



Shropshire
Council

Economic Growth Strategy for Shropshire 2017–2021





Introduction

This strategy sets out Shropshire Council's commitment and ambition to grow the local economy of the County.

It has taken into account the recently commissioned work with consultants IPPR North to develop a new economic vision alongside our own corporate plan and vision to 'make Shropshire a great place to live, learn and work'. It also links into and informs the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Strategic Economic Plan and European Structural Investment Fund (ESIF) Strategy. The objectives of the strategy also link to the West Midlands Combined Authority Strategic Economic Plan and the national

economic picture, in particular the modern Industrial Strategy for the UK.

The aim of this economic growth strategy is to provide the vision and ambition that will direct the actions Shropshire Council will take to achieve increased economic productivity and a prosperous and resilient economy.

Shropshire Council is committed in its role to grow the local economy and this includes our ability to invest in the economic growth agenda and to accelerate activity through our financial resources. An action plan will be produced to support this strategy that will inform the level of investment and timeframe



Our values as a Council and our approach to growth across the services within our own organisation will influence the success of this strategy. Equally we must engage effectively with people to communicate our growth ambitions and what we are doing to achieve them. We have and will continue to develop a commercial, enterprising and innovative approach which we are instilling into the culture of our organisation to help deliver our strategy.

However, we do recognise that Shropshire Council does not have control over all actions and activities that will generate economic growth. Therefore our vision will only be achieved by working collaboratively

across the public and private sectors and with our communities. We will commit to working with our strategic partners including the Marches LEP, Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise sector (VCSE), Town Councils, West Midlands Combined Authority and neighbouring authorities for the benefit of Shropshire's economy, businesses and residents.

'Building an economic vision for Shropshire – A report by IPPR North', February 2017 has informed this strategy. The IPPR North report (jointly commissioned with the University Centre Shrewsbury) is centred on four themes: people, place, private businesses and public services

and has made thirteen recommendations linked to these. Our strategy does not repeat these but has taken these recommendations into account in setting out the actions here.

There is a wealth of evidence and analysed findings that sit behind this document including a research report from IPPR North, Oxford Economics forecasts and the Shropshire Socio Economic Context report produced by the Council's Policy, Performance and Intelligence team.



The Vision

Our Economic Growth Vision for Shropshire...

To be the best place to do business and invest, renowned for its pool of local talent and expertise. We will strive to maximise our economic potential and increase productivity by fully utilising the benefits of our special environment and high quality assets.

Shropshire is a high quality location and has a generally well performing economy. It has one of the best natural and historic environments in England. It already has a reputation for being a fantastic place to live, and an economically active population with higher levels of qualifications than the national or regional average. Shropshire communities enjoy an exceptional high quality of life and environment, with vibrant historic market towns, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and one of the highest concentrations of historic monuments and buildings in the country. We will use these assets to attract investment and will continue to nurture them to ensure they are sustained for current and future generations to enjoy.



Our objectives

There is however, a step change needed in Shropshire's economic productivity. It has significant potential to do more and do it better. To realise our ambition to facilitate sustainable economic growth, Shropshire Council will be focused and committed to achieve maximum economic productivity from the assets and opportunities across the County. This will be based on three key objectives:

- Support and grow new and existing businesses
- Attract inward investment
- Develop and retain talent and skills

Delivering our Vision – priority actions and targets

To deliver against this vision we have six priority actions:

1. **Target** actions and resources where there are economic opportunities
2. **Enable** businesses to start, grow and succeed
3. **Deliver** infrastructure to support growth
4. **Meet** skills needs of businesses and people's aspirations for work
5. **Promote** Shropshire to investors
6. **Build** our reputation as a Council that is 'good to do business with'



As part of an organisational communications strategy, we will define a clear communications and relationship plan to underpin these objectives for economic growth. This plan will centre on regular communications with residents, businesses and key stakeholders. We will work collaboratively with our partners and neighbours, to ensure that delivery agencies understand our vision and to influence decision makers in Central Government.

This ongoing two-way conversation will define clear messages and re-iterate the objectives of our economic growth strategy. We will continue to build on relationships with businesses, organisations and networks to achieve shared objectives, and maximise communication channels for effective and positive outcomes. We will also continue to look at opportunities to improve the resilience of our towns and communities, maintaining Shropshire as great place to live and work.

