



Draft Economic Development Plan

October 2011

The Central Bedfordshire Economic Development Plan

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Central Bedfordshire Economic Development Plan

Foreword

Central Bedfordshire is a prosperous and attractive area. We want to ensure that we continue to be a place people want to live and work, and build on our leading education institutions and businesses to ensure our residents are able to benefit from the economic growth of the area. In changing economic conditions and new government policy, our Economic Development Plan sets out our commitment to supporting sustainable economic growth in Central Bedfordshire and provides an outline of the types of activities we will seek to undertake over the next few years with our partners to realise our economic growth potential.

In producing the Economic Development Plan we are embracing the critical role our partners and stakeholders will play in, delivering sustainable economic growth in Central Bedfordshire and the key role the Council has in enabling business and residents achieve their goals and aspirations. Reflecting this, we want to maximise engagement with partners, businesses and residents to ensure that the Economic Development Plan reflects real business and community needs and that through true partnership working our resources and those of our partners are deployed most effectively to meet local needs.

This plan builds on our Sustainable Community Strategy, Local Economic Assessment evidence base and our extensive consultation in developing the plan and sets how we want to work with partners to prioritise and support local job growth and opportunity for all in Central Bedfordshire.

Cllr. Ken Matthews
Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development



October 2011

Central Bedfordshire's Economic Vision and Priorities

The vision for Central Bedfordshire is to be:

“Globally connected, delivering sustainable growth to ensure a green, prosperous and ambitious place for the benefit of all”

The Economic Development Plan is Central Bedfordshire Council's response to reaching our full economic potential. The plans seek to meet the challenge of creating 27,000 new jobs by 2026 to accompany the anticipated level of housing growth of 26,000 new homes. This level of jobs growth is based on attracting new industries and businesses to the area in addition to new jobs created through population growth, such as increased retail and local services. The Economic Development Plan outlines how Central Bedfordshire Council through our partnerships will work to ensure that all our residents are appropriately equipped to benefit from new business growth, through having the skills to prosper and being fully able to access new employment opportunities. Building an international reputation as a leading location for business investment, Central Bedfordshire will be a place where existing companies thrive and new entrepreneurs are freely able to start up and grow.

Central Bedfordshire is to be recognised as a place truly open for business.

This ambitious plan reflects the area's vision developed through Central Bedfordshire Together, our Local Strategic Partnership, and sets out the type of place we want Central Bedfordshire to be with the economic priority at its heart in realising its economic potential.

The Economic Development Plan is a key part of the Council's Policy Framework. It draws from and links to a number of corporate strategies and plans that guide the delivery of all our public services and gives shape to our towns and villages.

