

Full Version

Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury councils

**West Suffolk**  
working together

# West Suffolk Growth Investment Strategy

Draft 11/01/18



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# 1. Foreword from our Leaders

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West Suffolk is a success story helping to drive the regional and UK PLC economy. With a track record of recent growth and attracting business investment, we are passionate about working with others to enable our residents and businesses to fulfil their ambitions. We are a diverse economy, with strengths in each of our market towns and an important rural economy. We are an innovative place, welcoming and driving forward changes to benefit everyone in our community and improve quality of life.

We have important strengths that are attractive to business and investment opportunity. Our location, well connected to Cambridge, Norwich, Ipswich and London through recognised growth corridors and lies on an international trade route. Our businesses, with global brands in food production and research, biotech production, unique expertise in equine science and a flourishing business services sector. Our people, with higher than average employment, and our environment. People consistently say we are a great place to live and we attract families and skilled professionals. This strategy aims to make sure businesses, partners and investors know what opportunities there and where we will be focusing our investments and energies.

Our strategy for growth is to build on these strengths and create a lasting legacy for future generations. Our immediate priorities are included in our Strategic Framework Plan 2017-2020. We are a place where people choose to invest. Our Growth Investment Strategy is bold and makes no excuse for that. We have been investing in success and forging new relationships with investors and developers. By investing in infrastructure and enterprise zones we have unlocked millions of pounds to create new attractive business sites in places such as Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill. While our Solar Farm, which is one of the largest of its kind owned by an authority in the UK brings in an income to support services and reinvestment. Our investment strategy follows and builds on this. It is much more than financial rate of return, it has our communities and businesses at its heart. It not only makes financial sense but brings social benefits from jobs, skills, homes and better health and well-being outcomes for our residents.



## 2. Introduction

This Strategy supports the delivery of the growth priorities in our Strategic Framework 2018-2020 and the West Suffolk Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2017-20. Our dominant driver is to grow our economy in a way that benefits all the people who live and work here, whilst making a contribution to the wider UK economy and provide a financial return that we can reinvest in our communities. Therefore, our investments decisions are driven by the goal of achieving a blended mix of financial, economic and social benefits and returns, based on delivering the priorities in our Strategic Framework.

Our strategy demonstrates how we are taking the lead in West Suffolk in pro-actively managing and stimulating inclusive growth for our local communities while directly benefitting the local, wider regional and UK economies. It sets a marker that West Suffolk is a great place to invest in and explains to investors, stakeholders and other partners how we will work with them to bring opportunities and support for business.

It highlights we are ambitious and keen to lead on and build our system wide approach with others to place making. Investors can benefit from the opportunities the locational advantage we have with proximity to Cambridge, London and Norwich economies, strengthened by our unique position in being within both New Anglia and Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnerships as well as close proximity to the Cambridgeshire Combined Authority. We also benefit from being an active member of the Suffolk Growth Board and the Cambridge and Norfolk Tech Corridor partnership.

It commits to continuing to use of our resources to co-design opportunities with the market, partners and others we collaborate with to gain wider benefits and access other funding. This could include lobbying Government, creating



innovative partnerships with developers or unlocking opportunities for communities to bring forward tailored local schemes. The Council approved Strategy and appropriate delegation enables us to work nimbly, with projects and business cases approved on a case by case basis against our approved investment framework.

In summary, our Investment Strategy reinforces the direction of travel for West Suffolk Councils. It guides the investments we will make and actions we will take to enable and support others who work with us and contribute to delivering what our economy and communities need to grow in the right way.

### 3. Our Growth Investment Strategy

The primary focus of our Strategy for investment over the next two years is to deliver the Growth priorities in our Strategic Framework 2018 - 2020.

This says we will be:

**"Supporting and investing in our west Suffolk communities and businesses to encourage and manage ambitious growth in prosperity and quality of life for all."**

Our Ambition:

**"Growth in West Suffolk's economy for the benefit of all our residents and UK plc."**

Our Growth Investment mission is:

**"To use our investments, assets, leadership and influence to maximise the benefits for our communities and businesses, to support services and generate economic, social and financial return."**

This document is:

- A tool, supporting and enabling delivery of the Vision & growth priorities in the Strategic Framework (2018-2020) and the legacy beyond that
- A reflection of the Councils' ambition and foresight that many of our investment choices now will lay building blocks for future generations
- A reflection of our pro-active leadership, clearly demonstrating our direction of travel
- A statement of our strengths as an area and opportunities; which also provide clarity for investors, funders and other stakeholders





## 4. Our role as an investor, growth priorities and our objectives

Which is to use our influence, investment, partnerships and regulatory powers to:

- Lobby for a better connected West Suffolk in terms of transport and digital connectivity
- Promote West Suffolk as a place to do business, to attract investment and innovation that increases salary levels and encourages the right mix of jobs to grow our economy
- Invest in and promote our local places by building on their unique qualities through specific local strategies, projects and services
- Develop our current and future local workforce through education, training and opportunities for all

Our role as an investor is:

**"To use our investment fund, influence and assets to maximise the positive impact we have on our communities and businesses, generating economic, social and financial return and reinvesting where it will achieve the most benefit to deliver the best outcomes for all."**

Being clear about where our strengths lie, our role as an investor in our own right and when we partner with others will drive success and embed more efficient ways of working. We have expertise and experience through our existing track record, which we can apply to support delivery of our projects.

