

Agenda Item No:	12	
Committee:	Council	
Date:	December 16th 2024	
Report Title:	Economic Growth Strategic Refresh 2025-28	

1 Purpose / Summary

- 1.1 This Strategic Refresh document has been created to continue the delivery of the Council's Economic Development Strategy 2012-2031 (EDS) and follows the first Strategic Refresh 2022-25. It sets out how the Council's Economic Growth Team, other Council departments and public and private partners will continue to work together to support economic growth in Fenland.
- 1.2 This Strategic Refresh also sets out the outputs and outcomes delivered via the first Strategic Refresh.

2 Key Issues

- 2.1 Since the approval of the Council's EDS and the first Strategic Refresh much of the local, regional, and national context has changed significantly for example EU-Exit, Covid-19, climate change and a new national government.
- 2.2 In addition, several strategies and plans have been produced by partners including the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority's State of the Region and Shared Vision and the potential for a new reservoir in Fenland all which need to be reflected in the Strategic Refresh.
- 2.3 These factors all contribute to the need for a second Strategic Refresh of the EDS.
- 2.4 The Cabinet at its meeting held on 15th November 2024 approved that the Strategic Refresh be considered by the Council and recommended its approval.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Council is requested to consider and approve the Economic Growth Strategic Refresh 2025-28.

Wards Affected	All
Forward Plan Reference	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Ian Benney
Report Originator(s)	Anna Goodall, Assistant Director Simon Jackson, Economic Growth Manager Ann Wardle, Business Engagement Manager
Contact Officer(s)	Simon Jackson, Economic Growth Manager
Background Papers	Economic Growth - Strategic Refresh 2025-2028

Report:

1 BACKGROUND AND INTENDED OUTCOMES

- 1.1 The economy, supporting economic growth, is one of the Council's three outward facing Corporate Priorities.
- 1.2 This Second Strategic Refresh has been created to continue the delivery of the Council's Economic Development Strategy 2012-2031 (EDS) and follows the first Strategic Refresh 2022-25. It sets out how the Council's Economic Growth Team, other Council departments and public and private partners will continue to work together to drive forward economic growth in Fenland and ensure that we are known as being "open for all business".
- 1.3 Since the approval of the EDS and first Strategic Refresh some of the local, regional, and national context has changed significantly for example through EU Exit and a new national government. In addition, partner strategies and services have also been created such as Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority's State of the Region and Shared Vision and Business Growth service. These changes in context and new strategies and services all contribute to the need for a second Strategic Refresh of the EDS and hence this document.
- 1.4 Economic growth is ultimately delivered by the people who own and/or run businesses. Those who are already in Fenland, those who relocate to Fenland and those who create a business in Fenland. One of the key roles of the Council is to support those owners, managers, and entrepreneurs in their growth decisions, location decisions and aspirations by for example enabling access to the high-quality business support that is available including any grant funding.
- 1.5 This second Strategic Refresh embodies this supportive role and is reflected in the refresh as follows:

- 1.5.1 **Growing businesses** - Through engagement with existing local businesses the Council targets the support that is available to help enable each business to grow and assist them to overcome any barriers to growth or to develop opportunities. This includes ensuring that businesses are aware of and supported in applying for any financial support for which they are eligible.
- 1.5.2 **More business start-ups** – Help ensure that the support is in place to enable local people to start a business and to stay in business including the possible availability of grant funding.
- 1.5.3 **Attract new businesses** - Help attract new businesses into the district from supermarkets and fast-food brands to businesses seeking a European or UK base. The Council proactively engages with targeted new business opportunities to ascertain each businesses plans and location requirements and puts together propositions with the aim of attracting them into Fenland.
- 1.5.4 **Available workforce** – Help ensure that supply of and skills of the available workforce are appropriate for the Fenland marketplace, as well as offering young people improved aspirations, increased wage levels and alternative career paths. Represent companies’ skills requirements for the development of skills support, funding and development of relevant courses.
- 1.5.5 **Available serviced land and premises** - Acquiring technical and specialist support to bring forward employment sites and premises to include infrastructure, highway, and market/commercial assessments. To bring together these and other similar requirements into a database of investment opportunities in Fenland.
- 1.6 The success of this Strategic Refresh will be demonstrated by the value each business places on their interaction with the Council and partners as demonstrated through case studies and feedback.
- 1.7 Economic growth can also provide opportunities for the Council to generate net positive income either through investment itself or potentially via Fenland Future Limited and can also generate business rate growth and therefore an increased revenue stream into the Council.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 As one of the Council’s three outward facing Corporate Priorities it is important that how the Council supports economic growth is as effective as possible and this second Strategic Refresh updates the existing EDS and follows the first Strategic Refresh 2022-25 to ensure that this continues to be the case.

3 CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Engagement with partners on other strategies has enabled external views and policies to be incorporated into the Strategy Refresh.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 An alternative to actively and proactively supporting Fenland's economic growth would be for the Council not to do so. However, there is clear evidence that the Council plays a vital role in the Economic Growth of the District including the attraction of significant external funding and investment, the provision of commercial property, attraction of new businesses into the district and expansion of businesses already in Fenland.
- 4.2 Moreover, all the other Districts and the Combined Authority in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough also recognise the importance of their Council supporting economic growth and the very competitive environment that exists for securing funding and investment.
- 4.3 This alternative option was considered and rejected as it would result in Fenland being significantly disadvantaged in securing economic growth and external funding.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Legal Implications

- 5.1.1 There are no specific legal issues engaged by the recommendations contained in this Report.

5.2 Financial Implications

- 5.2.1 All financial implications have been reflected for in the Council's draft budget.

5.3 Equality Implications

- 5.3.1 All individual projects and services have been assessed to ensure equality of access, etc.

6 SCHEDULES

Schedule 1 – Draft Fenland Economic Growth Strategic Refresh, 2025-28

SCHEDULE 1
Fenland Economic Growth Strategic Refresh 2025-28



Fenland Economic Growth

Strategic Refresh 2025-2028

Delivering the Council's Economic Development Strategy 2012-
2031

November 2024

Foreword by Cllr Ian Benney Portfolio Holder for Economic Growth



Fenland is a great place to live, work or visit and as Cabinet Member for Economic Growth I want to ensure that the residents benefit from local economic growth. There are major opportunities for growth in Fenland and this Second Strategic Refresh sets out how the Council will help maximise these opportunities over the next three years.

Ultimately economic growth is delivered by local businesses and the key role the Council undertakes is to support entrepreneurs, owners and managers when making decisions about how and when to grow or start their business. This second refresh sets out how the Council will continue to contribute to the decisions made by businesses.

Since the first Strategic Refresh much has been achieved including providing over £1.4m of grant funding and establishing a Customer Relationship Management system to enable real engagement with local businesses. You'll find more detail on what has been delivered set out in the Refresh.

Finally, whilst having a regular Refresh is important what I always ask is that action follows and having meaningful impact on economic growth in Fenland. With that in mind, you will find this Second Refresh to be as concise as possible, with a focus on measurable action and demonstrating that Fenland is truly open for all businesses.