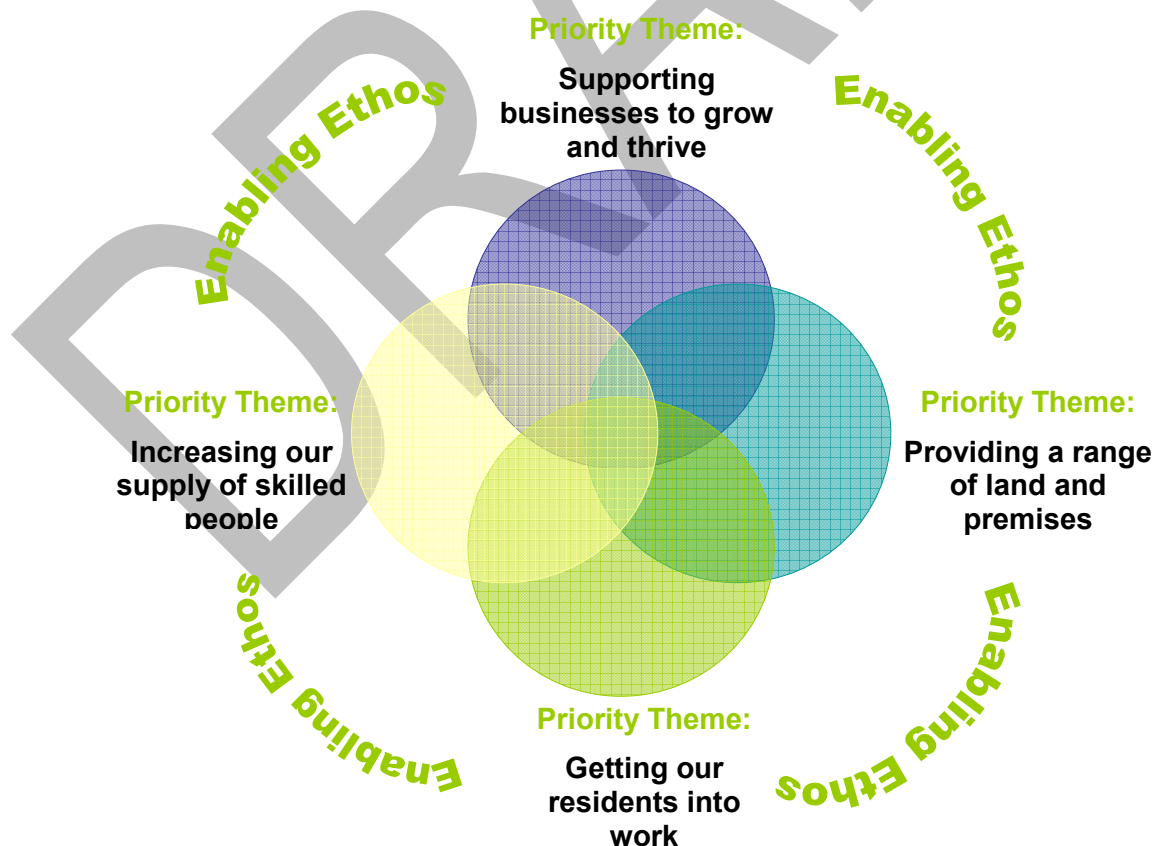
Central Bedfordshire is strategically located at the economic centre of gravity of the UK, lying to the north of London and connected via road, rail and air to the gateways to Europe and beyond. This strategic location, proximity to the urban centres, and high quality environment has encouraged strong levels of population growth over the last two decades. The rate of job creation over this period of continued growth has not matched the population expansion leading to increasing numbers of residents not being able to choose to work and live locally. Our Local Economic Assessment, carried out in 2011, provides the Council and partners with a common understanding of the local economic conditions. The Local Economic Assessment also reveals pockets of deprivation within the area and challenges that certain groups face in accessing employment. Furthermore, significant retail and leisure spend flows out of Central Bedfordshire, and is lost from our local economy.

This plan seeks to change this and deliver the ambitious and challenging job growth target for the area. This is a job growth rate of approximately 1,800 per year and represents a significant increase from current levels of growth (1,300 per year). This target is stretching in the current post-recession economy, where national growth rates are limited. The ambition to deliver sustainable growth is essential, as without this level of job creation the longer term future of the area could be as dormitory suburbs with an ageing population and a lack of local jobs for younger people, leading to increased demands for social care against a decreasing local economy.

The Central Bedfordshire Local Economic Assessment also highlights the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing Central Bedfordshire and concludes that further action is required to build on existing strengths and achieve our economic potential. The analysis suggests that action relates to four interrelated priority themes which together create a new economic model for our area. By realising the untapped economic potential of our area and maintaining job creation as a central priority to all our decision-making, sustainable economic growth can be achieved, befitting all our residents, communities and businesses.

The Central Bedfordshire Economic Model

The Economic Development plan focuses on creating the right conditions to attract, retain and grow business to provide more employment opportunities and support our residents to access and benefit from such opportunities. The four priority themes support this.



These themes are all interconnected and provide the overarching model for the Economic Development Plan. The four priority themes, are bounded to a cross cutting theme of an enabling 'can do' culture within the Council essential to the delivery of the plan.

Priority Theme: Land and Premises

What difference are we seeking to make?

Business growth is reliant on the availability and choice of a range of land and premises, from small serviced offices for business start ups and modern headquarter office developments, to fit for purpose manufacturing facilities and modern warehousing units. Likewise businesses require fast and efficient twenty first century infrastructure to support their activities and productivity. Central Bedfordshire's historic and natural environment both attract business and visitors to the area and contribute significantly to the local economy. Setting the strategic direction is essential to create the optimal environment to encourage business growth and facilitate the delivery of new investment in the area's infrastructure and high quality environment. In this respect the Economic Development Plan aligns with the Council's Local Development Frameworks and Local Transport Plan and Climate Change Strategy.

