



Draft New Forest Economic Development Strategy

Economic Development

January 2026

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Executive summary

- i. The New Forest District comprises four sub-areas:
 - Totton and the Waterside
 - Avon Valley and Downlands
 - National Park
 - Southern Coastal Towns.
- ii. The district has an outstanding natural environment and is attractive for visitors and those wishing to live in a more rural location.
- iii. The district is experiencing a declining and ageing population with a shrinking working age population.
- iv. This Economic Development Strategy will help the council to meet the priorities in the Corporate Plan, particularly those under the prosperity theme. It will need to work in partnership with local and regional/sub-regional partners to deliver the strategy.
- v. Hampshire County Council has prepared a detailed economic profile of the district (Appendix 1):
 - Economy valued at £6.4bn (GDP 2023)
 - Strong output growth in knowledge-intensive services, tourism and leisure uses since the pandemic
 - The area hosts 7,820 enterprises and 84,000 jobs
 - Productivity challenges persist with GVA per head 10.5% below the UK average.
- vi. The economic profile and consideration of the opportunities and challenges have led the council to set the following vision for the Economic Development Strategy:

The New Forest local economy will be vibrant, inclusive and resilient where people, businesses and communities thrive. It will deliver sustainable growth – fostering innovation, supporting enterprise and unlocking opportunities for residents of all ages.

vii. In order to deliver the vision and address the opportunities and challenges for economic development in the New Forest, this Economic Development Strategy sets out six strategic priorities with related actions. These are:

- Championing key growth sectors
- Accelerating the low carbon transition
- Developing skills for the future
- Revitalising towns and local centres
- Unlocking investment through strategic partnerships
- Fostering a culture of enterprise and innovation.

viii. The key growth sectors are:

- Tourism
- Port, transport and logistics uses along the Waterside and Solent coast
- Agriculture and forestry
- Marine industries
- Green technologies, (particularly around net zero energy production)
- Creative economy.

ix. The council will monitor progress on implementing the Economic Development Strategy through the measures set out in the monitoring framework. The Portfolio Holder will receive an annual report on progress against these measures.

1 Introduction

Context

- 1.1 The New Forest is located on the south coast between the large urban areas of Southampton and Bournemouth/Christchurch/Poole. The district is predominantly rural with the main centres of population located around the New Forest National Park which covers approximately 68% of the land area but contains just 19% of the population. There are four distinct sub areas: Totton and the Waterside; Avon Valley and Downlands; the National Park and South Coastal Towns. The district is preparing for changes in regional governance as Hampshire transitions toward a mayoral combined authority, creating opportunities to strengthen the New Forest's influence and access new funding streams.
- 1.2 The New Forest benefits from an outstanding natural environment but is also well connected, with transport links across the south coast and a quick mainline rail connection to London. The district is attractive for visitors and those seeking to live in a more rural location, particularly those recently retired to planning their retirement. The acceleration of remote working has enabled people to live in the New Forest when their employer may not be local.
- 1.3 The district experienced population decline between 2011 and 2021. It is predicted that there will be a significant increase in the number of older people and a decline in the working age population in the short/medium term¹.

¹ New Forest Housing Needs Assessment 2025

- 1.4 Totton and the Waterside is located on the western side of Southampton Water and is characterised by 20th century suburban development, with opportunities for growth constrained by the National Park located immediately to the west. Significant opportunities for economic development exist through the potential to expand the Port of Southampton at Associated British Ports (ABP) Strategic Land Reserve at Marchwood and at the former Fawley Power Station site in the south of the sub-area.
- 1.5 Avon Valley and the Downslands include the market towns of Ringwood and Fordingbridge and is more rural in character with a number of villages, including those within the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. Opportunities for growth are constrained by the boundary with Dorset Council and BCP to the west and the National Park to the east as well as the National Landscape to the North West.
- 1.6 The New Forest National Park is a significant tourist destination and although it doesn't contain any large towns, settlements such as Lyndhurst and Brockenhurst are extremely important as centres of the tourism industry. The National Park is also home to a number of significant visitor attractions in their own right, including Paultons Park (including Peppa Pig World) and Beaulieu Motor Museum. The opportunities and scope for growth are set out in the New Forest National Park Authority Local Plan.
- 1.7 The South Coastal Towns are located between the National Park and the sea. Much of the land outside of existing built-up areas is designated as greenbelt, although its suitability for development will be assessed through the Local Plan Review.

