



Economic Recovery Plan *Roadmap to Recovery*

The coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on every aspect of society, with the response to this bringing a significant challenge to the council, as well as residents and businesses across the borough. As the crisis begins to abate, the economic impact is becoming clearer and identifying key activity that will be required to support its recovery over the short-to medium term.

St Helens was once highly industrialised area and has a proud heritage of coal mining, railways and world-famous glass and chemical industries. The decline of these industries led to significant economic restructuring and a resultant reduction in jobs and business opportunity, the legacy of which is still seen today.

St Helens Economic Snapshot

Despite considerable positive change in more recent years in terms of the local infrastructure, housing and the environment, St Helens' comparative economic performance pre-COVID-19 sat within the bottom half of all local authorities. The productivity, or GVA (Gross Value Added, the measure of the value of goods and services produced in an area) of the borough was 25% less than the national average while prosperity (GVA per head) was even greater, at 46% less.

These gaps reflect both lower economic activity and employment rates. Business numbers and growth have both been nearly a third less than the UK average growth rate, and since 2015 a reduction in the business birth rate has impacted adversely on business density. As a result, employment growth has also been limited with the ratio of jobs to the working age population being nearly a quarter less than that within the UK.

The age profile of St Helens is comparatively old, with proportionally less people aged 16 and under than and more people over 65, than nationally. The proportion of the working age population is below national and North West levels and has fallen since 1992 and trends continuing to suggest this will continue. In addition, the borough has relatively high levels of deprivation and inequality, with nearly a quarter of all neighbourhoods within the borough falling within the most 10% deprived nationally.

Prior to the pandemic, St Helens had made significant progress against its labour market and skills profile. Since 2010, there was a considerable reduction in the number of economically inactive residents, and a significant improvement in residents' skill levels. However, despite this, economic inactivity remained higher than the UK average, fuelled by high levels of long-term sickness which reflects the poor health of much of the population.

Economy and Business

- St Helens economic productivity is low. St Helens GVA per hour worked in 2018 at £26.08 is 25% less than the UK average £35.00.
- Productivity, across all broad economic sectors is lower in St Helens than the UK average. In addition, St Helens' industrial structure is weighted towards the lower productivity sectors.
- Growth in St Helens productivity is below the UK average. St Helens Growth in GVA per hour worked between 2013 and 2018 is 9%, below the UK average growth of 12%.
- St Helens economic prosperity gap to the national average is very large. St Helens GVA per head in 2018 at £14,900 is 46% less than the UK average £27,500 GVA.
- Growth in St Helens economic prosperity also significantly lags the national average. St Helens Growth in GVA per head between 2013 and 2018 is 1%, below the UK average growth of 6%, reflecting lower employment and economic activity rates.
- St Helens' business density is approximately a third less than the national average. The number of businesses in St Helens in 2020 per 10,000 population 16-64 is 521, compared to 692 for the North West and 770 for the UK.
- St Helens' business growth rate is lower than regional and national averages. The number of businesses within St Helens has increased from 4,675 in 2010 to 5,745 in 2020, a growth rate of 22.8%, which is lower than the North West average of 23.5% and the UK average of 24.8%.
- St Helens' Business birth rates have declined over the last 4 years and are below regional and national averages. The latest business birth rate for St Helens in 2018 is 12.6%, which is below the UK average of 12.9% and the North West average of 14.2%.
- St Helens' business survival rates compare favourably to national and regional averages, although are anticipated to fall in the current economic climate. The latest business survival rates at 3 years from birth stand at 56.6%, higher than the North West average of 54.6% and the UK average of 55.3%.
- The number of high growth businesses increased in St Helens in 2018. The number of high growth businesses stands at 49.7 per 10,000 businesses, now above the North West average of 47.9 and the UK average of 47.5.
- The ratio of jobs to the working age population in St Helens is nearly a quarter less than nationally and regionally. There are approximately 55 jobs per 100 of the working age population in St Helens in 2020, compared to approximately 75 within the UK and North West.
- St Helens job growth rate is lower than national and regional rates. There is a total of 61,000 employee jobs in St Helens. Over the last 5 years St Helens Job growth is approximately 2%, compared to approximately 5% across the UK and 7.6% across the North West.

