

CONSULTATION DRAFT

Final design to be completed prior to publication

Staffordshire County Council

Economic Strategy

2022-2030

Foreword

We are ambitious for the economy of Staffordshire, our businesses, and people. The impacts of the COVID-19 public health crisis will continue to be felt on the local, national, and global economies for some time and cannot be ignored. However, the support measures delivered throughout the pandemic by the County Council, Government, and our partners, alongside the hugely successful vaccine rollout, have resulted in us being in a far better position now than even the most optimistic of commentators thought we would be at the start of the pandemic.

Our work to support the growth of the Staffordshire economy over the last decade has ensured that we have remained resilient, whilst the successful delivery of our Economic Recovery, Renewal and Transformation Strategy through the pandemic means we are now able to accelerate our plans. We will of course strive to take full advantage of the many opportunities to support the development of the local economy, but we also recognise that there are challenges to address.

The role of the County Council is central to supporting everyone during these changing times, and indeed the recovery and growth of our economy is already underway. As well as continuing to invest in the conditions all businesses need to thrive, we can now set out those priorities that we will now face head on as being of most benefit to the future of the local economy in the coming months and years, delivering on those issues that matter most to the people of Staffordshire.

Our ambitious Economic Strategy is our roadmap to supporting a vibrant, productive local economy where our existing business are helped to grow, new businesses are established and thrive, our residents have the skills needed to access the jobs of the future and supporting the creation of places across all parts of the county that we can be proud of.

Philip White

Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economy & Skills

1. Vision and Ambitions

Our Strategic Plan outlines those outcomes that the County Council most wants to achieve, including that, *"Everyone in Staffordshire will have access to more good jobs and share the benefits of economic growth."* To realise this ambition, we will:

- Work with our partners to regenerate our town centres.
- Support people to start and grow their business.
- Develop those investment-ready projects that will be vital to the future of the county.
- Enable people to benefit from better paid, local jobs.
- Develop our A50 / A500 and A38 strategic corridors to enable businesses in Staffordshire to innovate and grow, as part of the wider West Midlands Region.

Our Economic Strategy sets out further those priorities that we will focus on in the coming months and years to deliver the ambitions set out within our Strategic Plan. The pandemic has shown that it is impossible to foresee everything that may happen in the future, and we therefore need to ensure that we remain agile and able to respond to challenges and opportunities as they arise.

Government has set out twelve missions to level up the UK by 2030 and our Economic Strategy therefore sets out our vision and ambitions for the Staffordshire economy over this period:

By 2030, the people of Staffordshire will be able to benefit from more and better paid jobs with the county being one of the primary locations for sustainable growth and investment in the UK, creating places that we can all be proud of, driven by innovation, new technologies and supporting the move towards carbon neutrality.

Ambitions

By 2030, we will:

1. Tackle the challenges faced by many of our town centres and strive to create places that we can be proud of.
2. Create the conditions to allow more people to start and grow their business within Staffordshire, thereby addressing our relatively low levels of business start-ups across large parts of the county.
3. Address the low levels of skills across some parts of the county and support more of our residents to gain the high-level skills needed to take advantage of many better paid job opportunities.
4. Play our part in supporting the substantial planned growth within the county through the development of investment ready projects and securing funding for our infrastructure and services.
5. Ensure we do not miss the substantial opportunities afforded by our location in the centre of the country by developing our key strategic A50 / A500 and A38 corridors, including securing increased investment in innovation activities.
6. Put climate change at the heart of all that we do, including supporting businesses on their journey to Net Zero.

We recognise that Staffordshire County Council will not be able to achieve these ambitions by working in isolation, and we will need to continue working with all our partners if we are to be successful. We have a strong track record of such partnership working, including the delivery of numerous hugely successful economic growth and infrastructure schemes with our District and Borough Councils and by securing substantial levels of investment into the county.

2. The current picture

Our economy, strengths, challenges, and opportunities

The unprecedented nature of the COVID-19 public health crisis and the resulting effects felt around the globe have left an indelible mark on the economy. However, interventions made both locally and nationally to help support and minimise the economic impact of the pandemic, alongside the vaccine rollout, were hugely successful in averting the severe economic downturn that had been predicted by many. This left us in a very different, much more positive position to the one many economic commentators thought we might be in at the start of the crisis.

Our businesses

The recovery of the UK economy has been strong although the pandemic, together with a range of other issues, has left us with challenges that will need to be addressed. Issues such as the shift in peoples shopping habits towards spending more online and a renewed focus on the health and care sector has led to large increases in the number of jobs in some sectors, although workers wanting to take these jobs are proving hard to find for many businesses. Whilst this is an opportunity for some businesses and sectors to thrive, there will also unfortunately be businesses that are unable to adapt and survive due to changes to the economy. The immediate priority will therefore remain supporting both our businesses and residents through the recovery of the local economy.