The Role of the Council

- 1.8 The New Forest District Council **Corporate Plan 2024 – 2028** has been organised into the thematic areas of People, Place and Prosperity. Whilst this Economic Development Strategy is relevant to priorities under the People and Place themes it is most directly related to delivering the priorities under the Prosperity theme. These are:

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- Maximising the benefits of inclusive economic growth and investment
 - Supporting our high-quality business base and economic centres to thrive
 - Championing skills and access to job opportunities.
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1.9 The Council has an important place leadership role, including utilising Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding to support regeneration and infrastructure delivery, alongside wider economic development work to support local economic growth. To help achieve the Corporate Plan priorities the council will carry out or facilitate a range of functions to support economic growth in the district. These include:

- Supporting businesses and economic centres
 - Oversee work with businesses to promote local economic development
 - Support/promote high street initiatives through projects and media communications
- Place identity, regeneration and marketing
 - Oversee place-based marketing initiatives
 - Support strategic regeneration activities
 - Create positive media content with partners to raise the profile of the New Forest
- Skills development and access to jobs
 - Implement the Skills Action Plan
- Attracting economic growth and investment
 - Support services in embedding economic development principles
 - Bid development
 - Commission projects and services
 - Create positive media content to raise the profile of the New Forest
- Monitoring and reporting of key economic activity and related data

- Provide information and insights to senior officers, members and business networks
- Research and intelligence gathering
- Preparation of presentations and reports
- Ensure regional and sub-regional strategic growth opportunities are maximised, including the Freeport
 - Prepare Economic Development Strategy
 - Input into wider regional/sub-regional strategy development
 - Prepare bids
 - Ensure skills development is intrinsically related to strategic opportunities, especially those arising through the Freeport
- Working with key partners across the New Forest
 - Lead on and/or attending key business networks
 - Work with businesses to promote economic development initiatives
 - Work with partners on project delivery.

1.10 A structured engagement model with businesses, partners and communities, underpinned by improved local economic data and analysis, will support targeted delivery and better outcomes. By working in partnership with different organisations and interests across the New Forest the council will remain agile and responsive with the ability to adapt to new opportunities as they arise, particularly where external funding may become available. Whilst not an exclusive list the following partners are particularly relevant:

- Town and Parish Councils
- New Forest National Park Authority
- Hampshire County Council
- Hampshire Prosperity Partnership
- Solent Freeport
- Local businesses and business networks
- Local landowners and developers
- Tourism South East (LVEP)
- Go New Forest
- New Forest Business Partnership

- Hampshire Fair.
 - Local transport providers
 - Further and Adult education providers
 - The voluntary and community sectors
- 1.11 Alongside the delivery of an appropriate level of housing, the council needs to identify land to meet the need for economic development through its Local Plan Review in order to deliver sustainable development. The New Forest District Council Local Plan only refers to land outside of the National Park, with the National Park Authority responsible for producing its own Local Plan to cover the National Park. To inform policies and allocations of its Local Plan, the council has commissioned an Economic Needs Assessment (covering office, industrial and storage and distribution uses) and a Port and Marine Business Needs Assessment (looking specifically at the expansion needs of the Port of Southampton). The council has also assessed the suitability of land that may be available for employment or residential development in the Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment.
- 1.12 The council's Economic Development Team will input to wider regional/sub-regional strategy development and promote the district where interventions can accelerate economic growth in the New Forest. The Team will also be a key consultee within the council to respond to the proposals within the expected Development Consent Order application for port development at the site now known as Solent Gateway 2 and will aim to ensure that the economic benefits of the development are accessible to local residents.

Economic profile

- 1.13 Hampshire County Council has prepared a detailed economic profile of the district, and the full report is at Appendix 1. The latest figures, published in January 2026, will be incorporated into operational plans to ensure that the most up to date trends. These updates are produced on a regular basis ensuring that our projects and programmes are responsive to need and emerging trends.

1.14 In terms of locally significant sectors, there has been strong output growth in knowledge intensive services since 2019, driven by professional, scientific and ICT sectors. Tourism and leisure industries have rebounded strongly since the pandemic, including visitor attractions such as Paultons Park. Advance manufacturing remains a strategic strength but faces employment contraction.

