding from Homes England has brought forward the One Town Centre development, which will provide 71 new homes and 1200m<sup>2</sup> retail space. Today, demolition of the existing buildings has been completed, with the construction underway for a new mixed-use scheme, which will become the gateway to the town centre. Further developments, including 80 new homes at Link Drive are also underway, which will contribute to the vitality of the Town Centre.

Each of the residential schemes provide their own S106 contributions, which will see further investment into the wider town. Pre-pandemic comparison spend increased by 38% as did footfall (Experian, 2018). Some of the pop-up units have gone on to take up tenancies in newly available units. The tenants of the refurbished flats have established a community which previously didn't exist, creating a demand for an evening economy. Applications for redevelopment have also been forthcoming on assets not in the council's ownership.

Post-pandemic recovery looks optimistic for the town. Decisions to re-locate library services and community uses into the centre of the town has ensured occupancy rates and a source of attraction. The public realm refurbishments have benefitted the businesses which operate outside of their unit, and together have made the town more resilient to economic fluctuations.

Ka Ng, Chief Executive at Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council said:

"We are extremely proud of the development work that has taken place across Hatfield. Our ambitious plans are coming to fruition and breathing new life into our growing town centre. We are optimistic for the future and excited for the growing communities that can enjoy all that Hatfield has to offer."



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