In the longer-term Staffordshire continues to have significant strengths and opportunities to prosper. The county boasts a diverse economy with significant strengths in automotive (Jaguar Land Rover, Gestamp), aerospace (Moog), energy (General Electric, ABB), medical technologies, (Cobra Biologics, Biocomposites), construction (JCB, KMF), logistics (Amazon, DHL), digital (Risual) and agri-tech to name a few. Our economy is a microcosm of the UK with dominance in service sectors, but our thriving and growing high-value manufacturing base puts us in an enviable position. Supporting such industries and their supply chains will play an important part in rebalancing our economy, and over the last decade we have moved away from a dominance in lower value manufacturing and construction industries to a more balanced economy. This has ensured that the local economy has remained significantly more resilient through the pandemic than was the case during the financial crisis.

Whilst the county is home to many world-renowned brands, most of our businesses are small and medium enterprises. Supporting growth of our existing businesses and enabling people to start and grow their own business in the county will be vital to achieving our ambition for a vibrant, dynamic Staffordshire economy. Whilst our survival rates for newly formed businesses are high, large parts of the county have lower rates of business start-ups compared to similar areas and is an issue to be addressed.

From a relatively low base, innovation within Staffordshire is also on the rise, both within businesses and through our universities. Ongoing and recent innovation projects within the county include the Smart Energy Network Demonstrator, the HyDeploy project to trial injecting hydrogen into the gas network, the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport's (ADEPT) supported SMART transport 'live-lab' project at Keele University, as well as the planned Institute of Technology in Stafford that will focus on those high-level manufacturing and engineering skills needed by many local businesses. Staffordshire is home to numerous businesses that have been awarded the Queen's Award for innovation and continuing to support and nurture innovation activity within the county will be vital to achieving our ambitions for a clean, high-technology future economy.

Our people

No longer just the place for traditional skills, the county's residents are increasingly gaining higher levels of skills and qualifications, whilst there is a workforce of over 3 million people all within an hour of Staffordshire. As a county we continue to respond to business need for more advanced skills including manufacturing, engineering, and digital skills, and our three main universities will allow us to further develop those higher-level skills needed across many of our current and future industries. We have several high performing colleges across all parts of the county, providing us with a well-established and high-performing skills system.

However, there remain challenges with skills within the county that we need to address. Some areas continue to lag in the skills levels of residents, particularly within Cannock Chase, Tamworth, and parts of Newcastle-under-Lyme. These areas have had relatively low levels of skills amongst residents for many years and addressing this situation will have significant advantages in enabling our residents to take advantage of better paid job opportunities. We will need to ensure our residents are aspirational for their future, whilst also supporting people working in lower paid jobs to transition into higher paid employment and supporting affected businesses to be more productive and innovative through

new technologies and digitisation. We recognise that not all our residents will want a highly skilled job, but everyone should at least have the opportunity to get a good job that provides a high level of satisfaction and/or value to society, even if it remains lower paid.

Existing programmes and potential flexibilities provide the opportunity to address skills issues to some degree, but there is an opportunity to be more transformative and start to deliver programmes that address longer-term skills issues such as digital, leadership and management, business improvement, lean, agile and automation programmes. Many of these types of skills are vital for business growth and enabling people to successfully start and grow a business.

The shift to greater levels of remote working continues to change the dynamic of the labour market, with far larger numbers of people not needing to work as close as previously to their work location. We are already seeing this in effect with large numbers of people over the last couple of years choosing to move out of the major cities, especially London. Many industries, and particularly those that are office based, are now able to recruit from far further afield than previously was the case, presenting opportunities for businesses to draw from a far greater pool of talent, whilst having less restrictions on location is likely to mean more people will want to live in areas such as Staffordshire that offer unparalleled standards of living and amenities.

More widely than office-based sectors, many other industries affected by the crisis, both positively and negatively, will continue to change and evolve in the coming months and years. The logistics sector continues to prosper, and we have a thriving care market which has never been so revered as a career as it is now. Addressing skills gaps and hard-to-fill vacancies in growing industries will be important and is a challenge for everyone, including skills providers and the businesses themselves.

Our places

Our location at the heart of the country remains one of our key assets and makes Staffordshire a hugely attractive place to live, work and invest. This has made Staffordshire particularly attractive to the logistics industry which continues to grow, including through the development of the rail connected West Midlands Interchange site over the next decade, and presents significant opportunities for the future as the sector moves towards greater use of technology and cleaner ways to move goods around the country and beyond.

Our Strategic Infrastructure Plan outlines the level of growth planned within the county over the next 20 years, amounting to over 80,000 houses and significant levels of employment land. Our success in creating the conditions to support growth has led to many large-scale investments made by companies indigenous to the county and from beyond. The continued development of employment sites will undoubtedly be important in continuing to support growth within the county. Delivery of the level of growth expected will require substantial investment in all our infrastructure, whilst we will always need to consider how this growth can be delivered sustainably and in support of climate change targets.