This Strategy (see Opportunities) identifies our strengths and the broad areas where we will be seeking collaborations with others. We will actively encourage approaches from other interested parties from the private, public and third sectors which will contribute to our agenda.

### Our investment objectives are to:

- **Accelerate delivery of our growth priorities**

Through provision and alignment of funding, loans and resources and by collaborating with partners.

- **Increase our influence in delivering the best outcomes for our communities**

Through acquisition and increasing partnerships and collaborations who bring different skills and expertise and potential to access to wider funding streams. As well as reviewing and applying appropriate regulation and policies.

- **Generate a financial return when the right opportunities arise**

Through actively evaluating our assets and other opportunities presented to us, this will enable us to generate income which can be reinvested in essential services for our communities.

- **Innovate: Support creation of new markets**

By drawing on our strengths and insights and promoting the opportunities which arise to develop new markets, we are more responsive to our communities needs and stimulate growth. We constantly looking at more efficient and exemplar ways of delivering our growth and actively encourage and promote innovation within our area. We welcome anyone who wishes to approach us with new ideas and innovative approaches which will raise West Suffolk's profile and accelerate delivery of the priorities in our Strategic Plan.

## In addition, we will use local leadership to:

- **Lever private/public/third sector investment/funding & commitments**

Through having the right conversations, understanding the drivers and interests for others and sharing mutual benefits.

- **Avoid unnecessary duplication**

Avoid doing something if already being provided well by others and is meeting our growth priorities. Our focus will be to accelerate delivery; drive efficiency; identifying where duplication exists and being clear on what we will do relative to others.

- **Provide for communities when the market cannot and breakdown barriers and constraints**

We encourage openness from our partners and the market to better understand constraints and barriers which prevent delivery and what we need to do to meet local needs. We will continue to use partnerships to explore a wider range of options, provide access to skills and lever funding. We will invest to unlock barriers as long as it meets strategic aims for West Suffolk.

## Our strengths as an Investor and Investment partner are:

- Our drive, ambition and commitment to bring economic and social benefit to West Suffolk
- Transparent and dependable;
- Access to wide range of match funding streams and partners across the private, public and third sectors;
- Extensive data and local insights
- Mixed portfolio of property assets
- Financial acumen and resourcefulness
- Proven track record for delivery

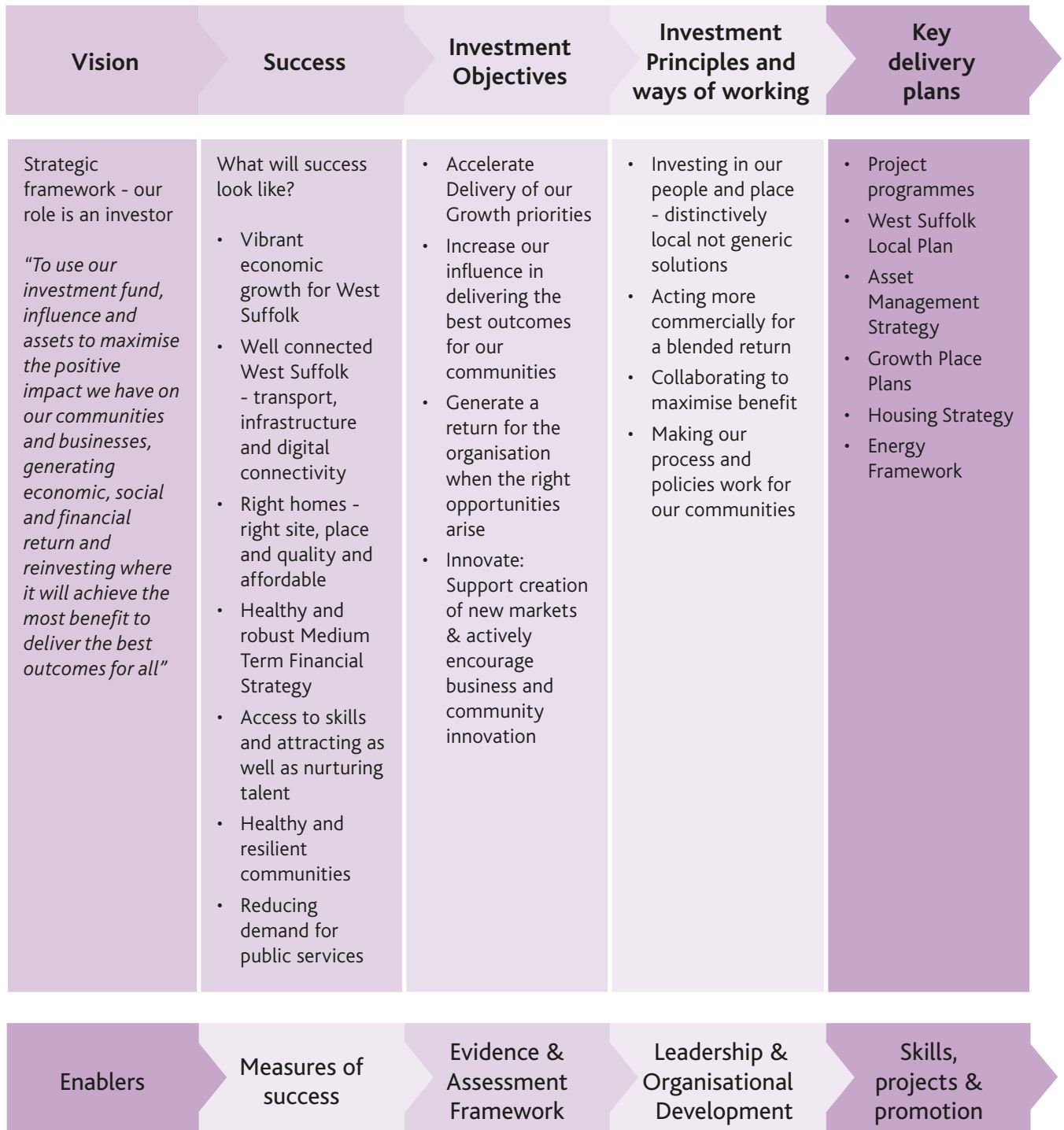
## We can bring added value through:

- Experience in community engagement and partnership working
- Regulatory consultancy e.g. planning, building control and environmental health (energy and food standards)
- Governance and structures which enable delivery
- Access to and experience of delivering a wide range of multi-disciplinary projects. Ability to bring an integrated approach with considering inter-relationship with application of other policies and strategies across the Public Sector system.





## Growth Investment Strategy



## 5. Our Investment Principles

Our Growth Investment Principles underpin our Growth Investment Strategy, providing direction for our approach:

Investing in our Place and People for inclusive growth	Behaving more Commercially, for a blended return	Collaborating to maximise benefit	Making our process and policies work for our communities
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### Investing in our Place and our People for inclusive growth

We will make a difference by prioritising investment projects across West Suffolk which maximise delivery of as many of our Growth priorities as possible and as such make a marked difference to our Place and People.

We will make most impact through actions and investments that build on the unique characteristics and opportunities our market towns and surrounding rural areas present. In 2018 we will be developing Place based Growth Plans, reflecting the uniqueness and opportunities of each area. This will enable us to further target our investment decisions.

Our Strategic Framework provides the broad vision of what we want to achieve across West Suffolk and provides the context for developing Place based growth plans for our market towns and rural areas. These will be developed in 2018 and will enable us to drill down to understand what our local market towns and rural area need to respond to their individual characteristics and grow and are likely to generate additional opportunities and/or target those already referred to later in this document.

We will look for added value and inclusive growth for our people when we assess investment opportunities and approaches for funding. This principle applies equally to investment in businesses, assets, partnerships, infrastructure as well as our places. We encourage those seeking funding to identify

clearly how this will be achieved in the context of our Growth Priorities. Examples could include but not be restricted to construction projects using a local supply chains and businesses developing apprentices with local colleges.

We invite proposals for social enterprise, business start-up and innovative projects seeking funding/and or loans and encourage others to respond to our growth agenda in a creative way. Proposals should demonstrate measurable benefits aligned to our Strategic growth priorities, added value for our people and deliverability by 2020.

Successful collaborations and partnerships are central to achieving the desired outcomes for our Place and People. By being clear on what we want to achieve and identifying investment opportunities, our approach will act as a catalyst, which will channel commitments, activities and match funding from others who identify with and/or have responsibility or a desire to achieve common outcomes.

We have considerable property and land assets across our Council areas, including those which house our services, people and businesses. We have a strong track record in delivering projects which improve and reconfigures our assets to make a more positive contribution to growth. We are currently engaged in a number of projects across our area and welcome ideas and proposals for others.

## Behaving More Commercially, for a blended return

By 2020 it is envisaged that local government will be funded from four main sources; council tax, new homes bonus; a share of business rates income and locally generated fees and charges. National policy encourages councils to behave more commercially and maximise where possible these income streams which also supports the UK agenda of supporting growth in housing and the economy. Behaving more commercially and investing in growth will generate returns to the Councils through these four income sources and, in some cases, may also offer the opportunity to generate additional local fees and charges. All of which can be reinvested into support our vital services.

These new arrangements for funding local government also present local authorities with a higher degree of uncertainty, risk and than the previous arrangements (i.e. Revenue Support Grant, Distribution of Business Rates). Our income will be much more linked with economic growth and the success of our places. However, we also are more able to control the level of funding through new commercial or housing development that we encourage and incentivise.

Having both funding and governance arrangements in place enables us to adopt a flexible, nimble approach to investment. Allowing us to seize opportunities quickly and behave more commercially, whilst recognising our role in supporting our families and communities and delivering inclusive growth. Our return is measured in the benefits achieved for our local communities and not just monetary value, this provides an element of flexibility on our approach to returns.

Projects are assessed against the Councils approved investment framework, when we consider costs against the measurable benefits which can be achieved in delivering our Strategic Growth priorities. Our growth investment returns are reinvested to support our vital services and other growth projects and are monitored as an overall portfolio to ensure

we achieve an overall net return of 1% (after borrowing costs) equivalent to £400,000 per annum from the investment fund performance. This current assumption will be reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process.

