

North Somerset Economic Growth Plan 2025 to 2035

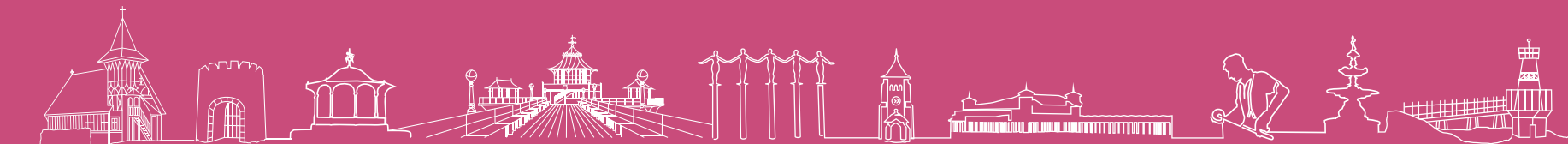
Driving inclusive economic growth
for a thriving and sustainable future

March 2025

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Foreword

Economic growth is good for our businesses, our residents and our places.

North Somerset Council is committed to creating a thriving, inclusive, and future-ready economy. By supporting workforce participation, upskilling residents, fostering business growth, and attracting investment, we are building a resilient economy that offers high-quality jobs, innovation, and sustainability.

The previous economic plan, the North Somerset Economic Strategy 2020-2025, was produced in response to the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has served North Somerset well, helping the area navigate difficult times and positioning the economy for a more positive future; however, a new set of circumstances and challenges now presents itself, including national economic and devolution agendas.

In developing this plan, we aim to be clear about our priorities and where we will focus our delivery activities, working alongside partners from across North Somerset and beyond. We need to make the case for investment from the government and the private sector, and to let the world know that we are open for business. Importantly, we must ensure that the benefits of growth are shared with our residents and that growth enables us to create better places to live and work in sustainable communities.

Sustainable growth is challenging, and we will need support from all our partners and the government. However, North Somerset is a place of opportunity, and now is the time to come together to realise its full potential.



Executive summary – Plan on a page

People:

Enhancing skills and well-being empowers individuals to reach their potential and businesses to access the talent they need to succeed

Two year vision

Economic inactivity continues to decline as tailored employment support programmes expand.

More residents upskill, securing higher wages and local employment.

Five year vision

North Somerset's workforce is more adaptable, with strong participation in future-focused industries

North Somerset offers a vibrant, opportunity-rich community where 18-30-year-olds choose to stay and contribute to sustainable economic growth

10 year vision

North Somerset is a national leader in workforce inclusivity, skills development, and business growth.

A diverse, high-wage job market reduces outbound commuting, keeping talent and investment local.

Pro-business:

Supporting business growth, attracting investment, and fostering innovation-led expansion in North Somerset's key sectors.

Two year vision

Start-ups and SMEs benefit from improved access to funding, workspaces, and business support.

Larger businesses receive targeted assistance to boost productivity and expansion.

Five year vision

A thriving small business ecosystem drives innovation and job creation, supported by sector-specific interventions.

Productivity gaps among larger businesses continue to narrow, enhancing regional economic competitiveness and identifying North Somerset as a critical part of the West of England regional economy.

10 year vision

Homegrown businesses, from start-ups to high-growth enterprises, drive sustained economic success

Place:

Boosting North Somerset's economy by supporting communities, decarbonising infrastructure, and providing business spaces and sustainable housing.

Two year vision

Strategic commercial sites and infrastructure projects attract

Five year vision

Inward investment and business growth increase, leveraging infrastructure improvements, affordable homes, workforce strengths, and an improved place brand.

Sustainability actions and decarbonisation programmes embed resilience across industries.

10 year vision

The region is a premier destination for inward investment, known for innovation, sustainability, and connectivity.

Long-term infrastructure planning ensures continued prosperity.

Action and interventions to deliver this vision are within the document and available in Appendix C

1. Introduction

Vision for Growth

North Somerset Council is committed to creating a thriving, inclusive, and future-ready economy. By supporting people into work, upskilling residents, fostering business growth, and attracting investment, we will build a resilient economy that offers high-quality jobs, innovation, and sustainability.

2-Year Vision: Laying the Foundations

- Economic inactivity continues to decline as tailored employment support programmes expand.
- More residents upskill, securing higher wages and local employment.
- Start-ups and small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) benefit from improved access to funding, workspaces, and business support.
- Larger businesses receive targeted assistance to boost productivity and expansion.
- Strategic commercial sites and infrastructure projects attract increased levels of inward investment.

5-Year Vision:

Accelerating Growth and Innovation

- North Somerset's workforce is more adaptable, with strong participation in future-focused industries (such as blue and green economy, digital technology, advanced manufacturing).

- North Somerset offers a vibrant, opportunity-rich community where 18-30 year-olds choose to stay and contribute to sustainable economic growth
- A thriving small business ecosystem drives innovation and job creation, supported by sector-specific interventions.
- Productivity gaps among larger businesses continue to narrow, enhancing regional economic competitiveness and identifying North Somerset as a critical part of the West of England regional economy.
- Inward investment and business growth increases, leveraging infrastructure improvements, affordable homes, workforce strengths, and an improved place brand.
- Sustainability actions and decarbonisation programmes embed resilience across industries.

10-Year Vision:

A Thriving, Resilient Economy

- North Somerset is a national leader in workforce inclusivity, skills development, and business growth.
- A diverse, high-wage job market reduces outbound commuting, keeping talent and investment local.
- Homegrown businesses, from start-ups to high-growth enterprises, drive sustained economic success.

- The region is a premier destination for inward investment, known for innovation, sustainability, and connectivity.
- Long-term infrastructure planning ensures continued prosperity.

The detailed actions which will deliver this vision are described later on in the document and set out in an action plan in Appendix C.

1.1 Why we need a North Somerset Economic Growth Plan from 2025 to 2035

The previous economic plan, the North Somerset Economic Strategy 2020-2025, was produced in response to the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2020-2025 Strategy has served North Somerset well by helping the area navigate difficult times and positioning the economy for a more positive future. However, a new set of circumstances and challenges now presents itself, alongside exciting opportunities upon which to capitalise.

At the national level, there is a focus on economic growth, along with an increasing expectation for regional cooperation on economic matters. This will include working with the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) to align with their Local Growth Plan and deliver programmes of activity.

1.2 How does this Plan work?

This Plan sets out a 10-year vision for North Somerset with interim objectives along the way.

The Plan begins by establishing the economic context for North Somerset, including a summary of opportunities and challenges, as well as information about our priority sectors.

Actions to deliver the Plan are identified and grouped under three themes: People, Business, and Place. These inform our investment priorities and ask the government.

Appendices to the Plan include a more detailed delivery plan, sector profiles, and information about stakeholder engagement in the creation of the Plan.

1.3 How will the Plan make a difference?

It is clear on our key sectors, which will guide the support we provide to businesses, and on the employment and skills support programmes we aim to continue and enhance.

The Plan highlights the importance of collaborating with regional partners at WECA and securing government investment in infrastructure, employment sites, business support, and employment programmes.

It identifies how North Somerset needs to develop as a place to help businesses and employees thrive and grow and the associated benefits

that this will bring, for example, health and wellbeing, lifelong learning and sustainable communities.

At the end of our 10-year plan, if our economy is thriving we'll expect to see the following positive changes in our:

- Economic inactivity rates have dropped to 12% of our population (lowest rate in the last 20 years). Currently levels are 22%.
- Our **Centre for Thriving Places index score** has increased to above 6 in all categories.
- North Somerset no longer has any wards in the top 10% most deprived Lower Super Output Areas.
- Labour productivity will have increased by 2% to be in line with the National average.

However, it is essential to note that many of these metrics will be influenced by macroeconomic factors beyond the Council's control. While we will continue to monitor progress, we will need to adjust our support and interventions to respond to these changes. The role of this Economic Growth Plan will be to create the conditions for growth to flourish, provide meaningful interventions for the small number of businesses and residents who face challenges in the economy, and continue to intervene to make our economy fairer, more inclusive, and more accessible for all parts of our population.

1.4 How the North Somerset Economic Growth Plan 2025 to 2035 has been developed

The North Somerset Economic Growth Plan 2025 to 2035 has been developed through:

- **Data Analysis:** A wide range of socio-economic data was analysed (See North Somerset Economic Baseline Report).
- **Literature Review:** Review of policies, strategies and evidence.
- **Extensive stakeholder engagement:** A broad range of individual stakeholders from approximately 35 different organisations were engaged for views and intelligence (See Appendix B).



1.5 Our key asks

This plan outlines a range of activities to support economic growth, many of which will be delivered by the Council itself.

However, in recognising that many activities will require external support and funding from government or other bodies, we identify the following as our highest list of priorities:

- Access to all economy-related funds and programmes currently available to the West of England Combined Authority: North Somerset Council has explicitly set out its ambition to join WECA and seeks government and WECA support for this request. In the interim, North Somerset must have equal access to funding made available to the Combined Authority, to avoid penalising our residents and businesses through the loss of millions of pounds of potential support and investment.

- National and regional support to further grow the priority sectors of the Green and Blue economy; technology and advanced manufacturing; cultural, creative and lifestyle; and food and drink manufacturing, recognising the contributions these can make to the wider economy and linking in with the WECA Local Growth Plan.
- Targeted unlocking of strategic employment sites, at the Weston Enterprise Area, which can deliver over 2,000 jobs and has strong investor interest, and at new locations emerging through our Local Plan.
- Strategic infrastructure investment to unlock future economic growth: whether the existing projects for Metrowest and the Banwell bypass, or future investments in digital and energy infrastructure. Councils and investors need to be given greater confidence at an earlier stage that investment will be forthcoming, and for the hurdles to delivery to be removed to speed up implementation.
- Support for ensuring that economic benefits are shared with all of our residents, whether that is through the continuation of employment and skills programmes, or support for our struggling high streets, creating a buoyant and circular local economy. North Somerset is too often dismissed as a region without high levels of inequality and disadvantage meaning our residents and businesses do not get the support they need to thrive. Some communities in North Somerset are among the most disadvantaged in the Country and we need support from Government to help them achieve better outcomes.

2. North Somerset Economy

2.1 UK Context

The UK economy has faced a turbulent period in recent years. Significant economic and political changes and shocks include Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical instability and the cost-of-living crisis. There are, however, signs that the economy is entering a period of recovery, and this is the perfect time to develop a positive and distinctive strategy for economic revival in North Somerset.

The 2024 General Election resulted in the election of a new Government with a stated mission to kickstart economic growth in the UK, focusing on creating good jobs and promoting productivity growth across the country.

North Somerset, with its range of positive economic characteristics, plays a key role in supporting this push for significant economic growth.

2.2 North Somerset Overview

North Somerset is bordered by the unitary authorities of Bath and North East Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, and Somerset Council. North Somerset boasts significant infrastructure that is crucial to the regional economy, including Bristol Airport, the M5 corridor, and Royal Portbury Dock, as well as numerous social assets.

The area is home to around 220,000 people, primarily concentrated in Weston-super-Mare (82,000 people), as well as across the other three main towns of Clevedon, Nailsea, and Portishead. Weston, as a town, is rapidly approaching the population size of the City of Bath and is expected to

surpass it in the next decade. The new Local Plan will find space for 24,000 new homes, which will undoubtedly have an impact on our economy, in terms of the skills needed to build this housing and the amount of commercial space we'll need to identify to ensure economic growth matches population growth.

The economic character of the area is of a mixed economy with a significant base of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), typically but not exclusively clustered around the towns. There are also large rural areas home to a range of rural industries and businesses, although agriculture itself is now a relatively small sector, accounting for only 0.7% of the workforce. The visitor economy is a significant contributor to employment, accounting for 16.2% of jobs, particularly in the coastal towns of Weston-super-Mare and Clevedon. However, it also poses some risks, including low productivity and seasonal, insecure employment.

