South Somerset, **a great place to do business**

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT **STRATEGY**

Public Consultation Draft

December 2018

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South Somerset, **a great place to do business**

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South Somerset, a great place to do business

Foreword

South Somerset enjoys a thriving, diverse economy. **It is home to world leading, high-tech, aerospace, engineering and manufacturing businesses.** A strong agricultural sector drives food and drink production and tourism.

This economy is matched by the quality of life afforded by our outstanding rural environment. The result is a district in which businesses develop and thrive and residents and visitors are never far from our beautiful countryside. Despite our successful past and strong economic credentials, we cannot afford to be complacent about the challenges ahead. We also need to ensure that we are ready for the opportunities too. International, national, and local economies are all likely to be affected by Brexit. The need for a sound economic strategy has never been greater.

Our Strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive understanding of the local economy. We have worked hard to reflect recent economic data and trends, to give us a clear baseline from which to position ourselves. We have ensured that our Strategy is aligned with national and regional policies.

It supports the aims of our own Council Plan and Local Plan to help maintain a successful, balanced economy. Encouragingly we start from a strong position. Our regeneration plans for Chard, Wincanton and Yeovil are already under way. Some of our previous priorities, such as the Yeovil Innovation Centre extension, have already been achieved.

I am very pleased to present our Economic Development Strategy, which will guide our work for the next few years and give us the flexibility to react to our changing world.

Jo Roundell Greene
Deputy Leader,
Portfolio Holder - Environment &
Economic Development

Merlin Helicopter, Leonardo
Courtesy of Yeovil Chamber of Trade

1. Introduction

Wincanton Racecourse
Courtesy of Wincanton Racecourse

1.Introduction

South Somerset District Council (SSDC) has economic development and growth at the heart of its agenda.

As such our approach is based on a whole Council, one team approach as set out in our Council Plan, which envisages every part of the organisation contributing to supporting economic growth. This seeks to create a strong, high performing, resilient and adaptable economy with increased productivity through flourishing urban, rural and land-based businesses. This is set within a vision for South Somerset as a place where businesses flourish.

To achieve our corporate aims this Economic Development Strategy (EDS) sets out what we will do, how we will work with our partners and what the outcomes will be. Our focus is to make a difference to the District's economy where it counts. Our Strategy looks forward over the next ten years and allows us to align the Strategy with our Local Plan. It builds upon current economic information and national and regional economic policies.

Purpose

The purpose of this Strategy is to:

- provide a consistent vision with clear objectives and priorities for our District's economy through our whole Council approach;
- set out how the priorities will be translated into a framework for change together with the actions needed;
- identify mechanisms for delivery, including our own role and responsibilities alongside the responsibilities of our public partners and the business community; and
- establish how we will measure and evaluate outcomes.

Elected Members' Priorities

The Strategy includes the priorities for economic development and growth established by our Elected Members through the District Council's four Area Committees.

The priorities set out by Members are to:

- have active, positive partnerships with key businesses to support a resilient business landscape;
- encourage small and artisan businesses;
- bring forward suitable land for small business units;
- promote and develop tourism;
- support local food and drink producers;

- provide employment land and business units of appropriate sizes readily available for uptake by businesses and residents;
- attract tourists and increase spend in and visits to the District; and
- support businesses across all sectors.

The Economic Development Strategy shows a clear route for us to deliver Elected Members' priorities to support and help achieve economic prosperity by working with other public partners, businesses and individuals. The Strategy will be informed by, and build from, our existing evidence base, our work, achievements and successes.

The Strategy means that we will be well positioned to benefit from changing national, South-West regional and local economic priorities. This includes supporting the Government's Industrial Strategy to enhance productivity levels whilst offering better access to skills, careers and economic inclusion for our workforce.

Current Economic Issues and Challenges

The context and background evidence for the Strategy is set out in separate Appendices. These include additional information, policy influences and background evidence. We have summarised below the main economic issues and challenges that we face.

Competition and Competitiveness

- Our economy has existing strengths and specialisms in the manufacturing sector, especially Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing (AEM) and rotorcraft. Whilst there is potential vulnerability if over-reliance is placed on these sectors, they offer major opportunities for growth and strengthening South Somerset's global position.
- There is a high proportion of SMEs and entrepreneurs in South Somerset, which provides an excellent opportunity for growth and innovation.
- There is an over reliance on a few large employers, making us vulnerable if they move operations away or reduce their workforces.
- Business growth and survival rates are positive. There has been a steady growth in the number of new enterprises (although below national levels) with business survival rates being above average over their first three years, although evidence shows the survival rate drops after that time.
- There are good employment growth forecasts for the next 10-15 years, with Health, Wholesale and Retail, Tourism, Food Services and Professional Services likely to see major increases in employment.
- The changing age profile of our District presents challenges, with difficulties in retaining younger people and in attracting returners. The District's distinctive natural and built environment offers an enviable lifestyle but this is often hidden and under-stated when attracting and retaining skilled workers.
- There are a range of allocated employment sites and land available to meet our future employment needs, but development viability remains a major challenge. This is particularly difficult for larger sites that will require more substantial new infrastructure to be provided in order for them to be developed.

- Hinkley Point is having both positive and negative impacts for our District. There could be considerable benefits for our businesses in the nuclear facility's supply chain. However, retaining and attracting a skilled local labour force could become increasingly difficult with the potential for a 'skills drain' from our District's workforce.