Cllr Ian Benney

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i. Executive Summary

This Second Strategic Refresh (hereafter referred to as Refresh) has been created to continue the delivery of the Councils Economic Development Strategy 2012-2031 and follows the First Strategic Refresh 2022-25. It sets out how the Council's Economic Growth Team, other Council departments and public and private partners will continue to work together to drive forward economic growth in Fenland and ensure that we are open for all businesses

Economic growth is delivered by businesses, those who are already in Fenland and are growing, those who relocate to Fenland and those who create a business in Fenland. One of the key roles of the Council is to support those owners, managers, and entrepreneurs in their growth decisions and aspirations by for example enabling access to the high-quality business support that is available including grant funding. The Refresh embodies this role and is reflected as follows:

- 1. Growing businesses** - Through engagement with existing local businesses the Council will target the support that is available to help enable each business to grow and assist them to overcome any barriers to growth or to develop opportunities. This will include ensuring that businesses are aware of and supported in applying for any grant funding support for which they are eligible.
- 2. More business start-ups** – Help ensure that the support is in place to help enable local people to start a business and to stay in business including where possible the availability of grant funding.
- 3. Attract new businesses** - Help attract new businesses into the district from supermarkets and fast-food brands to businesses seeking a first UK base. The Council will proactively engage with targeted new business opportunities to ascertain each businesses plans and location requirements.
- 4. Available workforce** – Help ensure both the supply of and skills of the available workforce are appropriate for the Fenland marketplace, as well as offering young people improved aspirations, increased wage levels and alternative career paths. Represent businesses skills requirements into the development of skills support funding and development of relevant courses.
- 5. Available serviced land and premises** - Acquiring technical and specialist support to bring forward employment sites and premises to include infrastructure, highway, and market/commercial assessments. To bring together these and other similar requirements into an “Commercial Investment Land and Property Database” for Fenland.

The success of the Refresh will be based upon how well the Council and its partners interacts with business owners and managers who make the decisions as to whether the business expands, relocates, or starts. Measuring success therefore includes

mostly input measures, inputs into the business decision making process. The ultimate outcome of the Refresh economic growth is delivered by business supported where required by the Council and its partners.

Critically, therefore, the success of the Refresh will be demonstrated by the value each business places on their interaction with the Council and partners as demonstrated through case studies and feedback.

The Council helps enable businesses to secure grant and other funding to support the growth of their business and attracts funding to support the growth of the economy for example for infrastructure to make available land for commercial development.

Economic growth provides opportunities for the Council to generate net positive income either through investment itself or via Fenland Future Limited and can also generate business rate growth and therefore an increased revenue stream into the Council.

1. Introduction

The economy is one of the Council’s three outward facing Corporate Priorities:

Quality Organisation Supporting effective delivery of our priorities and services	Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support vulnerable members of our community • Promote health and wellbeing for all • Work with partners to promote Fenland through culture and heritage
	Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a high performing refuse, recycling and street cleansing service • Work with partners and the community on projects that improve the environment and our street scene • Work with partners to keep people safe in their neighbourhoods by reducing crime and anti-social behaviour and promoting social cohesion
	Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attract new businesses, jobs and opportunities whilst supporting our existing businesses in Fenland • Promote and enable housing growth, economic growth and regeneration across Fenland • Promote and lobby for infrastructure improvements across the district

The Council created and approved its Economic Development Strategy 2012-2031 (EDS), “Building a competitive vision for Fenland” that focuses on the most important outcomes and outputs required to ensure continued economic growth in Fenland.

In 2021 the First Strategic Refresh 2022-25 was approved to continue delivery of the EDS and set out how the Economic Growth Team, other Council departments and public and private partners (hereafter referred to in this document as the “Team”) could continue to work together to drive forward economic growth in the district. This second Strategic Refresh 2025-28 follows on from the first considering changing circumstances.

Each Refresh is reviewed annually to ensure that the actions undertaken by the Team remain responsive, appropriate, up to date, deliver real impact and demonstrate how Fenland is open for all businesses.

Each Refresh utilises the five strategic ‘Model for Growth’ themes developed in the EDS designed to positively impact economic growth:

- Enterprise
- Workforce development
- Enabling infrastructure
- Business retention & growth

- Inward investment

Within each theme the Refresh sets out the projects and initiatives designed to have the most impact on each theme and includes:

- Action being undertaken
- Outcome expected
- Measurable outputs

2. Changing Context

Since the approval of the Council's EDS and the First Strategic Refresh, some of the local, regional, and national context has changed significantly. This section sets out the most significant economic changes and the most recent strategic responses made by partners. These changes all contribute to the need for a regular strategic refresh of the EDS and hence this document.

Change in National Government

The national elections this year resulted in a change in government. The new Labour government pledged to introduce a new industrial strategy in their election manifesto, and the King's Speech included a commitment to establish an Industrial Strategy Council. Labour's new industrial strategy broadly will aim to achieve two main goals: economic growth and a green energy transition.

The Industrial Strategy will include government actions aimed at promoting the development and growth of specific industries or sectors that are considered strategically important. Essentially, the government will intervene to support certain businesses. Government support can take various forms, including providing financial assistance (subsidies), offering tax breaks, or purchasing goods and services from businesses for government use.

EU Exit

Since the referendum in June 2016, the Office for Budget Responsibility has conducted a range of analysis on the economic and fiscal implications of EU exit. The latest forecast was published in the March 2024 Economic and Fiscal Outlook.

Overall trade intensity in the UK and the rest of the G7

Trade volumes in all advanced economies declined sharply at the height of the pandemic in 2020. However, UK trade intensity (exports plus imports as a share of GDP) has not recovered in line with other G7 countries since then. In the third quarter of 2023, UK trade intensity remained 1.7 per cent below its pre-pandemic level from 2019. By contrast, it had risen 1.7 per cent above pre-pandemic levels on average in the rest of the G7.

Composition of trade in the UK and the rest of the G7

Within UK trade, there has been a significant and growing divergence between the performance of goods and services since the pandemic.

Growth in UK goods trade (exports plus imports) has fallen well behind the rest of the G7. At the end of 2023, UK goods trade was around 10 per cent below 2019

levels, while it was around 5 higher on average for the rest of the G7 in the third quarter.

Meanwhile, UK services trade growth has been the strongest in the G7. It reached around 12 per cent above 2019 levels at the end of 2023, versus around 9 per cent above in the rest of the G7 in the third quarter.

The UK's differential performance between goods and services trade post-Brexit likely reflects several factors. First, global trade in services, where the UK has a relative comparative advantage, has grown faster than global goods trades since 2008. Second, post-Brexit trade barriers have created more significant frictions for goods than services. Third, the UK is less dependent on the EU for services exports than goods exports – around a third of UK service exports go to the EU, compared to roughly half for goods. Fourth, digitalisation makes trade in some services easier and less dependent on physical proximity than in the past.

What is driving the growth in UK services trade?

UK services trade has continued to grow strongly, including with the EU, despite the increase in trade barriers post-Brexit. Looking at its sectoral composition, around two thirds of the growth in services trade volumes since 2019 has been driven by the 'other business services' sector, which includes management consulting, research & development, and advertising. By contrast, exports of financial services and transport have lagged other sectors, declining 5.9 per cent and 2.0 per cent respectively. These are also sectors which are more likely to have been impacted by Brexit frictions.

The recent strong growth in the UK's exports in 'other business services' could reflect several factors. First, trade barriers with the EU may be lower for these kinds of services than goods or other, more highly regulated, services such as banking. Second, there has been particularly strong growth in service exports to the US, possibly capturing US firms outsourcing work to the UK, supported by the recent weakness in the pound. Finally, there is some evidence that services firms may have circumvented trade barriers by selling through foreign affiliates.

However, it remains hard to draw firm conclusions given the challenges of disentangling the simultaneous impacts of Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, and other geopolitical developments affecting UK and global trade.

Covid-19 Pandemic

The UK economy has bounced back from the Covid-19 pandemic much faster than previously estimated, according to the Office for National Statistics.