Overall, the North Somerset economy's diversity is one of its strengths, possessing sectoral strengths and growth potential while largely avoiding over-reliance on a single dominant employer.

North Somerset has a relatively well-skilled population, with 33.9% of residents aged 16 and above holding a qualification at NVQ Level 4 or above (Census 2021). This is similar to England and slightly higher than the South West average (33.1%). 14.9% of the population have no qualifications, which is lower than across the South West (15.7%) and England (18.1%).

Despite generally being an economically prosperous location, North Somerset has areas of significant inequality, particularly in Weston-super-

Mare, with five Local Statistical Office Areas (LSOAs) in central Weston-super-Mare falling within the most deprived 5% of England.

North Somerset is part of the West of England Functional Economic Area, and the council works closely with the West of England Combined Authority (WECA). It is not formally part of the Combined Authority, which causes challenges regarding investment in business support, skills, and enabling infrastructure. However, this may change over the next few years, in line with emerging government policy on devolution.

22% of North Somerset working residents work in the WECA area, and 9% of North Somerset's workers reside in the West of England. North Somerset and WECA are collaborating on the regional Local Growth Plan, informed in part by this Economic Plan, outlining a collective vision for the area's economic growth and how it can be achieved.

North Somerset is well-connected: the M5 corridor, which passes through the length of North Somerset, is crucial for the movement of goods and people from the West Midlands and the North to the South West.

The deep-water Royal Portbury Dock successfully serves the expansion of the West of England's economy and has played a critical logistical role in the delivery of the Hinckley C nuclear new build in Somerset. Portbury Dock is also known as one of the significant UK gateways for the global automotive industry, with an increasing focus on Electric Vehicles.

Bristol International Airport is the UK's 8th busiest airport and is mobilising expansion activity to reach 12 million passengers per annum by 2027/28 and ambition to grow to 15 million passengers per annum.

There are likely to be good supply chain opportunities in electrical vehicle battery manufacturing created by Gravity /Agratas, situated approximately

People



Population – 217,000

0 to 15 yr – 17.6% (18.6% England)
15 to 29 yr – 58.5% (7.2% England)
16 to 64 yr – 58.5% (63.0% England)
65+ yr – 23.9% (18.4% England)



19.9% economically inactive (21.3% in England)

35% students (27% England)
19% long-term sick (27% England)
14% carers (27% England)
14% retired (13% England)



77% employed (75.7% in England)



70.9% working age adults RQF3+ (A level) (67.4% in England)



6.2% 16 to 17 yr olds NEETs (5.2% in England)

Pro-Business

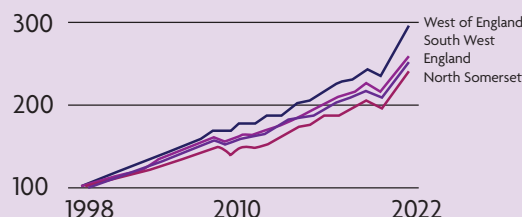


£6.1bn GDP; £26k per capita
(£34k per capita England)

£5.2bn GVA; £56k per worker
(£69k per worker England)

Closing the GVA gap would add £1.2bn
pa to the economy

25 yr GVA historic growth index



98.5% business are small or
micro



45.5% business five-year
survival rate
(39.4% England)



£35k workplace salary
(£43k England average)

Place



Major Infrastructure:
Port and airport
M5



Natural environment

2 national/13 local nature reserves
25 miles of coastline
Mendip Hills National Landscape



£320k median house price
(£290k in England)

8.9 affordability ratio
(8.3 England)



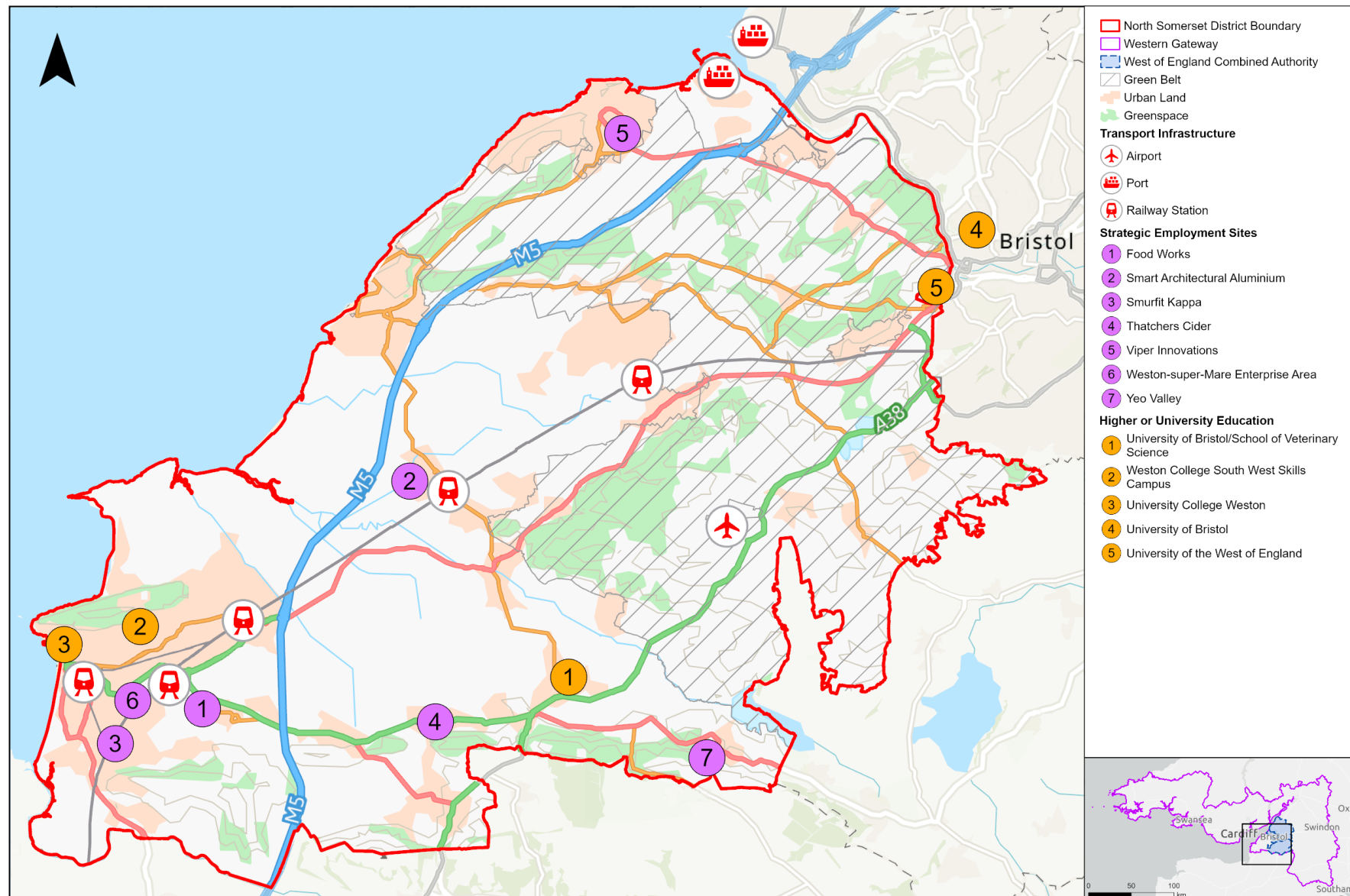
Travel to work

35% private vehicle (27% England)
19% public transport (27% England)
14% work from home
(27% England)



Inflow of 14,300 workers
Outflow of 19,500 worker

Bristol most popular commuting
destination



10-15 miles to the south near Bridgwater, and from the overheating Bristol market.

North Somerset's substantial economic assets, proximity to Bristol, and outstanding natural beauty give it a distinctive character with strong potential. The area has an excellent opportunity to leverage its existing strengths and to chart a course for growth, increasing productivity and reducing inequality to help deliver a more prosperous and fairer North Somerset.

Key socio-economic and geographical features are shown in the map and infographic below.



2.3 Addressing national policy drivers and international ‘Mega Trends’

The North Somerset Economic Growth Plan 2025 to 2035 will contribute towards achieving the Government’s top ‘Missions’:

- **Mission 1:** Kickstarting Economic Growth by boosting productivity in North Somerset
- **Mission 2:** Making Britain a clean energy superpower by growing the renewable energy sector
- **Mission 3:** Building an NHS and Care system fit for the future by supporting the growth of the health and care sector in North Somerset.
- **Mission 4:** Making Britain’s streets safe by addressing disadvantage and making attractive places which will help reduce crime and build more connected communities.
- **Mission 5:** Break down barriers to opportunity by addressing inequality, boosting social capital and enhancing skills.

It will address the following key national policy priorities identified in Invest 2035: Industrial Strategy and other key Government policies as set out in the King’s Speech and 2024 Budget:

- The three critical economic and productivity-boosting opportunities set out in Invest 2035, including Green Energy Transition, Digital and Technological Innovation, and Advanced Manufacturing and Services.
- Supporting key growth-driving sectors, including advanced manufacturing, clean energy, creative industries, life sciences and digital technologies
- Helping to create a pro-business environment.

- Improving public health to help keep people in work and get people back to work as quickly as they can after illness.
- Tackling unequal performance of the UK’s cities and regions to raise economic growth and reduce inequalities in our communities.
- Addressing the cost of living crisis through measures such as raising the National Living Wage and other employment reforms

NSC is not currently part of the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) but has expressed interest in joining and has secured government support for the principle, including a commitment to work alongside WECA to align with its Local Growth Plan. Being integrated into WECA would help NSC to deliver greater levels of inclusive growth.

The North Somerset Economic Growth Plan 2025-2035 aims to position North Somerset to address and be ready for the opportunities that would arise if it were to join WECA. However, it can also function as a standalone plan if membership is delayed or doesn’t occur for any reason.

Other global ‘mega-trends’ informing this plan include:

- **Reshaped global supply chains** due to COVID-19, geopolitical tensions and technological changes such as AI. This has increased the need for local economic distinctiveness, resilience and dynamism.
- **Climate and Biodiversity Emergency:** The great challenge of our age is to adapt local economies and embrace the ‘Green Revolution’ so that future generations can enjoy the quality of life we have.

2.4 Opportunities and Challenges

The detailed baseline evidence report supporting this Plan provides more detailed information on the opportunities and challenges facing North Somerset. Below is a summary of our current position.

Opportunities

- **Connectivity:** North Somerset benefits from strong international connections via its port, airport, and motorways, positioning it within the dynamic Bristol city region and the wider South West and South Wales green energy hub. Mainline rail links provide connections to Bristol and London within a two-hour travel time, with work on an additional rail link between Portishead and Bristol set to commence in summer 2025.
- **Quality of place:** attractive to investors, employers and potential employees, offering a mix of urban and rural, extensive coast and the Mendips National Landscape.
- **A growing and skilled population:** The population increased by 7% from 2011 to 2021, reaching 216,700, with 42% of residents holding NVQ Level 4 or higher qualifications.
- **Diverse economic base:** A mix of high- and lower-skilled jobs with opportunities to attract high-growth companies, with sectors including:
 - **Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering and Digital:** Home to over 6,000 employees and generating £650m, with strengths in aerospace, composites, and high-tech engineering. The digital and IT sector is expanding, offering further growth potential.
 - **Airport and Aerospace:** Bristol Airport, the UK's 8th biggest, serves 9.9 million passengers annually, supporting 3,750 jobs and a broad supply chain. The aerospace sector is key, benefiting from £1bn in National Wealth Fund investment.
 - **Creative Industries:** A thriving sector with key assets such as The Curzon, The Playhouse, and The Tropicana. Hosts innovative businesses and a sizeable freelance community in design, gaming, and media.
 - **Food and Drink:** A defining sector, including major employers like Thatchers and Yeo Valley. The Food Works Innovation Centre, located at Junction 21 of the M5, fosters innovation and drives business growth.
 - **Port, Maritime, and Green Economy:** The Port of Bristol handles 8.5 million tonnes of cargo annually and is well-positioned for clean energy projects, including green hydrogen.
 - **Visitor economy:** Welcoming 4m visitors annually and contributing £346m GVA, with key attractions including the Grand Pier, Tyntesfield, and the Mendip Hills. Investment in walking and cycling infrastructure supports diversification.