1.15 The main findings are summarised below:

- The district is ageing rapidly and losing working age residents, creating a shrinking labour pool.
- Housing affordability is the worst in Hampshire, deterring younger workers and reinforcing demographic pressures.
- Overall labour market performance is strong but still recovering from the pandemic's impact.
- High levels of part-time employment and reliance on lower paid service sectors limit economic growth and economic resilience.
- Strong growth in high growth businesses is creating a foundation for future economic expansion.
- The share of residents with advanced qualifications (Level 4+) has increased sharply.
- This combination of business dynamism and a more skilled population could enable a shift towards higher value-services, which remain undeveloped.
- Advance manufacturing and emerging green industries provide a strong platform for high value growth.

1.16 New Forest hosts 7,820 enterprises operating across 9,045 business units, with business growth stabilising in 2025 after years of decline. The local economy valued at £6.4bn (GDP) in 2023, with economic output (GVA) estimated at £5.7bn. Output is dominated by local private services and production sectors, while knowledge intensive services remain underrepresented - despite being the main driver of post-pandemic GVA growth. Productivity challenges persist, with GVA per head 10.5% below UK average. Employment has remained broadly stable since 2019, with 84,000 jobs in 2023, outperforming Hampshire, the Solent and the UK overall. Job density exceeds both regional and national averages. Vacancy levels have normalised post pandemic, with current demand in accommodation, care, food and beverage and health sectors, while manufacturing and knowledge intensive services show weaker demand. The economic profile data indicates that GVA is concentrated in the Waterside (30%) & Coastal (25%) economic sub-areas, together accounting for over half of total output. Alternatively, this could be expressed as Totton (14%) and Waterside combined at 44% (Note: Coastal includes land from Beaulieu to Ashurst in the National Park).

Opportunities and challenges

1.17 The district benefits from a range of opportunities

- To scale up knowledge intensive services and close the gap with Hampshire and the Solent and the national average.
- To build on its established strengths in advanced manufacturing and several emerging frontier industries where strong local concentrations provide a platform for innovation, high skilled employment and integration with clean energy technologies.
- To take advantage of the exceptional natural environment by maintaining and develop the tourism and visitor economy with an emphasis on green/sustainable tourism.

- Freeport designation of customs and tax sites will accelerate economic growth and provide funding through business rates retention. These retained business rates will support programmes and projects across the whole district, not solely in or adjacent to designated tax sites.
- Significant land available for economic growth at the ABP strategic land reserve at Dibden Bay and the former Fawley Power Station site. Dibden Bay represents both a major strategic economic opportunity and a significant environmental and infrastructure challenge due to its scale and sensitivity.
- Local labour agreements linked to major development sites could help local residents to directly benefit from growth.
- Potential diversification and innovation opportunities at the ExxonMobil site as the country moves to zero net carbon.
- Education – a recent increase in people of working age with advanced skills (RQF4+ qualifications) which has effectively closed the skills gap with Hampshire and the Solent which enhances New Forest’s competitiveness, capacity to attract investment and the growth of higher-value added knowledge-intensive sectors.

1.18 The district also faces some significant challenges

- Tourism and leisure will continue to underpin rural communities, but their predominance in lower paid roles (often part time and seasonal) highlights the need to complement them with higher value activities.
- The provision of infrastructure is critical to ensure sustainable development. In particular:
 - Transport infrastructure in the New Forest is fragmented with the major settlements surrounding the rural National Park and a high reliance on private car use.
 - The provision of transport infrastructure to facilitate major development in the Waterside area – to ensure residents of New Forest and South Hampshire can access employment opportunities by public transport.

- Digital connectivity – infrastructure in rural areas is essential to facilitate rural businesses and remote working or study.
- Housing is expensive and outward migration of younger age groups has accelerated the rate at which the population is ageing, and the working age population is shrinking, which means labour supply could potentially constrain growth.
- The exceptional natural environment of the New Forest restricts the availability of land and means that the costs environmental mitigation can affect the viability of potential employment generating development.

Vision

1.19 The economic profile and consideration of the opportunities and challenges have led the council to set the following vision for the Economic Development Strategy:

The New Forest local economy will be vibrant, inclusive and resilient where people, businesses and communities thrive. It will deliver sustainable growth – fostering innovation, supporting enterprise and unlocking opportunities for residents of all ages.

1.20 In order to deliver the vision and address the opportunities and challenges for economic development in the New Forest, this Economic Development Strategy sets out six strategic priorities with related actions. These are:

- Championing key growth sectors
- Accelerating the low carbon transition
- Developing skills for the future
- Revitalising towns and local centres
- Unlocking investment through strategic partnerships
- Fostering a culture of enterprise and innovation.