Until relatively recently, the UK was thought to be the only G7 economy not to have returned to pre-pandemic levels. Recent figures give Britain a similar performance to

France and a stronger rebound than Germany, the eurozone's largest economy, but its recovery remains weaker than other countries.

Climate Change & Net Zero

Fenland is low-lying and vulnerable to unpredictable weather patterns and rising sea levels. Emissions-focused initiatives remain central to economic strategies across Cambridgeshire & Peterborough.

Meeting the new national target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 68% by 2030 and transitioning to net zero by 2050 demands an even greater focus on measures that deliver economic growth through sustainable choices, business models and jobs.

Climate change is a business opportunity. The low-carbon transition creates opportunities for efficiency, innovation and growth that extend beyond high-carbon industries like energy and transport to all sectors. Companies can save energy and materials costs, serve new customer needs, enhance their reputations, and better attract and retain talent — all because of working to reduce their emissions and those of their customers and suppliers. Through their governance role, boards can help to ensure that climate opportunities are captured by reviewing corporate strategy and focusing on long-term value.

With the increased investment need throughout the housing sector in sustainable and net zero carbon products and services, there is an urgent need to support the growth of existing and diversification of new entrants into the marketplace.

Strategies and Plans

Fenland Emerging New Local Plan

The Council is preparing a new Local Plan. This important document will determine what the district will look like in the future and how it will become an even better place to live, work and visit. Once adopted, the new Local Plan will replace the current Fenland Local Plan (May 2014). The plan will cater for the growth of the District to 2040 and seek to allocate enough land in a variety of locations to meet the Council's growth ambition and the demands of business.

CPCA Shared Ambition, June 2024

The purpose of the CPCA Shared Ambition is to create a framework to:

- Give focus to a common set of outcomes - articulating what we want for our future
- Support us in building from existing strategies, plans and initiatives, recognising the work already being advanced across the region

- Help drive increased integration, engagement, joined up thinking and action across stakeholders to deliver our shared outcomes

CPCA: State of the Region, September 2024

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (C&P) State of the Region 2024 provides a comprehensive, evidence-based assessment of C&P's current economic, social, and environmental landscape. By analysing the most up-to-date data and insights from across the region, the report serves as a resource and evidence base for stakeholders, policymakers, and community leaders to understand the area's opportunities, priorities, and pathways for sustainable growth and prosperity.

Eight key themes are categorised into five core themes and three cross-cutting themes. The five core themes include Business and Enterprise; Health & Wellbeing; Workforce, Jobs & Skills; Wildlife & Nature; and Net Zero & Climate Resilience. These are fundamental to understanding the region's economic, social, and environmental health. The three cross-cutting themes, Tackling Inequality; Place; and Connectivity, transcend individual categories, addressing issues that permeate multiple aspects of regional development.

1. Place identifies key facts regarding urbanisation and land use, such as 90% of the population residing in Built Up Areas, despite only 8% of the land being classified as such. Meanwhile, the significance of high-grade agricultural land is also highlighted to underscore the region's diverse assets.

2. Business & Enterprise investigates the thriving economy, responsible for £31 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) annually and highlights areas of strength, such as Life Science and Healthcare sectors, and provides up-to-date analysis of areas such as the knowledge economy and global competitiveness.

3. Workforce, Jobs & Skills highlights data from across the employment landscape, covering 256,000 jobs. This considers the growth in knowledge-intensive sectors, particularly in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire, as well as the quality of work and inequalities between local districts.

4. The Health & Wellbeing indicators start to reveal further geographic disparities, for example, differences in mortality rates and health indicators across the region. Yet, positive trends are also observed, such as declining levels of smoking prevalence.

5. Environmental stewardship is evident in the Wildlife & Nature theme, with a range of indicators discussed to support the region's commitment to preserving and enhancing natural assets.

7. Net Zero & Climate Resilience covers the tangible emissions reductions made across the region to date, whilst setting out challenges such as the decarbonisation of buildings and increasing environmental risks.

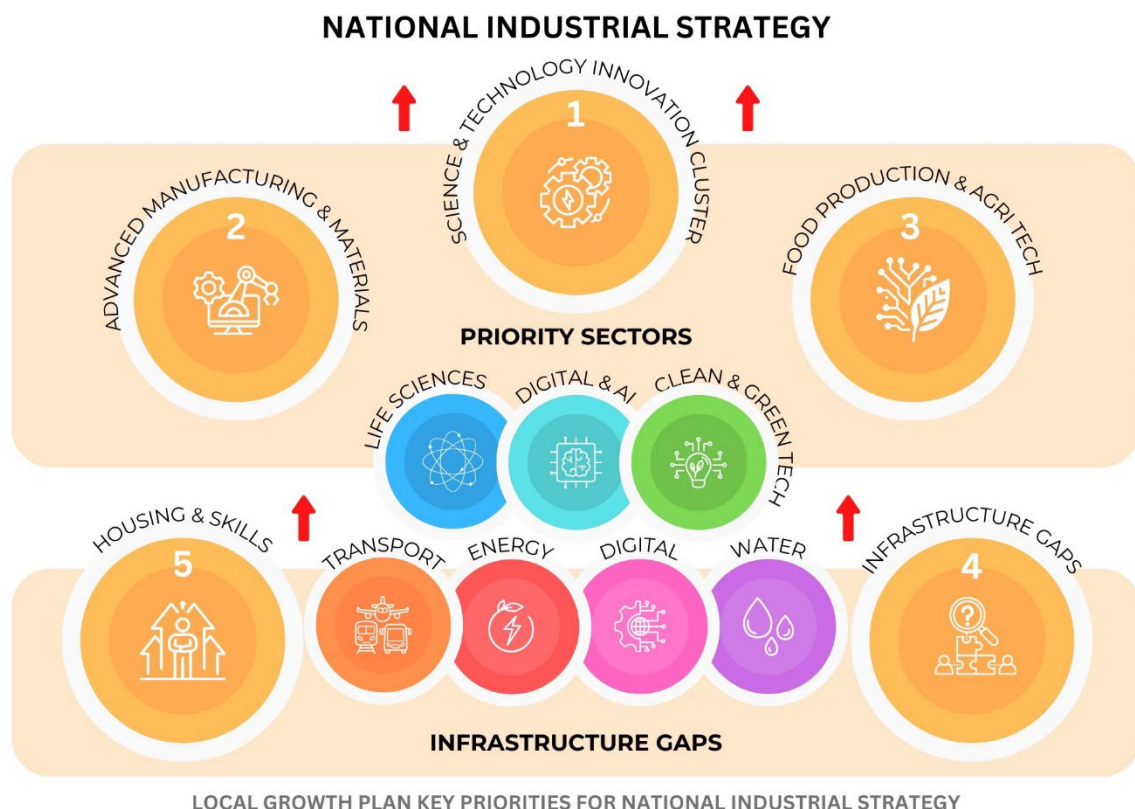
8. In addressing Tackling Inequality, the report unveils key disparities in incomes, employment gaps, and a range of other metrics underscoring the need for targeted intervention.

9. And finally, Connectivity reveals varying digital and transportation needs, at local, regional and interregional levels, presenting the need for investment to bring the region’s digital and transport connectivity up to that of some of its peers.

CPCA: Emerging Key Growth Priorities for a Local Growth Plan Feeding into the National Industrial Strategy, October 2024

A new 10-year Local Growth Plan required by the new Government guided by outputs from the Shared Ambitions and State of Region.