Challenges

Productivity: North Somerset's output per hour (£33) is 20% below the UK average, requiring investment in skills, employment space, and innovation to boost resilience and wages.

- **Disadvantage:** Some areas, particularly in Weston-super-Mare, rank among the most deprived in England, necessitating targeted interventions.
- **Climate and Environment:** Flooding, coastal erosion, and biodiversity loss pose increasing risks.
- **Housing:** High property prices relative to wages highlight the need for more affordable, high-quality housing.
- **Transport and Congestion:** Low public transport use (2.5%) leads to car dependency, congestion, and limited job access, especially in rural areas.
- **Care and SEND Needs:** North Somerset has a high concentration of care services, similar to much of the country, and an ageing population, as well as increasing special educational needs (SEND), which may require additional support and mean caring needs may reduce some people's ability to work.

2.5 North Somerset's Priority Sectors

The North Somerset Economic Growth Plan focuses on actions related to the following economic sectors. These sectors are already present or are emerging in North Somerset and have the best chance of delivering and enabling sustainable economic growth and productivity.

Specific interventions under the People, Place and Pro-Business enablers (Section 4) will support growth in these core growth sectors. See Appendix A for more detailed sector profile information:

- **Green and Blue Economy:** Ports/Airports, Energy Security and Decarbonisation, Green Tech and Retrofit. 
- **Technology and Advanced Manufacturing:** Life sciences, AI/IT, Financial Technologies, Food and Drink Manufacturing. 
- **Cultural, Creative and Lifestyle:** Creative industries, Film, Health and healthier living 
- **Food and Drink Manufacturing and Agri-food:** building on innovation activity at Food Works and recognising some of the major employers in North Somerset. 
- **Health, Social Care and SEND:** Ensuring its resilience, supporting innovation, and recognising the sector's significance for the wider economy to function. 
- **Foundational Economy:** Transport and Logistics, Retail and Visitor Economy (including high streets and town centres). 

2.6 Summary – North Somerset has significant economic potential.

North Somerset has fantastic economic potential. It boasts a wealth of attributes, including its location in a dynamic economic region, strong connectivity, a robust business base, and a skilled workforce, as well as an identity that combines economic, environmental, and quality of life factors. This strong and diverse blend of economic growth attributes positions North Somerset well to capture future economic opportunities. Key priority sectors in North Somerset that require this balance of factors to be in place include the blue and green energy, technology and advanced manufacturing, cultural and creative industries, and food and drink. The care sector and inclusive growth initiatives can also help to address some of the longstanding social deprivation issues. With the right interventions, the key enablers of productivity growth can help support a step change in North Somerset's economic fortunes.

3. Delivery of the vision

Actions to deliver our vision are grouped into three themes:

- **Supporting People:** Improvements to skills and well-being enable individuals to realise their potential and live productive lives. At the same time, businesses gain access to the right skill sets and capabilities to thrive.
- **Being Pro-Business:** Providing support to existing and new businesses to grow and become more productive, attracting inward investment, and working with partners to develop strategies that help to incentivise and enable expansion of our priority growth sectors to support innovation-led inclusive growth across North Somerset.
- **Being a commercially attractive Place:** Enhancing the economic growth potential of North Somerset, including improving outcomes for disadvantaged communities. Decarbonising infrastructure and building climate resilience. Delivering commercial spaces for businesses to grow and high-quality, affordable homes for our workforce so they can enjoy life in sustainable communities.

The details on how this will be delivered are described in each section below and in the action plan in Appendix C.

3.1 People

Supporting the health, well-being, education, and skills of North Somerset's residents is key to building an inclusive and productive economy. Ensuring people are skilled, healthy, and motivated will help them seize future opportunities. This requires raising aspirations through training, upskilling, and improving wellbeing to support disadvantaged groups in returning to work while encouraging young people to live and work locally.

Key challenges include high levels of inequality in central and southeast Weston-super-Mare, a 6.2% NEET rate (above regional and national averages), and an unemployment rate of 4.7%, which exceeds the England and South West figures. Skills gaps exist in advanced manufacturing, construction, health and social care, life sciences, and creative industries, as identified in the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP).

Addressing these issues requires strong collaboration among North Somerset Council, businesses, the health and education sectors, training providers, and the Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector. Investments, such as the £125m allocated for adult and social care (2024–2028 Corporate Plan) and the UK Government's 'Getting Britain Working' strategy, present opportunities to close the attainment gap, enhance workplace culture, and boost productivity.

Through the key projects set out in this section, the North Somerset Economic Growth Plan will prioritise:

- Upskilling and retraining to drive productivity, innovation, and economic growth.
- Attracting and retaining young people within the North Somerset area

- Reducing inequalities by increasing access to work and helping people to stay in and progress at work

Projects will include:

- **Seek funding to sustain and enhance adult employability schemes, adapting as needed based on funding and demographic shifts.** The Council will identify residents facing labour market barriers and provide targeted support to improve their skills and employability. Current programmes include Opportunity North Somerset, Skills Boot Camps, employment support for those with Special Educational Needs, and Women's Work Lab.
- **Work with providers to explore opportunities to enable preventative health programmes for cohorts of people more at risk of becoming economically inactive due to poor health:** Schemes such as smoking cessation, social prescribing, engaging older people in physical activity, weight management, health checks, mental health support and vaccination can help to reduce the demand on healthcare services by preventing illness before it starts, reduce absenteeism and presenteeism and help people get back to, and stay in, work. Targeted employability programmes such as Work Well and the Government's new initiative 'Connect to Work' seek to blend employment and skills support with targeted health interventions. These programmes must support residents in accessing work and enable employers to feel confident in recruiting from a diverse group of people. We will explore opportunities to expand provision through any new future funding streams and/or devolution deals.

- **Conduct a Community Wealth Building audit to identify existing activities and areas where additional work may be needed.** This could include establishing an Anchor Employers Network, reflecting on the Council's Employer of Choice Programme and how to roll out best practice, and leveraging additional benefits for our residents through the Council's buying power and social value.
- **Develop an easily understood skills system that is responsive to the needs of residents and businesses, and encourage more residents, particularly the unemployed and at-risk workers, to participate in post-16 skills programmes aligned with local business needs.** These skills initiatives will ideally cover all sectors but will initially focus on the skills needs of priority growth sectors, including green economy skills (e.g., green hydrogen and renewable energy installation, and low-energy retrofit), the Life Sciences, and the Cultural and Creative sectors. The Council will facilitate post-16 skills conversations that identify the local economy's skills needs and gaps. We will collaborate with businesses, the Chamber of Commerce, and Skills England through the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) process, as well as with schools, skills and education providers, to identify and deliver the right training courses that meet business needs at the correct times. Skills provision can be hard to navigate. Therefore, North Somerset Council will take a lead role in supporting access to skills via a one-stop shop approach to employability support and training.
- **Expand and strengthen higher education provision in North Somerset to help attract young people seeking higher education to stay or locate in North Somerset:** Although the wider area (West of England) has several world-leading universities and North Somerset has University Centre Weston (UCW) and University of Bristol North Somerset

Campus and Veterinary School at Langford, the area would benefit from strengthening the higher education offer as this could help to attract and retain more young people, which stakeholders identified as a constraint holding back productivity growth in North Somerset. We will also look to strengthen further links to existing universities and collaborations, such as the University of Bristol, the University of the West of England, Bath University, and Bath Spa University, and/or expand the provision of courses at UCW and other nearby University Centres and providers.

- **Support training and education providers in seeking that North Somerset becomes a regional 'flagship' of SEND provision and training.** Stakeholders provided feedback that North Somerset is fulfilling a role as a regional specialist in the provision of a range of care services, including Special Educational Needs (SEND). This North Somerset specialism could be celebrated and built upon to create a strategically important role and 'brand' for North Somerset. North Somerset Council will explore how to capture this opportunity by working with providers, schools and regional partnerships to understand the scale and scope of the opportunity and to develop a clear action plan to capitalise on it.
- **Support an increase in high-quality activities for young people, including new or improved facilities and cultural events, by linking to broader placemaking initiatives.** North Somerset Council will collaborate with Weston College and other educational providers, as well as community groups, to enhance and improve the facilities available to young people. This would help to retain and attract young people to North Somerset.
- **Grow our local economy and promote and market the opportunities in North Somerset to young people:** We will enhance the attractiveness

of North Somerset as a location for young people by further delivering placemaking and cultural programmes, and by attracting employers offering jobs that young people want to work in. North Somerset Council will continue to work closely with young people, employers, and training providers to promote apprenticeship schemes and access to employment and encourage employers to adopt positive recruitment and development offers for our working-age population.

- **Ensure North Somerset residents have access to the full range of devolved skills programmes offered at the sub-regional level through the area's formal involvement with the Combined Authority.** The Government has pledged to deepen devolution settlements across England, considering devolution to be a way of strengthening local democracy and accountability while providing an effective and efficient means of funding local growth aspirations. Without being part of a combined authority, North Somerset is hindered in its ability to access significant levels of Government funding for expensive items such as major infrastructure, employment and skills programmes.

3.2 Pro-Business

Businesses drive job creation, tax revenue, and innovation, ultimately benefiting the well-being and economic resilience of residents. SMEs dominate North Somerset (98.5%), with strengths in manufacturing, property, motor trades, and tourism; however, these are sectors that have traditionally had lower productivity. The region lags in high-productivity industries such as finance, IT, and communications, but has seen recent employment growth in financial services (+25%) and the professional,

scientific, and technical sectors (+17%), partly due to spillover effects from Bristol.

This North Somerset Economic Growth Plan focuses on fostering innovation, adopting new technologies, expanding market access, and building resilient, sustainable supply chains to strengthen the local economy.

The North Somerset Economic Growth Plan outlines a range of actions aimed at empowering North Somerset's businesses to innovate and accelerate the adoption of new technologies and best practices, while also helping them access new markets where possible.

Through the key projects set out in this section, the North Somerset Economic Growth Plan will prioritise:

- Supporting our businesses to explore innovation.
- Accessing funding to deliver sector-specific and tailored business support interventions.
- Improving productivity.
- Securing inward investment.

Projects will include:

- **Provide high-quality business support functions, including targeted interventions for priority sectors.** North Somerset Council will continue to build on existing business support functions by providing resources, such as identifying and utilising external funding opportunities as they arise, providing grants and business support, and enhancing existing programmes. Additionally, we offer mentorship, training, and networking opportunities to new and emerging businesses in North Somerset,

helping them start, develop, and grow their businesses. This will help businesses to overcome the challenges many start-ups face, to innovate, and expand, ultimately empowering them to thrive and contribute to the local economy.

North Somerset priority sectors closely align with those identified in the UK Industrial Strategy: Invest 2035. To further support the growth of these priority sectors, North Somerset will explore targeted interventions for priority sectors where there is demonstrable evidence that these interventions will boost growth and productivity.

These pieces of work will also support our larger businesses and should be considered as delivering that part of our vision as well.