In order to qualify our ambition for growth, and to support the Marches LEP ambitions and targets to build 70,000 new homes and create 40,000 new jobs by 2031, together with the West Midlands Combined Authority ambitious plans for growth, this strategy sets the following targets in Shropshire over the next 5 years (to 2021);

- Increase GVA (currently £6 billion) by 12%
- £300 million of private sector investment
- At least 3,700 new jobs
- 1,375 new homes per annum

These targets are ambitious, and importantly are informed by evidence from the current Local Plan together with recent studies and forecasts including work by Oxford Economics.

The following sections set out each of the six priority actions, which will be managed through a detailed action plan.

1. Target actions and resources on Economic Opportunities

There are a number of key opportunities that have been considered in the preparation of this strategy. This will be the focus of our future activity, working to maximise and promote these opportunities for the economic wellbeing and success of Shropshire.

- **Strategic location and economic relationships**

The geographic location and economic landscape of Shropshire provides an increasingly significant opportunity and one which we should promote and capitalise on. We are in a unique location situated within the West Midlands Combined Authority and Midlands Engine, on the border of the Northern Powerhouse and the boundary of Wales. This is a major opportunity given the status of these economic regions by Central Government and the collaborative cross border benefits with Mid Wales, particularly for infrastructure and skills.

Immediate actions:

- Participate in the West Midlands Combined Authority as a non-constituent member for the benefit of Shropshire and focus on the key areas of collaboration that are set out in the Strategic Economic Plan to 2030 to accelerate economic growth, employment and productivity and focus on mutual priority actions, including specifically the Land Commission and Growth Company.
- Work collaboratively with local authority partners and other LEP areas to help deliver the priorities within the Marches ESIF strategy and ensure that Shropshire benefits from the resources available in current and future programmes.
- Align with the Midlands Engine strategy and identify the benefits and opportunities for Shropshire linked to priority projects and key economic sectors.



Short/medium term actions:

- Work with Powys Council and Growing Mid Wales Partnership to understand the opportunities for collaboration on shared agendas – currently infrastructure and skills.
- Work with key partners across Cheshire and Staffordshire to align economic growth and infrastructure priorities in the North East of the County and ensure we are 'HS2 ready'.
- Position investment opportunities within promotional campaigns and collateral presenting the economic opportunities in the West Midlands Regions and other regions adjoining Shropshire.
- Assist the tourism and visitor economy sector partners to promote Shropshire as a destination and maximise the built and natural heritage assets throughout the county.

● Major employment sites and growth corridors

There will be further opportunities to bring forward new employment land to meet our economic needs and we will work with developers and partners to prepare existing sites for occupation and to identify and prioritise deliverable future sites based on a return on investment. We want to build on our rich legacy of quality business, high added value, quality of life and sustainability. The adopted Local Plan is currently under review with a target submission date to the planning inspectorate of December 2018. It provides the framework for housing and economic delivery across the county ensuring that we have a plan-led approach to achieving sustainable development.

Having readily available serviced employment sites in the right locations is key to our growth strategy and fundamental to increasing our economic productivity. In terms of meeting the needs of Shropshire based companies including those who are starting up and expanding, and to meet the requirements of other businesses and developers outside of the county looking to relocate and invest in the county. We will be bold, ambitious and forward thinking in our methods and approach to prioritising sites, and investing resources where needed to bring these sites forward for employment activity. This will be clearly presented in our investment strategy.

The strategic corridors and growth zones are clustered into the following:

- M54/A5 East growth corridor – this is linked to investment in Telford and the clustering and supply chain opportunities from existing and future companies in close proximity to this part of the County. This is a key road and rail transport corridor which reinforces Shropshire’s close proximity to the West Midlands and the growth potential that will develop from the Land Commission as part of the Combined Authority structure. We recognise that there are site constraints in some of these urban centres, but there are also opportunities:
 - To support the cluster of activities and key sectors in Bridgnorth and work with existing companies on future plans.
 - For the Council to work with neighbouring Telford and Wrekin Council and other key stakeholders to play a leading role in capitalising on opportunities arising from the redevelopment of the former Ironbridge Power Station.
- A5 west growth corridor including the site for Oswestry Innovation Park and Oswestry as the second largest historic market town in the County.
- Central Shropshire – Shrewsbury is a nationally renowned historic County town and serves a much wider catchment including Mid Wales. Opportunities within the town centre and the major employment sites at Shrewsbury Business Park, Battlefield, and the Sustainable Urban Extensions to the South and West of the town.