1.21 Across these priorities, the council will be proactive in seeking funding opportunities and will work strategically with partners in the region to secure inward investment and infrastructure to support businesses to locate and grow in the New Forest.

2 Strategic priorities and actions

Championing key growth sectors

2.1 The council will support and drive innovation and expansion in key sectors where the New Forest has a competitive advantage. These include:

- Tourism
- Port, transport and logistics uses along the Waterside and Solent Coast, Agriculture and forestry
- Marine industries
- Green technologies, (particularly around net zero energy production)
- Creative economy.

2.2 The natural environment is a major attraction for the New Forest with the presence of the National Park, the coast, and the Cranborne Chase National Landscape. It is also home to a number of national visitor attractions including Paultons Park (incorporating Peppa Pig World) and Beaulieu Motor Museum. The Economic Profile identifies that tourism and leisure employment has increased by 10% since pre-pandemic, with business numbers up by 3.5%.

2.3 Accommodation services, hospitality and retail businesses all benefit from increased visitor numbers and overnight stays. Improvements to facilities will be encouraged within the context of the historic and natural environments that need to be protected. Sustainable tourism will be promoted, both in terms of the way visitor facilities relate to the natural environment and the way in which visitors arrive in and travel around the New Forest. Opportunities to enhance active travel and public transport should be progressed.

- 2.4 The Waterside part of New Forest District adjoins Southampton Water and forms part of the wider Solent Maritime economy. The port is one of the UK's busiest and plays a key national role in both passenger and freight transportation. In 2025 the council commissioned Prior + Partners to prepare the New Forest Port and Marine Business Needs Assessment ([250910_FINAL_Port_and_Marine_Business_Needs_Assessment_Report.pdf](#)). This concludes that there will be growth in forecast volumes for containers, automobiles, dry bulk and cruise passengers, which are the main activity types handled by the Port of Southampton, alongside demand for additional land for port related industries.
- 2.5 Associated British Ports (ABP) owns and operates the Port of Southampton and published a draft masterplan in 2016. This makes it clear that opportunities for growth lie within New Forest District and in particular on the strategic land reserve owned by ABP at Dibden Bay. The Solent Freeport designation also recognises the potential for economic growth related to the port in New Forest with the designation of tax and customs sites at Solent Gateway (Marchwood), ABP strategic land reserve, ExxonMobil Fawley Complex and Fawley Waterside (former Fawley power station).
- 2.6 Whilst agriculture and forestry make small economic contributions in terms of numbers of jobs and economic output, they are essential to maintaining the natural landscape which makes the New Forest such an attractive location. There are particular pressures faced by the commoners who maintain the natural landscape through traditional methods of keeping animals. The commoners should be supported, and recognition is given to their need for backup grazing land to continue their management of the New Forest.

- 2.7 Access to the water along the south coast, rivers and Southampton Water means that the New Forest has a history of marine based industries. There are numerous wharves, yacht clubs, boat yards and marinas along the coastline. These are critical to the tourism industry and provide skilled jobs in boat construction and maintenance. The Economic Profile identifies that the number of marine businesses is lower than pre-pandemic levels, but that employment has remained broadly stable, compared to a national decline. There are important local plan policies that require that any new development will ensure the retention of existing wharves, boat launching facilities and vehicular access.
- 2.8 The New Forest does not have a history of development of green technologies. However, the Economic Profile identifies that the Low Carbon and Renewable Energy Economy is growing rapidly, with local employment estimated at 1,600 jobs in 2023 – up 83% since 2015.
- 2.9 Diversification and innovation opportunities exist at the ExxonMobil oil refinery complex for the practical adaptation of the site as the country transitions to a low carbon economy. Land at the former Fawley power station site is currently allocated for a mixed-use development by Policy SS4 of the adopted Local Plan. However, this is not achievable as the development would not be feasible or viable and the 1,380 dwellings originally envisaged to be delivered at this site have already been removed from the council’s housing land supply. The promoter is currently proposing a scheme for renewable energy generation and marine focused employment development on the site. Redevelopment of the site will follow the regulation and management of the temporary storage and distribution uses. The council is currently working with the site promoter to ensure a feasible, viable and appropriate future for this brownfield site.
- 2.10 The Economic Profile identifies that creative industries remain relatively small locally, but employment has grown by 14% (2019 – 2024), outpacing national and regional averages. There is a strong local collective of creative and cultural organisations and professionals in the New Forest that come together under the Folio network to provide support, networking opportunities and training. Folio share arts and culture resources, funding advice and news via a monthly e-newsletter.