People

- In recent years, St Helens had made significant progress against its labour market and skills profile. Despite improvement however, gaps compared to national levels still exist.
- St Helens employment rate is lower than the national rate. St Helens employment rate in the 12 months to June 2020 stands at 75.4%, above the North West rate of 75.2%, but below the UK rate of 76.1%.
- St Helens unemployment rate is higher than the national and regional rate. St Helens unemployment rate in the 12 months to June 2020 stands at 5.6%, above the North West and UK rates of 3.9%.
- St Helens youth unemployment rate is significantly higher than the national and regional rate. St Helens Youth unemployment rate in the 12 months to June 2020 at 21.3% (2,200 20-24 yr. olds) is significantly higher than the North West rate of 9.7% and the UK rate of 8.9%.
- There are more workless households in St Helens than nationally. Over 17% of households remain workless compared to a 14% UK average in December 2019.

- St Helens rate of economic inactivity has improved significantly. St Helens economic inactivity rate in the 12 months to June 2020 at 20.1% is marginally below the North West and UK average. However, 29% of the economically inactive are long-term sick, higher than the UK average of 23.7%, reflecting the poor health of a significant proportion of the local population.
- Skill levels in St Helens are lower than national averages. Approximately 11% of 16 – 64-year olds in St Helens hold no qualifications, 3% more than the national average. Approximately 33% of 16 – 64-year olds hold degree-level qualifications, around 7.5% less than the national average.
- There is a higher rate of young people aged 16-17 not in employment, education, or training (NEET) in St Helens than nationally and regionally. In 2020, 5.6% of 16-17-year olds were NEET or not known, higher than the England rate of 5.5% and the North West rate of 5.4%.
- Levels of pay within St Helens are less than national and regional averages. Average annual gross pay of St Helens residents in 2020 at £28,094 lags the North West average of £29,700 and the UK average of £31,461.

Place

- Relatively high levels of deprivation and inequality exist across St Helens. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 ranks St. Helens as the 26th most deprived local authority in England out of 317.
- Nearly a quarter of all neighbourhoods within the borough fall within the most 10% deprived of neighbourhoods nationally. There is a high prevalence of health, income, and employment deprivation.
- St Helens population is expected to grow at a lesser rate than that projected for the North West and England. The working age population is anticipated to grow 3.5% by 2037, below the respective projected North West and England increases of 8.5% and 10.3%.

The Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic

The impact of the pandemic has been unprecedented. Nationally, around 70% of businesses have seen a reduction in income, 80% of businesses have taken advantage of government assistance scheme where possible, and around 24% having closed down. Of those continuing to trade, over 60% businesses furloughed staff and more than 50% are looking to defer VAT payments.

Encouragement has come from a national increase in online sales, as well as an increase in the number of new businesses, albeit the latter is below the historic average. However, this encouragement must be tempered by the UK falling into recession.

Due to the historic local challenges, the impact of the economic downturn in 2008 was felt disproportionately in St Helens and by 2018 the borough had not recovered to its pre-recession peak. As a result, it is anticipated that the impact of coronavirus will also be disproportionately felt in the borough, particularly amongst young people.

From an economic standpoint St Helens does not face this challenge from a position of strength. In fact, St Helens is projected to have the second largest economic slowdown out of all local authorities within the Liverpool City Region, with an anticipated 39% decline in output.