We will consider the most appropriate delivery vehicle for each project taking into account the appropriate legal and financial advice. We plan to engage in partnerships and joint ventures to provide access to wider resources and skills to deliver the range of different projects we have. In addition we plan to operate through council-owned special purpose vehicles where appropriate to do so, such as Barley Homes (Group) Ltd (Jointly owned with Suffolk County Council) set up to deliver homes, initially in West Suffolk.

A review is also being carried out of our assets and a management strategy being developed to better use them to help deliver the Growth Priorities and wider benefits, such as envisioned for Western Way in Bury St Edmunds or Mildenhall Hub through the One Public Estate.

## Collaborating to maximise benefit

We have a strong precedent of partnership working and collaboration, including successfully sharing the services of our own Councils. This has recently culminated in our decision to create a new Single Council. This was given extensive support by our stakeholders who highlighted how much more effective it will be to work collaboratively.

We actively work on strategy and projects with others across the wider public sector system including Suffolk County, The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, NHS and Police and have the unique benefit of being part of both New Anglia and Greater Cambridge and Peterborough partnerships. Equally continuing and growing close working relationships with town and parish councils are vital in delivering managed growth and community initiatives in a partnership way.

We have a successful track record of securing external funding from a wide range of sources

such as the local LEP's, County Council and national programmes (an example is the Eastern Relief Road in Bury St Edmunds – which attracted all three of these funding sources). In addition we would closely work with health and education colleagues to drive savings and better outcomes through investment, such as Mildenhall Hub. We however recognise the need to secure funding from sources other than the local government family and with the continuation of Government austerity measures nationally and locally, attracting external funding starts to become integral to delivering our strategic priorities.

In addition one of the key principles of this strategy is enabling closer working and forging new partnerships with the private sector to deliver the strategic aims and support business. This follows on from the work we have been doing investing with developers in infrastructure, such as the Eastern Relief Road; setting up Enterprise Zones, Business Improvement Districts and the Destination Management Organisation, Bury and Beyond. We will continue to demonstrate to developers and businesses we are investor friendly and are committed to developing a meaningful working relationship with the private sector.

For each investment project we evaluate our strengths and expertise and seek partnerships to add value and skills in areas we are less experienced. We have set up a stakeholder investor group drawing on private sector expertise to further develop our market insights and skills in behaving more commercially and how we can better work with this sector.

We seek to deliver for our community where barriers make it difficult for the private sector to do so. We work with others to deliver shared outcomes, reducing unnecessary duplication and sharing success. We actively encourage and facilitate partnerships and collaborations across our businesses, communities and sectors to share good practice, resources, services, funding and innovation.

## **Making our process and policies work for our communities**

In 2018 we will preparation work for the next West Suffolk Local Plan, the Place based Growth plans will provide part of the evidence base to inform land use policy. Our stakeholder investor forum will enable us to engage with the market and other stakeholders to develop deliverable policies with support our agenda. We will continue to review and improve our planning processes and policies to ensure we can engage with developers in a pro-active way and provide early advice is available to help with planning applications.

We will explore the use of different delivery models such as our housing company with Suffolk County, Barley Homes to maximise our investment potential, address barriers and accelerate delivery.

We will continue to understand and use the Councils legislative powers such as CPOs and Business rate discretions, as a pro-active tool to positively influence outcomes for its businesses and communities. We will continue to support businesses to help them flourish and make it easy to seek help and enforce to help legitimate businesses who are impacted by those who do not follow the law or guidelines.

We have with other Suffolk Councils engaged in the 100% business rate retention pilot. We expect the 1st year pilot for 2018/19 to generate approximately £10.476m benefit over and above the existing pool, across the County. The additional benefit is to be split into place based allocations (East, Central, West, Ipswich), with £2.657m (of the £10.476m) for West Suffolk, this is in addition to our Investing in Growth fund of £40m (capital funding).

## 6. Strategic Context and our Growth Priorities

### Our Strategic Outcomes

We want to achieve the following broad outcomes and successes for our communities and businesses as set out in the Strategic Framework

- More of the right types of homes to meet the needs of all our residents
- Houses are more affordable for more of our residents and people who want move to work here
- Increased salary levels and the right mix of jobs and innovation to grow our economy
- More people are economically active longer as we have encouraged healthier lifestyles and more of our businesses adopt a culture which nurtures employee health & wellbeing as well as their talents and ambition
- We retain and attract talent and more young people choose to live and work here
- Skills have increased at all ages to supply business growth and attract the right businesses to our area
- We have reduced demands on services including for care and health by increasing uptake up preventative measures
- We have increased infrastructure provision to support growth of our market towns and rural areas
- Financially resilient West Suffolk

Our Growth Investment Strategy will also help deliver the West Suffolk system wide strategic priorities of:

- Safe and Clean
- Healthy and Well
- Inclusive
- Economically Vibrant
- Resilient and Strong
- Aspirational

We have developed measures in relation to these components so we can assess the impact of investments, work, projects and collaborations. We actively welcome ideas, and proposals from others on how we might best invest in our growth agenda. These are highlighted in the Opportunities section and will change as new initiatives come forward.