- 2.11 Go New Forest is an industry-led local not-for-profit community interest company that provides a destination-wide partnership to help manage and develop tourism and the visitor economy throughout the district. The organisation is an advocate for visitors, residents and the environment and the collaboration helps members optimise their development, operations and promotion delivering high quality valuable experiences for visitors.
- 2.12 The New Forest is part of the Hampshire, Portsmouth and Southampton Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP). This is part of a national network of LVEPs and enables collaboration on activities that work better at a regional level, including opportunities to bid for funding and share information and resources with local businesses.
- 2.13 The council is preparing a New Forest Creative and Cultural Framework to support and promote the growth of creative industries in the New Forest. It proposes to consult on a draft document in early 2026.
- 2.14 In order to support key sectors in the New Forest economy, the council will:
- Promote the New Forest as an attractive location for business and inward investment.
 - Identify suitable land for economic development (outside of the National Park).
 - Facilitate cross sector networks to help businesses connect and collaborate.

Accelerating the low-carbon transition

- 2.15 In October 2021 New Forest District Council declared a climate and nature emergency. This reflects national policy/targets as set out in the Climate Change Act 2008 (as amended in 2019) that legally commits the UK government to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

- 2.16 The council has adopted a Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document which encourages the assessment of carbon through reducing demand through design and the inclusion of renewable energy generation within the development. Local construction companies will be well placed to develop expertise in meeting requirements for low carbon design that can help meet demand beyond the local area.
- 2.17 Per capita carbon emissions are significantly higher than the average for Hampshire and the Solent. The largest source of greenhouse gas emissions is transport, which reflects the rural nature of the district, reliance on private vehicles and limited public transport connectivity. Industry and waste also play a more prominent role than they do in the rest of Hampshire and the Solent.
- 2.18 Targeted interventions to support low-carbon mobility are urgently needed to reduce emissions from transport. Expanding sustainable transport infrastructure, improving public transport connectivity and encouraging active travel, could help reduce reliance on private vehicles. Similarly continued investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy provision within the domestic housing stock will be essential to reduce emissions whilst improving living standards and reducing energy costs for residents. Addressing the rise in waste related emissions will require enhanced waste management strategies, including improved recycling rates and circular economy initiatives.
- 2.19 The council has invested in funding the **EcoBoost Business Grant**, delivered in partnership with the IncuHive Group. This is a pilot programme created to help local shops, pubs and small businesses cut energy use to cut costs and build long term resilience. Businesses taking part gain access to a practical package of support including:
- Free workshops exploring simple, effective ways to cut energy use
 - Tailored advice from sustainability specialists, focused on achievable improvements for premises
 - On-site visits to identify immediate cost saving measures such as insulation upgrades, draft-proofing and efficient equipment

- Grants of up to £2,000 (minimum 25% match funded) to help pay for energy-saving improvements that make a measurable difference to the bottom line.

2.20 The council will continue to encourage and support local businesses to accelerate the transition to a low carbon future. This includes:

- Providing advice and guidance to businesses on how to meet increasing regulatory requirements – particularly through the planning and building control processes.
- Monitoring and updating of the Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document to ensure that examples of best practice are up to date and easily available for local businesses – particularly those involved in building design and construction.
- Monitoring the carbon calculations for new developments and promoting those which achieve significant reductions, beyond the requirements of building regulations.
- Low carbon principles will also be embedded across town centre regeneration, skills development and strategic partnerships to ensure consistent alignment with district-wide environmental goals.

Developing skills for the future

2.21 The **New Forest Skills Action Plan 2025 – 30** sets out a clear, place-based strategy to ensure that all residents and businesses in the New Forest can thrive in a rapidly changing economy. The plan responds to local challenges such as an ageing population, young people moving away from the area, skills shortages and the need to transition to a low carbon economy. It capitalises on major opportunities, including the Solent Freeport, and aligns with wider initiatives such as the Hampshire Skills Partnership and Hampshire Skills training programmes to maximise impact and collaboration.