Set out below is a key diagram setting out five emerging key local growth priorities for the National Industrial Strategy, October 2024. The key theme underpinning sector strengths is the overall contribution to innovation and the globally significant science and technology innovation cluster. Two of the priorities reflect binding constraints and unlocking these has a direct causal relationship with the intensification, expansion and diffusion of the cluster (and the potential sector growth that sits within it) and the two other priority sectors that are nationally significant and through specific additional intervention can make a major contribution to the National Industrial Strategy.



CPCA: Single Assurance Framework, August 2024

As part of the overall CPCA Improvement Programme, a Single Assurance Framework (SAF) was developed. The aim of the SAF is to:

- To ensure there is focused investment for projects that support the delivery of the CPCA Strategy
- To ensure our projects & programmes are consistently delivering the required outcomes & driving impact
- To provide robust governance across all projects and programmes, at all stages of lifecycle
- To foster new collaborative ways of working between all areas delivering change

CPCA: Employment & Skills Strategy, 2022

This strategy builds on the ambition for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough set out in the 2019 Skills Strategy. The updated vision is for: A successful, globally competitive economy offering high-skilled, well-paid, good quality jobs, delivering increased productivity and prosperity to support strong, sustainable and healthy communities and enabled by an inclusive, world-class local skills system that matches the needs of our employers, learners and communities

Infrastructure Delivery Framework

The Combined Authority commissioned Stantec Ltd to take forward the Infrastructure Delivery Framework project. Data on development sites was sourced from councils and utility stakeholders contacted. This work has identified the major barriers to delivering sustainable growth as set out in Local Plans. The outputs have raised awareness of the extent of investment and sustainable growth being held back due to infrastructure constraints or costs linked to specific sites, or the cumulative impact of growth on strategic issues, such as water and energy supply.

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER 2), 2024

Developing a single strategic position to underpin the case for greater fiscal devolution and powers to unlock the delivery of major infrastructure, following earlier CPIER 1.

CPIER 1 produced a review of all the available economic evidence for the area chaired by an experienced and expert panel, bringing in new research on business clusters and growth. The set out a series of key recommendations, many of which were reiterated and developed by the subsequent Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Industrial Strategy.

The review segmented Cambridgeshire and Peterborough into three key economic areas with boundaries described as “fuzzy” – Cambridge, Peterborough (includes Whittlesey) & The Fens (broadly comprises most of the District of Fenland, and parts of the Districts of Huntingdonshire and East Cambridgeshire).

The key points with regards to The Fens were:

- The Fens is the most challenged economically of the three
- Market towns have lost their former glory and struggle to attract or retain young people
- Rural communities struggling to maintain high value industries
- Brexit poses a challenge to provide low-cost labour – “a concern that at all skill levels, from highly skilled workers to unskilled workers, businesses rely on foreign labour”.
- Businesses need to tackle low labour productivity by investing in the skills of their workers
- Immense potential for the Fens as the apex of British agricultural production & an attractive way of life in thriving Market Towns

Oxford to Cambridge Pan-Regional Partnership

The pan-Regional Partnership strategy, discussed at the most recent Board meeting on 19 September 2024, will form an important element of the forthcoming mid-year review. The Board has now signalled that it wishes to embark on a new phase for the Partnership and to develop a more ambitious strategy that places greater emphasis and alignment to delivering the government’s missions, and in response to this new government’s proposed policy changes around devolution, strategic planning, and infrastructure, including the Government’s position on East West Rail. Work will shortly commence to develop this new Strategy, helping to provide a focus for a future programme of work post-March 2025.

3. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats for the Fenland Economy

The EDS identified several strengths, weaknesses opportunities and threats (SWOT) for the Fenland economy and a number remain the same in 2024. The table below updates the original EDS SWOT:

	Fenland economy
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong demand from expanding businesses and relocators • Super-fast broadband i.e., >95% premises now access at least 24Mbps rising to >97% over the next 12 months • Proposed housing growth • Entrepreneurial culture • Low-cost base • Vibrant engineering and food processing sectors • Supportive and flexible planning • University of Peterborough & College of West Anglia • North Cambridgeshire Training Centre
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of serviced land or available industrial units • Mobile and mobile broadband coverage in rural areas • Pockets of high levels of deprivation • Poor transport links both into and within the District • Image of the area • Limited arts, culture and night-time economies • Recruitment issues – actual recruits and skill levels
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fens Reservoir • Potentially available land for development • New government Industrial Strategy • Climate change, low carbon & net zero i.e., market opportunities • Strategic employment sites i.e., Stainless Metalcraft Phase II Advanced Manufacturing Park & Peterborough Science & Technology Park • Location for Cambridge overspill
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing workforce vacancy rates • Climate change i.e., flooding risk • Growth of neighbouring centres • National and international economic and political issues

4. Actions

Responsibility for delivery of the Refresh rests mostly with the Economic Growth Team comprising the Economic Growth Manager, Business Engagement Manger and My Fenland Technical Support Officer. The Economic Growth Team will either deliver projects directly or through working with others such as other departments within the Council, the CPCA and partners to ensure delivery of the Refresh.

The Refresh utilises the strategic 'Model for Growth' themes developed in the EDS; Enterprise, Workforce development, Enabling infrastructure, Business retention and growth and Inward investment.

The Refresh highlights the individual actions being undertaken, the expected outcome resulting from taking these actions and measurable outputs. All the actions help ensure that Fenland is seen as both supportive of and open for all businesses.

The actions respond to the changes in context as set out previously and reflected in the SWOT analysis for example the continuing issue of lack of serviced land and available commercial property and in particular light industrial premises and the significant new opportunities including Stainless Metalcraft Phase II Advanced Manufacturing Park and Peterborough Science & Technology Park.

Enterprise

Objective

Maintain and build a thriving enterprise and entrepreneurial culture that encourages businesses to start up and grow.

Work Plan

Action	Outcome	Measurables 2025-28	Delivered 2022-25
<p>Economic Growth Team Service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote available employment sites and premises via for example the Fenland for Business website, including: Boathouse Business Centre South Fens Business Centre and Enterprise Park Council owned land & industrial units Private commercial property and land 	<p>Enabling businesses to access to employment sites and development land to support business growth</p>	<p>15 enquiries per year converting to 3 businesses per year finding new premises/site</p>	<p>65 enquiries</p> <p>10 company expansions</p> <p>1 business consolidated into their premises in March from other premises outside the district.</p> <p>Currently working with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Robotics company looking to expand due to an increase in exports to Ireland. 5 Medium business new site or existing site expansion 6 small businesses looking for new premises <p>Inward Investors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 businesses considering locating in Fenland

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expansion of Peruvian agrifood company to create a manufacturing facility in 2025
Maintain regular meetings with the business community, including the Fenland Chamber of Commerce (FCC) & The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)	More developed and coordinated approach to business intelligence to support business growth and competitiveness.	One new service to support businesses per year	<p>Quarterly meeting with FCC.</p> <p>Worked closely with Chair of FCC to re-establish the Chamber in Fenland.</p> <p>Quarterly meeting with FSB.</p>
Develop the Fenland for Business website to support businesses with signposting to advice and guidance and information	More businesses accessing the support and guidance available for example Growth Works that increases survival rates and job growth	<p>5% increase year on year of visitors to the Fenland for Business website.</p> <p>Increase the number of Fenland for Business followers on X by 5% year on year.</p> <p>We will add video content via YouTube, case studies showing how the Growth Team have supported local businesses and create a presence on LinkedIn.</p>	<p>Working with the Council's Communications Team have completely redesigned the Fenland for Business website with a customer focus on Start Ups, Growing Businesses and Inward Investors.</p> <p>Delivered 5% increase year on year of visitors to the Fenland for Business website and the number of followers on X.</p>
<p>Annual business start-up leaflet – targeting the hard to reach home based businesses and those considering starting a business.</p> <p>Signposting to the Fenland for Business website “Start” section of the website and encouraging new and existing businesses to register to receive regular e-</p>	Enabling more business start-ups and increasing the number of businesses registered on the Council's business database	<p>Every household paying Council Tax to receive a leaflet.</p> <p>Feeder for the Start & Grow programme.</p> <p>Additional 10% increase in new businesses registered on the Council's Fenland for Business website in the month post- delivery of the leaflet</p>	An insert with link to the Fenland for Business website was included in Council Tax bills providing information on the assistance provided to businesses by the Economic Growth Team and partner organisations.