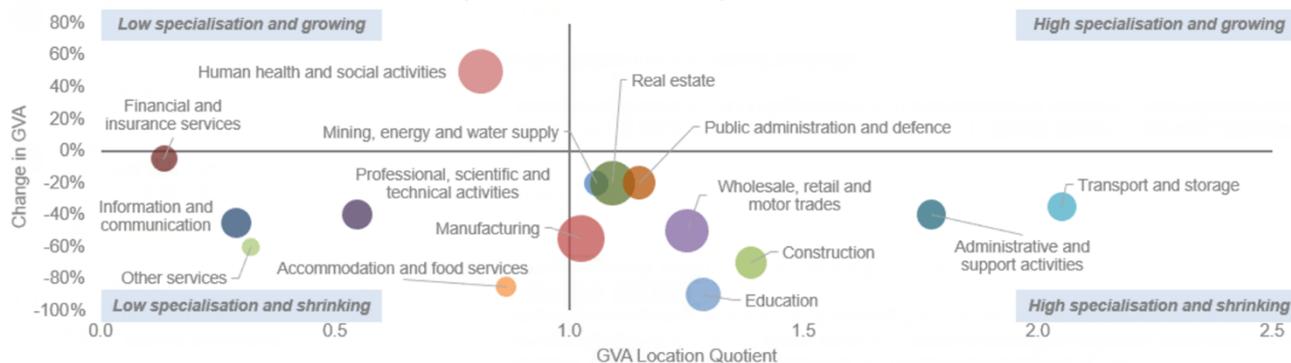
Projected Change in GVA Between Q1 2020 and Q2 2020



Source: LCRCA Analysis of Office for Budget Responsibility, 2020; ONS Regional Gross Value Added by Local Authority, 2018

This is due to the high concentration of sectors including education, retail, construction, and manufacturing that are projected to decline sharply in the short term. Additionally, St Helens has a higher proportion of businesses in accommodation and food services compared to nationally, a sector disproportionately affected by the pandemic with high closure rates.

Concentration of Sectors in St. Helens and The Impact of COVID on Their Output



Source: Office for Budget Responsibility, 2020; ONS Regional Gross Value Added by Local Authority, 2018

Note: Bubble size indicates GVA contribution to LCR economy.

Despite the initial and on-going efforts of the council to provide support to businesses, it is expected that there will be a rise in business failure rates, lower business birth rates, a reduction in the number of jobs and reduced capital investment for growth, all of which will impact the economy.

Certain sectors will take a disproportionate share of the economic impact, particularly the culture, leisure and hospitality sectors. The impact of the cessation of large sporting events at Haydock Park or St Helens RFC has implications not just for those businesses and their supply chain, but also for the wider visitor economy. National data indicates that the hospitality and leisure sector will be extremely vulnerable until they are able to operate free from restrictions. Much of our initial focus will be on supporting these sectors through the lockdown periods.

The pandemic also has the potential to quickly exacerbate existing labour market and skills gaps and undo much of the progress made. It also exposes other areas of concern and brings new challenges. It is expected that unemployment will rise, with an estimate 16,000 jobs at risk, leading more to turn to benefits and initial evidence already showing a significant rise in applications. In addition, the number of new job vacancies has fallen dramatically, pushing those now unemployed further from the prospect of employment.

The pandemic has the potential to quickly exacerbate existing labour market and skills gaps and undo much of the progress made. It also exposes other areas of concern and brings new challenges. There has been a sharp rise in people claiming benefits in the last 7 months. St Helens claimant count has increased by 76% between March and October 2020. Although the percentage increase across the NW and UK exceeds this, St Helens claimant count as a proportion of the economically active

population at 8.5% exceeds the UK average of 7.2%. In the period March to August 2020 the number of households in St Helens claiming Universal Credit increased by 53% to 15,264.

St Helens now has less job vacancies and there are greater numbers of people seeking work. The number of job vacancies in St Helens fell sharply by 64% between March and May 2020. The position in October 2020 is now just 2% down on the March 2020 position. However, the number of claimants per vacancy between March and October has increased sharply from 7.3 to 13.5, more than double the national figure.