Productivity

- We are not as productive a District as we could be. Evidence shows a relative lack of dynamism in our economy with productivity levels below our potential and lower than those of the South-West and national levels.
- Pay levels are generally below average, with growth in pay rates lagging behind regional and national trends.
- We are ranked 230 out of 379 local authorities in the UK Competitiveness Index due, in part, to significant productivity limitations in some of our agricultural, land-based and visitor sectors. This demonstrates that we have plenty of scope for improvement in productivity.

Innovation

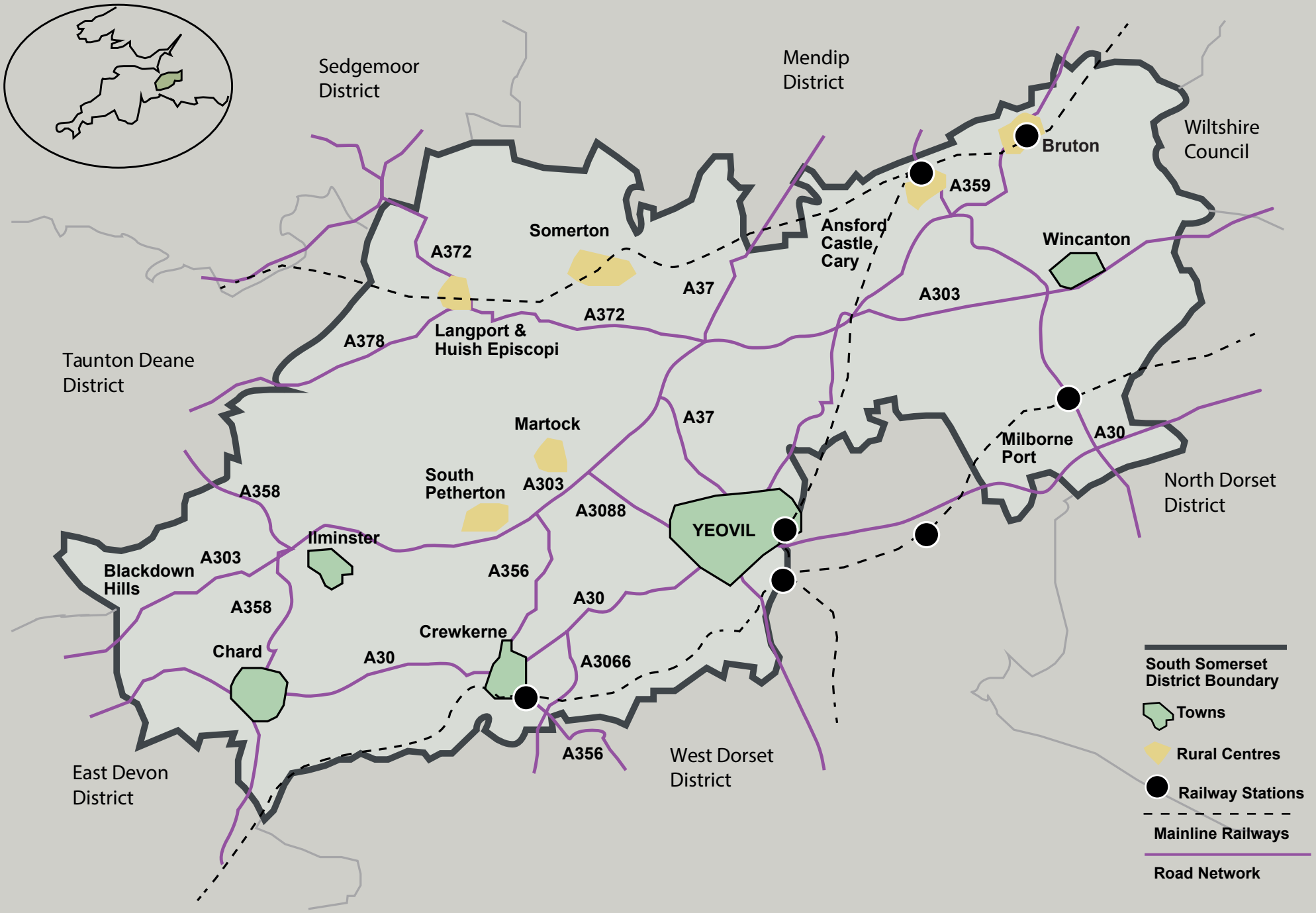
- The adoption and integration of new technologies and processes offers a great opportunity to grow our productivity, to do things better and be more efficient. We are not making the best of new technologies in our local businesses at present. One of the main reasons is the limited mobile telecommunications and digital connectivity available for our businesses in the District, especially in more rural areas.

Other Issues

- Skill levels and attainment need to improve, particularly by increasing the number of people qualified at NVQ Level 4 and above. There is a concern that businesses are often unwilling to invest in skills but equally there remains a challenge in providing adequate access to training and support to properly equip our workforce.
- There are many 'lifestyle' businesses in South Somerset, and the extent to which they want to grow will influence overall employment growth and productivity.
- The Agri-Food sectors have not had a high-profile but have the potential to be globally competitive.
- There has been an over-reliance on the continued success of the AEM sector.
- A key issue for South Somerset is to maximise the potential from the sectors in which significant employment growth is expected. Not to do so will limit both employment and productivity benefits.
- In addition, there has been a lack of diversification in our economic base. This diversification is needed to help minimise the impact of potential economic shocks.
- South Somerset is seen as having an under-developed public profile, both with visitors and investors.