Priority Theme: Supporting Business

What difference are we seeking to make?

We aim to deliver a step change in jobs growth in Central Bedfordshire. New jobs growth, and the benefits this has for residents in terms of new opportunities and services, can only be facilitated by:

- supporting new businesses to start up
- attracting new inward investment into the area
- supporting existing business to thrive and grow.

Taking an enabling approach and effectively engaging with local employers will be the key areas the Council will focus on to support business. Working in partnership with the public and private sectors we will enable businesses to grow by removing barriers, streamlining processes and making it easy for them to release their potential. This will be supported by the use of up to date business intelligence and tracking processes, allowing potential business growth opportunities and barriers to growth to be identified at the earliest stage and support to be targeted effectively.

Priority Theme: Skills for Growth

What difference are we seeking to make?

We recognise that for Central Bedfordshire to fulfil its economic potential, the importance of skills cannot be over-estimated. Skills are critical to all employers in all sectors: public, private and the voluntary and community sectors. We know that around 80% of the people who will make up our workforce in 2020 are already in employment. As such, significant effort will need to be placed on up-skilling the existing workforce in addition to supporting those in our school system. A highly skilled workforce will facilitate the growth of existing businesses and increase the attractiveness of the area to inward investors, generating job creation and fuelling local economic growth.

Skills are also a key factor in helping individuals engage with the labour market and achieve their goals and aspirations. We are seeking to direct and influence skills and training provision to ensure that Central Bedfordshire is well placed to match current and future employer and individual skills needs, stepping up to the various challenges and opportunities presented by changes to skills policy and funding, and ensuring that economic growth is not limited by lack of available local skills.

Alongside the Economic Development Plan, we have developed an All Age Skills Strategy to highlight a number of detailed activities that will deliver against the need to raise skills attainment and aspiration within Central Bedfordshire. The findings of this strategy are aligned to the Economic Development Plan to ensure that we are focusing our activities and priorities in the right area, building on the strong partnerships already in existence to meet business and individual skills needs.

Priority Theme: Into Work

What difference are we seeking to make?

To achieve Central Bedfordshire's economic potential we need to harness the time and skills of residents who are not currently able to participate in the economy. We have over 12,000 working age people on out of work benefits in Central Bedfordshire. Non-participation results in costs to the economy, such as benefit payments, and can reduce the quality of life for our residents and communities. Increasing participation raises the quality of life for individuals and communities by increasing household incomes and helping to lift families out of poverty.

Our key area of focus will be to increase access to the labour market for Central Bedfordshire residents through the provision of targeted support services to those in most need. This will be underpinned by local labour market and business intelligence, gathered through effective resident and employer engagement. More people in work will not only improve the quality of life of local residents, but will be a major stimulus to the Central Bedfordshire economy, increasing the income of our residents and creating more demand for local goods and services. This in turn will help local businesses to grow and help to attract new investment into the area.

What do we plan to focus on?

Listening to and engaging with local employers, business organisations, residents, stakeholders and partners from across the public, private and voluntary and community sectors has highlighted that a number of cross cutting work streams can be drawn from the four priorities of the Central Bedfordshire Economic Model to focus our corporate and partnership activities and make the greatest impact. In summary those work streams are as follows:-

1. Employer Engagement

A consistent and proactive approach to understanding employers' needs is fundamental to supporting new growth opportunities and addressing local business barriers.

2. Open 4 Business

A Council wide approach to doing business, delivering joined up services to businesses and enabling partnership working across Central Bedfordshire to achieve our economic potential.

3. Setting the Direction

Providing clear leadership and policy and putting in place the conditions to support economic growth, such as providing space for businesses to locate and grow.

4. Delivering the right infrastructure at the right time

Enabling the delivery of key infrastructure and new developments through working collaboratively with public and private sector partners to deliver the necessary infrastructure and high quality environment to create the highest quality of places to live, work and enjoy.

5. Maximising Investment in Central Bedfordshire

Attracting, securing and facilitating greater levels of public and private sector funding to be invested in Central Bedfordshire and maximising the use of existing assets to deliver economic growth.

6. Business Support and Sustainable Growth

Encouraging businesses to seek and access advice and support is essential to business success. The Council will work closely with those business advisers and intermediaries that our businesses choose, providing valued opportunities for business to business networking and strengthening local supply chains.