Staffordshire will be surrounded by new full-HS2 stations and benefit from classic-compatible HS2 services at Stafford. Ensuring the best connectivity possible to these stations throughout the county will provide significant future opportunities for growth whilst further investment in the country's rail network will provide better journey options and allow greater numbers of people to travel sustainably.

Digital connectivity has become increasingly important in recent years, with ever increasing levels of business activity, service delivery and consumer spending now taking place online. This was particularly evident through the pandemic with huge increases in office-based employees working remotely, which will persist to at least some extent. This presents an opportunity for Staffordshire to speed up its plans for high-quality digital infrastructure across the county through the delivery of gigabit capable broadband and supporting technologies, including 5G.

The county town of Stafford and larger towns throughout the county including Burton upon Trent, Uttoxeter, Cannock, Rugeley, Lichfield, Tamworth, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Biddulph, Leek and Cheadle remain the primary hubs of economic activity and where most of our residents live and work. The changing nature of retail has presented challenges for almost all town centres, at least somewhat compounded by the pandemic, with work to reshape and repurpose town centres being an increasingly important issue.

Whilst our urban centres are the primary residential and business locations, much of the county is rural and there has been significant development of our rural economy in recent years. Our natural assets such as the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Peak District National Park, alongside numerous attractions including Alton Towers and Drayton Manor theme parks, has supported sustained growth of our tourism sector. Farming also remains a vital part of the Staffordshire landscape and supports many local industries, not least the food and drink sector and our burgeoning restaurant scene with the

county now proudly boasting its first Michelin star, recently awarded to Upstairs by Tom Shepherd in Lichfield. The brewing industry in Burton upon Trent is one of most historic and notable local assets.

We know that Staffordshire is a great place to live, work and invest but we recognise that we need to shout about all the benefits of the county. Through our We Are Staffordshire and supporting ambassadors programme, we are ensuring that the County Council and our partners are promoting the county with one voice, thereby communicating those attributes that make Staffordshire special, competitive, and distinct.

Our track record speaks for itself. Staffordshire delivers. We have seen results that have created more, better jobs. Results to inspire trust that Staffordshire County Council and local leaders have developed the right local solution. That is why we firmly believe our Economic Strategy will make a difference; it will support our economy to recover from the public health crisis and then tackle those key challenges to enable it to transform and grow through clean, digital, highly productive industries.

3. Policy context

Policy decisions of national, regional, and local partners have an influence on what we do and how we operate. This section considers some of the most significant policy agendas relevant to our Economic Strategy, with a focus on national government policy as being a particularly important consideration to the delivery of our own priorities.

Levelling Up

The Government's levelling up agenda is both a response to many areas failing to fully experience the benefits of economic growth in recent years and a recognition that there has been underinvestment in areas outside of the South East by successive Governments.

Our Strategic Infrastructure Plan shows that there is evidence of underinvestment in Staffordshire whilst changes to the Treasury Green Book appraisal process and planned substantial increases in public sector investment mean Staffordshire is well placed to fully implement the Government's levelling up agenda.

The Government's Levelling Up White Paper sets out 12 missions to level up all parts of the UK. Improving economic prosperity and spreading opportunity will be vital in achieving all the missions, and the delivery of our Economic Strategy will therefore play a vital role in levelling up in Staffordshire.

The 12 missions fall under four overarching 'pillars', namely:

- Boost productivity, pay, jobs and living standards by growing the private sector, especially in those places where they are lagging.
- Spread opportunities and improve public services, especially in those places where they are weakest.
- Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging, especially in those places where they have been lost.
- Empower local leaders and communities, especially in those places lacking local agency.

As one of the Government's flagship policy agendas, this will have significant implications for responsibilities and resources moving forwards. We will strive to take full advantage of Government's levelling up ambitions in the county to help support the delivery of our Economic Strategy.

Building Back Better

The Build Back Better Plan for Growth sets out plans for how the Government intends to support the UK economy to rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan sets out several priorities, namely:

- Infrastructure
- Skills
- Innovation
- Levelling up
- Net zero
- Global Britain

The plan is essentially Government's high-level industrial strategy, setting the overall framework and overarching priorities. Further detail is provided within supporting strategies, of which several of those of most relevance to us are outlined below.

Plan for Jobs

The Government launched its Plan for Jobs in July 2020, setting out plans to support people back into work and develop the skills needed as we recover from the impacts of the pandemic. Through the crisis Government support focused upon those people and businesses impacted by lockdown measures, primarily through vast increases in spending on programmes including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and Self Employment Income Support Scheme.

The economic support measures put in place proved to be hugely successful in averting the economic disaster predicted by many commentators. This has allowed the focus to shift to supporting people into employment, including through schemes such as Kickstart and Restart. Such programmes are important to enabling people to take advantage of job vacancies and allow local businesses to find the workers they need.