- North East Shropshire and the A41 growth corridor linking to the M54 – related to the HS2 hub at Crewe and links to the North West to Cheshire and beyond. Includes the historic market towns of Whitchurch and Market Drayton together with the MOD owned site, Clive Barracks at Tern Hill, which will become available for development in 2022.
- A49 growth corridor related to strategic north-south road and rail links that connect Craven Arms and the key historic market towns of Ludlow and Church Stretton, with the proposed Crewe Hub and linking into Herefordshire, specifically to Leominster and Hereford.

Immediate actions:

- Produce a growth investment strategy for the key employment sites.
- Develop a project pipeline for the next 10 to 15 years. This will include the short and medium term priorities and set out what enabling works the sites will need to come forward. This will include Council owned sites, as well as understanding any interventions critical to third party owned sites that will contribute to our growth objectives. (This is aligned with the current Local Plan review.)

Short/medium term actions:

- Work with the Marches LEP and West Midlands Combined Authority to articulate the offer that Shropshire has for employment growth and work to secure funding to support this.
- Work with the Department for International Trade and the Midlands Investment Hub to present clearly the strategic employment sites in Shropshire.
- Develop a growth strategy for each of our key market towns. (Aligned with the current Local Plan Review.)



• Target growing and under-represented sectors

Shropshire and the Marches have a number of sectors that are performing well and where there are extremely successful companies operating in the locality. Our strategy includes working with companies in these sectors to support their growth and ongoing success. We will support innovative and advancing solutions in these sectors to enable their growth in an ever competing global economy. We have identified six existing sectors where there is growth potential, particularly with an emphasis on technologies and innovation;

- Advanced manufacturing including engineering, agri-food and agri-tech
- Food and drink processing
- Health and social care
- Visitor economy (and heritage based businesses)
- Environmental science and technologies
- Creative and digital industries

As part of our strategy to increase investment in these sectors, we will set out specific and clear actions relating to each of them. This will include supporting work on the development of the Agri-Tech west offer, a cross LEP initiative that is being led by Harper Adams University. We are committed to working with the health and higher education sectors on opportunities for us to become an area renowned for advancements in health and social care technologies and digital solutions. There will be a strategic view of the visitor economy for Shropshire and the wider Marches area, this will be an opportunity to develop strategic linkages and a coherent approach to marketing the County on a national and international scale. There is a specific action for us to optimise the knowledge that exists in Shropshire within the environmental science and technologies sector and to align this with the Government's agenda to promote smart and clean technologies and a low carbon economy. We will take a coherent approach to the creative and digital industries sector and understand the network and business to business opportunities for increasing productivity.

As the implications of Brexit and the details of the deal that the UK Government negotiates with Europe becomes clearer, we will work with sectors and partners to fully understand the opportunities and issues specifically for Shropshire and the wider Marches area. This will include implications for the agricultural sector in particular and we will engage with local and national organisations to capture their full input, information and intelligence.

As well as growth and existing sectors, we will also target growing under-represented sectors in our current economy, but those that are linked to the sector strengths we have. Financial and professional services and retail are particular sectors we can target. There is already a presence of companies operating across these sectors (including national retail, independent retailers, legal, accountancy, banking, business administration, land and property agents, architects and building contractors servicing the heritage sector) which are fundamental to the business processes of companies across other sectors both within Shropshire and beyond the County. We have scope to develop this and to promote our location and business base to existing and new companies.

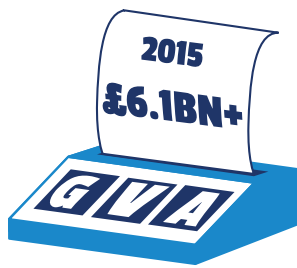
Immediate actions:

- Use this strategy to clearly set out the sectoral propositions and actions relating to each of these with partners and quantify the economic impacts of each sector.
- Work with partners including the Marches Centre for Manufacturing and Technology in Shropshire and support partnership priorities in the engineering cluster.
- Prepare a coherent visitor economy strategy alongside the sector, including those which provide a heritage based offer, that clearly sets out the ambitions and opportunities and is clear on the Council's role within it.
- Work with colleagues across the Marches to develop a position statement on key considerations arising from Brexit for our businesses and economy.