7. Improving Access to work and learning

Ensuring that our residents are able to access employment, learning and services and our businesses are able to reliably access their markets.

8. Meeting Employer Skill Needs

Working with existing and new employers to understand their skills needs now and in the future to help businesses grow and thrive, and sharing this with local education providers to deliver training and services to meet those needs.

9. Promoting Enterprise and Career Opportunities

Helping people to be more entrepreneurial in developing their careers is underpinned by providing high quality information, advice and guidance on the opportunities to develop skills, promoting local success and celebrating achievement of all our people and local businesses.

How are we going to deliver?

1. Employer Engagement

The Council aims to deliver a step change in employer engagement. Employer engagement is the action we take to inform, consult, involve and empower our businesses through ongoing relationships and dialogue. By focusing on how we listen to and delivery high quality joined up services to businesses and strengthening our partnerships with the public and private sectors, we will enable businesses to grow by removing barriers, streamlining process and making it easy for them to engage and access services. We have been working to understand how the employers engage with the council and how this can be improved. Employer engagement with the Council will be managed in a proactive way and we will introduce joined up systems to allow us to do this better. We will respond to employers' needs in a holistic and flexible way and, taking a 'whole Council' approach, use all of our business facing teams to gather intelligence and provide solutions. We will work hard to make all aspects of business engagement much simpler by improving information both direct to businesses and through business intermediaries. The Council will also work with existing business networks and organisations, recognising their key role in representing business views and needs. This will avoid duplication of activity and make best use of available resources.

2. Open 4 Business

The Council aims to ensure that Central Bedfordshire will be known as a place that champions business. We will develop a culture within the Council that takes business needs into account, adapting to size and capacity. Across all our services we will build our reputation as a 'Can Do' Council that is 'Open for Business'. This is a whole council approach, focusing on how we deliver high quality services and maximise the efficiency of how we operate as a Council.

As this new way of working develops it will be important to let businesses, investors and public partners know that Central Bedfordshire's innovative and flexible approach to achieving our growth aspirations makes us very much 'Open for Business', and an area where doing business is easy. The Council will work with partners and local business ambassadors to utilise their networks to spread the word. Key areas of focus of our approach are:

Defining the Offer

Businesses have told us that they are often confused by the plethora of services that the Council offers and there can be a lack of joined up solutions for our businesses. We will make things clear and simple and tell businesses what they can expect from us. We will make it easy to do business with us and will be honest with businesses, telling them when and why something may not possible and offering alternative directions where we can.

We will introduce a range of measures to support this, including:

- The promotion of the 'Golden Number' and dedicated web channel for business enquiries into the council. This will make it easy to access council services and will be underpinned by seamless interaction between council departments to support business needs.
- Meeting businesses face to face to work through ideas and requests, responding in a timely manner.
- Refer businesses to those agencies and partners that can help business grow.

Developing Partnership Working

The Council already works closely with a range of public and private sector partners. This must be developed further and strengthened to work together collaboratively as 'one team' to deliver real improvements in the area. We will support innovation and tap into the skills and expertise of our partners, businesses and residents in delivering services, making better places for our local communities and achieving Central Bedfordshire's economic potential.

The government recognises the critical role of public private partnerships in delivering economic growth, through the development of business led Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). LEPs seek to create the right environment for business growth by tackling strategic barriers to growth and promoting enterprise and innovation. Central Bedfordshire has been an active partner in the formation and development of the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) which covers our natural economic geography. The Council is committed to continuing its integral role in the LEP, positively engaging with partner organisations to make SEMLEP a success, delivering the area's key priorities.

In addition to being an effective partner, the Council will actively engage with Central Government departments to ensure that new policies take into account our area's needs. We will participate in the development of new policies and initiatives and maximise the potential benefit to Central Bedfordshire.

3. Setting the Direction

The Council will ensure that our corporate strategies, policies and plans each reflect the economic needs and contribution to increasing our area's prosperity and reducing inequality. Setting the direction and common purpose for our decision-making that shapes our towns and villages is essential.