2.22 The Skills Action Plan includes four strategic objectives:

- Inclusive growth

- A nature positive transition to a low carbon economy whilst also supporting key established sectors
 - Lifelong learning for all
 - Effective coordination of skills delivery.
- 2.23 The plan sets out 32 high level actions which will be developed by the Economic Development Service with strategic oversight from the New Forest Skills Group (which will coordinate implementation of the action plan). This group will work collaboratively with partners across the public, private, education and voluntary sectors to align skills investment with local priorities; coordinate joint initiatives (including targeted grant funding and employer engagement); and support the development of the Local Plan Review (ensuring skills planning is embedded in wider regeneration and infrastructure strategies).
- 2.24 Cutting across the strategic objectives and key sectors there is need to ensure that the resident population has sufficient training in digital skills and opportunities for innovation through utilising these skills. Digital skills are likely to become even more important in all sectors in the future and it will be important that growth and opportunities for residents are not restricted due to a lack of digital skills.
- 2.25 The research and engagement carried out to inform the plan identified five groups and communities that merit particular consideration in ensuring that their potential is enabled through skills delivery:
- Women entering or re-entering the workforce
 - Young people, especially those not in education, employment or training (NEETs)
 - People aged 50+
 - Job changers
 - Aspiring entrepreneurs and those seeking self-employment.
- 2.26 The council will assist in developing skills for the future in the district. This includes:
- Investing in local talent by enhancing access to training and employment opportunities
 - Implementing the **Skills Action Plan** which was agreed in 2025

- Consideration of a policy approach in the Local Plan Review to help secure employment and training opportunities for local people through the submission of an Employment and Skills Plan related to major development
- A focus on digital skills and the specific needs of the New Forest economy – for example, marine industries, tourism and hospitality, agriculture and forestry.

Revitalising town centres

2.27 The main towns of Totton, Hythe, Lymington, New Milton, Ringwood, Fordingbridge and Lyndhurst provide a good range of services and facilities and employment opportunities for the communities living around them. Changes to the way we shop, and access services mean that the role of town and local centres is changing. There may be opportunities for redevelopment and renewal in these town centres that can come forward on individual sites or more comprehensively.

2.28 Where appropriate there may be a need to provide guidance on the type and form of development and how different sites should relate to each other. The council may prepare masterplans or planning briefs for individual sites to guide and facilitate renewal and redevelopment. In other circumstances, it may engage with developers through its pre-application planning service on individual sites or support Town and Parish Councils that may wish to prepare a neighbourhood plan. The allocation of CIL funds and use of funding from planning obligations can assist with improvements to highways and the public realm to increase footfall in town centres and act as a catalyst for private investment.

- 2.29 The council has committed funds accumulated through the Community Infrastructure Levy to prepare a masterplan for the regeneration of Totton town centre and concept designs for two schemes that could be delivered alongside the masterplan work. The council is considering a proposal to develop a new town square that would provide Totton with a sense of community through a new central space which would incorporate markets and events. Alongside public realm/highway enhancements this could inspire shopping centre improvements and fast track redevelopment of publicly owned buildings in the Civic Quarter. The other proposal delivers town centre walking access improvements through footpath enhancements to enable a safe pedestrian route from the western side of Totton to the town centre.
- 2.30 The council has allocated CIL funds to prepare a masterplan and for highways and public realm improvements as part of the 'Thriving Market Place' project for Ringwood town centre. In addition to highways works to improve pedestrian safety, the public realm improvements could include tree planting, wayfinding signage, heritage improvements, market improvement, expansion and consolidation, infrastructure improvements and public art.
- 2.31 The council has also allocated CIL funds to deliver schemes at Milford on Sea seafront and Bath Road, Lymington. The emerging concept plan for Milford on Sea includes wayfinding (walking and cycling improvements), supporting commercial opportunities through 'pop up' buildings, creating additional children's play areas, a contribution to sea wall defence works and raised footpath creation. The Lymington project centres around the enhancement of the existing open space at Bath Road. Initial ideas are for a new play area (combined with a splash park facility or water feature), removal of the sea water pond and bandstand, increased space provision for cultural performances and music events, landscaping and tree planting.