Devolution

The devolution of powers and funding has been a major national policy agenda for many years. Much of this stems from Lord Heseltine's No Stone Unturned report, a review into supporting economic growth across the country. So far, the primary beneficiaries of devolution have been those areas that have a Mayoral Combined Authority, with the devolved powers and funding differing somewhat for each area.

Government's ambitions for further devolution to local areas is set out within the Levelling Up White Paper. There is recognition that many parts of the country have so far not benefited from devolution, and the Government has set out a new devolution framework in response. The County Council will be considering our response to this and how it could help us to deliver this and our other strategies in due course.

Skills for Jobs

The Skills for Jobs White Paper sets out how Government intends to reform further education, with a particular focus on supporting people to get the skills needed by businesses throughout their lives. The White Paper sets out several priorities including putting employers at the heart of the system, investing in higher-level technical qualifications, providing greater access to lifelong learning, reforming funding and accountability for providers, and supporting excellent teaching.

The skills system is vital in supporting people to get the skills they require to find employment and supporting our businesses to grow. Reforms to the system are therefore an important consideration in being able to achieve our ambitions for the local economy and supporting the growth of those sectors that will form an important part of our future.

Climate change

The need to consider our impacts on the environment and targets set both nationally and locally will be an important consideration in all that we do, including how we continue to support the growth and development of the Staffordshire economy whilst moving towards Net Zero. Government has released several strategies to set out plans and priorities for meeting our climate change targets, including the Prime Minister's Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution.

Further strategies of relevance include the Net Zero, Heat & Buildings, Hydrogen, and Industrial Decarbonisation strategies, as well as the Energy White Paper and Transport Decarbonisation Plan. All these documents and the policies within them will have at least some relevance to Staffordshire and will be considered as part of the projects and programmes to deliver our Economic Strategy.

Funding

National programmes continue to be an important source of funding for project delivery. Recently Government has provided the opportunity to bid for funding for local projects through programmes such as the Levelling Up Fund, Community Renewal Fund, and the Future High Streets Fund. Such programmes will continue to form an important part of the funding available to deliver local priorities, including the forthcoming Shared Prosperity Fund which is set to replace funding previously secured through the European Union.

Planning reforms / housing

Government published its Housing White Paper for tackling problems in the housing market at the beginning of 2017. This recognises that if more new housing is to be built, at a faster rate, it will have to be accompanied by investment in new infrastructure. Government has already committed to new investment in housing, industry, and infrastructure in Staffordshire through various funding programmes, including those of Homes England. The Levelling Up White Paper also sets out Government's intention to support greater investment in housing in the Midlands and North and therefore further investment opportunities are likely in the coming years.

Whilst the Housing White Paper is now 5 years old, housing clearly remains a top priority. The paper recognises the importance of strategic planning for long-term growth, and this is being considered through reforms to the planning system which will impact not only housing delivery but also far wider planning matters. The impact of these changes on growth within the county and the issues set out within our Economic Strategy will need to be considered.

National Infrastructure Strategy

The National Infrastructure Commission published the first-ever National Infrastructure Assessment for the UK in July 2018, making recommendations for how the identified infrastructure needs and priorities of the country should be addressed. The Government responded to this assessment through the publication of its National Infrastructure Strategy in November 2020, setting out its plans to transform the UK's infrastructure by 2050.

The Strategy takes a long-term view for most infrastructure themes and is an important consideration as to what and how infrastructure may need to change in the future, such as the rollout of gigabit-capable digital connectivity and the move towards electric and autonomous vehicles. Further detail will be announced through supporting strategies, some of which have already been released such as the Integrated Rail Plan. As detailed within our Economic Strategy, infrastructure will be vital in supporting the expected levels of growth within the county over the next twenty years and national investment in our infrastructure will be required.

UK Innovation Strategy

The UK Innovation Strategy sets out the Government's vision to make the UK a global hub for innovation by 2035. The Strategy outlines four priorities, namely:

- Supporting businesses that want to innovate including increased public investment in research & development.
- Attracting, retaining, and developing innovation talent.
- Ensuring innovation institutions serve the needs of businesses and places across the UK.
- Stimulating innovation activity to tackle major challenges and drive our capability in key technologies.

The Levelling Up White Paper also commits to greater levels of public innovation spending outside of the Greater South East. Innovation is an important driver of economic growth and supporting greater levels of innovation has the potential to play a key role in achieving our ambitions for the Staffordshire economy.

4. Our priorities

This Strategy outlines our ambitious and achievable plans as to how we will support the Staffordshire economy to continue to recover from the crisis and tackle those challenges that will bring the greatest benefits to the local economy, whilst delivering on those issues that matter most to the people of Staffordshire.

Here we set out the key priorities that we will strive to deliver, with our sights on achieving our long-term vision and ambitions for the Staffordshire economy, whilst meeting our targets for addressing climate change. These priorities do not represent all that we do and will do over the lifetime of the Strategy but show those areas of work that will be our focus and what we most want to achieve.