Our spatial plans for land use are guided by our Local Development Frameworks and planning policies. Sufficient commercial and industrial land has already been identified to deliver the 27,000 new jobs. Under our planning policies much employment land use in Central Bedfordshire is classed as category B use – B1: office, B2: industrial, B8: warehousing. It is estimated that in the region of 54% of new jobs will be created in non-B space sectors, including retail, leisure, hotel, health, care, education and home working. We will ensure that our policies support sustainable economic growth through providing a range and choice of sites and premises and continue to enhance the high quality environment, which is consistently recognised as a key factor in attracting businesses to Central Bedfordshire.

We will continue working with the development industry to promote and bring forward high quality developments, flexible to business needs. Furthermore, we will provide a range of pre-application advice to support sustainable employment land to stimulate jobs growth and increase business certainty. Reflecting the needs of small businesses, such advice will be provided free to small businesses seeking to grow in Central Bedfordshire. In addition to this, it will be important to continue to ensure that future policies and site allocations are flexible and responsive to business needs and, reflecting national policy, sustainable economic development is supported and communities engaged to benefit from growth. This will include introducing Local Development Orders to bring forward employment sites where these benefit the local economy. Key areas of focus of our approach are:

Bringing Forward Employment Land

In addition to bringing forward new land allocations, it is critical to ensure there is a choice and range of existing sites and premises for business to start and grow. We will seek to build on the strength of existing strategic employment assets, such as Cranfield, Woodside Park, Millbrook Proving Grounds and Stratton Business Park. Further to this, we are actively working with partners to identify and overcome potential barriers and constraints that may be restricting the commercial development of existing employment sites. To address this we are putting in place a Sites Acceleration programme targeting key sites that can support the short term availability of land and premises to deliver jobs growth. Furthermore we will work with local private sector partners to maximise the use of existing vacant business premises.

Regenerating our Town Centres

Town Centres are at the heart of our communities and are central to creating the right conditions for economic growth, yet Central Bedfordshire residents tend to spend more each year in centres outside of the area (£528m) than people from outside the area spend in our town centres (£66m). The balance of retail trade is -£462m, with eight times as much money leaving Central Bedfordshire than coming into it. We will work with partners to regenerate our town centres, creating environments and opportunities for new investment which make them more attractive. Masterplans and site specific development plans are in place or being developed in Dunstable, Flitwick, Leighton Buzzard, Biggleswade and Houghton Regis to encourage and guide private investment in our town centres and to improve and retain the viability of these important centres for the benefit of our local communities.

4. Delivering the right infrastructure at the right time

Local Development Frameworks, the Local Transport Plan and the Local Investment Plan set out a range of infrastructure needed to deliver the area's growth aspirations including: A5/M1 link road, new M1 Junction 11a, Woodside Connection, Luton Dunstable Busway, Green Infrastructure and Utilities and Energy. We will continue to work with central government and private sector partners to facilitate the identification and delivery of such business critical infrastructure to support jobs and business growth. We will continue to investigate delivery methods and funding models to ensure that the transport and utility infrastructure critical to business operations is in place. In addition to delivering key large scale infrastructure, a range of local interventions and activities to support modal shift also have a significant impact on the effective operation of business critical infrastructure and subsequent business investment decisions, performance, productivity and resulting opportunities for local employment.

Reflecting the need for economic austerity, the Council will seek to maximise the use of Council capital assets to facilitate economic growth in Central Bedfordshire. We will investigate the potential for Central Bedfordshire to pioneer emerging financing schemes which enable infrastructure that supports business and jobs growth, such as Tax Increment Financing. Further to this the Council will seek to ensure that future growth also supports local needs, through:

- Supporting neighbourhood planning proposals and maximising business engagement

- Use of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) to deliver key local infrastructure, whilst stimulating growth of small business in Central Bedfordshire by not requiring CIL funding for small business premises.

Key areas of focus of our approach are:

Supporting the roll out of Next Generation Broadband

Recognising the increasing demands from business and residents for access to high speed broadband, we will look to develop a Local Broadband Plan for Central Bedfordshire, setting out how the commercial and public sectors will work together to roll out next generation broadband (greater than 20 megabits per second) infrastructure and services.