A key issue for South Somerset is to **maximise the potential from the sectors** in which significant employment growth is expected.

South Somerset, **a great place to do business**


Sedgemoor District
Mendip District
Wiltshire Council
Bruton
A359
Ansford Castle Cary
Somerton
A372
A37
A372
A303
Wincanton
Langport & Huish Episcopi
A378
Taunton Deane District
Martock
A37
Milborne Port
A30
North Dorset District
South Petherton
A303
A358
A3088
YEOVIL
Ilminster
A303
Blackdown Hills
A356
A30
A358
A30
Crewkerne
Chard
A3066
A356
West Dorset District
East Devon District
South Somerset District Boundary
Towns
Rural Centres
Railway Stations
Mainline Railways
Road Network

2. Vision

Wincanton Town Centre
Photo by Rob West

2. Vision

Our vision for the period to 2028 is built on the aims of our Council Plan; our work with businesses, public partners and wider stakeholders; the evidence and context of the District's economic performance.

Our Economic Vision is:

South Somerset, a great place to do business.

Ideas

an innovative, productive economy

People

skilled and entrepreneurial people with good jobs and greater earnings potential

Business environment

a supportive environment for businesses to establish, grow and thrive

Infrastructure

excellent transport and communications infrastructure

Places

prosperous and sustainable, towns, villages and more rural areas with strong communities and a high quality of life

Reasons to Invest in South Somerset

We have:

- strong business growth and good survival rates
- a resilient local economy with low unemployment levels, high levels of economic activity and growing levels of skills and training inclusion
- several of the South-west region's most important high-tech aerospace businesses with many other advanced engineering and manufacturing companies
- a planned aerospace innovation and collaboration hub in Yeovil as part of the iAero initiative, to further focus economic growth in this globally significant sector
- allocated employment sites and existing commercial floor space available to suit the needs of a wide range of businesses
- distinctive and diverse Market Towns, with ongoing rejuvenation and regeneration programmes in place
- a high quality of life in our towns, villages and rural areas

- a range of agricultural and rural diversification opportunities
- good access to the West Country's strategic road and rail links and committed future improvements
- a programme that will drive superfast broadband roll-out across our District, particularly focusing on the provision for businesses and improving coverage in more rural areas

Golden Opportunities

- Our District is characterised by stable economic credentials offering potential for high levels of economic participation, low unemployment and will continue to support the highest number of jobs in Somerset.

- The strong concentration of key sectors in our District (e.g. aerospace and advanced engineering and manufacturing) supported by initiatives such as iAero, offers the potential for further diversification, innovation, collaboration and economic growth with better promotion of our national and global business reputation and competitiveness

- We have a key strength in the food and drink sector which links our agriculture and production industries. This offers strong local and international growth potential with expanding opportunities for existing and new businesses
- Our major employers support a wide ranging local supply network with scope to strengthen and grow their supply chain links
- Our existing schools, further education and skills training providers have well established, positive relationships with many employers and a clear appetite to expand and deepen these links. We place a clear emphasis on the importance of vocational/technical skills development, higher level education and career-long learning
- The tourism sector in South Somerset is long established as part of the wider South-west region's offer. We have a range of unique, nationally and internationally recognised attractions. Our District's visitor accommodation offer, our attractive rural environment and built heritage combine to offer real potential for further growth and value in the visitor economy

- Our more rural areas represent significant economic and environmental assets. They hold great opportunities for the diversification of our economic base, promotion of our visitor economy and support for rejuvenation of our Market Towns and villages
- We are home to RNAS Yeovilton, one of the largest military bases in the South-west. It is a focus for significant aero-sector investment, employment and supply chain expenditure at the local level
- Committed major infrastructure projects in our District and the wider area, including the A303 and A358 road network and London-Exeter rail improvements, will further enhance strategic access and connectivity and provide major opportunities for inward investment
- The potential of the digital economy for our District is significant. This is especially so for the rural areas where it will help to support business diversification, improve access to customers and markets and will enhance productivity.

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Yeovil Innovation Centre
Courtesy of South Somerset District Council

Montacute House
Courtesy of South Somerset District Council

3. Priority Themes and Action Plan

3. Priority Themes and Action Plan

Our Vision anticipates a sustained, thriving economy for our District.

Our Priority Themes reflect six dimensions or aspects of economic development. These Priority Themes provide a framework for individual projects and actions and will act to guide our efforts, bring together partners, stakeholders and places across our District.

Six Priority Themes

Our approach has six Priority Themes that complement each other and build on our existing strengths while facing our key challenges:

- **PT1:** Business Support, Retention, Innovation and Inward Investment
- **PT2:** Transport and Communications Infrastructure
- **PT3:** Economic Inclusion – Skills, Careers and Training
- **PT4:** Land, Sites and Workspaces
- **PT5:** Supporting Urban Economies
- **PT6:** Supporting Rural Economies

Each Priority Theme is set out in more detail in this section together with the primary and secondary actions/projects that will be the focus of our activity. For each Priority Theme we also show the outcome and output measures of success so that we can clearly judge our achievements and performance.

Primary Actions are those that are considered to be the most critical and which we will to deliver in the shorter term (over the next three years to 2021).

Secondary Actions are those which, while still important, will either need other actions to be completed first, or are activities that will become more important later in the Strategy's lifetime (from 2022 out to 2028).