Priority: Town centre / high street regeneration

Our town centres are the places where most people live and work within the county. Many high streets face challenges as people's shopping habits continue to change, whilst the use of online retail increased substantially during the pandemic. The ultimate impact of the shift away from physical to online retail will only become apparent in the coming months and years, although retail will be a far less important driver of footfall in many town centres.

However, high streets remain vital as places for people to live, meet, access services, enjoy themselves, and for many other reasons. The County Council therefore recognises the importance of reshaping and reimagining our high streets to create places that people value and have pride in. Retail space will shrink on many of our high streets, but other uses have the potential to grow, including hospitality, housing, education, and front-line services. As now, our high streets will have differing roles in the future with some high streets primarily serving the needs of residents of the town itself, whilst others meet a wider need such as providing employment opportunities for the wider population.

We of course recognise the important linkages between our urban and rural areas and the opportunities and challenges faced by the rural parts of the county which we will continue to address through our Rural Economic Strategy.

What we will do

- Planning for regeneration will be vital in reshaping and reimagining the future use of each of our town centres. The County Council will work with our District and Borough Council partners in developing plans for how we will support the transformation of our towns, as and when appropriate. Each plan will need to be bespoke for each place given the role of each town centre will differ, as will the required support and interventions.
- To support the creation of plans for our towns, the County Council will develop a town centre prospectus to clearly articulate our ambitions, our existing assets and our potential role and offer. This will include a clear set of criteria to identify the projects and programmes that will be the focus of the County Council and ensure the benefits of our investment in any town centre scheme are maximised.
- The Government has already invested substantially in a few of our town centres in recent years and the expectation is that this investment will continue. We will also continue to intervene and invest in our town centres, where this is agreed within the plan for each town. It is our expectation that our intervention will leverage additional investment into the town centres, including from Government and the private sector.
- The County Council has many assets within our town centres and high streets including offices, libraries, registration offices and land interests. We will therefore ensure we are maximising the use of our existing assets to support the redevelopment of our town centres and high streets.
- Through our responsibilities for highways, the County Council has a vital role in enabling people to access our town centres safely and reliably. We will continue to invest in our highway network to support the redevelopment of our towns. We have invested substantially in the sustainable transport infrastructure of the county in recent years and will continue to do so to ensure people can access our town centres using clean, green forms of transport, including consideration of how we can support the rollout of electric vehicle charging points.

Priority: Higher skilled, higher paid workforce

Whilst skills levels across many parts of the county are good and this paints a relatively positive overall picture, this hides the fact that skills levels in some parts of the county are low, and this is impacting on our resident's ability to take advantage of better paid opportunities. We recognise that not everyone will

want highly paid, highly skilled employment but even where this is the case, we want to aim to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to at least get a good job that provides them with high levels of satisfaction and/or provides a great deal of value to society.

Low levels of skills are particularly entrenched within Cannock Chase, Tamworth, and parts of Newcastle-under-Lyme. Addressing this issue by supporting our residents to gain higher levels of skills will have significant advantages in enabling our residents to get a better paid job, not only by increasing people's prosperity but also improving health and wellbeing.

The impacts of the pandemic, the UK's exit from the European Union and longer-term socio-demographic issues including the country's ageing workforce present skills challenges both now and in the future. Whilst the true impact of some of these issues remains unclear and will be for some time, they have already resulted in a mismatch between the skills required by businesses and those of the workforce, particularly within certain industries. Addressing this mismatch will be vital, with the Institute for Fiscal Studies describing the labour market as the *"lynchpin of the recovery."* Enhancing our partnership approach will provide greater resilience to future economic shocks and facilitate the development and implementation of both local and national interventions in a more co-ordinated and effective way.

What we will do

- The County Council will continue to support residents into, or to remain in, sustainable employment including through services and programmes to better connect people to jobs, providing services to navigate the complexities of employability and skills training and helping employers to recruit. This will enable the county to have a consistent approach to promoting jobs and skills which is clear for business, residents, and education and skills providers on where to go and what service to expect.
- The Council will support skills providers in creating rapid-retraining programmes, by building on its collaborative partnership approach across the county, to support people to find employment in those sectors where there are the greatest numbers of job vacancies.
- The vast majority of the county's workforce has already been through the school, further and higher education system and it will therefore be important that there are opportunities for greater levels of lifelong learning and support to upskill and reskill people throughout their working lives. This will enable people to access future employment opportunities including higher skilled, higher paid jobs.