5. Maximising Investment in Central Bedfordshire

The Council will work collaboratively with private sector partners to promote Central Bedfordshire as a location for new and sustained investment. Working with national bodies, such as UK Trade and Investment and more locally through SEMLEP, we will promote the area on a global scale as a location for business investment and will help to develop new commercial opportunities for existing businesses. Lobbying for investment in Central Bedfordshire will be key outcomes of our enabling culture, operating at both local and sub national level through the South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP)

Business Incubation

New business start ups and early stage high growth businesses often require dedicated provision of flexible accommodation and support services to achieve their growth potential. A lack of such space has been highlighted in Central Bedfordshire, therefore we will work with public and private sector partners to bring forward a range of business space, from dedicated enterprise and innovation centres, such as the Incuba Centre in Dunstable which seeks to provide dedicated business support and stimulate growth in the Low Carbon technologies sector. In addition to direct provision of new facilities we will work to roll out existing and new business support services to existing Council owned managed workspace centres and we will work with private sector providers to promote the area to attract further managed spaces, ensuring that there is sufficient supply of incubation space and support services, to foster business start ups. By promoting, creating and incubating new and established enterprises we will attract new investment. .

Investment & Innovation

Innovation and creativity drives productivity and successful enterprise and in turn attracts investment in new goods and services. Business links with higher and further education institutions can fuel innovation in new products and processes, delivering improvements in business productivity and profitability and creating new jobs. Currently only 6% of businesses in Central Bedfordshire have links with universities or colleges. Working together, businesses and education institutions can create innovative products and ways of working which help businesses to grow and increase productivity. We will work with our partners to foster such links and encourage collaboration, and seek to maximise private sector investment building on the area's existing world leading companies and education institutions and exploring new opportunities, through better engagement with appropriate bodies such as the Technology Strategy Board and Venture Capital funding organisations.

Supporting Rural Diversification

Rural businesses play a key role in Central Bedfordshire's economy. A key challenge facing rural businesses is the ability to respond to new market opportunities where this may require a move from agriculture to other sustainable commercial uses. In addition to targeted business support and the safeguarded rural employment sites, we will support rural business diversification in a sustainable manner by supporting redevelopment and reuse of existing buildings and sites to provide for a suitable scale of development opportunities which strike a balance with the need to protect our countryside.

6. Business Support and Sustainable Growth

Those businesses that seek support and advice are many more times likely to succeed. Businesses access support from a variety of sources, from both the public and private sector, which helps them to grow and overcome obstacles. 89% of businesses in Central Bedfordshire accessed some form of support in 2010, most of which came from private sector advisors (intermediaries) such as accountants and banks. We aim to work with these intermediaries to ensure that they understand both Central Bedfordshire Council's offer to businesses and the wider public sector offer with the aim of them 'selling on' products and services to their clients, maximising the level of available support and the take up of it. We know that 97.7% of our businesses employ fewer than 50 people, showing the importance of small business support. Key areas of focus of our approach are:

Business Support

In order to promote job growth we will introduce a range activities including:

- Deliver targeted support to high growth companies. Research shows that just six per cent of UK businesses are classed as high-growth, yet they are responsible for creating over half of all new jobs. We will work with business support and education partners to identify and deliver specific business support to such high growth companies, to enable them to realise their potential and support jobs growth in Central Bedfordshire.
- Actively work with the national Business Link organisation, local business support, and education partners to maximise awareness of and take up of business support opportunities within Central Bedfordshire for new and start up businesses.
- A Timebank service, working with private sector intermediaries to provide introductory support services, such as accounting, business planning, access to finance, human resources and property advice, to new start up and inward invest businesses, to support the local provision of such business support to maximise business growth potential
- Business networking is a valuable way of keeping up to date with best practice and new business opportunities. The Council will continue to work with business networks in Central Bedfordshire to promote new opportunities and access to support and advice.

Sustainable Growth

The UK's legally binding target to reduce CO₂ emissions by 80% by 2050 will mean that in the coming years carbon reduction will be at the heart of ensuring businesses thrive and grow. This will create opportunities for the development of new technologies, industries and services. We recognise that Central Bedfordshire is ideally located to benefit and support the emerging low carbon economy, particularly given the areas strengths in relation to research and development from facilities such as Millbrook and Cranfield University. Central Bedfordshire Council's Climate Change Strategy is committed to supporting businesses to thrive in a future low carbon economy and ensure that Central Bedfordshire realises fully the benefits of being a more sustainable and greener place to live and work. Improving environmental awareness, reducing waste and conserving use of our natural resources is vital. Small and Medium Enterprises can access funding to help reduce this impact and we need to raise awareness and increase the take up of existing and new initiatives, including the Green Investment Bank. This also includes funding to support the development of new green skills and adaptation to a low carbon business. Further types of support that will be offered, through cross service delivery of Council services include helping businesses adapt to a low carbon environment, supporting travel planning and promoting local procurement.