newsletter updates. Delivered with the annual council tax bills.			
Partner business support introductions	Smart Manufacturing Association (SMA) regarding Industry 4.0 adoption and grants		<p>25 companies referred to the SMA and a joint event held at The Boathouse, Wisbech with 21 companies attending. The SMA closed in March 2023.</p> <p>Business and Intellectual Property Centre (March) regarding Start Up support and grants</p> <p>An officer sat on the judging panel for the BIPC start up grant awards, judging entries from across Cambridgeshire.</p>
Memberships and Events			<p>The team worked with partners to benefit Fenland businesses, including CPCA, Shoestring – a member of the East of England board of the Institute for Manufacturing scheme, Committee members of Fenland Chamber of Commerce and judging the BITP grant scheme for startup businesses in Cambridgeshire</p> <p>Innovate Edge event – held at NCTC to inform Fenland companies of the support available for innovation.</p> <p>StocksAG - Innovate UK Edge Event, David Hampton, manufacturing and operations director at Wisbech firm StocksAG, said: 'I found it to be very informative as we had no idea of the</p>

			help and support that was out there to help support our journey. Several of the topics discussed were exactly the things we are underway with here at StocksAG."
<p>Community Renewal Fund (CRF) "Start & Grow" programme ends in June 2022</p> <p>To aid Start and Grow to engage individuals and early-stage/micro businesses in an intensive enterprise programme. It will bring skills development and business investment together in one scheme through a 'pre-qualification' process for grant awards.</p>	<p>Increases start-up success through investment in local businesses; it equips new and existing enterprises with the business skills they need for sustainable growth and through this will safeguard jobs and increase employment.</p>	N/A	<p>(7 months period to end June 2022)</p> <p>Programme delivered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 supported enterprises • 8 jobs safeguarded • 25 new businesses • 25 new products • £150k investment attracted • £500k grants paid <p>Value for money: outputs require approximately £10k investment per business compared to the expected investment of £32k via other funded programmes.</p>

Workforce development

Objective

Help ensure that current supply of and skills of the available workforce are appropriate for the Fenland marketplace, as well as offering young people improved aspirations, increased wage levels and alternative career paths. Improved access to employment, training, and skills for balanced economic participation.

The Team will act as a key intermediary between business and key training and skills providers including the CPCA, colleges, developing North Cambs Training Centre and University of Peterborough.

Work Plan

Action	Outcome	Measurables 2025-28	Delivered 2022-25
<p>Work collaboratively with Jobcentre Plus to help raise awareness to businesses of enterprise opportunities and work placements.</p> <p>Quarterly meetings with Jobcentre Plus and proactive marketing of Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) programmes and initiatives</p>	<p>Improved awareness businesses of enterprise opportunities, apprenticeships, and work placements</p>	<p>4 meetings per annum with Jobcentre Plus</p> <p>3 listings per annum of DWP programmes in the Team's e-newsletter</p>	<p>4 meetings per annum with Jobcentre Plus.</p> <p>3 listings per annum of DWP in programmes in the Team's e-newsletter.</p> <p>DWP had a stand at the redundancy event, which was arranged by FDC officers for IPL, Westry staff.</p> <p>EG Team attended the DWP Jobs fair in Wisbech</p>
<p>Work collaboratively with College of West Anglia (COWA), North Cambridgeshire Training Centre</p>	<p>A more supportive environment for private sector involvement and</p>	<p>4 meetings per annum with COWA</p>	<p>4 meetings per annum with COWA & COWA presented their skills offer at an FDC online event to</p>

<p>(NCTC) and ARU Peterborough to deliver programmes that meet the needs of local business including quarterly collaboration meetings</p>	<p>improved opportunities for employment growth.</p> <p>NCTC provides training across a range of vocational subjects for between 80 and 130 apprentices each year. The apprentices are equipped to find good careers in the local economy and help businesses meet their skills needs.</p>	<p>4 meetings per annum with ARU Peterborough</p> <p>4 meetings per annum with NCTC</p>	<p>share lessons learnt from the retrofit program run by FDC and Clarion Housing</p> <p>4 meetings per annum with ARU Peterborough</p> <p>4 meetings per annum with North Cambridgeshire Training Centre.</p>
<p>To engage with CA Growth Works with Skills - demand-led skills service connecting learners and employers with opportunities that enable growth.</p>	<p>Deliver a fair and inclusive economy by empowering local people to access the education and skills needed to meet the needs of the local economy and business, both now and in the future.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>Number of referrals per annum – 20 to end Dec 2023 when the service was ended by CPCA. A new Skills service was established in April 2024.</p>

Enabling infrastructure

Objective

The provision of excellent underpinning infrastructure, which, as well as providing serviced land and available premises, to include road and transport linkages and the provision of superfast broadband.

Work Plan

Action	Outcome	Measurables 2025-28	Delivered 2022-2025
<p>Acquiring technical and specialist support to bring forward employment sites to include infrastructure, highway, and market/commercial assessments. The sites include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stainless Metalcraft, Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Launchpad & Manufacturing Technology Centre • Peterborough Science & Technology Park, 50 acres-built area 70 acres green space, carbon zero • Development of light industrial units adjacent to the ex-Bartletts site 	<p>Enable progress to be maintained to ultimately deliver sites and premises.</p> <p>Enable funding to be sought to support delivery.</p> <p>Business rate revenue forecast created.</p>	<p>12 key employment locations assessed, delivery plans and forecast business rate revenue projections in place.</p> <p>Delivery commenced on 3 key employment sites.</p>	<p>Internal FDC team created, and objectives agreed. Assessment of which sites to focus on within the project undertaken.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sites around the location of Fenton Way Chatteris <p>These sites and others to be combined into a key sites database capable of generating Investment Prospectus, completion of funding bids, etc</p>			
Work with partners to encourage and promote sustainable low carbon green infrastructure.	A more tailored sustainable environment to support green infrastructure, environmental and renewable supply chains.	Ongoing dialogue.	Ongoing dialogue.
Support the development of sustainable and enhanced broadband infrastructure including completing the delivery of the Fenland component within the Connecting Cambridgeshire project	Widespread access to enhanced broadband speeds and infrastructure that provide greater business competitiveness and viability.	Engaging with partners including the private sector e.g. CityFibre to help them deliver by 2022-23 >97% premises (homes and businesses) having access to broadband speeds of at least 24mbps.	Meetings undertaken with City Fibre and UPP regarding fibre installation in Wisbech and March during the search for cabinet sites. Now operating as BAU.
Fens Reservoir	The new c£3billion reservoir is at the heart of a whole new water supply project to provide homes and businesses with a reliable water supply.	The Economic Growth Team is working to help ensure that the opportunities of both the construction phase and the completed reservoir are fully exploited for Fenland residents and businesses.	The Economic Growth Team is working to help ensure that the opportunities of both the construction phase and the completed reservoir are fully exploited for Fenland residents and businesses.
Discretionary Business Rates Scheme	Cabinet & Council approved a new discretionary business rates scheme	Ongoing.	Ongoing.

	aimed at encouraging developers to build new business units with the potential of not having to pay business rates for up to 12 months until the unit is occupied.		
Medworth Employment and Skills Strategy	Ensure the strategy benefits the local community.	Feedback on the proposed strategy and engagement with Medworth on its delivery.	N/A

Business retention & growth

Objective

The District is seen as an exciting place to seek to start or grow a business. This objective recognises the importance of proactively targeting and supporting growth-oriented employers in Fenland; helping them to grow through enhanced access to finance, expert advice, suitable premises, and locations.