Over a quarter of the St Helens workforce was furloughed at some point between the start of lock down and the end of July. In St Helens 27.7% of employments used the corona virus job retention scheme at some point to the end of July, marginally below the regional and national average. The majority of these employments have now come off furlough, At the end of August 8% of employments within St Helens were still furloughed, approximately 2% less than the national and regional average.

The Uncertainty of our Exit from the European Union

The impending exit from the European Union remains uncertain with limited details available on the terms of the exit. The impact of this has been severe with a depressed economy prior to the pandemic and deeper lingering economic effects that show no signs of abating.

While there will undoubtedly be opportunities, perhaps through the proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund which aim to “reduce inequalities between communities”, the likely benefits remain unclear given the limited detail on how the fund will operate and be administered. However, this new funding stream could be an opportunity to fund a prepared pipeline of projects and schemes that support economic recovery.

Supporting the Economic Recovery of the Borough

In response to the pandemic, the Council has already done all it could to support our residents and businesses in the short-term, including:

- Ensuring our Ways to Work and Households into Work teams continued to operate during lockdown to continue supporting people back into employment
- Working closely with partners to ensure the availability of advice and guidance on employment and training opportunities
- Providing recruitment support and advice to businesses looking to retain and expand their staff
- Helping Businesses to adapt to new trading conditions and to embrace innovation
- Successfully supporting the reopening of the Borough’s Town Centres; and
- Providing additional grant support to Retail, Hospitality and Leisure businesses.

Now, as part of the Council’s plans to recover and reset, we will undertake activity to enable recovery, such as administering Business grants and Work to put long-term plans in place to reset our economy. Our priority is to *support a strong, diverse and well-connected local economy* with an aim to; improve economic growth, enhance business density and increase the numbers of jobs.

The approach will be adaptable in order to respond to the rapidly changing and challenging environment, as well as incorporating learning from engagement with residents, business and partners, through formal Partnerships and informal engagement events

Delivering Economic Recovery in Partnership

St Helens Borough forms part of Merseyside and is one of the six local authority areas, along with Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, and Wirral, that make up the Liverpool City Region. However, we must also recognise that we border and share a local economy with Wigan and Warrington.

For many years, the City Region authorities have collaborated closely on key strategic planning issues such as the economy, infrastructure, housing and environmental assets and these working relationships were formalised by the creation of the City Region Combined Authority in 2014.

In response to the impact of COVID-19 on the regional economy, the Combined Authority developed its Economic Recovery Plan, named *Building Back Better*, a design for a new, progressive and resilient economy. Recognising our close allegiance to the city region and the strong part that St Helens will play in the regional recovery we have decided to mirror the framework for our own approach, that will cover:

- The Business Ecosystem
- People Focused Recovery; and
- Place and a Green recovery.

St Helens has the capacity to play a stronger role in the recovery of the Liverpool City Region and the wider regional footprint. Our relationships with the City region, Greater Manchester Authorities and Cheshire and Warrington are all essential in order to access private, Government and devolved recovery funding to supplement the Council and our partners own activity.

The key to the success of the St Helens economy will be our relationships and partnerships at a local level. This economic recovery plan has at its heart the intention to work closely with stakeholders across the borough, including business leaders, education and skills providers, young people, public sector partners, and the community and voluntary sector. The Council's role will be to facilitate, enable and collaborate to deliver an Economic Partnership recovery Plan.

It is seeking to identify new industries, opportunities and areas of growth that could put it at the forefront of transformation. An example of this will be the development of the £25m Town Investment Plan in 2021 which will outline how, by working with public and private sector and in partnership with English Cities Fund, we will invest in transformative projects to shape our future economy.

Business Ecosystem

To support business survival and promote future growth, a suite of interventions will need to be tailored to respond to local needs and develop an effective business ecosystem, this being our network of; suppliers, distributors, customers, competitors, government agencies, and other organisations.