- **Continue to lobby for parity of access to business support activity aligned with North Somerset's inclusion in the West of England Combined Authority.** As outlined in the skills section, North Somerset's non-membership of the Combined Authority puts its businesses at a disadvantage, and our membership and/or access to funding streams should be prioritised.
- **Provide climate change adaptation business support:** For businesses vulnerable to climate change and/or SMEs with a significant carbon footprint, as identified in the Enhancing Green Opportunities for SMEs in North Somerset report (Eunomia, 2021), a range of business support activities will be implemented to support their transition to net zero. This includes more sustained awareness raising through the provision of information delivered at business networks and clubs, focusing on decarbonisation actions they can undertake, case studies of successful initiatives by other SMEs, and guidance on external funding sources available, such as heat pump grants. Additionally, if funding becomes

available, North Somerset Council can provide implementation support to SMEs, including training and workshops, as well as advice on developing feasibility studies and applying for grant funding.

- **Allocate and promote commercially attractive and ambitious employment sites in the new Local Plan:** In developing our new Local Plan, we will explore the demand, market and potential locations for additional new commercial space and innovation/grow-on space across North Somerset. Stakeholders have fed back that providing sufficient business space to meet business needs should be an essential element of the North Somerset Economic Growth Plan 2025-2035. This space should be the right quality and quantity in the right locations to support long-term growth, capitalising also on supply chain opportunities from significant investments in the area, including Gravity/Agratas and potentially Epic, as well as overspill from the overheating Bristol market. This includes a variety of spaces and developments, ranging from local office-based and industrial start-ups to 'grow-on' spaces for firms to scale up their operations. All sites should be sustainable in terms of accessibility and the environment. A business-friendly approach to planning will help to bring forward appropriate developments more quickly. However, there is significant competition for land across the area and a shortage of suitable and commercially viable land that is 'shovel-ready' for investment.
- **Support innovation centres and grow on space, including at the Weston Enterprise area and in potential future growth locations:** North Somerset Council will continue to support the growth of the Weston Enterprise Area, which, through its existing business support and innovation activities, is attracting start-ups and existing businesses seeking grow-on space. This includes continuing to promote and collaborate with existing initiatives, such as Food Works SW, which

provides an innovation and collaboration hub for the food and drink sector, and The Hive, which offers managed workspaces and business support to enterprises from multiple sectors.

North Somerset Council will work to deliver opportunities at its strategic employment site, Weston Business Quarter, for new businesses looking to establish or grow in North Somerset. This will involve lobbying regional and central government, creating business cases to apply for grant funding for enabling infrastructure, and continuing to promote the location to new businesses where possible.

- **Support innovation-led business growth:** North Somerset Council will collaborate with Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) colleges and providers, regional and national Government, and business groups to explore ways to encourage innovation-led business growth in North Somerset. For example, by helping to create technology test beds and exploring the potential for innovation districts, as well as enabling and supporting projects and opportunities for innovation and knowledge exchange within the priority growth sectors.

Activities could include working on joint funding bids, integrating with existing strategies, identifying suitable sites, assisting providers in navigating planning requirements, identifying skills gaps, and providing signposting. Additionally, continuing to support and host forums for innovation and knowledge exchange is essential. Links to existing and future similar institutions and initiatives serving business innovation across the wider sub-region will continue to be developed, such as the West of England Aerospace Forum, Hydrogen South West, and TechSPARK. These groups will be strengthened as they play a crucial role in developing a robust ecosystem for innovation and upskilling,

supporting various sectors and fostering collaboration between academia and industry across North Somerset and the wider sub-region.

Alongside this work, we will continue to review our targeted business support interventions to ensure they are fit for purpose and lobby for parity for North Somerset businesses to any devolved business support from government/WECA.

- **Enable a North Somerset-wide coordinated approach to Inward Investment, including Foreign Direct Investment (FDI):** North Somerset Council will collaborate with existing inward investment organisations such as Invest Bristol & Bath to create a compelling and coordinated approach to promote North Somerset to the range of priority growth sectors targeted in the Economic Plan. There will likely be a split of activities, with Invest Bristol & Bath continuing to focus on industries such as the green economy and creative sectors and North Somerset focusing on broader, foundational economy sectors, including retail, food and drink, and the visitor economy. However, the promotion of North Somerset must be as effectively and efficiently coordinated as possible.

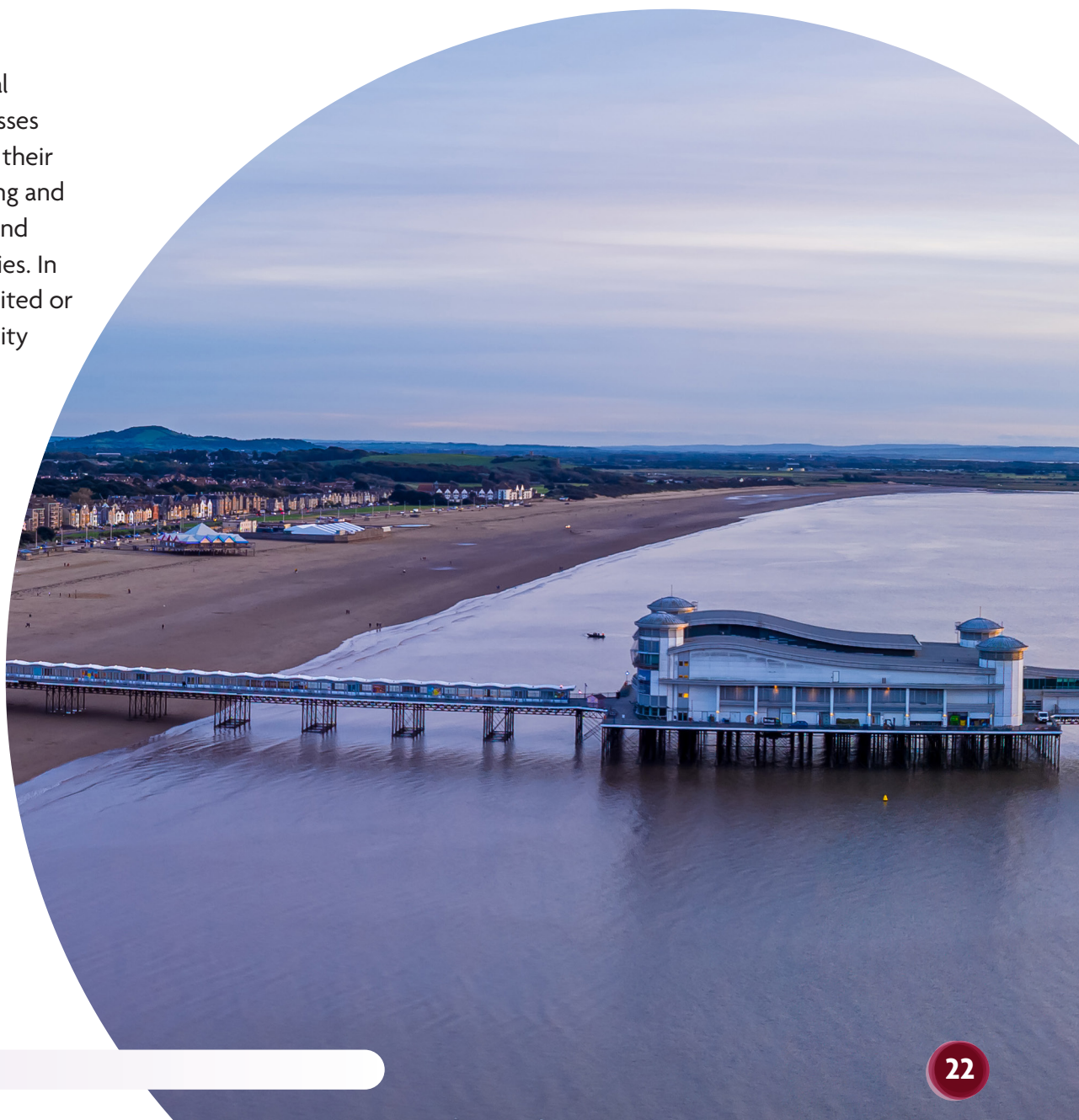
This will include working with Invest Bristol & Bath to align their North Somerset strategy with the evolving UK Industrial Strategy, ensuring they promote broader sectors where possible. It will involve collaborating with the UK Government to attract national priority growth sectors, including clean energy, advanced manufacturing, life sciences, and the cultural and creative industries. Additionally, working with these organisations ensures that, where possible, the economic opportunities North Somerset can offer, such as the green and blue economy, advanced manufacturing, engineering, and technology, are promoted effectively at trade shows, exhibitions, UK trade missions, and events.

3.3 Place

A high-quality and well-connected physical environment is a critical enabling factor underpinning sustainable economic growth. Businesses and investors prefer locations with attractive amenities to support their workforce. Successful economies offer a range of affordable housing and accessible transportation options, including public transportation and active travel routes, to facilitate access to employment opportunities. In turn, poor digital or energy infrastructure, road congestion, and limited or low-quality housing can significantly undermine business productivity and the attractiveness of an area for investment.

At the heart of our places are our town centres and high streets. Our retail and visitor economy sectors face challenging times, and continuous diversification, revitalisation, and investment will be required if our town centres and high streets are to thrive. This will include encouraging new homes in or close to town centres, facilitating investment in retail premises, and supporting a wide range of activities and events that will bring residents and visitors into our centres to spend their time and money, and build community connections.

Many of the place elements referenced under this theme are influenced by a range of factors, both within and outside the council's control. They are often subject to more extensive strategies and action plans, both locally, regionally, or even nationally. Through the Economic Plan, we seek to identify those priorities and projects that will have the most direct impact on our local economy and growth prospects.



This North Somerset Economic Growth Plan will prioritise:

- Creating desirable places to live, work and spend time, supporting our town centres and high streets in particular.
- Lobbying for investment in sustainable infrastructure, in particular strategic transport, energy, digital and flood defence.
- Supporting business decarbonisation and climate adaptation initiatives, helping ensure their resilience to energy shocks and shortages.

Projects will include:

- **Call on the Government to fast-track electrical grid reinforcements to unlock key economic growth sites.** North Somerset's electrical grid must be reinforced to ensure the correct capacity is provided in the right places to meet the area's future economic needs. This will involve working with District Network Operators (DNOs), Developers, National Grid, the UK Government and Great British Energy to deliver strategic network reinforcement projects and fast-track high-priority schemes.
- **Deliver current and future investments in transport infrastructure,** helping to reduce congestion and carbon emissions, and freeing up road space for critical economic travel, thereby improving productivity. This would include:
 - **Full delivery of Metrowest Portishead – Bristol rail link and Banwell bypass schemes, to improve productivity, reduce congestion and unlock major new growth locations.**
 - **Reopening of the freight line from Portbury to the new Gravity site in Bridgwater, which will unlock supply chain opportunities associated with this significant investment.**
- **Infrastructure to support the delivery of the 2025 Local Plan, particularly where it will facilitate new employment sites.**
- **Continued investment in improving and expanding bus services to offer an attractive and affordable alternative to car use.**
- **Ensuring that cycling and walking investments align with the needs of businesses and their employees. Good-quality networked cycle and walking links, such as the coastal routes, can also bring significant benefits to the visitor economy, with cycle tourism estimated to contribute £2.24 billion per annum to the UK economy.**
- **Call on the Government to improve rural digital connectivity.** Evidence suggests that some regions of North Somerset, particularly those in more rural locations, experience relatively poor digital connectivity. North Somerset Council will lobby the government and providers and support initiatives to ensure that all commercial and residential areas (both new and existing) have the best possible full-fibre digital infrastructure.
- **Explore and support industrial and commercial decarbonisation in North Somerset, building on the work of the West of England Industrial Cluster's Local Industrial Decarbonisation Plan:** Stakeholders identify that there are high levels of private sector demand for decarbonisation projects in North Somerset, due to its strong logistical and burgeoning green energy and green economy sectors. Exploring these opportunities will help to provide confidence in the green energy sector that North Somerset is a place of potential investment opportunities.