Tourism and the Visitor Economy

Equally the quality of our environment and availability of leisure and cultural amenities is important to ensuring the area remains attractive to investment. Tourism and the visitor economy are both significant and growing in our area and that needs to be fostered. Wider business growth activity for tourism businesses will be channelled through Experience Bedfordshire and aligned to core business support initiatives to maximise effective delivery.

7. Improving Access to Work and Learning

Access to work and learning needs to be addressed both in terms of the physical transport needs and the personal and social reasons. This includes addressing long term health conditions that marginalise many from being able to successfully secure employment.

Getting to Work

Lack of available and affordable transport is a major barrier to accessing employment and training, particularly for young people and those in rural areas. In addition to physical access planning through the Local Transport Plan and working with employers to develop travel plans, the Council will look to continue to support and promote schemes such as Wheels to Work and car sharing which help those most in need to access the labour market.

Tailoring welfare provision to local need

The introduction of the DWP Work Programme and the JobCentre Plus' Get Britain Working Schemes means that Councils will now take more of an influencing and performance management role in articulating and evidencing the needs of our local residents to shape national programmes to meet their needs. We will gather evidence to inform national and local policy to ensure that groups facing difficulty in entering and retaining employment receive targeted support from providers to help them into the job market and promote such help within our communities.

Around 4,600 people from Central Bedfordshire's working age population claim employment related benefits as a result of a work-limiting illness. Over half of these claim Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance for mental health conditions and musculoskeletal disorders. Furthermore key groups including disabled people, people from ethnic minorities and people over 50 can also face barriers in actively participating in the local labour market.

There is a clear need therefore to focus on these groups and provide a dedicated package of support to aid their transition from benefits into employment. We will aim to work with Work Programme providers and the Get Britain Working schemes to maximise the support available in Central Bedfordshire. This will include supporting local work clubs and actively pursuing new opportunities and pilot opportunities to support those in most need of help to get into work.

This support will include the continued access to European Social Fund funding in Central Bedfordshire enabling us to add value to national programmes by commissioning local projects targeted on our communities' needs that otherwise will not be available.

Targeted support to tackle Youth Unemployment

Within Central Bedfordshire the unemployment rate for 16-24 year olds is 19.1%, compared to the average overall unemployment rate of 5.6%. As a priority we will continue to support young people to remain in education, employment and training through personalised support offering young people a successful progression opportunity suited to their needs and early intervention for those individuals most at risk of becoming not in education, employment and training.

Volunteering as a route to employment

Volunteering has seen a marked increase in take up as a result of the recession and can be another route to the labour market as it builds individuals' self-confidence, improves job skills and provides work experience. We will work closely with our voluntary and community sector and social enterprise organisations, recognising the increasing role they have in delivering jobs growth and supporting those in most need. Utilising the knowledge and expertise of these groups and empowering them to support local growth will be a key feature, delivering support that is focused on generating local employment opportunities

8. Meeting Employer Skill Needs

Employers that invest in the development of their workforce will profit and improve productivity. Consistently employers report skills needs and gaps that limit their growth. Key activities will be to ensure that businesses are aware of the benefits of skills development and the supply of opportunities available to them. With a move away from state funded training the need to promote to employers and employees the benefits of investing their own time and finances in training is increasingly more important. To promote the advantages of training to employers, activities will include:

- the use of business training champions
- training and support with workforce development planning
- leadership and management support

Key areas of focus of our approach are:

Providing Labour Market Intelligence

Working together is critical in taking the skills agenda forward and Central Bedfordshire Council will use its role as an enabler to establish a partnership based mechanism that will improve awareness of the skills requirements of employers, the support available from providers, and the skills needs and aspirations of individuals to help to inform policy investment and delivery. Activities will include undertaking business and individual skills needs surveys and gathering future skills needs information so that individuals and providers can be responsive to existing and future market/sector needs and effectively target limited resources at these needs. We will work with providers to inform and influence the delivery of flexible and responsive training that meets employer needs. Thereby providing local pathways and progression routes in work.