The impact of the national and local response to the pandemic has cause significant financial challenges and a need for increase advice and support, with our key regional employment sectors being hit harder than the national average. In addition, changing behaviours and expectations, particularly with an increased reliance on digital solutions, have led to a need for new and innovative solutions, as well as effective enabling infrastructures to meet these demands and promote business sustainability.

Our aims will be to:

- Minimise business failure rates
- Safeguard jobs
- Provide effective business infrastructure
- Increase the resilience of supply chains
- Empower businesses digitally; and
- Stimulate start-up growth and entrepreneurship.

Aligned to the Combined Authority, we will deliver our aspirations through the provision of:

1. Access to finance

As we continue to promote, and in the main administer local and national funding schemes, such as the discretionary fund and business grants fund, we will also begin to look at additional ways to provide financial support through existing and new opportunities, such as a Town Centre Fund.

Other inward investment options will be actively researched and promoted, through investor support or in partnership with the Recovery Investment Platform, Future Innovation Fund and Kindred Social Investment Vehicle.

2. Business support and advice

A key success of the response to the pandemic has been the ongoing business advice and support, which has led to levels of engagement that have never previously been seen. Working with key partners, such as the St Helens Chamber of Commerce, we will continue to build on this success by investigating opportunities to establish sustainable mechanisms to support businesses to ensure they remain sustainable.

We will look to identify best practice from across the region, and tailor this to local needs, using our regulatory powers, leveraging our assets, or introducing new schemes and initiatives to encourage businesses to recover or even get established. This will include Start-up Support Packages, Night-time and Leisure Economy Packages, pavement licences and road closures, visitor economy measures, festivals and events, business accommodation and enterprise hubs, in addition to the planned review of the St Helens Ambassadors' programme.

3. Innovation, research and development

Working practices and customer behaviours have changed and the business ecosystem has had to adapt at pace as a result. While some of these have been temporary, others will likely lead to significant long-term changes that will require more permanent solutions.

Digitisation and digital innovation are an area that has grown exponentially, and in order to ensure our economy is fit for the future, we will need to ensure everyone embraces this change and is supported to optimise it. Working with the Combined Authority, the Council will make use of; Digital Supply Chain Platform, Advanced Manufacturing Support Programme, Liverpool City Region Accelerator, and Liverpool Health Ventures to embrace digital and enabling a culture of commercialisation.

4. Network and infrastructure development

Along with direct involvement in supporting the business ecosystem, there is also a need to ensure the infrastructure exists in which it can flourish. Through investment in transport (such as the ERIC scheme) and digital projects (such as the digital super spine) we can provide the infrastructure needed by modern business. In addition, we will undertake marketing and communication activity (such as the digital high street) to raise awareness, drive footfall and attract new businesses and investment.

Along with these local schemes, we will engage with the LCR Long-term Infra Platform, and LCR Digital Connectivity project, the latter of which will deliver gigabit-capable speeds and fast, reliable broadband across the region, boosting productivity and innovation by creating, with a private sector partner, a resilient fibre network.

5. Inward Investment

While the initial focus should be on keeping our existing business base, there is still a clear need to focus on growth in the medium and long term. We recognise the importance of continuing to secure future investment in the borough and will seek to put in place the dedicated resources to allow us to provide a compelling proposition to prospective investors and provide the wraparound service to facilitate their investment in St Helens.

People Focused Recovery

The existing challenges of St Helens will only be further exacerbated by effects of the pandemic, which will likely lead to an increase in unemployment, reduced opportunities for future employment and resulting in severe financial challenges. Evidence already shows this is taking place and that the pandemic has increased the gender wage gap.

While supporting businesses to survive and grow, there will also be a need to upskill those who remain in employment and reskill those that are unemployed to increase their opportunity for future employment. In addition, the health vulnerability of the local population could mean that people are more susceptible to the effects of COVID-19, potentially increasing economic inactivity due to ill health and a further Public Health challenge.