- To have a higher skilled, higher paid workforce we will need to retain and attract skilled workers, including graduates, by ensuring that Staffordshire is an attractive place to live and work. Through our services and placemaking responsibilities, the County Council will continue to ensure that we are achieving this ambition, whilst enabling the creation of those jobs within the county that will form an important part of our future economy.
- We will support the development of further vocational education and training provision within Staffordshire to support our key sectors that require technical skills. This will include maximising the benefits of the apprenticeship levy by encouraging a greater number of higher-level apprenticeship opportunities within the county, enabling larger employers to take greater ownership of their future skills requirements.
- Through our own responsibilities or by working with our partners, the County Council will work to address any wider issues that are either discouraging or stopping residents from being able to take advantage of good employment opportunities. This may include generational factors, health issues, poor educational attainment, a lack of appropriate and affordable childcare, transport to suitable job opportunities, access to adequate broadband, and a lack of affordable housing in areas where there are good employment opportunities.

Priority: Supporting start-up and step-up businesses

Encouraging a greater number of business start-ups and supporting these to grow will play an important role in increasing productivity levels and creating employment opportunities within the county. Start-ups are already a vital source of jobs, not only in terms of self-employment but also creating those future businesses that grow and take on employees.

However, within Staffordshire we currently do not have the level of business start-ups of many similar areas, and therefore encouraging and supporting more people to start their own business has the potential to bring significant benefits. Creating a more dynamic, entrepreneurial local economy with greater levels of start-ups and self-employment brings the increased likelihood of creating those businesses that go on to be future employers and generate jobs and wealth within Staffordshire.

Achieving this will require a focus on several issues. We will need to ensure that the county has the right infrastructure in place, including high-quality premises, broadband and transport connectivity. Business and innovation support also remains key, including increasing innovation activity within the county, the

provision of good-quality advice, and access to finance when appropriate. There is also an important role for the education and skills system in ensuring people recognise that starting their own business is a viable career option and equipping them with the skills needed to start and grow a business.

What we will do

- We will ensure that we have suitable sites and premises ready and available to enable people to start and grow their business within the county, as well as continue to take advantage of future business investment opportunities. This includes the provision of incubator space and the delivery of new and expansions of existing Enterprise Centres where there is a clear case to do so.
- The County Council will continue to ensure that there is good quality business support provision for people who are looking to start and grow their business within Staffordshire. This includes the direct delivery of advice and funding programmes that are needed and are not already being delivered by other providers.
- The need to meet climate change targets presents both opportunities and threats to our economy. Through our plans for the delivery of this Strategy, we will consider how we are able to support new start-ups and the growth of existing businesses within industries that emerge and are able to diversify to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the move towards Net Zero. For those industries for which climate change legislation is and will be a threat, we will do all we can to support businesses to survive and adapt to continue to play a key role in our economy.
- Through the Levelling Up White Paper, Government has committed to substantial increases in investment in research & development outside of the Greater South East. As a key driver of business and therefore economic growth, we will consider how we can support increased levels of innovation activity in the county, both through innovation institutions in key sectors such as advanced manufacturing, logistics and energy, and within businesses themselves.
- We will work with education, skills, and careers advice providers to ensure that people recognise that starting their own business is a good career option and providing them with the skills needed to start and grow a business. This includes those leadership, management and digital skills that are so important to businesses surviving and having the greatest opportunity to innovate and grow.

Priority: Developing investment ready projects

There is planned to be substantial growth in housing and jobs within Staffordshire in the coming years, as set out within our District and Borough Council partners local plans who have the responsibility for setting the overall level and location of development within their area, in line with national guidance.

The County Council has a key role in supporting this growth through the delivery of projects that help to ensure that development is sustainable, supported by those local services that people really value and ensuring the benefit of development is maximised.

We have delivered numerous projects to support growth within Staffordshire recently, including school expansions and the opening of the first new secondary school within the county for 25 years. We have delivered the rollout of superfast broadband across the county and made significant transport improvements, including the delivery of the Staffordshire Western Access Route and Lichfield Southern Bypass schemes to unlock development sites and mitigate their impacts. We continue to invest in our green transport infrastructure to allow people to travel around the county sustainably.

However, we now need to plan for the longer-term growth of the county. Our Strategic Infrastructure Plan outlines the scale of the challenge, with tens of thousands of homes and job generating schemes to be delivered over the next twenty years. Supporting this growth will mean vast investment in the county's infrastructure, with an estimated cost of over £4 billion. This investment will come not only from the County Council but also private developers, infrastructure providers and Government, including through nationally significant infrastructure projects such as HS2.

For projects and programmes which the County Council is responsible, we will continue to plan proactively to deliver those schemes to support development and fully realise its benefits. The County Council continues to have significant assets within the county, and we will develop projects to ensure that we are maximising the value of these assets to deliver our ambitions for the future of Staffordshire and its economy.

What we will do

- We will develop a pipeline of future County Council projects to ensure that the substantial levels of growth planned within the county can be accommodated without being detrimental to levels of accessibility, connectivity, and services.

This will allow us to leverage investment, forms part of the delivery of our Strategic Infrastructure Plan and supports our District and Borough Council partners in the delivery of their local plans.