2.32 The council will use its resources (particularly through communications channels) to support partners arranging events in the district. Town and Parish Councils are likely to take the lead in promoting local initiatives and the council will attend events and support businesses where appropriate. Events can help with marketing town centres through raising their profile and generating increased footfall

2.33 The council will facilitate the revitalisation of its towns and local centres through its regeneration and placemaking activities. This includes:

- Monitoring land availability and liaison with key landowners to examine the potential for development on any significant opportunity sites
- Preparation of planning guidance to lead to the regeneration of key town centres where opportunities exist for redevelopment
- Including policies to control development in designated town and local centres through the Local Plan Review
- Facilitating Town and Parish Councils to prepare Neighbourhood Plans to help guide development where communities wish to take the lead on a locally based approach.

Unlocking investment through strategic partnerships

- 2.34 The council needs to work with other authorities that have responsibilities for delivering services within the district, especially Hampshire County Council and the New Forest National Park Authority. Infrastructure providers are also key to delivering successful and sustainable economic growth in the district, especially transport infrastructure. Whilst most statutory undertakers have a legal duty to service new development, the provision of transport infrastructure is fragmented between Hampshire County Council, National Highways, Network Rail and train and bus operating companies. The District Council does not have direct responsibility for transport infrastructure but needs to ensure that sufficient provision is made as part of new development and acts in a gate keeper role as proposed development is brought forward. This will be particularly important as proposals for the expansion of the Port of Southampton are brought forward at Dibden Bay, given the likely scale of development. As governance arrangements evolve towards a mayoral combined authority, the council will position the New Forest to secure investment and a strong voice within the wider Solent and Hampshire economy.
- 2.35 Fawley Waterside is the site of a former oil-fired power station. The site is currently allocated in the adopted Local Plan 2016 – 2036 Part 1 for residential-led mixed use development, including 10 ha of employment land and up to around 10,000 sqm of ancillary community, retail, leisure and service uses under Policy SS4. However, the outline planning application 19/10581 for 1,380 new homes and 95,300 sqm of new commercial, civic and employment space (for which a resolution to grant subject to a S106 agreement was given in July 2020) was withdrawn in July 2024 due to a lack of viability. The site is now a designated tax site within the Solent Freeport. The council is currently working with the site promoter to ensure a feasible, viable and appropriate future for this brownfield site.

- 2.36 The council has previously engaged in sub-regional partnerships to help unlock growth, for example, through the Partnership for South Hampshire (PfSH). A notable success of the partnership was to provide a strategic scheme of mitigation to prevent harm to protected birds on the coast through an increase in recreational disturbance and allow development to come forward in compliance with the habitat regulations. A similar partnership has been formed with the National Park Authority to help mitigate the impact of recreational disturbance on protected sites within the New Forest.
- 2.37 The role of the **Hampshire Prosperity Partnership** is to work collectively across sectors and geography to the benefit of the regional economy, including making recommendations to Hampshire County Council on economic development priorities. It also has a role in making recommendations on the use of the legacy reserves from the local enterprise partnerships, following the transfer of financial assets to the upper tier local authorities. It has issued a call for projects that contribute to sustainable and inclusive economic growth in Hampshire, with a preference to support projects that involve substantial match funding. It is worth noting that as governance arrangements evolve, the specific role and remit of the Partnership may change; the Council will remain flexible to adapt to the new structure.
- 2.38 The council will aim to unlock development through strategic partnerships including:
- Collaboration with the Solent Freeport to attract investment and ensure that sub-regional plans are beneficial to New Forest residents
 - Engagement with Associated British Ports on proposed port development at Solent Gateway 2 and Marchwood Military Port
 - Engagement with landowners at the former Fawley Power Station site to examine a viable and appropriate future for this brownfield site
 - Collaboration with the Hampshire Prosperity Partnership.

Fostering a culture of enterprise and innovation

- 2.39 The council needs to work with other authorities that have responsibilities for delivering services within the district, especially Hampshire County Council and the New Forest National Park Authority. Infrastructure providers are also key to delivering successful and sustainable economic growth in the district, especially transport infrastructure. Whilst most statutory undertakers have a legal duty to service new development, the provision of transport infrastructure is fragmented between Hampshire County Council, National Highways, Network Rail and train and bus operating companies. The District Council does not have direct responsibility for transport infrastructure but needs to ensure that sufficient provision is made as part of new development and acts in a gate keeper role as proposed development is brought forward. This will be particularly important as proposals for the expansion of the Port of Southampton are brought forward at Solent Gateway 2, given the likely scale of development.
- 2.40 Whilst more significant proposals may individually generate the need for infrastructure, the council will assess the cumulative need for the infrastructure needed to support the growth proposed in its Local Plan (through the Infrastructure Delivery Plan) and how it will be provided. This may include the requirement for S106 funding as part of a planning permission or the use of Community Infrastructure Levy funding.
- 2.41 The council has many interactions with local businesses through its regulatory functions (such as planning and licensing). The council aims to provide an effective and efficient service to keep costs for businesses to a minimum. The council will provide bespoke guidance through its website and also offers a pre-application advice service with the aim of ensuring that planning applications can be determined within recommended government timescales when submitted.

