



A prosperous future for Hart

A strategy to support a successful local economy, 2025-35

March 2025

Preface

This 10-year strategy to support a successful local economy in Hart was developed by SQW, working closely with officers from Hart District Council.

Underpinned by a thorough analysis of the local economy, the strategy was materially informed by a series of consultations – with local businesses, business groups/networks, key stakeholders (from within and beyond the district) and with elected members. These took place in October and November 2024. Subsequently, a major workshop was organised to consider and finesse the draft strategy and to secure wider ‘buy-in’ to it.

In late December 2024, the English Devolution White Paper was published. It signalled a restructuring of local government in two-tier areas like Hampshire. This means that over the 10-year timescale of the strategy, institutional structures are likely to change, and Hart District Council may cease to exist in its current form.

The Council itself has an important role in delivering a prosperous future for Hart, but not an exclusive one – and wider partners and stakeholders will be key to its delivery. Hart District Council will help to bring partners together, and it will work hard to ensure that the priorities outlined in this document are advanced.

A Prosperous Future for Hart is fundamentally about the place – not the Council. It should therefore have long term currency as the structure of local government evolves and as new economic opportunities emerge.

Contents

1. <u>Introduction</u>	3
2. <u>Hart's economy today</u>	5
3. <u>Towards 2035: A vision for the future</u>	15
4. <u>Priorities for prosperity in Hart</u>	17
5. <u>Moving forward and keeping track</u>	21



**Funded by
UK Government**

Research and analysis by
SQW

1. Introduction

Hart is an attractive district with a well-performing economy. It is a place which offers an excellent quality of life in a high-quality environment, and it is a key part of the North Hampshire and Blackwater Valley technology corridor. *A Prosperous Future for Hart* looks ahead to the next ten years, taking a fresh view of the district's economy and its potential. Building on a consultation process within and beyond the council in autumn 2024, it identifies the steps that Hart District Council and its partners can take to support sustainable, long-term prosperity.

Some key principles...

Four principles underpin the development of the strategy:

- **It is a strategy for the whole Council.** It is not just an 'economic development' strategy: it recognises the contribution that a range of local authority functions can make to future prosperity – through the planning system, community development, environmental services and range of other functions.
- **It will rely on partnership working:** Future prosperity will depend on private investment and a robust business community, which the strategy seeks to encourage and support. Alongside this, investment in skills and the transport and community infrastructure that the area needs will have to involve other public sector partners, including Hampshire County Council and central Government, and it will be important to 'make the case' for Hart.
- **It is a strategy for the medium-to-long term:** With a ten-year horizon, it seeks to look beyond current funding cycles and the period covered by the present Local Plan to take account of longer-term trends and issues.
- In that context, **it is a framework for prioritisation, not a 'spending plan'**. Hart District Council has been successful in recent years in ensuring responsible financial stewardship, ensuring that public services are delivered effectively at a time of substantial pressure on resources. This will continue to be important – so the strategy isn't about the Council spending more; it's about how its current resources and those of its partners can most effectively support prosperity in the longer term alongside service delivery today.

The current (and changing) strategic context

This strategy complements a series of other important plans and strategies that the Council has adopted:

- First, the **Corporate Plan** for 2023-27. This sets out the Council’s ambitions in relation to “*planet, people and place*”, and includes an ambition for a “*sustainable economy that makes Hart a great place to live, work and enjoy*”, underpinned by a resilient and financially sound Council.
- Second, the **Hart Local Plan (Strategy and Sites) 2032**, adopted in 2020. This is the District’s core statutory local planning framework. The evidence base for the Local Plan was developed 9-10 years ago and includes an Employment Land Review encompassing the neighbouring districts of Rushmoor and Surrey Heath as well as Hart, recognising the links between them.

In January 2025, the Council decided that work should start on a new Local Plan. This strategy ought to provide context for the new Local Plan, informing the refreshed evidence base that will come forward over the coming years.