While self-employment is less prevalent in St Helens compared to the national and regional average, it is still vital to the local economy. New working methods and Lockdown innovations have demonstrated too many hidden skills and entrepreneurial talent. Therefore, it is important that we continue and encourage and ensure that the correct support and assistance is available to support start-ups and help grow successful businesses.

However, creating jobs is only one part of the challenge and we know that we also need to be able to have people with the right skills to fill them. We will work with partners to raise aspirations, create a local infrastructure, develop local schemes, use national initiatives to; support employability, tackle skills gaps reduce skills shortages. We will also look to directly create opportunities for employment (e.g. graduate employment programme, apprenticeship programme, Kickstart programme) or to help people become tomorrow's entrepreneurs.

Our aims will be to:

- Increase job opportunities
- Enable people to get back to work quickly
- Engage early with those at risk of redundancy to reduce the time out of employment
- Create a broad range of opportunities for employment, including in-work progression
- Ensure education, training and skills development exists and meets the current and future needs of people and employers
- Support education providers to make up lost learning time
- Develop pathways to work schemes to engage young people and reduce the numbers not in education, employment or training
- Raise aspirations, encourage enterprise, and provide careers advice in school curriculums and targeted at the most vulnerable young people including Looked After Children; and

Aligned to the Combined Authority, we will deliver our aspirations through the provision of:

1. Support People in to Work

Having worked hard to change the historic challenges in regard to unemployment and skills, the Council and our partners are in a good position to build on the success of our pre-pandemic schemes, such as Ways to Work and Households into Work, and supplement this with additional national, regional and locally targeted initiatives, such as the Kickstart Scheme and the DWP Back to Work Programme.

We will work closely with local employers as well as key partners, such as Jobcentre Plus, St Helens Chamber of Commerce and St Helens and Carmel Colleges and Local Sixth Forms to provide a responsive offer to align support to vacancies and skills shortages.

We will lever in addition funding through the Liverpool city region for the roll-out of the Sustainable Job Creation Programme, Graduate Employment Programme, Entrepreneur Development Programme, responsive employment support and targeted support for specific groups.

2. Develop Skills to Improve Employability

Our ongoing and improved engagement with local businesses, through partnerships with the St Helens Chambers of Commerce in addition to our own council engagement with local businesses, we are more easily able to determine future skills demands than ever before. We will need to develop a Skills and Employment Strategy which is evidence and intelligence led that will demonstrate how the Borough will work closely with businesses and providers, to match emerging skills demands with local provision. Our future programmes will be clearly evidenced, business-led skills programme. Utilising regional funding we will reskill and retrain.

With the growing demands on digital technology, we will use regional funding to undertake a digital skills project to retrain businesses, workers and job seekers for the increasingly digital world. In addition, using our own services, as well as working with our partners, we will enhance access to an adult learning offer tailored to the opportunities in the employment market, and use flexibilities within the apprenticeship levy to introduce new apprenticeships and traineeships which will include those already in work.

3. Prevent Young People becoming NEET

Schools and Early Years Providers have been at the very forefront of the pandemic, they have relied heavily on local and regional support to introduce blended learning solutions to support reopening and sustain a mixed learning offer.

This new relationship provides a strong foundation to introduce an enhanced catch-up programme to overcome lost learning particularly amongst our most vulnerable children and young people and raise attainment levels and ensure they are not permanently disadvantaged. In addition, along with the LCR, we will look to implement a creative curriculum to capture the talent of young people in the City Region.

Being mindful of the existing issues we face with those becoming NEET, we understand that the pandemic is likely to further exacerbate this, and so we will need to work with others to identify those being at risk and support their successful transition to education, employment and training. Through the introduction of a fully funded offer for school leavers and a young person's guarantee we aim to ensure that all those aged under 25 can access training, an apprenticeship or a job, especially those who have been out of work for more than 6 months.