Work Plan

Action	Outcome	Measurables 2025-28	Delivered 2022-25
Undertake a proactive account management business engagement programme with larger employers and potential growth companies	Better informed intelligence to enable support and guidance to be delivered in a more coordinated way. Business issues identified and mitigated, growth opportunities identified and supported	18 case studies featuring businesses that have directly benefitted from the support provided by the Team. Group of 40 businesses receive 1:2:1 “account management” service with 40 businesses visited per annum	15 case studies featuring businesses that have directly benefitted from the support provided by the Team. Group of 40 businesses receive 1:2:1 “account management” service with 40 businesses visited per annum 42 company meetings completed resulting in the identification of 9 active expansion projects involving the support of the EG Team.
Undertake a proactive business engagement programme with all known employers and business owners	Significant proportion of businesses aware of the Team and the business support opportunities available to them.	2,500 businesses receive a minimum of 6 e-newsletter communications from the Team per annum.	2,500 businesses have so far received 25 e-newsletters communications from the Team.

Reactive follow up to engagement with Team from businesses	Business issues identified and mitigated, growth opportunities identified and supported.	4 case studies produced annually featuring businesses that have directly benefitted from the support provided by the Team.	10 case studies have been produced evidencing how these businesses have benefitted from the support provided by the Team.
CPCA Sector Advisors	Ensuring that Fenland businesses gain maximum benefit from the CPCA sector support available.	Team to refer a minimum of 20 businesses for 1:2:1 support per annum.	The team will engage with the new CPCA team of sector advisors when they are in position in Sept 2024
CA Growth Works Business Coaching & Skills Service – 1:2:1 consultancy, masterclasses, grant funding	Providing support packages tailored to a business's specific needs, growth objectives and timeline. Enabling business growth.	N/A Growth Works contract ended December 2024.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 385 Jobs (Committed) • 40 Apprenticeships created • 183 Additional training and learning outcomes • 240 Business Supported with growth Diagnostic • 63 Business starting Coaching Assignments • 63 Business starting a Coaching Journey • 63 Business completing a Coaching Journey • £956,724 awarded in Capital Growth Funding in local Small Businesses
Work with agents and developers to bring forward employment land provision,	An enhanced district wide office and commercial accommodation that	10 1:2:1 meeting with agents and developers per annum.	20 1:2:1 meeting with agents and developers held.

<p>encourage investment in 'move on' opportunities through:</p> <p>Quarterly Agents and Developer Forum meetings, 1:2:1 engagement with agents and developers.</p> <p>The Team will work closely with the Council and Fenland Future to assess investment opportunities.</p>	<p>supports growth and diversity in the emerging sectors.</p>	<p>2 agents and developers forum meetings per annum.</p>	<p>6 agents and developers forums held.</p>
<p>Develop joint Business events with partners to encourage networking, share business issues, etc</p>	<p>Enabling more businesses to expand</p>	<p>2 joint partner business events per annum</p>	<p>6 joint partner business events have been delivered.</p> <p>Smart Manufacturing Alliance on - Digitalisation for the Pathway to Net Zero - Boat House - 30th November 2023.</p> <p>Decarbonising Dissemination event. Worked with Clarion to develop an event to share with the construction sector the lessons learnt from updating and retrofitting social housing (net zero). COWA had a speaking slot. Jan 24.</p> <p>Event with Innovate UK Edge in March 2023 regarding support for research and development.</p>

<p>Services for Business</p> <p>All businesses registered for business rates receive a communication advising them of the services available to them from the Council and its partners such as Growth Works.</p>	<p>Enabling more businesses to expand</p>	<p>Every business registered for business rates receives a communication.</p>	<p>Every business registered for business rates received communication from the Economic Growth Team with their Business Rates Bills.</p>
<p>Adopt a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) data management</p>	<p>Improved understanding of businesses and their requirements, issues, etc enabling enhanced support to be provided.</p> <p>Data extracted from the database for inclusion in funding submissions, etc.</p>	<p>Increase the number of businesses listed in the CRM database by 1% per annum (c25 businesses).</p>	<p>A CRM system branded Evolutive provided by Alcium Ltd was acquired in April 2024. All data held by the Economic Growth Team on local business is now held in the system and the number of businesses is targeted to grow annually. The CRM delivers significant benefits including enabling reports and analysis to be created efficiently, a joined-up service provided for businesses, targeted communications and the end-to-end management via the CRM of business grant schemes. The CRM has also enabled the hosting of a commercial land and property database to be created on the Fenland for Business website.</p>
<p>Housing sector sustainable and net zero carbon products and services</p>	<p>A webinar event primarily designed to target local supply chain that are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. already working in Net Zero Carbon arena 	<p>Growth in the supply chain both locally and nationally.</p>	<p>Growth in the supply chain both locally and nationally.</p>

	<p>2. working in construction but not specifically NZC, and</p> <p>3. existing business and/or start-up's that see this as a growth area and would like to diversify existing activities.</p>		
South Fens Enterprise Park additional light industrial units Phase I and Phase II (additional funding will be required to deliver Phase II)	Enabling more businesses to expand and locate in Fenland	N/A	The project was put on hold due to a substantial increase in construction costs.
Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF)	SPF funding of £1.25m over three years has been secured by the by the Growth Team. Case studies will be made available via the Fenland for Business website.	N/A SPF ends March 2025	The programme is on time and funding will be utilised by February 2025. A full programme evaluation report will be produced by August 2025.
Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF)	REPF funding of £436k over two years has been secured by the Growth Team. Case studies will be made available via the Fenland for Business website.	N/A REPF ends March 2025	The programme is on time and funding will be utilised by February 2025. A full programme evaluation report will be produced by August 2025.

Inward investment

Objective

To maintain and increase the level of employment in the district and improve the quality of employment locally to provide all ages of the community with the opportunities that match their skills and aspirations. This will require the district to secure new inward investment to compliment current local employers.

The district has clear advantages to offer investors in key sectors, in particular Agri/food, precision engineering and manufacturing, professional and business support services, and the environmental and renewable sectors.

The Team will proactively target and engage with different business sectors from supermarkets and fast-food brands to international businesses looking for a UK base. The engagement with individual businesses will help the Team understand the plans and location requirements of these businesses and where appropriate put forward propositions that seek to attract them to locate in Fenland. Even where a business does not currently have expansion plans the Team will have started a relationship with that business which in the longer term may result in investment into the district.

In addition to the Council, Fenland is promoted as an investment destination through the CPCA Inward Investment Team, Cambridgeshire Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Business, commercial agents and developed relationships with strategic employers.

Encourage additional investment from parent companies of existing international investors to bring in new products or technologies leading to the expansion or retention of their Fenland facilities.