- Third, the **Climate Change Action Plan** for 2023-27. The Council declared a climate emergency in 2021, and the Corporate Plan sets out an ambition to make Hart a carbon neutral District by 2040. The Climate Change Action Plan outlines the medium-term steps to achieve this, focused on transport and energy efficiency in the Council’s building stock and in private sector housing.

There is also a history of **collaborative strategy development**, recognising Hart’s important links with its neighbours. As well as the Employment Land Review, a North Hampshire Narrative was prepared in 2021, together with the local authorities for Basingstoke and Deane, Rushmoor and Test Valley, identifying a series of shared themes.

More recently, Hampshire Prosperity Partnership adopted an Economic Strategy for Hampshire in 2024, which aims to “*drive sustainable economic growth and prosperity for Hampshire’s communities*” – with the aim of job creation and higher economic output, as well as quality of life, reduced environmental impact and more accessible opportunities.

Nationally, Government policy is also changing, with a renewed focus on economic growth (including via a new industrial strategy), planning reform and the role that local authorities and local partnerships can play. The Government’s English Devolution White Paper contains proposals for substantial changes in the local government landscape, including the creation of larger local authorities, and this is likely to lead to a reorganisation of local government in Hampshire. While this will influence the delivery of this strategy over time, a clear understanding of Hart’s economy and local priorities for prosperity in that context remains essential.

Strategy structure

The remainder of *A Prosperous Future for Hart* is structured in four chapters. **Chapter 2** sets out the economic context for action. **Chapter 3** introduces a vision for future prosperity in Hart and outlines a series of ‘priorities for prosperity’, which are explained further in **Chapter 4**. **Chapter 5** concludes, explaining how progress will be measured.

2. Hart's economy today

Generating annual output of around £3.4 billion and supporting 43,000 jobs, Hart has a productive local economy, underpinned by a skilled workforce and important links to the wider sub-region. This supports relatively high earnings, a large stock of small businesses and a thriving community sector. Sustaining this will be important in the context of technological and demographic change. This chapter sets out a picture of Hart's economy and its opportunities and challenges, informing its future strategy.

Spatial picture

Hart is a relatively small district, with a population (in 2023) of around 102,000. **Fleet** (including Church Crookham and Elvetham Heath) is the main urban area); alongside **Yateley** and **Blackwater and Hawley**, it forms part of the **Blackwater Valley** urban area, which extends beyond the district to the larger towns of Farnborough, Aldershot and Camberley. In the west, **Hook** is the primary centre; in addition, the larger villages of **Hartley Wintney**, **North Warnborough** and **Odiham** form secondary local service centres.

Beyond the main settlements, Hart is “primarily rural”: around 30% of the population lives in the rural part of the district¹, and this is an important part of its character and economy. While none of the District is within the Metropolitan Green Belt, it contains important environmental designations, especially the **Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (TBHSPA)**, which includes areas to the east of Fleet and south of Yateley and Blackwater.