Short/medium term actions:

- Support growth opportunities in the agri-tech sector by working with Harper Adams University and partners to become leaders in this field and develop the agri-tech West proposition.
- Develop an approach with the agricultural sector in preparation for Brexit and work with the Marches LEP and neighbouring authorities to explore the opportunities to play a key role in influencing Central Government.
- Explore and define the scope for the digital health and social care sector in Shropshire working with colleagues in the HE sector (particularly University Centre Shrewsbury) and health sector (including existing centres of excellence).
- Work with our existing HQ businesses in the advanced manufacturing sector to help promote Shropshire and its successes to external partners.
- Strategically understand Shropshire's natural and historic environment assets, knowledge and expertise, and the ways in which they can be used as resources. This links to the University Centre Shrewsbury ambitions to become a centre of excellence for environmental sciences, technology and management and create an environmental innovation hub.
- Review the previous study carried out into creative industries and set this in the current context of increased digitisation, social media and innovation in the sector. We will also learn from successes elsewhere e.g. Coventry and Warwickshire.





High levels of businesses survive at least 3 years

67.9%

compared to 59.4% nationally

● Identifying External Funding Opportunities

Shropshire Council and its partners will be open to the opportunities provided by UK Government, European and other funding bodies, including Growth Deal and the European Structural and Investment Fund. Such investment is already being utilised positively to deliver economic growth in Shropshire and we will continue to do so. When funding opportunities align with local growth priorities, we will seek to provide the advice, capacity and expertise to take advantage of these, to maximise investment which will grow the local economy in the county.

Immediate actions:

- Maximise the amount of funding secured from Europe to deliver economic growth across Shropshire and ensure effective delivery of those already funded.
- Fully utilise the funding currently secured for economic growth projects through Growth Deal and other UK government sources.
- Maintain intelligence of potential funding opportunities for projects in our pipeline

Short/medium term actions:

- Work with the Marches LEP to understand the opportunities for funding post Brexit.
- Advocate the importance of our projects with potential funders and collaborate to tackle issues and deliver priorities.
- Work with partners to secure external funding to bring forward projects.

2. Enable businesses to start, grow and succeed

There are over 15,480 businesses in Shropshire with the vast majority of these classed as small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) where the number of employees is less than 250. Continuing the positive work already in place to support this SME base, including supporting start-up businesses through the Marches Growth Hub and our Shropshire Hub, remains a key action in our strategy. The relationships and track record of success with this group of companies will not be underestimated in terms of the importance that they play in our economy.

We will identify fast growing companies and work with those who have potential to increase output and employee numbers through our business relationship management function. We will also continue to work with our partners to ensure that we develop the best business support offer and ensure that Shropshire businesses benefit from external opportunities which will meet their needs.

We will build on our existing programme of engagement and collaboration with our larger companies, supporting their growth potential and the spin-off benefits from their presence in Shropshire. This includes business chain opportunities (linked to under-represented sectors identified above) and their involvement in generating solutions to common challenges, for example the Marches Centre for Manufacturing and Technology.

The Shropshire Business Board will continue to be a key partner in delivering our growth agenda and we will work with board members to continually build on the relationships and opportunities that are generated from this close collaboration. These members will have an increasingly important role to act as champions for Shropshire and to support representations to Government on key policy issues and future changes.





Immediate actions:

- Continue to support the Marches LEP in delivery of the Marches Growth Hub website.
- Continue successful delivery of the Marches Growth Hub, Shropshire and business support provision, working closely with key delivery partners, in particular the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, local authority project partners, the Business Board, and the universities and colleges to deliver a gold standard support package for SMEs.
- Continue to develop the Shropshire hub's outreach programme of business support provision and events.
- Work closely with the Marches Centre for Manufacturing and Technology in the development of a satellite Growth Hub based in Bridgnorth.
- Ongoing business relationship management with our existing companies and key account management with our major employers.
- Work with and support the growth of supply chain companies across the sectors and provide efficient and effective responses to their queries.
- Continue to service the Business Board and work collaboratively with board members to achieve this strategy for growth, working with them to review and evaluate progress annually.



the average number
of jobs per
enterprise

12,000

the number of businesses
who employ
less than 4 people



Upto March 2017

1,980 businesses

or individuals visited the
Growth Hub for
business support



Short/medium term actions:

- Record effectively all engagement with companies and communicate this internally within the Council with relevant departments to ensure businesses receive a joined up approach.
- Identify those sites that could provide incubator opportunities and space for smaller businesses in the County to expand.
- Produce a responsive and relevant programme of business events, liaising closely with the business community and our key partners.
- Continue to build strong relationships with key business support providers.
- Through a robust business plan ensure the ongoing success and sustainability of the business support model and offer in Shropshire.