Energy security projects can help provide clean energy generation and decarbonise existing industries. This will also support the green economy priority sector. These projects are currently in the early stages of development in North Somerset but are outlined in more detail in the West of England Local Industrial Decarbonisation Plan (LIDP). Examples of projects being investigated in the LIDP include a Carbon Capture and Shipping Hub (7 CO₂) at Bristol Port/Avonmouth, as well as options for E-Fuel, Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), and Green Hydrogen manufacturing facilities at the same location. Links to innovative energy generation projects in the wider regional area, such as proposals for small modular nuclear reactors (SMRs) at Oldbury/Berkeley in Gloucestershire, could also benefit North Somerset's energy resilience and green economy transition.

- **Support the delivery of flood risk mitigation projects.** Due to its geography, specifically its coastal location and areas of low-lying land, North Somerset is at risk of coastal, fluvial, and pluvial flooding, which prevents development in many areas and substantially increases the costs of building, presenting barriers to business investment. Climate change increases this risk. North Somerset Council will collaborate with funding and delivery bodies, including the Environment Agency, DEFRA, Drainage Boards, and water companies, to deliver, maintain, and enhance flood alleviation schemes as appropriate. This will also help provide resilience to the local economy by reducing potential disruption and cost to businesses caused by flooding. The specific strategy and evidence base are set out in the North Somerset Council Local Flood Risk Management Strategy.

- **Deliver regeneration and placemaking initiatives** to ensure that our towns and villages are attractive places to live, visit and invest. This will include the completion of the current Levelling Up Fund (LUF) investments in Weston-super-Mare, as well as the delivery of the North Somerset Cultural Strategy and Action Plan. It will require working with a wide range of partners, particularly Town and Parish Councils and Arts Council England (ACE), which have designated North Somerset as a Priority Place for support and investment. The council will aim to facilitate and support a wide range of events and community activities that can bring life and footfall to our towns and villages, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of the area to both employers and employees.
- **Support the changing face of our high streets and town centres:** We recognise that our retail and visitor economy sectors are facing challenging times, and that continuous diversification, revitalization, and investment will be necessary for our town centres and high streets to thrive. The council is already investing in its properties where possible to improve their appearance and attractiveness to tenants. It will work with other landlords to encourage them to do the same, supporting them through grant schemes such as UKSPF, where such funding is available from the government. Where landlords are reluctant to engage or are outright negligent, the council may seek to use its powers as an early adopter of High Street Rental Auction (HRSA) legislation to take action to bring the properties in question back into use.
- **Facilitate higher levels of good-quality, reasonably priced housing for residents in sustainable locations: Providing appropriate levels of good-quality, sustainable,** and affordable housing is a priority for North Somerset Council. The Council is developing a Local Plan that will

outline housing sites to meet identified housing needs. It is also looking to bring forward mixed-tenure affordable housing on its landholdings, with a focus on brownfield town centre sites, which can help increase footfall to the local economy. Aligned with this, we will explore how to enable shop and office-to-residential conversions – where appropriate – to generate more activity in our central areas.

4. North Somerset's Ask

A new investment approach to enable a step change in the North Somerset economy

Capturing the fantastic economic opportunities outlined in the North Somerset Economic Growth Plan 2025-2035, while also addressing the core challenges facing North Somerset, will require effort and an embracing of new ways of working. It will also require substantial new investment. This investment will include a combination of public and private funding and will cover the following three enablers of growth:

- **People:** Investment to improve skills and wellbeing so that people can realise their potential and live productive lives, and so that businesses have access to the right skill sets and capabilities to help them thrive. Working with companies to encourage them to grow and develop their labour force to support individuals and the business ecosystem
- **Pro-Business:** Investment to support existing and new businesses to grow and to invest in research and development, attracting Inward Investment and working with partners to develop strategies that help to incentivise and enable expansion of our priority growth sectors to support innovation-led growth across North Somerset.
- **Place:** Investment to enhance the economic growth potential of North Somerset, including its deprived communities. Decarbonising infrastructure and building climate resilience. Delivering commercial spaces for businesses to grow and high-quality, affordable homes for our workforce.

The principle of focused investment and potential borrowing to invest where it can deliver economic growth is likely to necessitate new and innovative partnership arrangements, funding, and delivery mechanisms to achieve the required scale. To capture the significant economic opportunities for North Somerset, West of England and the wider nation as set out in this Economic Plan, it will be important that North Somerset gains access to devolved funding to help unlock funding and to send a signal to the private sector that the area is 'open for business'. North Somerset Council will help facilitate, collaborate, and steer broader inward investment, as well as seek private sector partners to identify the right investment and delivery mechanisms that meet North Somerset's vision and key priorities.

Delivering the ambitious North Somerset Economic Growth Plan 2025-2035 priorities will be complex. An Action Plan has been developed that outlines major activities to give each of the key priority projects and interventions outlined in the North Somerset Economic Growth Plan 2025-2035. The entire action plan is provided in Appendix C.

4.1 Conclusion

Investment can help unlock a positive future for North Somerset.

The priorities outlined in the North Somerset Economic Growth Plan (2025-2035) can help deliver a positive future for North Somerset. A future that will help deliver the UK Government's number one mission of 'kick-starting economic growth'. It will also help to increase productivity and accelerate the transition to net zero. It will enable a more innovative and dynamic business ecosystem, a stronger, more resilient, and cohesive society, and provide a greater sense of confidence, economic identity, and a positive message about North Somerset as a place to invest.

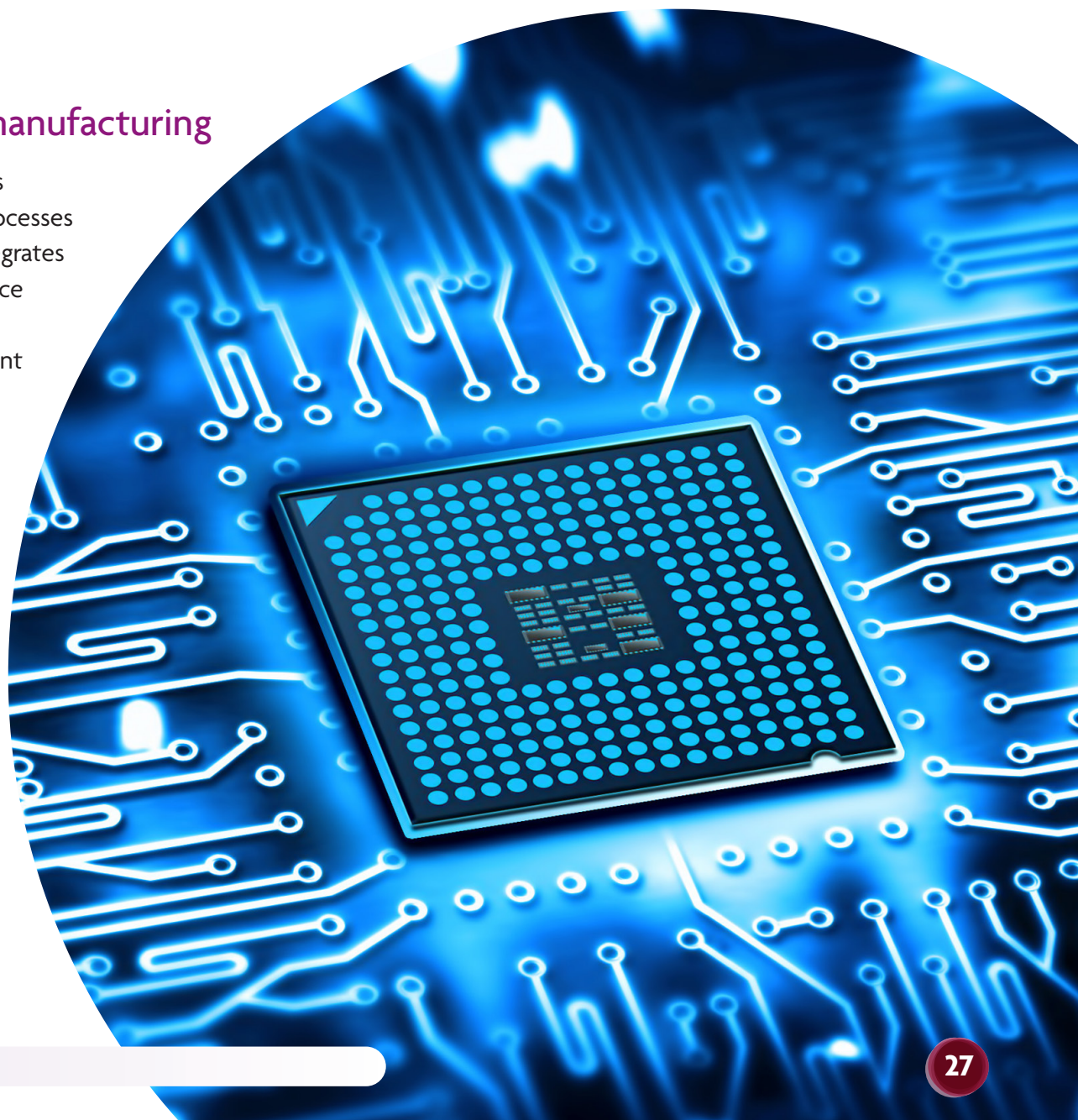
Appendix A: Sector Profiles

Sector profile 1: Technology and advanced manufacturing

The Advanced Manufacturing and Technology sector encompasses industries that utilise cutting-edge technologies and innovative processes to improve products and manufacturing efficiency. This sector integrates advanced materials, digital technologies, and automation to enhance productivity, sustainability, and competitiveness. The UK Industrial Strategy identifies advanced manufacturing as a nationally important growth sector. Key sub-sectors include life sciences, information technology (including Artificial Intelligence), Financial Technology, Food and Drink Manufacturing, Aerospace, and Robotics, among others.

Advanced manufacturing and technology in North Somerset

North Somerset is a burgeoning hub for the technology and advanced manufacturing sectors. These sectors are crucial for driving innovation and economic growth in North Somerset. Manufacturing contributes 15.8% to North Somerset's economy, while for comparison, the WECA and England manufacturing sectors make up 6.9% and 9.1% of their respective economies. Manufacturing contributed over £830 million to the North Somerset economy in 2022 and employed more than 7,000 people in North Somerset in 2023.



Case Study: Smart Systems (Aluminium), Yatton

Smart Systems, a company under the multi-national Corialis Group, is the UK's leading supplier of aluminium systems used in construction. They have a major campus in North Somerset, with over 60,000 m² of manufacturing space, research and development facilities and a sales and operation hub. Over 500 people are employed at the smart facility, which is the most advanced of its kind in the UK.

The life sciences sector, with a focus on biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, and medical devices, is experiencing significant growth in this area. The region is home to numerous tech startups and established firms specialising in AI, big data, cybersecurity, and FinTech, mainly due to the strong presence of this sub-sector in nearby Bristol. The Council signalled its support for the life sciences by granting approval to Epic Systems for a campus development that will bring up to 2,000 jobs to North Somerset. This is the most significant inward investment the West of England has seen in the last decade, and will unlock further opportunities in the med tech supply chain and encourage clustering of other high value businesses.

Furthermore, aerospace and advanced engineering are crucial components of North Somerset's economy, making significant contributions to both local and regional economic growth. In the West of England, this sub-sector is worth over £2.7 billion. Advanced manufacturing and technology

firms in North Somerset include Edwards, <M, SFK, Smurfit Kappa, Viper Innovations, Powervamp and MSEIS.