We will take on board the insights provided by the St Helens Good Childhood Inquiry to tackle our longstanding deficit in young people's aspiration levels in order to nurture and retain as much talent as possible for our future economy.

4. Address Health and Wellbeing Vulnerability

The lockdown has put a tremendous strain on the health and wellbeing of our communities, both from the imposed isolation, the impact upon mental health and wellbeing, as well as the potential financial strain of furlough and unemployment. Given the existing issue of health vulnerability in the borough it is important that this is addressed to ensure people are fit and able to maintain in work, or return to education, employment or training.

We understand that financial challenges can lead to severe outcomes, and we will introduce support to help manage finances, tackle debt and reduce the risk of homelessness. In addition, we will roll out the national digital poverty programme in order to introduce high-speed broadband and 5G infrastructure, that will keep people connected through improved access to digital connectivity as well as providing devices for those that need them.

A community and voluntary sector resilience programme will be introduced, in partnership with the LCR and their Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Sector Resilience and Capacity Fund, that will provide the right infrastructure and financial resource for the sector to engage with those impacted by the pandemic.

Aligned to our business support offer, and in partnership with the LCR, we will develop and deploy a workplace wellbeing programme, to ensure businesses recognise the challenges they face and develop the tools to be able to support individuals to overcome them.

Place and ensuring a Green Recovery

St Helens is perfectly positioned at the heart of the North West. The link between the conurbations of Liverpool and Manchester with a strong strategic position at the heart of the northern powerhouse. We have a proud industrious heritage with innovation at our core we are a great place to live and grow. We have access to a 3million strong workforce within one hours travel time and in recent years we have become a place for logistics, advance manufacturing and research & development.

Located on the West Coast mainline and Trans-Pennine rail network and sitting directly on the M62 and M6 we have unrivalled accessibility and connectivity. Not to mention access to two airports and the enhanced Port of Liverpool. Our location and access make us a perfectly situated to take advantage of future developments associated with Superport, Rail freight, Logistics and Manufacturing. Our heritage and innovation couple with our place-based opportunities make us a great place to embrace a green recovery.

The borough covers an area of 136 square kilometres. The two primary town centres play an important role in providing a range of retail and other services, complemented by the roles played by a range of smaller district and local centres across the borough, the importance of which has only been intensified during the pandemic.

With the opportunities provided by our geography, and the challenges faced due to the changing nature of high streets along with the likely negative impact of the pandemic on local key business sectors, a key aspiration and opportunity will be the delivery of our ambitious development sites and our emerging plans to regenerate the town and district centres.

Our aims will be to:

- Regenerate our town and district centres, providing a unique St Helens experience
- Establish Glass Futures as a centre of excellence with global recognition and use it as a catalyst to attract further foundation industry to the area
- Enhance the visitor economy, including investment in heritage, arts and culture
- Create a world-class digital Infrastructure to facilitate
- Deliver green, new homes and communities at Cowley Hill and Bold
- Facilitate employment sites and economic development of a local and regional scale
- Deliver the infrastructure to facilitate sustainable growth
- Invest in active transport and green infrastructure
- Support businesses to increase their profitability by reducing their environmental impact and taking advantage of the growing market for low carbon and environmental goods and services
- Develop and deliver a programme to meet climate change commitments; and
- Deliver Growth that benefits people.

Aligned to the Combined Authority, we will deliver our aspirations through the provision of:

1. Revitalised Urban Centres

We successfully worked with businesses and partners to reopen our high streets and are continuing to respond to the changing regional and national guidance as it emerges. However, our town centres need significant investment as they look to adapt to the changes in consumer behaviour and the challenges facing retail.

We will revise our existing regeneration plans to consider the additional impact of the pandemic on these centres and the opportunities our new partnership with the English Cities Fund (ECF) will bring. We will create new sustainable urban centres that serve the needs of our local communities.