15,480
enterprises
registered in Shropshire

82.4%
of people aged
16-64 are
economically active

3. Deliver Infrastructure to support growth

The delivery of high quality infrastructure to meet the needs of businesses and residents is essential to the implementation of this economic growth strategy for Shropshire. We will ensure that the infrastructure is fit for purpose by putting in place a coherent strategy and clear programme to address the issues and fulfil future requirements. We will also ensure through delivery that we integrate the key principles of natural infrastructure such as waterways and green corridors. A list of all immediate and short/medium term actions related to transport infrastructure, digital connectivity, utilities capacity, housing and local place infrastructure is summarised at the end of this section.

Shropshire Council's Strategic Programme Board will maintain an overview of all economic growth and infrastructure projects which are led by the Council or where the Council has a role in enabling partners to deliver. Options and opportunities to use renewable energy measures, reduce carbon emissions and the integration of low carbon district heating will be key considerations for projects. The design of new developments will be encouraged to consider the use of sustainable construction techniques, resource efficiencies and how new proposals positively address impacts of pollution.

Transport infrastructure:

There are a series of local, regional and national challenges to transport infrastructure provision to enable growth and the development of new homes and employment space in Shropshire. The transport infrastructure in Shropshire is of particular regional importance and the Council's involvement with Midlands Connect is key to enhancing its capacity.

Shropshire Council and the Marches LEP is actively engaged with Midlands Connect at Board level. The Marches LEP has also produced a Strategic Corridors study, supported by the three Local Authorities, which is informing the Midlands Connect programme.



Through the Marches LEP we have identified our strategic transport corridors which are vital to deliver growth across the Marches area. These are the strategic road and rail networks that are the responsibility of Highways England and Network Rail and which will require investment from Central Government to improve them, providing benefits that spread beyond Shropshire onto the regional footprint.

Our engagement with Highways England, as it develops Route Improvement Strategies, is focussing on improvements to the A49 and A5, together with secondary impacts caused by 'pinch points' on both the Strategic Road Network and the local highway network. The resolution of those 'pinch points' on routes accessing European and global markets through the Welsh and North West ports, will have a beneficial impact both regionally and locally. The Council is also working with the Road Rail partnership, a statutory body with Network Rail and Highways England that is enabling conversations about linking improvements to railway infrastructure to growth opportunities.

Shropshire Council, through its active involvement within West Midland Rail Ltd is already gaining service improvements for the Shrewsbury to Birmingham service, together with later and improved Sunday services.

Shropshire continues to input its development proposals into both the Midlands Connect process and the periodic Rail industry consultations to enable the use of rail to enable growth in those rail connected Shropshire market towns, which will support the wider WMCA Strategic Economic Plan objectives. An example of this would be the extension of the electrification from Wolverhampton to Shrewsbury. Electrification will not only help to achieve added potential economic benefits but will provide ongoing environmental benefits to those towns served by services.

The ever tightening public purse and the increasingly competitive environment to secure public investment into infrastructure means we must be smart and clear about our priorities and look at innovative ways to deliver schemes including co-ordinating



with neighbouring authorities where appropriate. We have been successful in securing investment into some of our transformational local schemes including the Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Package, Oxon Link Road and feasibility funding for the North West Relief Road for Shrewsbury. We need to continue to demonstrate clearly the case for investment and articulate with partners how investment in our infrastructure facilitates economic growth.

Digital connectivity:

Ensuring that mobile connectivity and broadband provision across Shropshire supports our ambitions for growth and fulfils the requirements of how our residents and employers choose to live and work is extremely important. The role of our Connecting Shropshire programme is key as is our responsibility to continue to put forward the case for greater investment in mobile and broadband coverage and for this to be specific to meet the needs of our primarily rural geography.

Digital connectivity is now fundamental for businesses whether global, small or for individuals in Shropshire working from home. Provision and reliability of the digital network will enable all aspects of business to operate and grow and will be a basic requirement of any investors looking to locate here.



54,336 premises
now have access to
superfast broadband



Utilities capacity:

We know that on some of our existing and future housing and employment sites there are constraints as a result of the lack of capacity in some of the utilities. We will work closely with landowners, tenants and utility providers to foster the effective planning of infrastructure investment in Shropshire, to understand capacity constraints and to explore ways of addressing these where it is possible to do so. We acknowledge that our role within this can be limited and there may be opportunities for the market and for investors to address such constraints. For example, we have engaged with Scottish Power Energy Networks in helping to secure significant investment proposals in the north of the County to improve electricity infrastructure by 2021. There may also be opportunities to look at our own abilities and opportunities to produce some of our own supply – for example district heat networks.