- We will also continue to plan for and deliver those improvement projects that support the County Council's wider ambitions and priorities, including for the health and wellbeing of our residents, the local economy and climate change. This includes supporting the rollout of gigabit capable broadband across the county which is vital to both businesses and residents, and the continued delivery and support of sustainable transport infrastructure and electric vehicle charging points as we move towards Net Zero.

Priority: Strategic corridors

Our location at the heart of the country and between Manchester and Birmingham provides us with vast opportunities to develop the strategic corridors that connect places across Staffordshire and beyond. The A50 / A500 and A38 corridors are two of the most important locations for economic activity within the county and are vital in connecting residents to jobs. However, the full potential of these corridors has yet to be fully exploited and therefore a substantial opportunity remains.

There has already been a significant amount of investment across the corridors in recent years with a great deal of further investment planned. The corridors connect numerous towns and places, whilst planned investment in road and rail, including HS2, will only improve connectivity across the sub-region and provide the potential to deliver significant infrastructure-led sustainable growth in the future.

The corridors play a central role in the Midlands and UK economy and are home to several renowned national and global brands including AstraZeneca, Bombardier, Bentley, JCB, Nestle and Rolls Royce. These and other major employers are engaged in highly innovative activity, such as JCB's recent development of the first hydrogen motor in the industry. Supporting existing and new businesses to innovate and grow remains a priority, whilst wider ambitions such as the provision of good homes and green infrastructure will be vital in creating places where people want to live, work, and invest.

What we will do

- The County Council will drive forward plans for those aspirational, transformational projects that will form a vital part of the county's future, including the A50 / A500 and A38 corridors.
- As part of this, we will support and unlock investment in road, rail, and digital connectivity across the corridors, including the restoration and reopening of rail stations and delivery of sustainable transport improvements between transport hubs and places where people live and work. We will also continue to support and work to maximise the local economic benefits of the nationally significant infrastructure projects that will be delivered in the county over the coming years.
- We will work with our partners, in education, local authorities but above all the private sector, to bring together corridors of true innovation and employment growth. We will develop plans for increased levels of innovation and enterprise across the corridors, including as part of becoming a Smart Energy region and driven by existing energy assets and innovations such as hydrogen.
- We will continue to support and unlock the delivery of high-quality housing and employment sites across the corridors in support of the delivery of local plans.

5. How we'll do it

Achieving our vision and ambitions for the Staffordshire economy will require the delivery of appropriate projects and programmes, set out within existing and future supporting delivery plans. Many of these projects and programmes will require us to continue strong joint working with local stakeholders, an approach that has proven hugely successful in recent years.

We therefore recognise that many of the schemes that will be vital in delivering this Strategy will be delivered by others, and the County Council will 'lead', 'collaborate' and 'advocate' as appropriate:

- **'Lead'** on direct delivery.
- **'Collaborate'** on delivery with partners and stakeholders.
- **'Advocate'** for the delivery of projects and programmes by other organisations that meet our own ambitions as.

Delivery of the priorities

The priorities set out within this Strategy will not be considered in isolation. Through delivery plans and the development of future projects and programmes, we will consider how schemes can support the delivery of several of our priorities. As an example, the delivery of new start-up space within a town centre could help to achieve our ambitions for both town centre regeneration and greater numbers of people starting a business within the county.

Whilst the priorities set out within this Strategy will be our primary focus for the Staffordshire economy, it is also important to consider that we have several other relevant strategies that we will need to consider when developing delivery plans and supporting projects and programmes. Climate change and continuing to support our rural economy are key priorities for instance, with further detail set out within our Climate Change Action Plan and Rural Economic Strategy.

We are not starting from scratch but very much building upon our recent successes, including:

- The unlocking of strategic employment sites such as the i54 South Staffordshire Enterprise Zone, Redhill, and Lichfield Park.
- Planning and delivering major infrastructure schemes to support growth including the Stafford Western Access Route and Lichfield Southern Bypass.
- The delivery of business support programmes including start-up support, support to reduce environmental impacts, and support for businesses through the pandemic including the Staffordshire Means Back to Business programme.
- Creation of new high-quality business premises including the expansion of our enterprise centres and development of the Innovation Centres at Keele University's Science and Innovation Park.
- Investment in skills & employability programmes that have helped to halve the number of adults with no qualifications and dramatically reduce the number of people Not in Employment, Education or Training.

These schemes have delivered huge benefits for the local economy and people of Staffordshire, and we will continue to work tirelessly to achieve our ambitions.

Investing to deliver the strategy

The County Council continues to invest significant sums of money in the Staffordshire economy, whilst we have a vital role in unlocking funding from a range of sources and advocating for investment within the county. We also have many assets within key locations across all parts of Staffordshire that will play an important role in achieving the vision, ambitions and priorities set out within the Strategy. Our approach to funding the projects and programmes to deliver the Strategy will therefore be through one or more of the following:

1. Making best use of our funding to ensure that existing budgets, projects, and programmes are targeted towards the delivery of the Strategy.
2. Maximising the investment of other organisations within the county including through bidding to external funding programmes, advocating for investment within the county such as by infrastructure providers, and utilising our existing resources to unlock further funding including from the private sector.
3. Making use of and maximising the benefit of our assets where it is appropriate to do so.