Work Plan

Action	Outcome	Measurables 2025-28	Delivered 2022-25
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<p>Work closely with and respond to information enquiries from CPCA Inward Investment Team</p>	<p>Delivering economic growth through the attraction of inward investment.</p>	<p>Working with the CPCA Inward Investment Team:</p> <p>10 inward investment enquiries per annum</p> <p>1 inward investment per annum</p>	<p>Working with the Growth Works (GW) (2022-2023) and CPCA (2024-25) Inward Investment Teams:</p> <p>20 inward investment enquiries</p> <p>8 GW enquiries received</p> <p>5 inward investments</p> <p>1 GW inward investment at negotiation stage</p>
<p>Economic Growth Team inward investment service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying suitable land or commercial premises • Helping to facilitate planning applications • Identifying suitable funding streams • Working with businesses to source suitable workforce • Arrange business development meetings with local supply chains, • For large scale investment, facilitating on-going high quality business support to help nurture business growth 	<p>Delivering economic growth through the attraction of inward investment.</p>	<p>2 inward investment enquiries per annum</p> <p>1 inward investment per annum</p>	<p>There was engagement with 59 companies that were considering Fenland as an inward investment or expansion location, with 3 successful inward investments, 1 foreign direct investment from Peru and 4 expansions.</p>

<p>Continue to market Fenland propositions to target growth sectors, individual businesses and locations including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supermarkets, fast-food brands, hotels, etc • Inward Investor Pack • Targeted Business Exhibitions • Programme of strategic marketing 	<p>Positive coverage of Fenland as a location of choice for business</p>	<p>Attendance at a targeted business exhibition per annum and generation of 3 quality leads.</p>	<p>Email and telephone contact undertaken with major hotels, fast food companies and supermarkets</p> <p>Creation of Inward Investor Pack developed for UKREiif</p> <p>Attendance at the UKREiif exhibition and conference held in May Royal Armouries Leeds bringing together an array of key decision-makers from every area of the built environment: the public sector – with every core UK city and regions involved – alongside government, investors, funders, developers, housebuilders, and more.</p>
<p>Deliver ‘soft landing’ tools that support an aftercare programme for new and recently established investors, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face meetings • Free office accommodation • Priority planning applications 	<p>Effective message of Fenland being ‘Open for Business’ delivered to businesses and potential investors</p>	<p>Continued marketing of package to potential investors, intermediaries i.e., agents, lawyers, banks and partners i.e., Growth Works Inward Investment.</p>	<p>Marketing of package to potential investors, intermediaries i.e., agents, lawyers, banks and partners</p> <p>Intermediaries identified. Meetings to take place, pack produced and marketed.</p>
<p>Collate Insight/data – targeted market research to include opportunities for attracting an hotel into Fenland, high quality manufacturing and engineering, research institutions, etc</p>	<p>Enabling propositions to be communicated to key sectors such as high-quality engineering to market Fenland as an effective location for their business.</p>	<p>1 research project undertaken per annum.</p> <p>1 proposition created for a target market per annum.</p>	<p>1 research project undertaken</p> <p>1 proposition created for a target market per annum. Initial Agrifood proposition created. Research organisation to deliver project</p>

			<p>identified and discussed with potential providers</p> <p>Initial Advanced Manufacturing/Precision Engineering proposition also created and will be delivered by research providers</p> <p>Discussion underway with CPCA to request funding for the research.</p>
<p>Consider Discretionary Business Rate Relief to incentivise businesses to locate in Fenland and commercial developments to be brought forward. Any relief is totally discretionary and only considered where it acts as a real incentive to business.</p>	<p>Attraction of inward investment, expansion projects and development of commercial space for example light industrial units.</p>	<p>1 business per annum considered for discretionary business rate relief.</p>	<p>1 business provided with discretionary business rate relief.</p>

5. Measuring the success of the Refresh

The Refresh seeks to help continue the delivery the Council's Economic Development Strategy 2012-31 with the overall aim of achieving economic growth in Fenland. What does economic growth look like?

- More business start-ups
- More businesses relocating into the district
- More expansions of existing businesses
- More local well-paid jobs for local people
- Thriving town and village centres
- More home-based businesses

The delivery of economic growth is substantially in the hands of businesses and specifically the people who run or create them. People make the decisions about whether to expand, relocate, start and so on. Given this, the role of the Team is to:

- support owners/senior managers with their decision making through account management, signposting and so on
- ensure that there are opportunities for businesses to acquire suitable premises and/or serviced land on which to expand or locate
- ensure that the message that Fenland is "open for all businesses" and what that means practically for businesses is understood across Fenland and outside of Fenland by targeted businesses, targeted sectors and those making enquiries about relocating into Fenland

Demonstrating the success of the Refresh is therefore based upon how well the Team interacts with these decision makers that ultimately lead to the business expanding, relocating, or starting. The resultant outcomes being more businesses, more jobs, higher paid jobs, more apprenticeships, etc

Examples of feedback received from Fenland businesses:

Vita Nova Solutions, Chatteris

Vita-Nova Solutions has been enjoying support from Fenland for Business for several years and has benefited from advice, signposting and grant funding.

Director Paul Millard said: "It has been key to everything we have done. I can't overstate how valuable the Fenland for Business team has been to us.

"If they are not supplying us a grant they are supporting us in other ways. They have been vital in what we have been doing.

"If I don't know what to do, my contact at Fenland for Business points me in the right direction."

Suncrop Produce Ltd, Chatteris

Richard Hall, of Chatteris firm Suncrop Produce Ltd, a salad supplier to major retailers that employs up to 170 people in peak seasons said: "I've recommended Fenland for Business to so many other businesses already.

"I had no idea this service was out there, within the public sector - and it's free! For me it has opened the door massively.

"We now have serious potential of getting grants from the Government. It has enabled us as a business to deal with adversity in the marketplace, turn a corner on energy costs and to get help where it was needed."

Agrimech, Manea

Belinda Smith, finance director of Agrimech, a leading UK manufacturer of end of line weighing, bagging, placing and palletising systems, based in Manea, said: "The teams at Fenland for Business and Growth Works have been invaluable to our business, introducing us to a business support network within Fenland and nationally, including contacts and information that we would never have found without their help and support.

"Our ongoing relationship with the teams ensures that we are made aware of and can take advantage of new opportunities that become available to businesses that we would often never have otherwise heard about. It's a fantastic service for Fenland and I would encourage businesses to get in touch."

StocksAG, Wisbech

Following a Fenland for Business information event, David Hampton, manufacturing and operations director at Wisbech firm StocksAG, said: "I found it to be very informative as we had no idea of the help and support that was out there to support our journey. A number of the topics discussed were exactly the things we are underway with here at StocksAG."

Rai and Rai Bathrooms, Whittlesey

Rai and Rai Bathrooms was supported to secure a Rural England Prosperity Fund grant.

Firm director Raivis Tidemanis said: "The grant has made us feel 'seen' and supported by Fenland District Council and Whittlesey Town Council.

"It was an absolute pleasure having the grand opening with them and gave us an extra boost of confidence to want to do well and we really felt part of the community that day!"

Ruth Godden, of Rai and Rai Bathrooms, said: "If you want support, ask Fenland for Business. The team is so helpful and so knowledgeable. Getting that advice is great."

A4 Plus Limited, March

James Blayney, head of business operations, said: "We applied for a grant to update some of our equipment, and allow us to support our customers in even more ways. As a business, that utilises the latest CAD Technologies it is important for us to continue to move with the times.

"We found the support and guidance from the Fenland for Business to be excellent and the opportunities they offer to be great for local business.