Housing:

The availability of housing of the right type, quality and cost, and in the right location to meet the needs of the population and to ensure that Shropshire remains an attractive place to live forms part of our growth strategy. It is an important consideration for businesses that employees will be able to secure the type of housing they want and for our balanced approach to growth with increased homes, jobs and productivity. This will need to align with our housing strategy and the Local Plan review.

We recognise that the delivery of housing is not always in our control as a Council but we must support the supply of housing through a plan-led approach and the broad distribution and allocation of strategic sites. We will also need to support the delivery of sustainable residential development which provides appropriate access to local facilities, services and infrastructure, whilst also conserving our high quality natural and historic environments. There are different requirements for different segments



of our population and the needs of older people compared to graduates and families must be considered in the strategic planning of housing. There is a particular need to consider adequate provision for starter and affordable accommodation to help retain and attract families and young professionals to the area.

We will work in partnership with communities, registered providers and the private sector to ensure opportunities are available for the market to continue to deliver homes at a sufficient rate to meet needs. We will be developing new innovative housing solutions to scope and deliver homes that meet the needs of our communities and support the wider adult social care agenda, as well as support a growing economy. A range of delivery mechanisms will be explored including opportunities for direct delivery by Shropshire Council, an example of this is the 'One Shropshire' scheme. We will also engage with the Homes and Communities Agency to explore how programmes they operate can be implemented in Shropshire together with full consideration of the actions proposed in the Government's Housing White Paper: Fixing our broken housing market (February 2017).

Local place infrastructure:

There are many facilities and assets that contribute to a place and the Council's role in place shaping is important in the context of economic growth because it helps to create the conditions and environment that attracts people and businesses to Shropshire. This links to the Council's leisure and cultural strategies, the provision and standard of schools in the County, the provision of public services and the use of public assets.

The way in which we will utilise the high quality natural environment and attractiveness of the historic and built environment to promote Shropshire to investors will be referred to again below. Within this infrastructure context it is also important to highlight the role of the Council in helping to shape the proposition of Shropshire as a place to live and work.



All actions related to infrastructure to support growth

Immediate actions:

- Refresh and update our infrastructure investment plan and programme to support growth over the short, medium and long term (this will need to be continually reviewed and updated).
- Continue the roll out of the Connecting Shropshire programme and promote the case for increased mobile and broadband coverage with Central Government and providers.

Short/medium term actions:

- Deliver the schemes already in the programme that have secured funding and maximise the positive impacts of them to the economy and communities e.g. Shrewsbury Integrated Transport Package.
- Continue to work with utility providers both at a strategic level to communicate Shropshire's vision and growth objectives and at a local scheme level to seek to deliver the optimal solutions for employment and housing developments.
- Through the Council's role as planning authority, promote high quality design solutions to underpin the delivery of sustainable new development and seek to address future economic barriers.
- Promote a strategic 'plan-led' approach to housing and employment development and use the local plan review to support this.
- Work with the Homes & Communities Agency, communities, Registered Providers, Trusts and the private sector to help bring forward the supply of new homes.
- Develop and deliver new innovative housing solutions to meet our residents' needs.
- Consider use of our own assets, services and skills in ways that continue to support place making and deliver economic growth.

4. Meet skills needs and people's aspirations for work

We will need to support potential across all segments of the working age population to maximise our full economic output. In support of this we will prepare a skills strategy that meets the future needs and growth opportunities for Shropshire's economy and which aligns with the Marches LEP skills strategy and action plan. Our strategy will be focused both from the business perspective taking into account what skills companies need currently and into the future, and a people perspective to ensure that those who want to work can access the training provision and tools that will lead to employment.

We recognise that the Council has a role to play in helping to match the skills needs of existing companies, and future projections of business activity, with training and learning provision from our educational institutions and providers. This will apply through all stages of learning from schools, FE colleges, the HE sector and adult training providers. We can help to share information from our intelligence about skills needs, introduce businesses and education providers to each other, and communicate known future development plans and growing sectors so that schools can inform and prepare young people who may take these opportunities in the future.

We will use the opportunities from the apprenticeship levy to recruit apprentices into our own organisation as well as work with businesses on the apprenticeship plan for the County. We will work with centres of excellence and Higher and Further Education sectors to develop more centres in Shropshire that provide vocational learning, opportunities for collaboration with businesses and to ultimately support more apprenticeship positions.

