

Draft Economic Strategy for Swindon to 2026 (revised)

Cabinet

Date: 26th April 2017

Author:	Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration, and Skills Corporate Director for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills
Wards:	All
Locality Affected:	All
Parishes Affected:	All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 The report seeks Cabinet approval of the revised draft Economic Strategy that sets out the Vision, Objectives and Actions to accelerate growth in Swindon's economy over the next ten years.
- 1.2 It also seeks approval to go out to public consultation on the draft Economic Strategy. The Strategy will come back to Cabinet and Council for final sign off in the Summer 2017.
- 1.3 Officers have engaged with central Government departments, Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP), businesses, business service providers, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and business networking groups to lead to the production of draft Economic Strategy (see Appendix A). The draft Economic Strategy is wholly consistent with the Council's Vision for Swindon and will contribute directly towards three of the four pledges, namely:
 - 1.3.1 Priority one: improve infrastructure and housing to support a growing low carbon economy
 - 1.3.2 Priority two: offer education opportunities that lead to the right skills and right jobs in the right places
 - 1.3.3 Priority three: ensure clean and safe streets and improve public spaces and local culture.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the revised draft Economic Strategy, which sets out the Vision, Objectives and Actions for Swindon's economy over the next ten years for the purposes of public consultation;
- 2.2 Request the Corporate Director for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills and Cabinet Member for the Economy, Regeneration and Skills to bring the Strategy back to Cabinet and Council for approval by the Autumn of 2017, having taken into account comments made during the consultation process.

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What is the purpose of Swindon's Economic Strategy?

- 2.3 Swindon's Economic Strategy is a high level strategic document that will sit alongside the Council's Local Plan 2026, the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership's Strategic Economic Plan, and above the Council's Skills and Employment Plan, Town Centre Masterplan and Transport Strategy.
- 2.4 There are many reasons why places choose to write economic strategies, namely to:
 - 2.4.1 Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the local economy, within a regional and national context. This allows authorities to bid for funding to address weaknesses and build on strengths.
 - 2.4.2 Signal the scale of growth ambition to national government, to partner agencies and to developers and investors.
 - 2.4.3 Identify the economic priorities, the direction of travel and the key ten year outcomes that articulate what success will look like.
- 2.5 The adoption of the Economic Strategy will be followed by a delivery plan that sets out in some detail how the strategy will be delivered, the resources involved, and which agencies will lead on the actions.
- 2.6 It is intended that the Switch on to Swindon Place Board, who are responsible for promoting Swindon to the outside world, will also continue to input to the ongoing development of the Strategy. They are a key partner in the delivery of some of the actions contained within the strategy, particularly in relation to promoting Swindon to attract inward investment. Initial feedback from the Place Board was very positive, as they acknowledged the clear direction from the evidence base leading to four key themes. They emphasized their desire to continue to input, particularly through the development of narrative and communications support.

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- 2.7 Swindon Borough council adopted its current Economic Strategy (2013-26) in 2013 (Council Minute 93, 2012/13 refers). It is good practice to review and update existing strategies as local and national factors change.
- 2.8 Over the last 4 years, Swindon's growth in employment and wealth creation (measured in Gross Value Added) has been higher than the UK average.
- 2.9 The updated evidence base, including the employment land needs assessment, has highlighted a shortage of high quality deliverable employment land in Swindon that is a key constraint to future economic growth.
- 2.10 The ongoing challenge of moving to a low carbon economy and the demographic impacts of an ageing population.

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- 2.11 The EU referendum and subsequent process to leave the European Union has highlighted a number of economic opportunities, uncertainties and changes in the international landscape. This matter was considered prior to the referendum by the Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Minute 52, 2015/16 refers).
- 2.12 The Government's forthcoming Industrial Strategy presents us with a number of opportunities in which to highlight Swindon's economic strengths, high value economy and to access funding in the recently announced Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund and National Productivity Investment Fund.
- 2.13 There is a need to accelerate improvement in educational outcomes as identified by the Council in its Vision, Pledge 17 "to improve education attainment, in particular at ages 16/19, so we are above the average in England in five years (Council Minute 33, 2015/16 refers) and Ofsted (November 2016). Well performing schools would attract skilled residents and therefore businesses, as well as providing us with a future skilled workforce.
- 2.14 The following consultation programme has been developed in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration, and Skills. The Growing the Economy Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its 29th June, 21st September and 30th November 2016 has provided overview to support the Strategy's development.
- 2.15 Swindon's business community has been involved in setting the Vision and themes for the Economic Strategy and it is proposed that they are given further opportunity to influence the direction and priorities underpinning the draft Strategy as well as proposed actions, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economy Regeneration and Skills, during the Spring of 2017.
- 2.16 **Business engagement to date**
- 2.17 Officers have engaged with businesses in a number of ways to shape the themes, and to identify actions to growth the economy (as detailed in Appendix C). The intention would be to identify a prioritised list of actions with the business community to grow the economy.