Area Committee Economic Development Priorities

As part of the Council's work on its new Council Plan, the Elected Members in each of the District's four Area Committees have identified specific economic development priorities and actions.

These are set out in the following table which identifies the Members priorities; which Area Committee originated each priority (the red tick); which Areas the priority would be applicable to; and how each aligns to the wider EDS Priority Themes and actions.

Somerton Town Centre
Photo by Mike Taylor

Wincanton Town Centre
Photo by Rob West

Yeovile Town Cenrtre
Courtesy of Yeovil Chamber of Trade

Crewkerne Town Centre
Photo by David Jones

Area Committee Members Priorities	Alignment to EDS Priority Theme(s)	North	East	South	West
Active, positive partnerships with key businesses to support a resilient business landscape	PT1 PT3	✓	✓	✓	✓
Encourage small and artisan businesses	PT1 PT4 PT5 PT6	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bring forward suitable land for small business units	PT4	✓	✓	✓	✓
Promote and develop tourism	PT1 PT5 PT6	✓	✓	✓	✓
Support local food and drink producers	PT1 PT2 PT3 PT4 PT5 PT6	✓	✓	✓	✓
Provide employment land and business units of appropriate sizes readily available for uptake by businesses and residents	PT4 PT5	✓	✓	✓	✓
Attract tourists and increase spend in and visits to the area and wider District	PT5 PT6	✓	✓	✓	✓
Supporting businesses across all sectors	PT1 PT2 PT3 PT4	✓	✓	✓	✓

Priority Theme 1: Business Support, Retention, Innovation and Inward Investment

To help businesses compete locally, nationally, and internationally, it is important we help them to understand what support is available to them, how to access that support and to ensure they can operate in an environment that fosters innovation. In-depth, ongoing engagement with our businesses and employers is critical for understanding their needs, providing and signposting business support and for long-term business retention. We need a focused approach to business engagement and retention to ensure our resources are direct and effective, enabling businesses to grow to their full potential.

There are advantages to engage in business support networks, where local supply chains can be strengthened and common approaches to challenges developed. There is also a need to further advance our work with partners on opportunities for research and development, to support start-up and retain grow-on businesses as well as encourage a stronger, more commercialised link between intellectual property, research and innovation in the District. We are committed to encouraging inward investment to South Somerset including through the (Invest) Into Somerset Partnership.

Primary Action/Project	Rationale	Year One (19/20) Milestones
1.1: Create and maintain a business 'key account' programme	We will work proactively with our priority and high growth businesses, based on regular and direct contact, to ensure we understand business needs and to promote business collaboration and networking. This will assist in ensuring our support for local business is appropriate for business needs and reflects feedback from our business stakeholders who are keen to promote and encourage our regular dialogue with the business community.	Yr 1: Targeted engagement of 100 businesses across key sectors to understand their issues and opportunities to support them as appropriate.
1.2: Map and evaluate existing key sector support plans, and business support networks and initiatives alongside key partners, including marketing and promotion as a business destination for potential new high growth sectors	Our District supports a number of key growth sectors, including aerospace, advanced engineering and manufacturing, healthcare, tourism, and food and drink, which offer strong opportunities for growth, diversification and increased export-based trade. Working closely with our partners, including the HotSW LEP through the Local Industrial Strategy, we will investigate and encourage opportunities for innovation, improved productivity, expansion and new investment based on detailed sector plans, and review existing support networks and initiatives to ensure local and prospective new business explore opportunities for collaboration, diversification and new markets. This will also support higher value job creation and employment opportunities to help retain young talent and attract returners after qualifying from University.	Yr 1: Prepare key sector propositions and plug in to relevant LEP Productivity Strategy Delivery Plans including Aerospace (iAero), Local Industrial Strategy and Defence Strategy opportunity work streams.

1.3: Provide support for a focused Business Support service	Given the various issues and challenges facing businesses at all levels across our District, we will provide a focused service for the local business community that will inform and advise on relevant business support matters and appropriate contacts to ensure advice from our partners, such as the LEP Growth Hub, is made available where appropriate.	Yr 1: Establish a business support service based on signposting to internal and external assistance including Growth Hub, Somerset Business Agency, SWMAS, Innovate UK and DIT.
Secondary Action/Project	Rationale	Year One (19/20) Milestones
1.4: Support work with internal and external partners, hotel, leisure operators and attractions to develop co-ordinated visitor attractor packages	Our District supports a range of tourism and visitor attractions and attractive countryside that is accessible from the A303 strategic corridor. Their attributes support good prospects for increasing and enhancing opportunities for the tourism and leisure sector. As part of a coordinated programme with our partners, we will support, encourage and promote the visitor economy, including maximising the potential of higher value, linked trips with existing facilities and encouraging an expanded offer of support facilities, including accommodation.	Yr 1: Agree action plus delivery plan and support activity with SSDC Tourism lead.
1.5: Continue to work with our partners to facilitate, develop and promote business investment and innovation support for South Somerset	Working with our partners, we will continue to support and promote existing working relationships of established business networks to help evolve and shape support and advice for our business community.	Yr 1: Work in conjunction with the Key Business Accounts programme to prepare an 'Inward Investment Prospectus' for South Somerset.
1.6: Improving local business supply chains purchasing alongside support and advice for local business to bid for public service/works contracts	The local supply chain network is well established amongst key sectors in our District, and opportunities exist to strengthen the local business supply chains. We will work with our partners to evaluate how to improve and promote local supply chains, including use of a local supply chain purchasing charter to maximise opportunities for local business. Advice, guidance and support will be given to encourage local businesses to tender for public service contracts, to help enhance new business opportunities.	Yr 1: Investigate the current Council supply chain and purchasing charter position. Identify best practice examples from elsewhere in Somerset and beyond. Identify potential areas for support to local businesses through developing a procurement aim to source the maximum percentage possible of what we buy from within the District to capture social value and community benefits locally.