# 7. Investment assessment pipeline

## Growth Investment Fund

In April 2017, we set up both a £40m capital and £2m revenue investment fund across West Suffolk to deliver our Growth agenda. Our approach to investment will follow the four principles set out in this strategy:

- Investing in our Place and People
- Behaving more Commercially, for a blended return
- Collaborating to maximise benefit
- Making our process and policies work for our communities



## How projects will be assessed

### Business Case

Investment projects will be managed as a portfolio by the Councils programme management process and business cases and decisions made within the Councils existing governance structure. They be assessed for Strategic fit against the approved Strategic Plan and Growth Investment Strategies and the five stage business case programme referenced in our Investment Framework.

Feasibility Concept	Feasibility - Deliverability and design stage	Approval stage	Delivery/ Implementation stage	Close out stage
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### Approach to Risk

Our approach to risk, as set out in our approved risk management framework, is based on context, proportionality, judgement and evidence-based decision making that considers each capital investment project on case by case basis and is documented at all stages, following the following core principles.

a positive approach;	contextual decision making	informed risk-taking	proportionality	decision risks vs delivery risks	a documented approach	continuous improvement
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## Quality Assurance

Each business case committing resource from this fund will be reviewed and signed off by the S151 Officer and monitoring officer whom will provide detailed advice for each case having regards to the Councils financial and legal obligations and powers.

- **General Powers:** The Councils have general powers to acquire and dispose of land pursuant to sections 120 and 123 Local Government Act (LGA) 1972. The purpose of any acquisitions must be either for the Council's functions or for the benefit or improvement or development of the relevant Council's area.
- The Councils will also have duties to act in accordance with their common law fiduciary duty to obtain value for money and to make decisions in a business-like manner that does not unduly favour on particular section of the Council's tax payers. The key requirement to prevent State Aid is that the Councils should behave entirely commercially and without regard to policy or other public interest factors.
- The Councils have broad borrowing powers in section 1, LGA 2003 provided they do so within the relevant limits and in accordance

with the CIPFA Prudential Code. It is envisaged that borrowing will be through the Public Works and Loan Board however an appraisal, taking into account the Councils approved Treasury Management and Investment Strategy, will take place prior to borrowing being entered into.

Where the Councils consider a business case for investment for 'a commercial purposes', it will do so taking into account the statutory Guidance on the Power in the Local Government Act 2003 and the Local Government (Best Value Authorities) (Power to Trade) (England) Order 2009. Which requires an authority to prepare a business case in support of the proposed exercise of the power to do for a commercial purpose anything which the Council is authorised to do for the purpose of carrying on any of its ordinary functions and the business case required is to be a comprehensive statement as to: (a) the objectives of the business, (b) the investment and other resources required to achieve those objectives, (c) any risks the business might face and how significant these risks are, and (d) the expected financial results of the business, together with any other relevant outcomes that the business is expected to achieve.

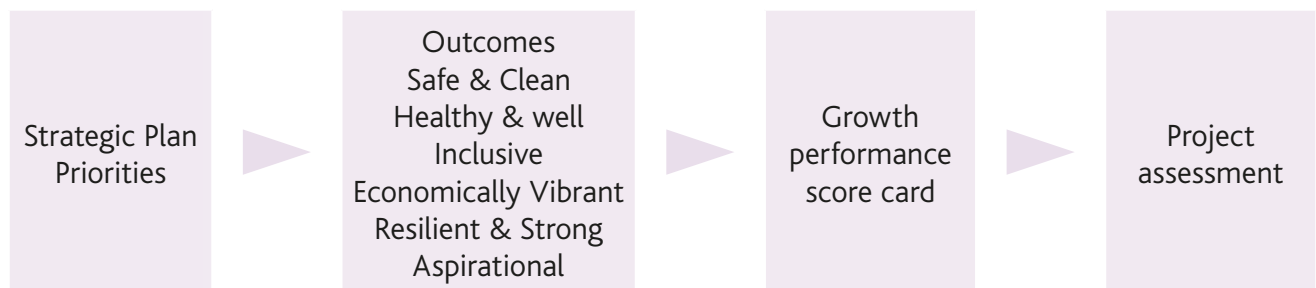


## Measuring and Monitoring our Success

### What will success look like:

- Vibrant economic growth for West Suffolk
- Well connected West Suffolk – transport, infrastructure and digital connectivity
- Right homes – right size, place and quality and affordable
- Healthy and robust Medium Term Financial Strategy
- Access to skills and attracting as well as nurturing talent
- Healthy and resilient communities
- Reducing demand for public services

We will measure how well we are doing across our portfolio as a whole in achieving our priorities and vision with the following process.





## 8. Opportunities for Investment

In the Context and Introduction sections there are descriptions of why West Suffolk is a great place to invest in – being on an international trade route as well as being part of the regions which are the economic engines for the regional and UK PLC.

In the context of the investment environment we have identified broad areas which present opportunities and meet the priorities set out in the Strategic Framework 2018 – 2020, which are set out also below. The purpose of which is to stimulate interest, align stakeholder activity and investment relative to our own. These are not an exhaustive list and we therefore welcome other

proposals and ideas. Additional opportunities will be explored as we undertake our growth place plans in 2018.