3. The economic strategy work programme

- 3.1 The following stages of work have been completed:-
 - 3.1.1 Evidence gathering: there is an employment land needs assessment for Swindon to 2036 and suitable employment sites will be identified during the development of the Local Plan in 2017. The evidence base accompanying the Economic Strategy, set out as a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, will be published in March when approved by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

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3.1.2 A first phase of engagement with officers, businesses and stakeholders (such as Business West, Growth Hub, INFLUENCE, Department for International Trade, Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy) has already been carried out and has led to the production of the draft Economic Strategy which is attached at Appendix B.

3.2 The next stages of the work programme include:-

3.2.1 A wider **business consultation** with Swindon's business community will take place in parallel with the public consultation, where we would release the draft Economic Strategy for comment, review and discussion.

3.2.2 **Full public consultation** will take place during May and June 2017 including development of online consultation questions, and through discussions with stakeholder groups in accordance with our Diversity Impact Assessment. We will target community action groups such as the Equality and Access Group, Older people's networks and Inter-Faith forum.

3.2.3 **Stakeholder engagement:** We will also continue to engage Government, Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP), neighbouring local authorities and our fast growth city partners (Oxford, Cambridge, Milton Keynes and Norwich). We have had initial meetings with Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), the Department for International Trade (DIT) and Homes and Communities Agency which have contributed towards the development of the draft Economic Strategy.

3.2.4 The Strategy will come back to Cabinet and Council for final sign off in the Summer.

3.3 Swindon's draft Economic Strategy is attached in Appendix B. The Vision reads:

"By 2036, Swindon will aim to be the UK's most innovative, productive, fastest-growing city, and will grow sustainably by upskilling our workforce to enable our businesses to compete, whilst enhancing residents' quality of life."

3.4 The strapline to sit alongside the vision is "**Accelerating Swindon's Growth Potential**" as this reflects our status as one of the UK's fastest growing cities¹. To date our growth has been predominantly population-based (driven by rapid housing delivery), but in the economic strategy, we articulate our intent to grow the economy, and employment, to match housing growth. This will become more

¹ Source: Centre for Cities annual reports

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important as the authority becomes more dependent on business rates as a form of income.

- 3.5 The four key themes associated with the Economic Strategy are Business Growth, Land and Infrastructure, Town Centre Regeneration and Education and Skills. The associated aims are:-
- 3.5.1 To grow the economy, strengthen and diversify the business base and create jobs that deliver enhanced opportunities for innovation and exporting
 - 3.5.2 To enhance Swindon's competitive position as one of the UK's most productive economies by attracting investment, accelerating housing delivery and creating high value employment
 - 3.5.3 To create a fast growth high value economy by improving education outcomes and upskilling our residents to enable our businesses to grow and compete
 - 3.5.4 To enhance the attractiveness of Swindon as a place to live, visit and do business in through delivering transformational change in the town centre including significant improvement to the leisure, cultural and evening economy
- 3.6 Increasing equality and opportunity is an underpinning imperative, to reduce dependency and improve resilience through a strong and growing economy which benefits everyone. This will improve life chances, reduce worklessness and ultimately improve health and well-being outcomes.
- 3.7 The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats provide a summary of the comprehensive evidence base that is being developed through the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for each theme, and will be published in March 2017 (see Appendix B for more detail).

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 The Council could choose to work from the current Economic Strategy. However the Strategy is now 5 years old, and the evidence base that has been refreshed has pointed to some urgent needs to address issues including setting new strategic employment land allocations. Doing nothing would risk a slowing economy, which would not support delivery of the Council's Vision, Priorities, and Pledges.

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5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 No direct financial implications as a result of this report. Legal and Human Rights Implications
- 5.2 Legal and human rights implications have been into account in preparing this report. It is considered that the recommendations are compatible with Convention Rights.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 No direct implications as a result of this report

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 The Economic Strategy will have an accompanying Diversity and Inequality Assessment to maximise fairness and opportunity for all.

Risk Management

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for the development of the Economy evidence base is currently in draft, and available from the author on request.

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – draft Swindon Economic Strategy to 2026 (revised). *(Copies of the Strategy Document have been forwarded to Cabinet members under separate cover. The Strategy Document is available for inspection on the Council's website and copies can be obtained, on request, from Committee and Member Services).*
- 8.2 Appendix B – summary of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats underpinning the Economic Strategy
- 8.3 Appendix C – details of business engagement to date

9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan

- 9.1 This is a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan for March 2017.