Success Measures

- Establishment of an up-to-date Key Business Account Programme and direct contact with key employers in year 1 (2019-2020) to understand their issues and opportunities to provide appropriate support. **(Key Outcome 6)**
- Creation of a Business Support function to signpost to appropriate assistance **(Key Outcome 6)**
- Expansion and growth of existing key sectors and increase in the proportion of new growth sector representation and inward investment in the District **(Key Outcomes 6 and 7)**
- Increase in the number and per head expenditure of visitors to South Somerset **(Key Outcomes 6 and 7)**
- Enhanced number of local companies benefitting from local SSDC supply chain networks **(Key Outcome 6)**
- Increase in the number of local employers securing public service contracts **(Key Outcome 6)**

Kimbers Farm Shop
Courtesy of Kimbers Farm Shop

Priority Theme 2: Transport and Communications Infrastructure

Key infrastructure needs to be in place to allow business to thrive. We need to ensure the planned road and rail infrastructure upgrade and improvement projects are delivered and the construction process effectively managed.

Businesses also require very high quality, comprehensive digital communications infrastructure in both rural and urban locations. Broadband and next generation (5G) mobile infrastructure is a key enabler and crucial for modern business. Whilst much of Heart of the South West area benefits from good connectivity, there is a need to bring Superfast Broadband and mobile infrastructure to many communities and businesses.

Primary Action/Project	Rationale	Year One (19/20) Key Milestones
2.1: Support delivery of committed road and rail infrastructure projects	Improved transport connectivity, particularly to the strategic road network via the dualling of the A303 and A358 are identified funding commitments. The improvement of road and rail infrastructure and capacity is a key requirement reported by stakeholders, particularly for supporting future growth in the food and drink, healthcare and tourism sectors, and wider inward investment. To maximise these emerging opportunities, we will work together with relevant partners to encourage programme delivery and minimise disruption from construction works for our business community.	Yr 1: Continue to support the A303 dualling proposals through the Development Consent Order (DCO) process. Work with Network Rail and rail operators to encourage/ lobby for investment in upgrading the rail infrastructure and services.
2.2: Continue to support and secure delivery of superfast broadband and mobile communications to rural and urban businesses in South Somerset	Digital connectivity is essential for promoting and supporting economic growth across our District. Stakeholders identify the need for high-speed digital infrastructure and broadband coverage as a priority, particularly for our rural areas. Alongside our partners, we will work together to support and secure programme delivery aims for superfast broadband (over 24Mbps) to all premises in our district by 2020. This will help to support our existing enterprises and attract entrepreneurs and high value workers to the area. It will also encourage enhanced opportunities for rural diversification, self-employment and high potential growth sectors.	Yr 1: Work with Broadband Delivery (BDUK) and Connecting Devon & Somerset (CDS) and other parties as necessary to clarify and promote their voucher schemes and any other funding opportunities to maximise Superfast Broadband (SFB) coverage.

Secondary Action/Project	Rationale	Year One (19/20) Key Milestones
2.3: Ensure the District benefits from successive digital fibre technology upgrades in future	Advances in technology and changing business needs require upgrades. To ensure our residents and businesses benefit from a high-quality service that meets future needs, we will investigate and work alongside our partners to maximise the opportunities arising from enhancements in digital fibre technology over time.	Yr 1: Investigate potential future opportunities through HotSW LEP Place Task & Finish Group and explore potential for SSDC to commit funding to 'top up' any SFB Voucher Scheme (within state-aid rules).

Success Measures

- The District has high speed broadband coverage (Government target 100% by 2022) **(Key Outcome 3)**
- The commitment of funding from Central Government and key partners to deliver key highways and junction improvements at the A303 and A358 in accordance with project timescales **(Key Outcome 4)**
- Improvement in rail infrastructure and services **(Key Outcome 4)**
- Improvement in mobile phone coverage across the District, including delivery of a 5G network **(Key Outcome 3)**

Priority Theme 3: Economic Inclusion – Skills, Careers and Training

The right mix of skills in our workforce attracts investment and enables businesses to innovate and compete on quality. It is a key driver of economic growth. Acquiring the right skills also gives individuals more choices in the labour market, enables them to secure better earnings and income and reduces levels of social deprivation.

Our workforce has been characterised by lower skills, with a high proportion of part-time workers. There is a need to increase and up-skill our workforce in sectors where there is a proven demand to do it. Further education colleges, training providers and support for a range of job-based learning, including vocational apprenticeships are at the heart of raising aspirations, nurturing talent and supporting workplace learning. Learning and skills providers are operating in a market environment where there is increasing choice and where the acquisition and maintenance of skills is an investment both for the individual and the employer.

We need to support and respond to local business and community skills needs, so that they can be economically active, build lasting careers and in turn attract and retain businesses in the District.