The Council is not responsible for and could not deliver all of these on its own, they exist as a focus of where the Council would wish to concentrate energies and as appropriate financial investment to deliver with stakeholders, developers and investors. This is a living document and as new opportunities arise or new markets identified, we will add to this section of the strategy as part of a formal annual review through our committee structure.

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY

#### **Growth in West Suffolk's economy for the benefit of all our residents and UK plc**

We will use our influence, investment, partnership and regulatory powers to:

- Lobby for a better connected West Suffolk in terms of transport and digital connectivity
- Promote West Suffolk as a place to do business so as to attract investment and innovation that increases salary levels and encourages the right mix of jobs to grow our economy
- Invest and promote our local places by building on their unique qualities through specific local strategies, projects and environmental services
- Develop our current and future local workforce through education, training and opportunities for all

#### **Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active.**

- Foster supportive networks to improve and sustain the lives of individuals, families and communities
- Work with and influence partners, including the voluntary sector, in our shared endeavour of improving the health, wellbeing and safety of families and communities

#### **Increased and improved provision of appropriate housing in West Suffolk in both our towns and rural areas.**

- Plan for housing to meet the needs of current and future generations throughout their lifetimes, that is properly supported by infrastructure, facilities and community networks
- Improve the quality of housing and the local environment for our residents
- Enable people to access suitable and sustainable housing

When measured at the local authority level, the populations of Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Borough Councils appear to be relatively affluent, and experiencing lower levels of deprivation and social upheaval than many other parts of the country. However, this overall picture masks pockets of real deprivation in certain wards and a wider lack of social mobility. We need to ensure that our investment across West Suffolk enables families and communities to contribute to and benefit from, growth. This is known as inclusive growth and should support the health and wellbeing of communities.

As well as individual families, there are a number of neighbourhoods in West Suffolk where communities are experiencing real difficulties on a day-to-day basis. Many of the issues facing our residents today are not picked up in statistical analyses, such as loneliness and isolation, a lack of practical support, or mental health problems. Our commitment to supporting resilient families and communities ensures that we can invest, either financially or through capacity building, in the voluntary and community sectors. We also need to be mindful of our changing demographics and the challenges and opportunities that brings. For example, an engaging population means we need to invest increasing the skills of our health and care workforce, but also harness the experience and skills that our older population can bring to their communities.

### Opportunities for Inclusive Growth

- Provision of training and skills throughout each stage of life, developing connections between schools, colleges businesses and community outreach programmes to develop more pathways to employment
- Encourage socially responsible business investing in employee health and wellbeing as well as community initiatives
- Co-living and co-location of services and careful planning, land use and good design can enhance access to essential services and provide a ready support network

- Intergenerational projects can be mutually advantageous for cohesive communities, examples include co-location of student and specialist housing, share nursery and elderly day care. There is also scope to set up a digital platform for sharing skills and volunteering and support across ages.
- Development of inter- generational housing and the creation of innovative ways to enable elderly people to downsize in their existing communities
- Digital platform for sharing skills and volunteering and providing support across ages.





## Housing

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY

#### **Increased and improved provision of appropriate housing in West Suffolk in both our towns and rural areas.**

We will use our roles as a local housing and planning authority, a regulator, an investor and local influencer to:

- Plan for housing to meet the needs of current and future generations throughout their lifetimes, that is properly supported by infrastructure, facilities and community networks
- Improve the quality of housing and the local environment for our residents
- Enable people to access suitable and sustainable housing

There is a national drive to deliver more housing and tackle homelessness. This, combined with a growing need for additional houses in West Suffolk presents a real opportunity to be more creative in encouraging new types of housing which better respond to the needs of our local communities.



#### **Opportunities for Housing:**

- Creation of a new local plan to give certainty for residents and developers
- Increasing intelligence on potential barriers and developing ways to accelerate delivery on the sites which are currently allocated in our local plan
- Where our assets can be used for housing, which is better attuned to the needs of the people who live or wish to live in our area
- Housing concepts which can be adapted to meet the needs of people throughout their life, including what is achievable through modular and new building technologies
- The use of smart technology within homes to enable our home environments to respond better to specific needs, supporting more independent living
- Sites to retrofit different housing types into our existing market towns which cater for the needs of a wider range of needs and further diversify and integrate communities
- Creation of co-housing schemes which support inter- generational living with shared community space and services
- New concepts for supporting changes in family dynamics e.g. separate accommodation for dependants
- The use of different models to deliver more affordable housing
- Schemes to encourage collaboration for local SME builders
- Encouraging career diversification and changes for all ages in construction skills, as well as construction apprentices and younger people

## Business

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY

#### **Growth in West Suffolk's economy for the benefit of all our residents and UK plc**

We will use our influence, investment, partnership and regulatory powers to:

- Lobby for a better connected West Suffolk in terms of transport and digital connectivity
- Promote West Suffolk as a place to do business so as to attract investment and innovation that increases salary levels and encourages the right mix of jobs to grow our economy.
- Invest and promote our local places by building on their unique qualities through specific local strategies, projects and environmental services
- Develop our current and future local workforce through education, training and opportunities for all

#### **Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active.**

- Foster supportive networks to improve and sustain the lives of individuals, families and communities
- Work with and influence partners, including the voluntary sector, in our shared endeavour of improving the health, wellbeing and safety of families and communities

Our areas of focus are supporting new and innovative start-up, ensuring a supply of quality move-on space to meet our growing businesses and creating the environment which attracts new businesses which create the right mix of jobs to grow our economy now and into the future.