We will of course need to ensure that any investment by the County Council is achieving the maximum possible benefits in achieving the delivery of the Strategy. Supporting plans, projects and programmes will therefore need to be considered against the following key principles:

1. Delivery of the Economic Strategy's vision, aims and priorities
2. Alignment to one or more of the strategic priorities
3. Outputs
4. Deliverability
5. Funding (including our own investment and the amount of leverage)
6. Risk

In the development of delivery plans and the consideration of existing and new schemes, it will also be important to consider what needs to stop, what needs to continue, what needs to start and where there may be gaps in interventions against the strategic priorities that need to be filled.

In the longer-term, funding to deliver the Strategy is more uncertain and will be dependent on several factors. We have an opportunity to explore different approaches to funding growth as a County Council as well as influencing how the Government progresses its various policy agendas including levelling up and County Deals. We will continue to work with our partners, including Government, to shape and access funding to deliver the Strategy as appropriate.

Working with others to get the job done

There are many stakeholders that we will need to work proactively with to successfully deliver this Strategy. Outlined below are several of our main partners who we will be working with to deliver our plans for the local economy in the coming years.

Staffordshire's District & Borough Councils

Staffordshire County Council has a strong track record of working proactively with our Staffordshire District / Borough Councils, including on many schemes that have had a substantial positive impact on the local economy such as our Staffordshire Means Back to Business programme. We will continue to work closely with our District and Borough Councils as many, if not all, of our economic programmes require a multi-disciplinary approach with the County and District / Borough Councils having different but complementary relevant responsibilities.

This Strategy recognises the importance of Staffordshire as a place to the future of the local economy. Alongside planning policy responsibilities, the Districts / Boroughs responsibilities to reshape town centres, in tandem with the County Council's roles particularly regarding infrastructure delivery, will play a vital role in achieving the aims of the Strategy.

Government

The County Council works directly with many Government departments. In recent years this has included the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on several skills projects, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and particularly Homes England on housing schemes, the Department for Transport on a number of major road schemes, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on the delivery of the superfast broadband project and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on a number of funding schemes for rural areas and businesses.

Whilst devolution should provide greater autonomy for local areas and this is something we will support, it will be clearly be vital for us to continue to work closely with Government to deliver our vision and ambitions.

Midlands Engine

The Midlands Engine partnership brings together public sector partners and businesses to complement the activity of other local organisations. The Midlands Engine Strategy sets out a collective ambition for economic growth and prosperity across the East and West Midlands. It highlights how the region can build upon existing business sectors and areas of opportunity, including many of our key industries, universities, and employment areas as places of national and global significance.

The Midlands Engine priorities are all vital to the future economic growth of the Midlands and Staffordshire and we will continue to proactively engage in the Midlands Engine to support investment in the area.

Midlands Connect

Midlands Connect researches, develops, and recommends transport projects which will provide the biggest possible economic and social benefits for the Midlands and the rest of the UK. Through Midlands Connect we are considering the wider future requirements for investment in the strategic road and rail network. We view this as being a key mechanism for the development of connectivity improvements, particularly investments by National Highways and National Rail.

The partnership is currently conducting a range of studies into how we can alleviate congestion and support growth across several strategic transport corridors that are within or affect Staffordshire, particularly the A50 / A500 and A38 corridors. We are actively engaged in these studies and future transport investment will remain vital to supporting the future growth of Staffordshire.

Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) brings businesses and local authorities together to support economic growth, create jobs and raise skills levels. Since its inception, the County Council has secured a significant amount of investment through the LEP for many projects across the county including several roads, employment sites, housing, and business premises projects. The LEP also has responsibility for the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Growth Hub which provides support services for our local businesses.

The role and responsibilities of LEPs has recently been under review, whilst the Government has confirmed through the Levelling Up White Paper that having a strong business voice within each part of England remains important. We will continue to consider the implications of the changing role for LEPs in delivering our economic ambitions for Staffordshire.

In addition to the LEP, the County Council also proactively works with our business representative organisations, particularly the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce and Federation for Small Businesses. These organisations have a vital role in having direct contact and working with our business community.

Infrastructure Delivery Organisations

The County Council works proactively with all organisations with responsibility for the county's infrastructure. This includes both National Highways and Network Rail who have responsibility for Staffordshire's trunk road network and rail infrastructure.

In recent years we have worked with Government and Openreach to rollout superfast broadband across Staffordshire, whilst we also continue to work with utility providers to successfully deliver employment and housing schemes.

Relationships with these organisations, and many others, will therefore be critical to the successful delivery of the priorities set out within our Economic Strategy and our ability to sustainably deliver the levels of planned growth expected in the county in the coming years.