Primary Action/Project	Rationale	Year One (19/20) Key Milestones
3.1: Support to identify emerging skills needs with business networks	We need to understand the emerging skills needs of local business and will work together with our partners to align our collective intelligence to ensure appropriate training and skills development is communicated to the education and skills providers, to help deliver a skilled workforce.	Yr 1: Work with partners including the Education Business Partnership (EBP) and Yeovil College to clarify and match employment skills and training needs.
3.2: Continue to promote apprenticeship and other business training opportunities	Whilst the level of apprenticeship achievements has increased across Somerset (by 71% between 2008-2014), we will continue to work with our partners to encourage and promote opportunities for apprenticeships amongst our local employers, in support of improving career opportunities for young people and helping our business community to attract and retain young workers.	Yr 1: Commence a HNC/HND business training programme in partnership with Yeovil College for local businesses and SSDC staff. Support the SCC led bid for EU Employment training funds with local providers.

3.3: Support greater engagement with schools and colleges to increase aspirations and improve career choices for young people addressing social mobility issues	The promotion of career opportunities and improvement of skills performance amongst our younger residents is essential for supporting the future skills needs of our economy. Business stakeholders identify concerns of a skills gap which combined with an ageing employment profile in our district necessitate a need to improve aspiration and attainment to maximise employment opportunities across all sectors. We will support and engage with our partners to support initiatives such as HotSW LEP Career Hubs, to promote and support improvements in attainment and career aspiration.	Yr 1: Work with EBP to support employer skills needs and support career opportunities. This will include looking to make links with secondary schools, colleges and employers, increasing the chance of employment and earnings and addressing social mobility issues
3.4: Improve digital skills	To support and promote the full potential and opportunities of the digital economy to support higher productivity and business growth, we will work proactively with our partners to develop, enhance and improve the digital skills of business and the existing and future workforce.	Yr 1: Engage with HotSW LEP Digital Skills Partnership to formulate a detailed plan.
Secondary Action/Project	Rationale	Year One (19/20) Key Milestones
3.5: Continue support for voluntary (third sector) partners and business support networks / representative groups who provide business support	We will support and promote our partners who provide wider business support and advice to the business community, particularly as a source of guidance and assistance to local employers.	Yr 1: Ongoing monitoring and input as necessary.
3.6: Promotion of self-employment and business start-up	Our District currently has the lowest levels of self-employment in Somerset (13.4% compared to 17.5%, at March 2016). The opportunity exists to support economic activity and entrepreneurship to promote self-employment as a source of new and innovative business and to boost levels of self-employment and small business growth. This is particularly important for promoting diversification in the rural economy; to build on the high levels of part time working; and to enhance the resilience of businesses in our District.	Yr 1: Clarify the dynamic between the current low unemployment levels and the opportunities for self-employment and business start-ups.

Secondary Action/Project	Rationale	Year One (19/20) Key Milestones
3.7: Support provision and signposting of access to finance for new and growing businesses (See also Priority Theme 1)	A key barrier to new and expanding business is availability of finance. Working together with partners, we will ensure new and expanding local businesses understand the options available for financial support to encourage and support facilitate business growth, particularly given the large micro business sector in our District.	Yr 1: Clarify the situation regarding finance for new and growing businesses and investigate options.

Success Measures

- Increase in the number of new business start-ups **(Key Outcome 6)**
- Average 3-year business survival rates are sustained or increased **(Key Outcome 6)**
- Improvement in the levels of NVQ Level 3 and 4 **(Key Outcome 5)**
- Higher levels of local apprenticeships secured for young people **(Key Outcome 5)**
- Improvement in social mobility **(Key Outcome 5)**

Priority Theme 4: Land, Sites and Workspaces

Our economy will be better placed to thrive and grow if the right mix and choice of employment land, sites for commercial development and high quality workspaces are created. To support business innovation, we need to provide space for new and existing businesses to work, foster talent, and grow. We will need to create and support the development of work hubs and co-working spaces across the District to provide a supportive environment for new and existing small businesses.

Growth orientated businesses are found across economic sectors and the right business accommodation in the right locations is critical, linked to high quality transport access and digital communications infrastructure.

Primary Action/Project	Rationale	Year One (19/20) Key Milestones
4.1: Support development of new start-up and grow on incubation managed workspaces	The need for new start up and expansion space extends beyond the innovation sector and the lack of appropriate workspace for SME's, particularly in the rural areas, is reported by stakeholders. Working closely with business partners and the development industry, we will seek to encourage the delivery of supported floor space to encourage the continued growth of the micro business sector, which is of key importance to our district economy.	Yr 1: Identify demand and investigate opportunities whilst supporting on-going SCC initiative in Bruton.
4.2: Support investment in new high quality mix of commercial floor space	Given the changing needs of market requirements for a range, quality and choice of floor space, we will work with the development industry to support investment in new commercial floor space, suitable for a mix of uses. This is important for maximising commercial flexibility and meeting existing business needs and potential growth sectors, such as food and drink, healthcare and social care, and tourism. It will also help to encourage new office floor space, which historically has been limited across our district.	Yr 1: Assess in detail the barriers to provision of high quality commercial floor space and identify actions to help secure delivery. Input into the new Local Plan work stream to promote positive employment land policies and allocations.
4.3: Create and promote a key employment sites portfolio	In order to help support the expansion of existing businesses and attract new investment to our District, it is important we identify and promote available employment sites in South Somerset. Focused on key sites, and in conjunction with the development industry, we will develop a sites portfolio to promote our district as a quality destination for business.	Yr 1: Update (Invest) into Somerset to promote SSDC key employment sites and premises.