### Opportunities for Business

- The extent to which we can accommodate the supply chain for our local business as well as high value sectors such as the Bio-medical, tech and advance manufacturing sectors located in Cambridge and Norwich.
- Accommodating the support, back office, research and advance manufacturing components, for Cambridge and Norwich high value businesses.
- As part of the Cambridge Norwich tech corridor; there is greater scope for business collaboration to explore increasing profitability by technological optimisation.
- Business collaboration of those who are willing to share ideas and initiatives across West Suffolk including in supporting the health and wellbeing of staff as well as investing in attracting high calibre employees, apprentice and skills initiatives.
- With a higher than UK average number of self-employed there is an opportunity to understand the contribution this group can make by understanding the range of skills they may be able to provide in supporting our larger local businesses and in coaching and mentoring others. A formal collaboration on a digital platform would enable this group to share resources and skills. We would also like to explore the benefits for providing meet up facilities for this group, optimising use of our and other community assets.
- Our rural economy and high quality green environment presents significant potential to grow our tourism offer, at the same time as responding to our well-being agenda and making the most of our established food sector.
- The value of culture in enhancing our economy and enhancing on our Place as destinations of choice, building on the contributions of the Arc in Bury St Edmunds and the Home of Horse racing in Newmarket.
- Start-up/incubation space and companies focused on innovation, STEM industries and combining strong sectors in our areas such as agri-tech, research and food.

- Collaborations and initiatives to support 'buy local' and procuring local companies and skills, particularly for large planned projects such as Lakenheath airbase improvements.
- Initiatives to further develop skills across all ages in higher value sectors including STEM and advanced manufacturing.



## Infrastructure and Energy

### STRATEGIC PRIORITY

#### **Growth in West Suffolk's economy for the benefit of all our residents and UK plc**

We will use our influence, investment, partnership and regulatory powers to:

- Lobby for a better connected West Suffolk in terms of transport and digital connectivity
- Promote West Suffolk as a place to do business so as to attract investment and innovation that increases salary levels and encourages the right mix of jobs to grow our economy.
- Invest and promote our local places by building on their unique qualities through specific local strategies, projects and environmental services
- Develop our current and future local workforce through education, training and opportunities for all

#### **Resilient families and communities that are healthy and active.**

- Foster supportive networks to improve and sustain the lives of individuals, families and communities
- Work with and influence partners, including the voluntary sector, in our shared endeavour of improving the health, wellbeing and safety of families and communities

#### **Increased and improved provision of appropriate housing in West Suffolk in both our towns and rural areas.**

- Plan for housing to meet the needs of current and future generations throughout their lifetimes, that is properly supported by infrastructure, facilities and community networks

The majority of our market towns benefit from close proximity to major road growth corridors; the A14 linking Port to Cambridge and the other large growth centres in the Midlands as well as the A11 Tech Corridor. We actively work with our partners and the County Council to bids for finance to further enhance these links as well as the East West rail projects, the A1307 into Cambridge and Combined Authority light rail proposals. Our planning policies ensure that sufficient infrastructure is put in place to support Strategic housing applications and as member Council of Suffolk Growth Programme board we are actively developing a Strategic framework which will seek to integrate cross boundary transport with infrastructure and growth.

In addition to large infrastructure improvements referred to above, there are a number of opportunities for infrastructure and energy:

- Maximising potential for energy efficiency in new development, the Council can also provide consultancy to support initiatives.
- Council optimising energy efficiency with asset improvements and in new development
- Increasing electric charging
- Looking for further opportunities such as the Toggam Solar Farm to produce clean energy and raise income to support services and further investment
- Enhancing station gateways at Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds
- Working to enhance Broadband connectivity for our businesses, people and place and the useful role it plays in inclusive growth, providing access for our rural hinterland to support homeworking and also connectivity to important services. We will draw on the expertise and insights on our doorstep with BT located within our neighbouring local authority and are actively working on a pan Suffolk project with New Anglia LEP to improve connectivity.
- Exploring use of modern technology to manage travel demand in and around our market towns



## 9. Investment Environment

### West Suffolk Growth Investment Strategy

The investments we make occur in a wider regional and national context. Our businesses and communities are well placed to benefit from and contribute to the growth of Cambridge to the West, Suffolk and Norfolk to the North and East and south to London. We are determined to ensure that our investment approach adds value locally, acting where others do not or cannot. We are also clear that the investments we make in the success of our communities and businesses will contribute to the local and national economy. Being on an international trade route and close to the port of Felixstowe also makes West Suffolk an attractive place to invest and ready to seize opportunities brought forward by new trade deals through Brexit.

We want our investments to have both immediate and long term, lasting impacts. So we will take account of the longer-term economic trends and context in how we plan and manage our investment.