"The grant has an obvious financial benefit to the business. But it also allowed us to improve in key areas, and review where best to spend the money available. This was exciting for our team, as they can see the growth plan for the business coming to life!

"Upgrading our office equipment allows us to enhance our service offerings to customers. We can work more quickly and efficiently which benefits our staff as well as our clients. The main use of the grant for us was to upgrade a key piece of software, which directly affects our customer experience and attracts new business. This will not only generate more revenue for us but will benefit our local suppliers as well."

Joe Perry's Snooker & Pool Palace, Chatteris

Director Joe Perry said: "We were recently supported in opening our new business by Fenland for Business which was very much appreciated and very, very helpful.

"The team helped us considerably from start to finish during the whole process.

"I would encourage any other businesses in the area thinking of contacting Fenland for Business to definitely go for it as they will no doubt benefit from the experience.

"Our grant was used to purchase five brand new pool tables which gave us a great first impression when we opened our doors to potential new members and clients.

"Our business has provided a safe fun space for all ages and abilities to enjoy in the Chatteris area as well as providing jobs for the locals. As the business grows we will provide more opportunity and jobs for local people.

"Getting this grant was obviously a help financially but more than that really boosted the morale of myself and fellow staff as it indicated we had great support from the Fenland area and local council. It gave us extra belief to push on and make the project and business as good as we possibly could."

G & CA Lombardo, March

Helen Lombardo, Office Manager, said: "We were unaware of any grants for small business until we received a newsletter. This was a great opportunity to follow this up. The support from the team made this process a lot easier than was expected.

"Even if you aren't sure on what you are able to apply for the team will help. Sign up to the Fenland for Business newsletter as this is very informative."

The Secret Garden Touring Park, Wisbech

Stephen Pollington, who is co - owner of The Secret Garden Touring Park with his wife Lesley, was awarded a Rural England Prosperity Fund grant, which enabled early completion of a sound attenuation (management) project for its events venue.

Stephen said: "We have invested a great deal into this important project over 2023, but to receive this significant boost from the government rural prosperity fund now completes our much-needed technology, which has made the project come to fruition a year ahead of schedule.

"The technical equipment will not only ensure our whole site is comfortable for our touring park customers but will also provide a much-needed boost to the quality of sound within the events area for all to enjoy.

With a great number of professional touring acts visiting us in 2024, it also ensures that the quality of technology in our venue is matched to that they would be familiar with in most UK theatre touring venues.

Enviornmental Services Group

Sam Awolesi, managing director, said: "The grants application process is user-friendly and fully supported by the Fenland for Business team. The time taken and the efforts required to complete the application were worth it.

"The support received from Fenland District Council and the professional approach by the staff are very much appreciated and we encourage other businesses who are thinking about grant funding to apply and benefit from the initiatives as we have."

Eco-Pak and Suncrop Produce Ltd

Richard Hall, operations director, said: "We would like to convey a heartfelt thanks to the Fenland District Council. This money will help us stay competitive within the marketplace, which means we can look to take on more work and hopefully employ more local people. We will definitely be keeping an eye on future grants as we have many other cost / energy saving ideas for us and potentially the wider community which with a little help could become reality."

Qualitetch Components

Chris Garner, Finance Manager, said: "We would strongly encourage other local businesses to apply for the next round of funding. The process, in our experience, has been straightforward and incredibly worthwhile, with the support and guidance received from Fenland for Business being thorough and appreciated. We have found the team to be extremely helpful and understanding throughout the grant process, as well as being very open and approachable at any of the local events we have attended. If any Fenland company is contemplating engaging with Fenland for Business whether it be for potential grant funding or for support elsewhere then you should not hesitate to do so."

R-Tec Services & Innovation, Wisbech

Lee Wilmot, managing director said: "Having the grant will enable us to continue investing in the very best equipment and in turn add additional employees to cope with new product demand.

"The application in general is quite straightforward and assistance has always been offered, so the benefits of not over burdening my company with finance or debt while trying to grow is very important. This grant enables us to balance the costs of investment so would advocate this to all businesses.

"I would like to personally thank the Fenland Council for their support and guidance with the application."

Cobra engineering

Kim French, financial controller, said: "The team at Fenland District council were extremely helpful throughout the duration of the application process. We discussed, in detail, Cobra's plans for expansion and growth over the next five years. Their guidance and advice has been invaluable - making it a seamless process."

Vita-Nova Solutions

Paul Millard, director/owner, said: "As a result of the grant we will be looking at bringing in at least two new employees over the next 12 months. It's a great award for us but also for the local economy.

"I'd encourage other businesses to take a look at the second round of funding and to make contact with Fenland for Business. This type of funding can make a lot of difference to how quickly you can get a project up and running and develop your business.

"Fenland For Business have been absolutely fantastic. The enthusiasm from them has been incredible. They instilled me with confidence that applying for the grant wasn't wasting my time and the process was really easy."

Volmary

Wayne Eady, Managing Director, said: "While the process of application requires some technical input and a bit of time, the team at FDC are very helpful and we'll certainly be keen to apply again if more opportunities arise to create more energy saving systems and grow our local team further."

FRP Group Holdings

Nick Osborn said: "As an established but ambitious Fens-based business we are absolutely delighted that Fenland District Council are able to continue supporting our growth with this essential grant from their Fenland for Business programme. This will enable us to boost employment within our team and increase the range of services we offer to our customers.

"I would actively encourage other local SMEs to apply for the next round of funding as the process is really straightforward and Dawn was really helpful at every stage. It is fantastic that we have been able to access this grant support to continue our growth as a business - without the comprehensive support from the Fenland for Business team it wouldn't have happened - it's as simple as that!"

6. Bidding for external funding & resources

The Team helps enable businesses to secure grant and other funding to support the growth of their business and attracts funding to support the growth of the economy for example for infrastructure.

The Team helped secure £1.2m Shared Prosperity Funding and £436k Rural England Prosperity Funding. The Team will continue to work closely with partners including the CPCA to secure any future funding for Fenland.

Working closely with the CPCA's Growth Works programme the Team helped secure in the three-year period from 2012 in Fenland:

- 385 Jobs (Committed)
- 40 Apprenticeships created
- 183 Additional training and learning outcomes
- 240 Business Supported with growth Diagnostic
- 63 Business starting Coaching Assignments
- 63 Business starting a Coaching Journey
- 63 Business completing a Coaching Journey
- £956,724 awarded in Capital Growth Funding in local Small Businesses

Working closely with the CPCA's Growth HUB in 2023-24 the Team helped secure:

- 62 businesses across the region received 1 hour session with Growth Hub business advisors (including, mentoring, signposting, guidance on national programmes)
- 12 businesses across the region have had 3-hour workshop delivery (business planning and Financial Overview)
- Role in helping the FDC UKSPF Start-Up Programme, including support to run Workshops and Mentoring

7. Income generation

Economic growth can provide opportunities for the Council to generate net positive income either through investment itself or potentially via Fenland Future Limited (FFL) and its Business Plan. Such opportunities include investment in existing commercial property both occupied and unoccupied, design and build commercial property for committed end users, speculative design and build of commercial property and so on.

The Team works with existing Fenland businesses that require new premises and businesses that are considering locating in Fenland. The Council or potentially FFL can provide solutions to a business's property requirements and where appropriate the Team will advise businesses of these options. The Team will collect the necessary information from a business to enable both the Council and potentially FFL to make an initial assessment of the opportunity.

Economic growth can also generate business rate growth and therefore an increased revenue stream into the Council. The Refresh includes an action to produce a forecast in the growth in business rate revenue generated by the development of key commercial sites in the District.