Secondary Action/Project	Rationale	Year One (19/20) Key Milestones
4.4: Engage more closely with commercial agents and the development industry	The delivery of employment land requires an understanding of market requirements, availability and viability. To inform this, we will engage closely with local commercial agents and developers to facilitate information to identify current and emerging property needs and potential opportunities for economic growth.	Yr 1: Engage to clarify and create key employment sites and premises portfolio.

Success Measures

- New employment land supply is supportive of the objectives of the Council's Local Plan and Employment Land Evidence Base **(Key Outcome 1)**
- Occupation of Yeovil Innovation Centre as a hub for business growth and example of good practice **(Key Outcome 2)**
- Development of innovative and flexible workspace at locations across the District **(Key Outcome 2)**
- The Council maintaining an updated and regularly reviewed key sites portfolio for promoting the District **(Key Outcome 1)**
- Increased levels of enquiries for commercial floor space **(Key Outcome 1)**
- Regular meeting of Commercial Agents Forum **(Key Outcome 1)**

Priority Theme 5: Supporting Urban Economies

South Somerset is characterised by a mix of larger urban centres such as Yeovil, market towns such as Chard and Wincanton and a large number of smaller towns and villages.

Together these urban centres offer the key locations for our economy (including the evening economy) to be successful, for our entrepreneurial ethos and culture to thrive and to grow. They must be attractive and desirable places to live, work and visit.

Our Strategy recognises the importance of our larger and smaller urban centres and supports the ongoing and expanding programme of rejuvenation and regeneration both to facilitate economic prosperity but also improve the quality of life for our residents and workforce.

Primary Action/Project	Rationale	Year One (19/20) Key Milestones
5.1: Continue to deliver the Yeovil Refresh programme	We will continue to promote, support and encourage the delivery of the objectives of Yeovil Refresh in conjunction with our partners and stakeholders, to rejuvenate and regenerate Yeovil Town Centre, as the primary economic centre in our District. Our focus will be to maximise the potential to secure developer interest and investment in accordance with the programme delivery plan and Refresh aspirations, and to support Local Plan objectives.	Yr 1: Provide business and inward investment support to Yeovil Refresh. Reach an agreement to establish an entrepreneurial work hub in the centre of Yeovil.
5.2: Continue to deliver the Chard Regeneration Programme	Working alongside our partners and stakeholders, we will promote, support and encourage the realisation of the objectives of the Chard Regeneration Programme for the enhancement of the town.	Yr 1: Provide business and inward investment support to Chard Regeneration.
5.3: Prepare the Wincanton Town Centre Rejuvenation Plan and programme	We will support and promote the enhancement and strengthening of Wincanton Town Centre, working alongside our partners and stakeholders to secure a strategy to guide regeneration proposals.	Yr 1: Confirm Wincanton Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan including a vision, potential development options, delivery plan and budget.
5.4: Supporting new businesses to occupy space in our town centres	We will support new business and entrepreneurs by working with partners to deliver business space in our towns for businesses to establish themselves and grow in the early days.	Yr 1: Investigate models and incentives to deliver competitive town centre business space.

Secondary Action/Project	Rationale	Year One (19/20) Key Milestones
5.5: Review potential and requirements for other town and village rejuvenation and regeneration programmes	The smaller centres across our District act as important centres for our local communities and businesses. We will work with our partners and local stakeholders to investigate opportunities for rejuvenation and regeneration that promote and encourage business growth and investment, including support for appropriate commercial uses to address the changing role of centres. The pressures and threats facing town and village centres is identified as a concern by many stakeholders, particularly for our smaller centres.	Yr 1: Work with the Market Towns Investment Group (MTIG) to plan and start to deliver a programme to support rejuvenation of market towns.

Success Measures

- Delivery of investment in accordance with the objectives identified in the Yeovil and Chard regeneration programmes, and a framework for regeneration in Wincanton **(Key Outcome 9)**
- Improvement in occupancy levels in the designated centres of the District, including promotion of mixed uses and business space **(Key Outcome 9)**
- Increased levels of market town health check measures **(Key Outcome 9)**

Priority Theme 6: Supporting Rural Economies

Our rural areas are viewed as an asset rather than a barrier to sustaining a thriving, prosperous economy. Rural areas require particular attention as much of our District is rural in nature or has a rural-centric economic character. Our Strategy needs to support the interaction between our urban centres and their surrounding rural areas, and help 'showcase' and build the link between rural communities and economic sectors, and our towns.

Our rural areas include significant and sensitive natural environments as well as cultural assets that make South Somerset distinct. These assets underpin much of our economy and support our overall quality of life and attractiveness for businesses and residents to locate here and to remain as well as for visitors to the District.

Primary Action/Project	Rationale	Year One (19/20) Key Milestones
6.1: Continue to promote and safeguard traditional rural businesses and services including artisan businesses, food and drink and tourism which support and contribute to the vitality and viability of rural communities	The historical role and function of our rural communities and surrounding hinterlands has changed although traditional businesses and services including artisan industries, food and drink and tourism contribute significantly to the economic health of our rural areas. We will work with our internal and external partners and stakeholders to investigate opportunities to encourage and safeguard traditional enterprises and services, which have value to local communities to help promote and support economic growth that is compatible with rural areas.	Yr 1: Engage businesses as part of the Key Account Management programme backed by research to identify specific actions and interventions necessary to support productivity, growth and innovation by utilising new technology.
6.2: Assess the potential to support and grow a local, sustainable, circular economy	Alongside our partners, we will investigate the potential to develop opportunities available for rural based businesses and small business activity based on a circular economy, particularly in the tourism, leisure, agricultural, and food and drink sectors.	Yr 1: Undertake research and action planning to identify actions/interventions necessary.