Future opportunities

There are significant opportunities to attract highly productive firms in the technology and advanced manufacturing sectors to North Somerset, which will help provide good-quality direct and supply chain jobs for the local workforce and boost the overall productivity of North Somerset. An essential action to enable this is to give the right space to meet their needs and, where appropriate, seed funding and business support to attract new firms to the area. A crucial attractor for these types of firms will be North Somerset's strong links with leading research institutions in Bristol and Bath, which will be leveraged to encourage further investments in sectors such as life sciences, IT, FinTech, and aerospace industries.

Sector profile 2: Green and blue economy

The Green and Blue Economies in North Somerset are pivotal for creating a sustainable and equitable future. These sectors encompass a wide range of activities focused on reducing environmental impact and promoting social well-being. The green economy covers a diverse range of economic sectors, characterised by a common theme of environmental sustainability. Key areas include energy security and clean energy, decarbonisation, sustainable agriculture, sustainable tourism, marine biotechnology, aquaculture, shipping, and retrofitting existing infrastructure to increase energy efficiency, among others.

North Somerset presents a significant opportunity in the green economy.

North Somerset's strategic location, with access to major ports and an airport, positions it as a hub for green logistics and sustainable transport. North Somerset and the wider region are investing heavily in energy security sources, including wind, solar, and tidal power. For example, a 75-acre solar farm near Kewstoke, North Somerset, was recently approved, and proposals are underway for a Bristol Wind Terminal at Avonmouth to transport offshore turbines to the Celtic Sea. These initiatives not only aim to reduce the carbon footprint but also to ensure energy security and create green jobs in occupations such as building retrofit, renewable energy installation, engineering, and environmental and energy specialist roles. The Climate Change Committee estimates that between 135,000 and 725,000 new jobs could be created in the UK, which, proportionate to North Somerset, would equate to up to 2,000 new jobs. In addition to



creating employment opportunities, innovation in green technology is driving economic growth and increasing productivity for existing firms. This includes advancements in energy storage, smart grids, and sustainable building materials. There is significant support for the green economy sector in the wider West of England. WECA, for example, has established a £100m (£10m public funding and £90m private) Green Growth West Impact Investment Fund, which will support SMEs and projects focused on green growth and decarbonisation. North Somerset could potentially access this funding if it were to join WECA.

Case Study: Bristol Port, Portbury

Bristol Port is a significant economic asset for North Somerset, playing a crucial role in the region's Green and Blue Economies, with plans in place to become a net zero port by 2040. North Somerset Council have worked in collaboration with Bristol Port and other partners to understand, test, and mobilise pathways to industrial decarbonisation in the Portbury, Avonmouth and Severnside Area.

Future opportunities

Bristol Port, with its plans to support tidal energy generation and carbon storage through nature-based solutions, among other sustainability targets, while ensuring safe and unhindered trade, will be a key driver of the green and blue economies in North Somerset. Additionally, Bristol Airport has ambitious decarbonisation plans, including a partnership with Bristol Port to increase the use of sustainable aviation fuel and green hydrogen, alongside a range of green economy opportunities promoted by other North Somerset businesses. Another key opportunity highlighted during stakeholder engagement is the multi-million-pound construction and retrofitting sector, which will also play a significant role in the future.

Sector profile 3:

Food and drink manufacturing and agri-food

The Food and Drink Manufacturing sector involves the processing, packaging, and distribution of food and beverages. This sector encompasses a diverse range of activities, from the production of raw materials to the creation of finished products ready for consumption. The sub-sector of agri-food, or agricultural technology, refers to the use of technology and innovation to improve the efficiency and sustainability of farming practices.

Food and drink and agri-food in North Somerset

The Food and Drink Manufacturing and Agri-food sectors are vital to North Somerset's economy, contributing significantly to local employment, innovation, and economic growth. There has been substantial investment in the Food and Drink Innovation Centre in the Weston-super-Mare Enterprise Area – Food Works SW, which is represented on the Defra Food Security Panel. This hub is located within the Defra-designated food enterprise zone. This enhanced level of holistic support enables North Somerset food and drink businesses of any size to undertake new product development and introduce high-quality, innovative products to the market.

The integration of technology in agriculture is transforming the sector. Innovations such as precision farming, automated machinery, and sustainable practices are increasing productivity and reducing environmental impact. Innovate UK-funded UK Agri-Tech's advanced Dairy

Development Centre in nearby Shepton Mallet, highlighting the region's importance to the UK Agri-food sector—particularly in dairy farming.

Another key food and drink sector asset is the Bristol Veterinary School at Langford, which specialises in livestock welfare and the use of AI technology, as well as food security. This presents an economic opportunity for North Somerset, for example, by partnering with start-up businesses and attracting private sector investment for incubator units and technology test beds. Together, the range of enhanced support in North Somerset allows the area to produce high-quality internationally renowned food and drink products, with companies like Yeo Valley and Thatchers leading the way.

Case Study: Yeo Valley (Dairy), Blagdon

Yeo Valley is a family-owned dairy company based in North Somerset, known for its organic products and according to the Grocer Magazine in 2020 they were the third largest yogurt brand in the UK and export their products internationally. Yeo Valley are a major employer—with over 1,500 employees in North Somerset. Moreover, the company emphasises sustainable farming practices, including organic farming and renewable energy use. Yeo Valley is known for its sustainability and social value credentials, being the first UK brand to introduce 100% recycled plastic packaging for its yoghurt products.

Future opportunities

There is an opportunity for North Somerset Council and stakeholders to collaborate regionally and make the case for broader sector support in the food and drink sector, particularly where this intersects with advanced manufacturing and technology. For example, to connect with a wider

innovation ecosystem in the West of England, such as FutureSpace, Science Creates, Bristol Robotics Lab, and the Science Park, as this creates the right environment to develop Innovate UK bids. This also enables wider links into life science, food security, sustainable packaging, and supply chain development. There are also opportunities to create the right kind of business space for the sector in strategic locations, enabling the growth of existing and emerging food and drink businesses. Finally, there is an opportunity to develop a food and drink cluster at Weston Business Quarter and develop wider supply chain opportunities for the region through a private sector or joint venture scheme.



Sector profile 4: Cultural, creative and Lifestyle

The Cultural, Creative, and Lifestyle sector is vital for enhancing the quality of life and attracting talent and investment to North Somerset. The industry not only generates jobs and wealth, but it also serves as an enabler for enhancing the local area and its desirability in North Somerset. The wider region is already well-known for its substantial presence in sub-sectors such as Media Production, design, gaming, and virtual and Augmented Reality.

Building on the West of England's positive, globally recognised high-profile media and cultural brand

The West of England is the UK's third-largest TV cluster, with over 6,000 businesses contributing £650 million GVA to the economy. The area's picturesque locations make it an attractive site for film and television productions, and its proximity to the Bottleyard studios in Bristol creates good, cost-effective film location options. Recent TV examples filmed in North Somerset include Outlaws, Tracey Beaker, and Rivals, Enid Blyton, Sherlock, and Doctor Who. Channel 4 and the BBC have a substantial presence in nearby Bristol, with a positive impact on North Somerset. Culture West, funded in part by Arts Council England and regional partners, is a £3.1 million programme designed to nurture creativity and culture in the region, providing support and resources to freelancers in the creative sector.

Future opportunities

Super Culture, The Front Room, Weston Artspace, and North Somerset Arts provide resources for both amateur and professional artists and creatives. Well-established companies, such as Trigger, Arcadia, and FineLine Lighting, operate on a larger national scale, but the area is characterised by many high-quality freelancers working across the sector. The quality and potential of the industry in North Somerset are demonstrated by the fact that it has two Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations. Arts Council England has stated that North Somerset is one of 11 priority places in the South West for increased investment in culture. Overall, this sector is not only crucial for the area's economy but also for its social well-being – making it an attractive place to live and work. Therefore, this Economic Plan will identify interventions that support the sector, enhance the business eco-system for existing firms and attract new businesses to locate in North Somerset.

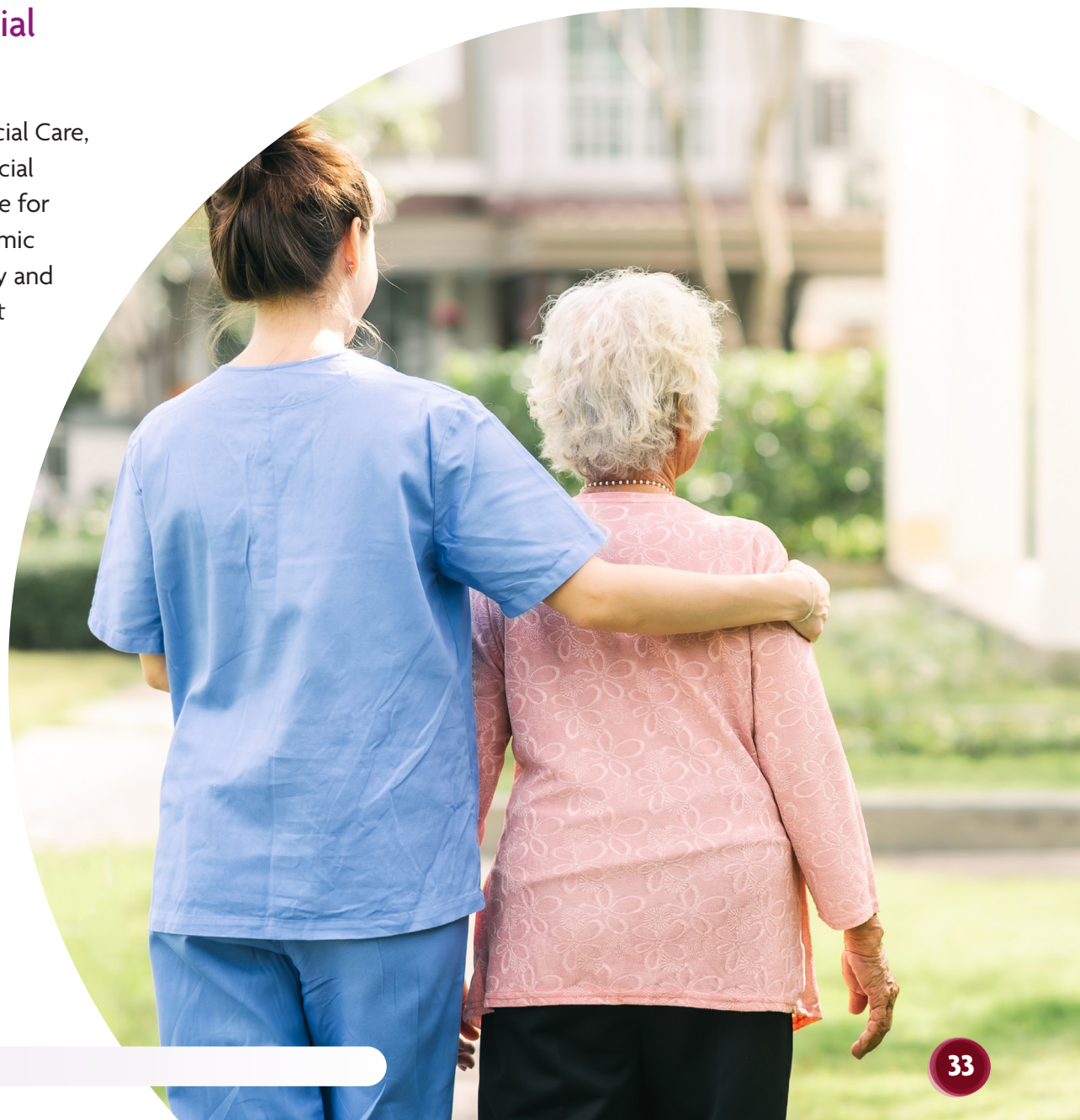


Sector profile 5: Health, social care and special educational needs (SEND)

Whilst not often recognised as an economic driver, the Health, Social Care, and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) sector is crucial for ensuring the well-being of residents. By raising the quality of life for area residents and workers, it can have a positive impact on economic productivity. For example, it can help reduce the effects of poverty and generate greater economic output by freeing up workers' time that is currently spent caring for older parents and children with special educational needs.. Providing high-quality care services is a local and national priority, with a focus on supporting the elderly and vulnerable populations. This includes residential care, home care, and community support services.