We want to support collaboration between research and business as this will be a key route to seeing the development of innovative solutions and new technologies in some of our target sectors and will help give Shropshire a leading edge in some of these. We see the presence of the HE sector in the County as essential going forward alongside working with HE institutions based outside our area in neighbouring authorities and with whom a number of our businesses work with and have connections to.



The current demographic of Shropshire is well evidenced and documented. We need to work within this context and maximise the opportunities this provides us. We need to find ways of supporting a younger workforce and retaining the talent and skills of young people and graduates in the County. This is linked to the housing offer, affordability of the area, and supporting cultural and vibrant hubs in the key towns. We need to support the 'middle' range of our working population by encouraging those people who are likely to be professional individuals or couples and families to live and then stay in Shropshire. Providing the opportunities of good quality employment and future development potential in the work place for ambitious residents to progress are key factors for this demographic of the local population.

Some of those working locally are under-employed, working in roles that they are over-qualified for. This creates two key problems, one that there is the chance that these people will leave Shropshire to take on 'better' employment outside of the County and these skills and resources (and those of their families potentially) are then lost. Secondly, whilst these people are in these roles and not progressing then vacancies for lower skilled people are not available. Tackling in-work progression by working with companies and attracting new companies into Shropshire with higher qualified opportunities for work is part of our strategy.

Our increasing older population provides Shropshire with an opportunity for those that want to work within this age group. There is a pool of labour for volunteering opportunities within businesses and communities, and knowledge or skills to share with a new generation of entrepreneurs through mentoring and coaching. This could lead to volunteering hubs in the community and potential to work with other public service providers to help deal with demands and build community resilience.

Whilst there is lower unemployment in Shropshire compared to regional and national averages, our strategy recognises the barriers facing some of our residents in accessing employment. These challenges can be complex and may relate to health and well-being issues as well as a lack of skills. This calls for a joint public sector approach between Health and Employment services to deliver support to individuals in a more holistic way.



In particular, this strategy recognises the link between employment and mental health and how being actively engaged in work can help reduce and prevent some of the impacts of poor mental health and low levels of confidence and self-esteem. It is estimated that mental ill-health costs the UK economy £70 billion per year through lost productivity, social benefits and health care. Therefore working with employers to create a working environment that supports staff mental wellbeing and collaborating with partners who support those with mental health issues to access the labour market will have social and economic benefit.

Immediate actions:

- Prepare a detailed skills plan for Shropshire working collaboratively with businesses and education and training providers to ensure this is evidence based and targeted on actions to address the challenges specific to us e.g. encouraging an increase in higher qualified and better paid jobs.
- Continue to work with schools and colleges to facilitate relationships with businesses and help to foster entrepreneurship and ensure young people are aware of future opportunities for employment in Shropshire.



Short/medium term actions:

- Agree a way of sharing information on future developments and sector growth with schools, colleges and universities to support young people to make informed decisions about their careers.
- Implement the Council's apprenticeship plan and work with vocational facilities and providers to support skills provision for identified key sectors.
- Continue to collaborate on initiatives and programmes with the FE and HE sector that will benefit Shropshire businesses and economy.
- Working with businesses to explore initiatives to facilitate in work progression, this could relate to retraining courses and programmes and some up-skilling.
- Work with the community and voluntary sector and public service partners to understand the volunteering capacities and opportunities and help to facilitate where appropriate.
- Continue to support projects and programmes to ensure that Shropshire benefits from the European Social Fund.
- Explore best practice in multi-agency approaches to supporting individuals with health and employment skills needs and align this with the Government's new Work and Health Programme.
- Raise the awareness of mental health and wellbeing with employers through networks and opportunities for sharing best practice and engaging in key initiatives such as organisational campaigns and support and advice.



**of the population
have at least one
qualification**



**Businesses reporting
a skills gap**

**Shropshire's population
is becoming more
highly skilled**



5. Promote Shropshire to investors

To attract new investment into Shropshire we will need to promote our offer clearly and effectively in the national and international market place. This will require communicating a strong identity and clear messages as to why investors should choose Shropshire to commit their resources over other locations.

We need to be bold and confident and sell the benefits that Shropshire can offer to businesses and investors. Understanding what the private sector is looking for when making investment decisions is key to informing the approach we take. Fundamentally this needs to be about generating confidence in the market opportunities and locational benefits of investing in Shropshire, enabling businesses to be successful and make a financial return on investment. In addition to bespoke requirements that will be specific to each enquiry, the components set out in this strategy will be fundamental to their considerations.