Secondary Action/Project	Rationale	Year One (19/20) Key Milestones
6.3: Assess and encourage targeted business and development support for agricultural and land based industries to make best economic use of assets	The diversification of the rural economy, including improvements in communications infrastructure, offers scope to sustain and enhance appropriate rural based industries. We will encourage and promote our rural businesses through targeted assistance and advice to maximise the opportunities for diversification and business growth balanced alongside protection for the countryside.	Yr 1: Engage businesses as part of the Key Account Management programme backed by research to identify specific actions and interventions necessary to support growth, innovation and increased productivity through the use of new technology.
6.4: Investigate opportunities to improve alternative travel to work methods including public transport services in the rural areas	Poor public transport connectivity in the rural areas of the district impacts on social mobility and threatens accessibility to employment and education, particularly for our younger residents. This is a concern for many stakeholders across our District. We will work with partners and service providers to investigate, encourage and promote opportunities for improvements in public transport services.	Yr 1 – Investigate options to support businesses and staff as part of the Key Account Management programme through travel planning initiatives including car share, minibuses and cycle to work schemes.

Success Measures

- Levels of new business generation in the rural areas will increase **(Key Outcomes 3, 4, and 10)**
- Increased productivity **(Key Outcome 8)**
- Development of a rural business network to promote a circular economy **(Key Outcomes 6 and 10)**
- Increased levels of tourism in the rural areas, by value and visitor night stays **(Key Outcomes 6 and 10)**
- Enhanced transport services/schemes to serve employment locations in the rural areas **(Key Outcome 4)**

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4 Key Outcomes

We will measure the success and achievements of our Strategy by securing the following key outcomes which link to our identified Priority Themes and a range of supporting actions to deliver these priorities, as set out in previously in Section 3.

Key Outcome	Priority Theme
Key Outcome 1: supported the delivery of commercial employment land to help meet our Local Plan objectives. We will have enabled a sufficient range of deliverable sites and premises.	**Priority Theme 4** Land, Sites and Workspaces
Key Outcome 2: ensured that a network of managed/supported workspaces have been delivered for more of our businesses (start-up or grow-on) in our towns and smaller centres.	**Priority Theme 4** Land, Sites and Workspaces
Key Outcome 3: improved the ability of our businesses to work digitally and to compete globally. We will have secured excellent and comprehensive digital connectivity with widespread broadband provision to rural areas in particular.	**Priority Theme 2** Transport and Communications Infrastructure **Priority Theme 6** Supporting Rural Economies
Key Outcome 4: enhanced strategic and local connectivity by road, rail and public transport through our support for committed schemes. We will have investigated and advocated further improvements with our partners, especially for more rural areas.	**Priority Theme 2** Transport and Communications Infrastructure **Priority Theme 6** Supporting Rural Economies
Key Outcome 5: created an environment that enables increased economic inclusion, productivity and opportunities for growth. We will have a strong, well equipped workforce with enhanced skill and career routes including apprenticeships, work-based training and higher education qualifications. This will be supported by active, positive partnerships with education providers and businesses.	**Priority Theme 3** Economic Inclusion – Skills, Careers and Training **Priority Theme 1** Business Support, Retention, Innovation and Inward Investment

Key Outcome	Priority Theme
Key Outcome 6: introduced a support programme with our partners for our businesses with a targeted, 'key account' programme to help productivity and diversification.	**Priority Theme 3** Economic Inclusion – Skills, Careers and Training **Priority Theme 1** Business Support, Retention, Innovation and Inward Investment
Key Outcome 7: established focused inward investment and business support programmes. This will allow us to work effectively with our high growth/priority sectors, promote collaboration and develop the profile of South Somerset as a place to do business and invest.	**Priority Theme 1** Business Support, Retention, Innovation and Inward Investment
Key Outcome 8: stimulated productivity and innovation by working collaboratively with our key public and private partners.	**Priority Theme 1** Business Support, Retention, Innovation and Inward Investment
Key Outcome 9: reinvigorated our key towns and smaller centres through a programme of regeneration and investment.	**Priority Theme 5** Supporting Urban Economies
Key Outcome 10: enhanced our reputation for a high quality natural and built environment, which contributes greatly to our quality of life and continues to support agriculture, food production and tourism.	**Priority Theme 6** Supporting Rural Economies

The Key Outcomes are reflected through our Vision and Priority Themes which in turn drive the programme of actions and projects set out in our Strategy.

South Somerset, a great place to do business

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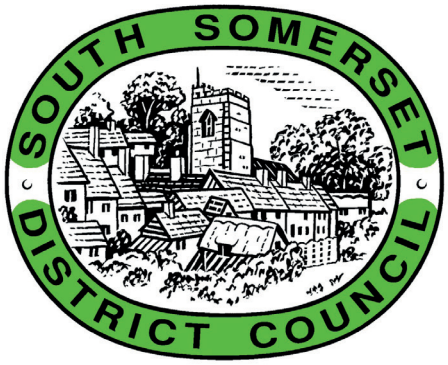

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT **STRATEGY**

Public Consultation Draft
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