While we will use our own assets and funding to kick-start these opportunities, we will also look to maximise access to private and external funding opportunities to make things happen and happen fast.

2. Sustainable Communities

St Helens is unique in the strength of the communities within it and any future development must look to maintain this while promoting growth and provide the infrastructure to sustain future generations. Through the adoption of our Local Plan, we will be able to manage future development in a way that maintains the character of the borough while providing opportunities for future generations, new housing, including affordable homes and new and varied employment options will make our communities even more resilient. The delivery of these plans will be accelerated through direct involvement and enabling activity. Opportunities at Parkside, Moss Nook, Omega North, Haydock Point and Cowley Hill will be supported, nurtured and guided to ensure they deliver the sustainable and quality place that we want St Helens to be. We will be ready to access the right private capital investment, social housing provider support, housing grant and Government support.

Infrastructure improvements will be needed to enable successful future development, and so we will bring forward schemes, such as the digital super spine and local loops, to provide digital capacity that addressed the significant growth in local need. We will invest in transport infrastructure, be that through new roads (Parkside Link Road), enhanced accessibility (Hackney Carriages & Rank Provision) or improved public transport (the ERIC scheme to improve interchange options for Lea Green station). We will explore new opportunities to maximise walking and cycling connecting local people to local jobs.

3. A Vibrant Visitor Economy

The borough has a long and proud cultural history, we will shortly consider the adoption of an arts strategy to accompany the recently adopted heritage strategy these documents set out our ambitious plans for the future. The developing Cultural strategy framework must also represent the cultural economy and the existing visitor economy. Currently visitor and resident leisure spend is low and this key element of the local economy is underrepresented. To help our economic recovery we will address this gap and look to grow a visitor economy that is appropriate to the size and cultural significance of the borough.

Investment in development of a digital and more animated high street along with a more proactive approach to marketing St Helens as a destination, will raise our profile and awareness across the region and beyond in order to increase those visiting our borough.

Links will be made to complementary programmes, such as the LCR Somewhere scheme, in order to build community cohesion as well as running outdoor public art events, to animate our spaces and provide a more attractive and vibrant family café culture and safe night-time economy through a new

Licensed Premises Network and the Best Bar None programme, to extend visitor and resident dwell time.

St Helens has amazing architectural backdrop and as shopping becomes less of a visitor draw it will be the space between the buildings that defines the success of the town and opens it up to the potential of events, festivals and culture activity.

We will explore pop up performances, pop up food, storytelling that brings the outer assets of St Helens into the centre. Cultural trails will join the tremendous assets of the place together.

We will explore innovative new models that foster socially responsible entrepreneurial activity, the St Helens version of BOXPARK will bring creativity, craft and studio spaces into the town, demonstrating the innovation, zeal and sense of community that the pandemic brought to the forefront.

4. Innovative and Green Economy

In celebrating our past, we must also look to the future, and so we will invest in innovative schemes that raise our profile and support our commitment to carbon neutrality. Our historic links with glass will be central to the delivery of the Glass Futures project, an industry backed scheme in collaboration with the global glass industry, academia and government. The scheme will provide economic stimulus while also researching innovative new approaches to glass manufacturing in a bid to reduce its environment impact.

In addition, linking to LCR schemes, such as Manufacturing Technology Centre's (MTC) will introduce radical innovation of Modern Methods of Construction (£155million programme), the LCR Hydrogen Economy Programme will bring innovation to energy, and the Refurbishing Housing for a Green Future Programme will help to tackle fuel poverty, reduce energy consumption and tackle the climate crisis directly.

Our work will link to available funding regionally as well as nationally to promote a sustainable recovery through the development of local supply chain that create social value, while also developing a flourishing green economy, all delivered through the targeted use of local spending power, the attraction of key national and global partners, and stimulation of entrepreneurship and small business growth.