The quality of our environment for people to work, live in and visit forms one of the County's greatest assets. It will form part of our proposition to investors and we will fully utilise the opportunity for us to promote our strong heritage, cultural, and natural offer. The attractive combination we have to offer includes the mixture of market towns and within them the retail and historic cores, cultural activities, and open spaces. Our countryside offers a diverse and widely celebrated range of landscapes, and offers a rich array of historic villages and farms, country houses, ancient monuments, parks and gardens, canals, rivers and wildlife sites. Their sustainable economic future is important, not least to the many businesses which trade off this offer.

We have a strong relationship in place with the Department of International Trade and we will ensure that this is developed going forward, with specific sector leads.

We will promote our economic growth ambitions and opportunities with Central Government as well as with the private sector and we can do this in a number of ways. In particular we will work with our MPs to increase engagement with Ministers and support our approach to key businesses and responses to opportunities that are announced centrally.



We will work with the Shropshire Business Board, stakeholders and private sector networks to develop and implement our promotional activities. These partners and networks are key to providing the business experience of Shropshire and we will continue to develop our portfolio of Case Studies.

We will have a clear approach to promotional campaigns and the collaborative opportunities for promoting ourselves, this will include on a Marches LEP, West Midlands Combined Authority and Midlands Engine footprint as appropriate. It will also involve collaboration with neighbouring authorities and wider economic initiatives in some instances.

Immediate actions:

- Prepare an investment proposition for Shropshire based on why people and businesses should invest/locate/work here.
- Continue to build upon our Invest in Shropshire website and social media presence.

Short/medium term actions:

- Agree the suite of promotional material to communicate the proposition. This will include an investment prospectus and map.
- Grow the investment brand for Shropshire based on our vision and economic ambitions.
- Produce an engagement plan that includes the strategy for targeting potential investors, and use existing relationships and linkages with companies already here to support this.
- Set out which campaigns, conferences and networks we want to target and be involved in, for example through the Midlands Engine and Invest in Great campaign (DIT)

6. Build our reputation as a Council that is 'good to do business with'

In setting out this strategy we are demonstrating our serious commitment to support growth in Shropshire's economy. We therefore need to ensure that we work in the most effective, efficient and intelligent ways within our organisation to achieve this, including commercial and enterprising solutions and approaches (as outlined in the Commercial Strategy) and targeting our resources where they will have greatest impacts.

We will listen to and understand business needs, both existing and new, and instil the need for timely and clear responses and decisions across all services that have a role in economic growth. We have an excellent track record of successfully securing external funding to deliver economic growth priorities and we will continue to maximise opportunities and resource to deliver the economic aspirations within this strategy.

We want to be a Council that organisations, partners and businesses have positive experiences of working with.

Immediate actions:

- Continue the strong relationship with Shropshire Business Board.
- Listen to feedback and use this to inform future working and our approaches as a Council.
- Internal review of functions to ensure an 'end to end' offer is provided to businesses.
- Continually assess the growth culture of the organisation to ensure that across all services we are working as positively and pro-actively as is possible.

Short/medium term actions:

- Develop the right culture across the organisation by developing specific workforce development packages for colleagues.
- Develop a 'wrap around' support package for major investment into the County.

Performance and monitoring

An action plan sits alongside this strategy and will be set out as immediate (6 months), short term (next 2 years), medium term (next 5 years) and long term (beyond 5 years). This action plan, along with the overall targets will be reviewed regularly and updated annually by Shropshire Council for the duration of this strategy.

References

The following is a list of all the strategies, documents and papers referenced within the Economic Growth Strategy for Shropshire 2017-2021

Building an Economic Vision for Shropshire – A Report by IPPR North (2017)

European Structural Investment Fund (ESIF) Strategy 2014-2020

Marches LEP Strategic Corridors Study

Marches LEP Three Year Skills Plan 2017-2020

Marches Local Enterprise (LEP) Strategic Economic Plan

Midland Engine Strategy (2017)

Oxford Economic Baseline Forecasts for Shropshire, 2012-2036

Shropshire Council Commercial Strategy 2017-2021

Shropshire Council Corporate Plan 2016/2017

Shropshire Council Local Plan Partial Review 2016-2036*

Shropshire Economic Profile 2017

West Midlands Combined Authority Strategic Economic Plan (SEP)

UK Government - Building Our Industrial Strategy: Green Paper (2017)

UK Government Housing White Paper: Fixing our Broken Housing Market (2017)

*Shropshire Council is reviewing its adopted Local Plan and consulted on 'Issues and Strategic Options' in January 2017.



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