### National

The longer term economic impacts and opportunities of Brexit are uncertain and much debated. But the uncertainty itself is currently reducing levels of business confidence. Whilst investment continues to grow at a moderate pace, spurred on by strong international demand and satisfactory rates of profitability, there can be no certainty that this will continue. This makes the role of West Suffolk Council in influencing and bolstering confidence for the benefit of the local community even more important.

The national demographic context is one of an ageing population, as is true for most countries in Western Europe. Higher proportions of older people place increasing demands on certain social infrastructure, but is also an opportunity. An engaged older population has much to contribute and improving participation in the

workforce could significantly impact Gross Domestic Product (GDP). At the same time, this demographic and social change is drawing more portions of society into the workforce. The strengths of a diverse workforce are increasingly recognised, but also requires greater flexibility to meet new expectations. Millennials, those born between 1980 and 1995, have greater expectations of working abroad than previous generations.

Meanwhile artificial intelligence (AI), automation and increasing digitisation are long term disruptors across almost all industries. Technological advancement poses a threat to certain portions of the workforce but simultaneously promises improvements in productivity and a revolution in the way we live and work. We are observing a delicate balance between those who benefit from the opportunities created by globalisation and technological change and those increasingly 'left behind' by the market, austerity and automation. This raises the profile and importance of inclusive growth and progress which seeks more than just increasing GDP. There is also increasing awareness of emissions and environmental damage will influence the way we use resources and the development of new technology. This will change the way in which we manufacture goods, how we transport them and how we travel.

### Regional

Macro-trends will play out differently across the country. The East Anglia economy makes an important contribution to national output. Cambridge is a driver of UK growth and home to globally important clusters in a number of technology related sectors. Norfolk and Suffolk is a £35.5bn economy and grew by 10% between 2010 and 2015. This is faster growth than many "powerhouse" areas, and whilst the structural impact of the 2008 recession is still felt in jobs growth and productivity the region has major strengths and growth opportunities in ICT, telecommunications, life sciences and



energy sectors. Agriculture, food and drink sectors are significant employers and are shifting towards higher value processing activity rather than traditional production which provide opportunities for growth in new products and markets. There are also cross sectoral opportunities around technical skills and new approaches (for example between Agriculture and ICT and Professional services and a growing digital sector).

Norfolk and Suffolk agreed a new Economic Strategy in October 2017 which provides an important framework for regional investment by the LEP, local councils, private investment and national agencies. Our investment strategy is consistent with this regional approach. The strategy identifies West Suffolk as a key growth area, with the A14 and Norwich to Cambridge corridors prioritised as locations for further growth and investment.

The Norfolk and Suffolk strategy also prioritises investing in the skills needed to both improve business productivity and innovation and ensuring that all our citizens have opportunities to develop the skills that they need to succeed. The region has higher than average levels of economic engagement, but has lower than average wage levels. Driving up the overall value of jobs and ensuring that the benefits of growth are felt by all our communities is a priority for West Suffolk as well as the wider region. This will be reflected in how regional investment is prioritised.

### **West Suffolk**

West Suffolk's local economy shares many of the characteristics of the wider region, with centres of strong recent growth. We have relatively high levels of employment, higher than the national average. We also have some of the highest jobs to population ratios in the region, for example in Bury St Edmunds. In contrast, other areas are sparsely populated. In the population, we see a base of established families, young renters as well as pockets of deprivation. So our investments will reflect this diversity of need.

There is a mixed business base, with concentrations of firms operating in Agri-tech, poultry, leisure, food and drink production and insurance. We are home to multinational brands such as British Sugar, Silver Spoon and Greene King, Omar, IFF, the Horse Racing industry and opportunities through the RAF Bases, such as the development of Mildenhall. West Suffolk has experienced a net inflow in the number of 21-25 years olds, over a third of whom hold university degrees. Alongside centres of high skills and recent growth productivity and overall skills levels remain below average - GVA per head in Suffolk (£22,781) is below the UK average (£25,601).

Housing affordability is similarly varied. Median house prices can be as high as 200% of UK median house prices, driven by a radiation effect from London and Cambridge. Overall, housing affordability has increased as an issue as wages have increased more slowly than house price increases. But there are also areas of lower values. Ensuring a variety of tenures in the housing mix will help to continue to attract people to the area and represents a real opportunity for growth.

The Growth Investment Strategy is being implemented at a time where the macro-economic context is uncertain and signals a clear demonstration of commitment by West Suffolk Council to the local economy. Working with Partners to achieve the collective interest will ensure the strategy aligns to our economic growth aims and is robust during times of uncertainty.

## 10. Our Financial and Governance Context

### Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016 - 2020

Our West Suffolk Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2017-20 sets out the West Suffolk Councils' intention to facilitate sustainable growth that benefits our communities, including through investment, over the period of the strategy. This is in order to deliver our growth objectives as well as to move towards the Councils' goal of financial self-sufficiency.

Our response to our financial challenges and opportunities, set out in our MTFs include six theme, three of which include:

- behaving more commercially
- being an investing authority
- taking advantage of new forms of local government finance

These reinforce the Council's commitment to continue to invest in our area and is the basis for our Growth Investment fund and approach.









Forest Heath & St Edmundsbury councils

**West Suffolk**  
working together