Future opportunities

North Somerset is committed to improving health outcomes through investment in healthcare infrastructure and services. A Joint Strategic Needs Assessment has been carried out to assess current and future needs. This has informed plans to expand access to medical facilities, promote preventive care, and support mental health initiatives. The sector in North Somerset, as well as more widely across the UK, also faces significant challenges. The Economic Plan sets out proposals to support the sector in North Somerset. These proposals can help to ensure that the care sector supports the local economy in its drive to increase productivity, rather than acting as a drag on productivity.



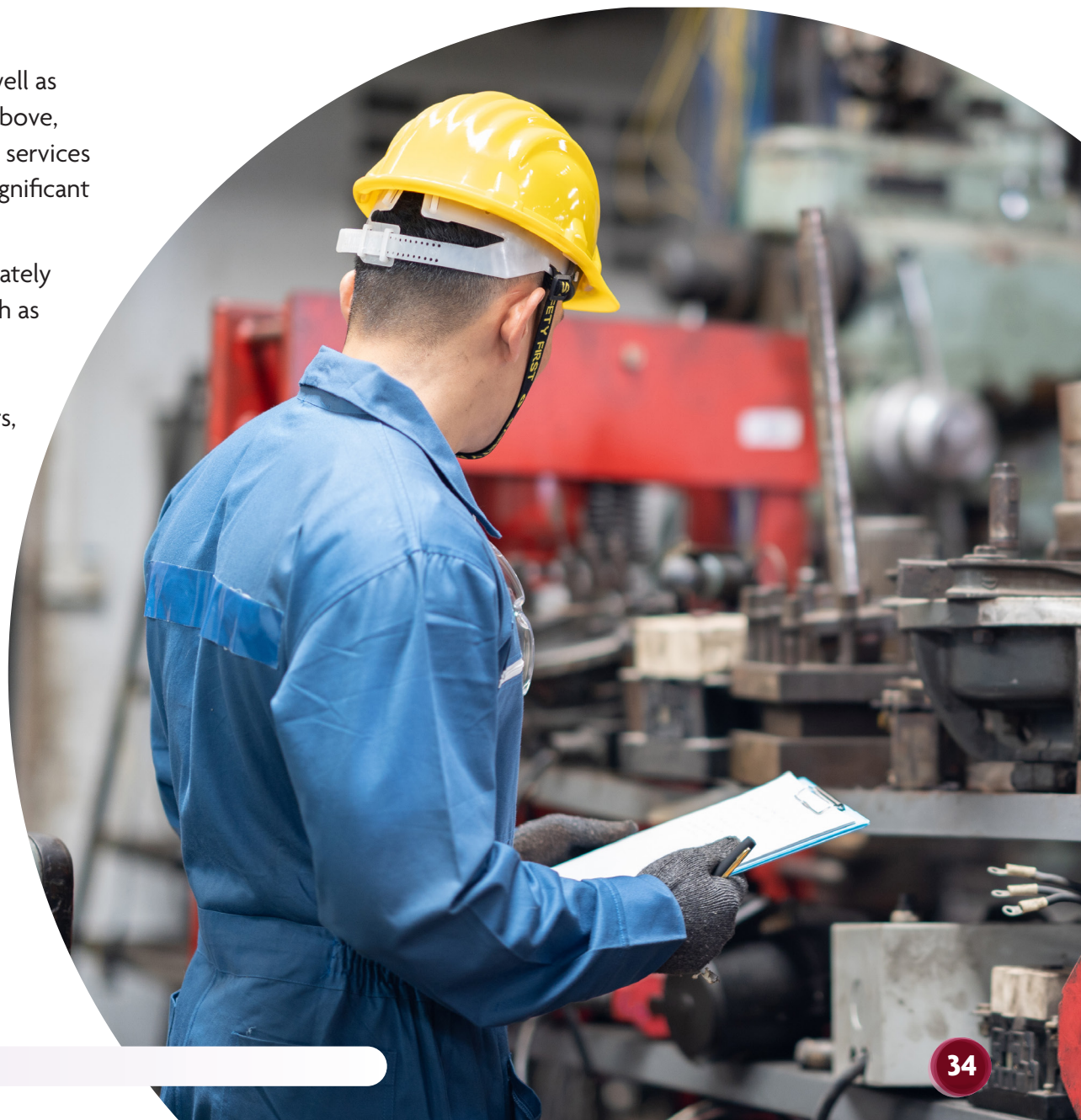
Sector profile 6: Foundational economy

The Foundational Economy, encompassing logistics and Retail, as well as elements of the health, care, and food and drink sectors covered above, underpins North Somerset's economic stability, providing essential services to sustain the effective functioning of the region and generating significant levels of employment.

The foundational economy in North Somerset makes up approximately 40% of total employment. Parts of the foundational economy, such as efficient transport and logistics, are vital for sustainable economic growth. Additionally, adequate healthcare, education, and public services provide a solid foundation for local businesses and workers, enabling them to focus on generating economic value and improving productivity.

Future opportunities

Supporting the stability and improvements to foundational economy sectors will ultimately benefit the North Somerset economy, as well as enhance the quality of life for its residents. The investments in sustainable solutions at Bristol Port, along with improvements in transport connectivity, will be vital drivers of future growth in the area. Skills development will enable productivity gains and help attract and retain workers, including young people, who are critical to the economic prosperity of North Somerset.



Appendix B: Stakeholder engagement process

An extensive stakeholder engagement process was conducted in the development of the North Somerset Economic Growth Plan with the findings playing a key role. This appendix outlines the details of stakeholder engagement carried out to support the development of the North Somerset Economic Growth Plan. It includes the stakeholder organisations contacted and the events and dates of specific engagement events:

Process

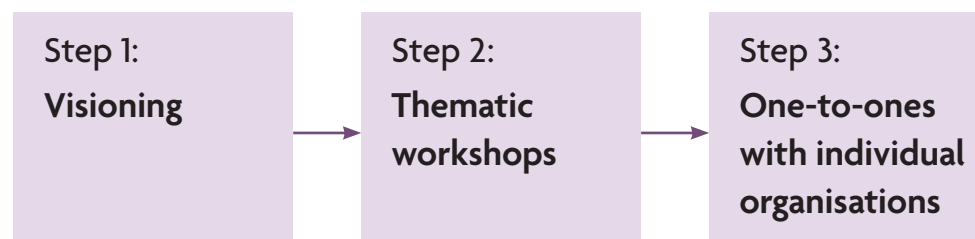
The stakeholder engagement for the NSGS followed the three main stages:

Step 1: Visioning

Step 2: Thematic groups

Step 3: One-to-one meetings with individual organisations

Below is an illustrative diagram to show the stakeholder engagement for the NSGS. Although the illustrative diagram shows the engagement as a linear approach, the delivery of workshops and other engagement sessions was occasionally held in parallel.



The key Stakeholder engagement events were as follows:

Step 1: Visioning

3 May 2024	Visioning Workshop
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Step 2: Thematic Groups

9 July 2024	People, Skills and Inclusive Growth Workshop
11 July 2024	Growth Sectors and Green Economy Workshop
17 July 2024	Investment, Productivity and Innovation, Infrastructure and Place Workshop

Step 3: One-to-ones

30 May- 18 September 2024	14 one-to-one sessions with individuals or a small number of people (maximum of five within an organisation).
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Stakeholder workshop vision responses

During the Visioning Workshop, attendees were asked to contribute three words that they would want to be included in the NSGS. The words provided were:



Stakeholder organisations engaged:

The following stakeholders were engaged through the process set out above:

Stakeholder Organisation Engaged and type

5. Bath University (Private Sector)
6. Bristol Airport (Private Sector)
7. Bristol Port (Private Sector)
8. Bristol University (Private Sector)
9. Business West (Private Sector)
10. Citizens Advice Bureau (Private Sector)
11. Clevedon Bid (Private Sector)
12. CURO Group (Private Sector)
13. Department for Work and Pensions (Public Sector)
14. DOWLAS Property Group (Private Sector)
15. Edwards Vaccums (Private Sector)
16. Food Works South West (Private Sector)
17. Mead Realisations Ltd (Private Sector)
18. Mendip Outdoor Activities Centre (Private Sector)
19. National Careers Service – CMT Services (Private Sector)
20. North Somerset Business Intelligence Network (Public Sector)
21. North Somerset Council Community Learning (Voluntary Sector)

22. North Somerset Care Providers Forum (Public/Voluntary Sector)
23. North Somerset Food and Drink Forum (Third Sector)
24. North Somerset Parish and Town Councils (Third Sector)
25. Puxton Farm (Private Sector)
26. Revprop Limited (Private Sector)
27. Seetec Plus (Public Sector)
28. Small Business Federation (Private Sector)
29. Thatchers Cider (Private Sector)
30. The Age Diversity Forum (Voluntary Sector)
31. The Hive Business Support
32. This is Gravity Limited (Private Sector)
33. Visit West (Public Sector)
34. West of England Combined Authority (Public Sector)
35. West of England Combined Authority Growth Hub (Private Sector)
36. Western Gateway/Porth y Gorllewin (Private Sector)
37. Weston Chamber of Commerce (Private Sector)
38. Weston College (Private Sector)
39. Weston College Year 2 Business Learners Student Group (Private Sector)
40. University of the West of England (Private Sector)
41. Yeo Valley (Private Sector)

Appendix C: Action plan

An Action Plan has been developed, which contains major activities to deliver each of the key priority projects and interventions listed in the North Somerset Economic Growth Plan . It also details the lead delivery partner, other partners or stakeholders who will need to be involved in their delivery, as well as associated timeframes. It lists sources of funding, which

will often involve North Somerset working in partnership with the private and third sector. It also lists the outcomes likely to result from the priority actions, helping to achieve the NSGS vision.

The priorities described in the NSGS are tied together in an action plan that will help underpin the development of an effective delivery programme:

People

Vision

Economic inactivity continues to decline as tailored employment support programmes expand.

Project description

Seek funding to sustain and enhance adult employability schemes e.g. Opportunity North Somerset

Timescale

Two years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Employers

- Weston College and Universities
- Community, Voluntary Social Enterprise Sector (VCSE)
- DWP/JCP
- Other commissioned providers

Potential funding route(s)

- Devolution deal funding
- UK Government funding
- Local authority funded

Key delivery actions

- Review employability services
- Ensure new funding is fully integrated into existing models.
- Utilise the Employment and Skills Taskforce to identify and address gaps.

Key outcomes

- Improved health and wellbeing
- Aligned/responsive skills provision
- Increased aspiration
- Increased participation of adults in education.
- People entering employment.
- Demand management on other services.

Project description

Work with providers to explore opportunities to enable preventative health programmes for people aged 50+ to ensure they are more economically active.

Timescale

Two years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Health Services
- VCSE
- Employers

Potential funding route(s)

- UK Government funding
- Health investment

Key delivery actions

- Closer integration between Public Health services (Health and Wellbeing Plan) and Economic Plan.
- Ensure support offers above are embedded in Public Health interventions.
- Identify gaps as services settle and seek funding to plug if available.

Key outcomes

- Reduced health inequalities
- Improved health and wellbeing
- Increased participation of 50+ in employment
- Demand management on other services.

Project description

Undertake a Community Wealth Building Audit to identify where activity is already taking place and where additional work might be needed.

Timescale

Two years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- VCSE
- Anchor Employers

Potential funding route(s)

- Audit completed by existing staff resource
- Additional projects funded through the UK Government.