<https://incuhive.co.uk/acceleration-investment/new-forest-business-support>

The Council will work proactively with all partners to identify, pursue and secure funding opportunities. This will include making or co-ordinating bids with public sector partners, as well as actively seeking and responding to focussed local, regional and national funding routes. The council will also signpost and assist where funding is available to local businesses to continue with start up and enterprise support and mentoring. 2.42The council will aim to foster a culture of enterprise and innovation by creating the conditions for entrepreneurs and small to medium sized enterprises to flourish. This includes:

- Ensuring the provision of infrastructure to support development
- Creating a business-friendly environment for regulatory service provision
- Providing access and signposting to funding opportunities and business support.

3 Implementation and monitoring framework

- 3.1 The council will monitor progress on implementing the Economic Development Strategy through the measures set out in the monitoring framework below. The Portfolio Holder will receive an annual report on progress against these measures. Delivery will be phased and proportional to the Economic Development Teams capacity, with actions prioritised to remain realistic within the available resources and reviewed regularly with the Portfolio Holder.

N.B. – The draft action list below will be kept under review during the consultation period and updated prior to the final document being prepared

Strategic priority	Action	By when	Measure
Championing key growth sectors	Respond to consultations on planning applications by highlighting the benefits of development in key growth sectors	Ongoing	Development of new employment floorspace
	Work in partnership with Hampshire Prosperity Partnership Board to continue to promote inward investment in the New Forest	Ongoing	Inward investment secured
	Respond to opportunities to bid for public funding to support growth in key sectors.	Ongoing	Number of funding bids
Accelerating the low carbon transition	Support businesses to reduce carbon use	Ongoing	Number of businesses receiving support and/or grants to reduce carbon use
Developing skills for the future	Build upon the work already undertaken within the New Forest Skills Action Plan	Ongoing	Delivering of the priority actions

	Consideration of a policy approach in the Local Plan Review to secure the submission of an Employment and Skills Plan related to major development	December 2026	Employment and Skills Plans policy related to new development
Revitalising town centres	Support and promote events in town centres to increase footfall	Ongoing	Number of events taking place
	Monitor land availability and liaise with key landowners to realise the potential for development on any significant town centre opportunity sites	Ongoing	Delivery of regeneration proposals
	Prepare planning guidance to lead the regeneration of key town centre sites where opportunities exist for redevelopment	Ongoing	Delivery of regeneration proposals
	Delivery of Totton town centre masterplan and regeneration schemes	December 2026	Adoption of masterplan and completion of regeneration works
	Comprehensive business support initiatives that also enable the development of thriving market places and pop up shops in empty premises	April 26 – Marh 27	Number of businesses supported Number of start up enterprises

Unlocking investment through strategic partnerships	Collaboration with the Solent Freeport to attract investment and ensure that sub-regional plans are beneficial to New Forest residents.	Ongoing	Delivery of development proposals and related Employment and Skills Plans
	Engagement with Associated British Ports on proposed port development at Dibden Bay and Marchwood.	December 2026	ABP proposals for delivery of development proposals and related Employment and Skills Plan
	Engagement with landowners at the former Fawley Power Station site to examine development opportunities as part of preparation of the new Local Plan.	December 2026	Local Plan Review policy for Fawley Waterside
	Collaboration with the Hampshire Prosperity Partnership	Ongoing	Delivery of actions in Economy and Growth Plan for Hampshire
Fostering a culture of enterprise and innovation	Maintain dialogue with infrastructure providers on an ongoing basis to prepare an Infrastructure Delivery Plan to support the new Local Plan and ensure sufficient infrastructure is provided for major development.	December 2026	Preparation of Infrastructure Delivery Plan

	Provide information and signposting to small businesses through the NFDC website.	Ongoing	N/A
	Provide business support and advice on funding opportunities through IncuHive.	Ongoing	Number of businesses receiving support through IncuHive