Promoting Apprenticeships and Vocational Learning

Within Central Bedfordshire the growth in the number of apprenticeships is slower than in many other local authorities, making it increasingly important to promote the benefits of vocational learning to employers and individuals, encouraging employers to take on apprentices, and work with providers on pre-apprenticeship support.

To address the low take up, and to engage most effectively with national policies, we will develop an apprenticeship plan, including links to wider vocational opportunities, to take this area of work forward. Initial activity will include supporting individuals through pre-apprenticeship assessments, support and placements which lead to progression into apprenticeships or employment.

9. Promoting Enterprise and Career Opportunities

Promoting enterprise and routes to employment, particularly to those furthest from the workplace in disadvantaged communities and poor families is a national and local policy priority. Enterprise creates employment opportunities, stimulates innovation and, more broadly, helps to develop employment readiness skills and is an effective route out of poverty. We will work with partners to support those in our most deprived areas with schemes including mentoring, enterprise coaching, local enterprise clubs and promotion of the Enterprise Allowance Scheme. This will align with and support the Get Britain Working initiative, provided through the JobCentre Plus and our own Poverty to Prosperity Strategy. Specific action will include establishing a range of enterprise and Job Clubs throughout the area, maximising access to available support and also promoting the Enterprise Allowance scheme to support self employment. Further to this, a key element of our work will be to secure European Social Funding and use this to commission local enterprise projects

Key areas of focus of our approach are:

Advice and Guidance

The timely provision of quality career advice and guidance plays a key role in supporting people to progress through and into employment and the Government has indicated a change towards mechanisms which deliver all-age career guidance. Welfare and financial advice and guidance are also important in tackling poverty and financial exclusion. We will work with partners to provide such advice and guidance and will look to support individuals with financial planning and access to financial services such as credit unions.

Raising Individual's Awareness to Local Opportunities

For some people, skills development and training may be a low priority either because they are unaware of the advantages that can accrue from training, because they are not aware of the opportunities available or because of barriers to training. There is, unsurprisingly, a strong correlation between qualifications and employment prospects. We will therefore promote and raise awareness of the support and opportunities available at all ages for skills development and the importance of skills in achieving ambitions within our communities. At the centre of our activities in this area will be the development of employability skills and effective career advice. Activities include:

- Delivery of an Enterprise in Schools programme including CPD for teachers, specific enterprise activity and use of case studies
- Working with partners on the Young Chamber of Commerce project
- Working with the 14-19 strategy group to encourage schools to continue with work experience and to incorporate enterprise education into the curriculum
- Investigating the provision of information to professionals outside of education who may be responsible for giving advice, e.g. social workers supporting young people leaving care.

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Monitoring the Plan

As we implement the plan, an effective monitoring system will be essential to show how we are moving forward towards meeting the vision for Central Bedfordshire and supporting 27,000 additional jobs to 2026. Aligned to the Sustainable Community Strategy, the EDP will be monitored against four key performance indicators.

- **Number of people in employment**
- **Number of out of work benefit claimants**
- **Economic activity rate**
- **Number of people in apprenticeships**

These will be monitored on a quarterly basis, with the exception of apprenticeship data which will be monitored annually due to data availability. In addition to these, the following measures will be utilised to consider performance within each of the priority themes.

Supporting Business

To monitor the general level of business start ups, growth and performance in Central Bedfordshire the following measures will be monitored annually:

- Number of businesses (registration and stock)
- 1-5 year business survival rate

Land and Premises

To monitor development activity in Central Bedfordshire with a particular focus on the performance of our town centres the following measures will be monitored annually:

- Change in commercial floor space stock
- High street vacancy levels

Into Work

To monitor the performance of the Central Bedfordshire Labour Market and people's ability to access employment, the following indicators will be monitored annually:

- Number of people who are unemployed or economically inactive accessing information advice and guidance on volunteering through volunteer centres
- The levels of youth unemployment

Skills for Growth

To monitor the level of individuals' skills, take up of training and business skill needs the following indicators will be monitored annually:

- % of working age people with level 2, 3, 4 qualifications
- % of people who have received job related training in Private Sector in the last four weeks

These indicators, as well as a wider overview of the performance of the Central Bedfordshire economy, will be published annually through an update to the Local Economic Assessment.