Key delivery actions

- Establish staff group and criteria to audit.
- Test
- CWB statement of activity and future projects

Key outcomes

- Increased social value from Council services.
- Job and skills

Vision

More residents upskill, securing higher wages and local employment.

Project description

Develop a navigable skills system that is responsive to the needs of residents and businesses, and encourage more residents, particularly the unemployed and at-risk workers, to participate in post-16 skills programmes aligned with local business needs

Timescale

Two years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- VCSE
- Skills and employability providers
- Employers

Potential funding route(s)

- UK Government Funded (UKSPF)
- Weston College and Universities
- Employers

Key delivery actions

- Delivery of a skills and learning 'one-stop shop' or 'online platform'
- Identify future funding to maintain service.

Key outcomes

- Increased participation of adults in education
- Increased employment opportunities
- Raised aspirations
- Aligned/responsive skills provision

Vision

North Somerset's workforce is more adaptable, with strong participation in future-focused industries (such as blue and green economy, digital technology, advanced manufacturing).

Project description

Expand and strengthen higher education provision in North Somerset to help attract young people seeking higher education to stay or locate in North Somerset

Timescale

Five years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Weston College and Universities
- Employers

Potential funding route(s)

- Weston College and Universities
- Understand Weston College's expansion plans
- Identify how NSC can support.

Key outcomes

- Raised aspirations

- Increased participation of young people in local policy formation
- Attracted and retained young talent

Project description

Support training and education providers to explore opportunities for North Somerset to become a regional 'flagship' of SEND provision and training

Timescale

Five years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Care Providers
- Schools
- Weston College and Universities
- Health Services
- VCSE

Potential funding route(s)

- Government grants/loans
- Health investment

Key delivery actions

- The scale and scope of the opportunity will be explored

- Development of an Action Plan
- North Somerset becomes a regional 'flagship' of SEND provision and training

Key outcomes

- Children reach their potential at school
- Increased aspiration
- Improved health and wellbeing

Vision

North Somerset offers an opportunity-rich community where 18-30 year-olds choose to stay and contribute to sustainable economic growth

Project description

Support an increase of better quality 'things to do' for young people, including new/improved facilities, and cultural activities and by linking to wider placemaking initiatives

Timescale

Five years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Community groups,
- Cultural organisations,
- Developers,
- Leisure providers

Potential funding route(s)

- UK Government Funding,
- Arts Council,
- Local Authority Funding

Key delivery actions

- Invest in youth-friendly leisure and cultural spaces
- Promote youth engagement in planning,
- Expand evening and weekend activities

Key outcomes

- Improved social cohesion
- Higher youth participation in community events,
- Increased local economic activity

Project description

Grow our local economy and promote and market the opportunities in North Somerset to young people

Timescale

Five years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Placemaking Agency
- Employers,
- Universities,
- Marketing agencies,
- Local influencers

- Businesses

Potential funding route(s)

- UK Government Funding
- Private Sector Sponsorships

Key delivery actions

- Make best use of marketing campaigns showcasing career and lifestyle opportunities,
- Leverage social media for outreach
- Enhance graduate retention strategies

Key outcomes

- Increased awareness of local opportunities,
- Higher graduate retention
- Stronger local economy

Vision

North Somerset is a national leader in workforce inclusivity, skills development, and business growth.

And

A diverse, high-wage job market reduces outbound commuting, keeping talent and investment local.

Project description

In addition to the activities above—Ensure North Somerset residents have access to the full range of devolved skills programmes offered at the sub-regional level through the area's formal involvement with the Combined Authority.

Timescale

Timescale

Five years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- West of England Combined Authority,
- Skills Providers, Business Leaders
- Uk Government

Potential funding route(s)

- Devolution Deal Funding
- UK Government Skills Funding
- Private Sector Investment

Key delivery actions

- Ensure inclusive access to training programs
- Align skills development with emerging industries,
- Foster workplace diversity initiatives

Key outcomes

- Stronger workforce adaptability,
- Higher employment rates,
- Enhanced economic resilience

Pro-business

Vision

Start-ups and SMEs benefit from improved access to funding, workspaces, and business support

And

Larger businesses receive targeted assistance to boost productivity and expansion.

Project description

Provide high-quality business support functions, including targeted interventions for priority sectors:

Timescale

Two years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Employers
- Business support providers
- Banks
- Growth Hub

Potential funding route(s)

- Government Grant / Loans

Key delivery actions

- Explore and develop specific sector plans
- Continue to deliver business support activity (commissioned and directly)
- Identify funding streams to maintain activity.

Key outcomes

- Sector employment growth.
- Increased productivity
- Business Resilience

Project description

Continue to lobby for parity of access to business support activity aligned with North Somerset's inclusion in the West of England Combined Authority

Timescale

Two years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Business Support Organisations
- Chambers of Commerce,
- SME Networks

Potential funding route(s)

- UK Government Grants,
- Regional Business Funds

Key delivery actions

- Advocate for equal funding opportunities,
- Expand business support programmes,
- Facilitate SME access to regional growth initiatives

Key outcomes

- Increased business support access
- Higher SME survival rates
- Strengthened regional economy

Project description

Provide climate change adaptation business support

Timescale

Two years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Large Employers,
- Business

- Growth Hubs,
- Universities

Potential funding route(s)

- UK Government Industrial Strategy Funding,
- Private Sector Investment

Key delivery actions

- Establish tailored business growth programmes
- Support R&D and digital transformation
- Encourage collaboration between large firms and SMEs

Key outcomes

- Improved business productivity
- Increased innovation,
- Greater economic output

Vision

Strategic commercial sites and infrastructure projects attract inward investment.

Project description

Allocate and promote commercially attractive and ambitious employment sites in the new Local Plan

Timescale

Two years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- IBB
- Property agents
- Landowners

Potential funding route(s)

- Public-Private Partnerships
- Government grants/loans
- Private investment

Key delivery actions

- Allocate sites
- Promote with partners

Key outcomes

- Economic growth
- Job creation

Vision

North Somerset has a thriving small business ecosystem which drives innovation and job creation, supported by sector-specific interventions

Project description

Support innovation centres and grow on space including at Weston Enterprise area and in potential future growth locations.

Timescale

Five years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Universities
- Employers
- Skills and education providers

Potential funding route(s)

- Government grants/loans
- Private Investment
- Public-Private Partnerships

Key delivery actions

- Identify routes to delivery and funding models.

- Continue to support the existing Innovation Centre (Food Works) and promote benefits.
- Knowledge exchange

Key outcomes

- Increased innovation
- Economic growth
- Job creation

Vision

Productivity gaps among larger businesses continue to narrow, enhancing regional economic competitiveness, identifying North Somerset as a critical part of the West of England regional economy.

Project description

Support innovation-led business growth

Timescale

Five years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Innovation Hubs,
- Universities,
- Startups, Investors

Potential funding route(s)

- Government Grants,
- Venture Capital,
- Public-Private Partnerships

Key delivery actions

- Develop business incubators,
- Promote tech and sustainability-focused startups

- Enhance R&D investment

Key outcomes

- Increased business innovation,
- Growth in high-value industries,
- More competitive regional economy

Vision

The region is a premier destination for inward investment, known for innovation, sustainability, and connectivity.

Project description

Enable a North Somerset-wide coordinated approach to Inward Investment, including Foreign Direct Investment

Timescale

Five to 10 years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- WECA
- Invest in Bristol and Bath

Potential funding route(s)

- Public-Private Partnerships
- Government grants/loans
- Private investment

Key delivery actions

- Data on existing inward investment is conducted
- Secure future funding to deliver investment services i.e. NSC involvement with IBB

Key outcomes

- Economic growth
- Job creation

Place

Vision

Strategic commercial sites and infrastructure projects attract initial waves of inward investment

And

Inward investment and business growth increases, leveraging infrastructure improvements, affordable homes, workforce strengths, and an improved place brand.

Project description

Call on the government to fast-track electrical grid reinforcements to unlock key economic growth sites.

Timescale

Two years

Lead delivery organisation

National Grid

Delivery partners

- District Network Operators
- Private Developers
- UK Government
- Great British Energy

Potential funding route(s)

- UK Government funding
- Private investment
- Public-Private Partnerships

Key delivery actions

- Strategic network reinforcement
- Electrification of ports
- Implement renewable energy projects

Key outcomes

- Enhanced grid capacity
- Decarbonisation
- Improved air quality
- Job creation

Project description

Deliver current and future investments in transport infrastructure

Timescale

Five years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Sustrans
- Community organisations
- UK Government

- WECA
- Rail partners

Potential funding route(s)

- UK Government funding
- Local authority funding

Key delivery actions

- Creation of new active travel neighbourhoods, new high streets and district centre active travel improvement schemes
- Promotional and educational awareness-raising programmes
- Extending the WESTscoot and WESTbike e-scooter and e-bike hire schemes

Key outcomes

- Increased rates of active travel
- Reduced road congestion
- Improved connectivity
- Lower carbon footprint
- Increased health and well-being of North Somerset residents and workers

Project description

Call on Government to improve rural digital connectivity

Timescale

Five years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Internet Service Providers
- Private Developers

Potential funding route(s)

- UK Government funding
- Private investment
- Public-Private Partnerships

Key delivery actions

- Installation of full-fibre infrastructure
- Development of data centres
- Improvements to rural connectivity

Key outcomes

- Enhanced digital infrastructure
- Improved connectivity

Project description

Deliver regeneration and placemaking initiatives

Timescale

Two years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- UK Government
- Heritage England
- Arts Council England

Potential funding route(s)

- UK Government
- Heritage England
- Arts Council England
- RNLI

Key delivery actions

- Deliver UK Government Funded regeneration projects in Weston town centre
- Deliver Cultural Audit actions

Key outcomes

- Improved brand
- Jobs
- Improved business confidence
- Increased footfall

Project description

Support the changing face of our high streets and town centres

Timescale

Two years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- UK Government
- Heritage England
- Arts Council England

Potential funding route(s)

- UK Government
- Heritage England
- Arts Council England
- RNLI

Key delivery actions

- Implement High Street Rental Auction projects
- Deliver Cultural Audit actions

Key outcomes

- Improved brand
- Jobs
- Improved business confidence

- Increased footfall
- Reduction in vacancy levels

Project description

Facilitate higher levels of good quality and reasonably priced housing for residents in sustainable locations

Timescale

Two to five years

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Homes England
- Registered Providers
- Development community

Potential funding route(s)

- Homes England
- Private Investment

Key delivery actions

- Adopt new Local Plan
- Identify delivery partners or Joint Ventures
- More affordable homes
- Increase of attractivements of North Somerset as a place to live and work.

Vision

Sustainability initiatives and decarbonisation embed resilience across industries.

Project description

Explore and support decarbonisation opportunities in North Somerset, building on the work of the West of England Industrial Cluster's Local Industrial Decarbonisation Plan

Timescale

Two to five years

Lead delivery organisation

Industry

Delivery partners

- NSC
- UK Government
- Investors

Potential funding route(s)

- Public-Private Partnerships
- Private Investment

Key delivery actions

- Support delivery of projects in the Local Industrial Decarbonisation Plan

- Roll out learning and further work to the industry beyond the West of England Industrial Cluster
- Build decarbonisation support into business support programmes.

Key outcomes

- Business growth
- Increased energy resilience
- Lower carbon footprint

Project description

Delivery of flood risk mitigation projects

Timescale

Medium – Long Term (three to five+ years)

Lead delivery organisation

North Somerset Council

Delivery partners

- Environment Agency,
- Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
- Internal Drainage Boards
- Water companies

Potential funding route(s)

- UK Government funding
- Private investment

Key delivery actions

- Implement flood alleviation schemes
- Increased flood resilience
- Protected communities



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