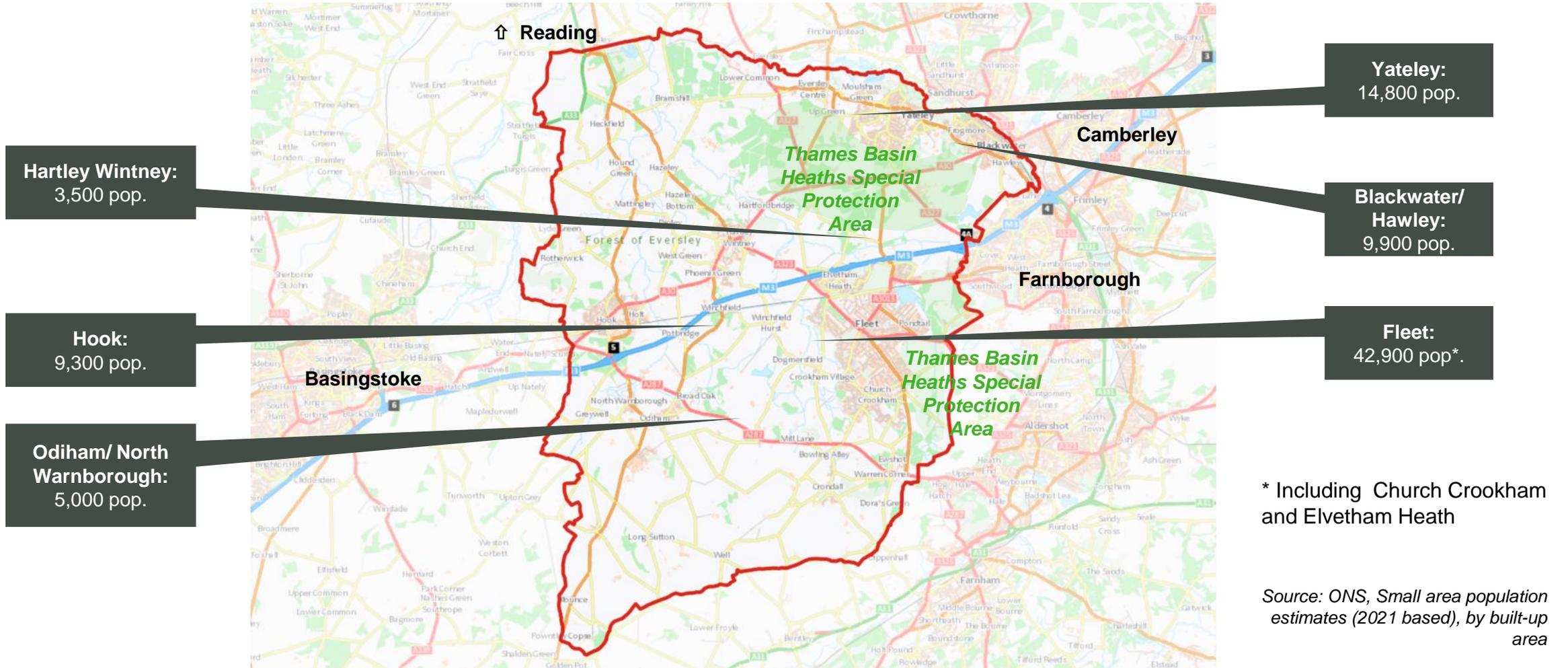
¹ Hart District Council (2020), *Hart Local Plan*, p.26

The main transport **infrastructure** axis runs east-west: the M3 and the South West Main Line both serve Fleet and Hook and provide good access to London and the neighbouring towns of Farnborough to the east and Basingstoke to the west. North-south links are secondary, although Blackwater is served by the Reading to Guildford rail line. Public transport connectivity *within* the district is somewhat weaker, especially to and from Hart's rural communities.

Connections with neighbouring districts are important: previous analysis has identified a functional economic area and a housing market area including Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath², and some strategic services (such as further education provision and major hospitals) are provided from larger centres outside the district, such as Farnborough and Basingstoke. Taking a wider regional perspective, Hart is located within a complex network of towns and connections to the west and southwest of London, with Guildford, Farnham and Reading and the M4 corridor all nearby.

² Strategic Housing Market Assessment for Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath (2016); Hart, Rushmoor and Surrey Heath Employment Land Review (2016)

Figure 2-1: Hart in context



Economic growth over time

In common with other parts of North Hampshire, economic growth accelerated from the mid-twentieth century, with substantial suburban development linked with good transport connections, the growth of defence-related activities (which in Hart itself include RAF Odiham and Gibraltar Barracks at Minley, and the concentration of defence industries at Cody Technology Park), and the development of the M3 Corridor as a location for corporate headquarters (such as Serco, based at Hook) and research and development activity.

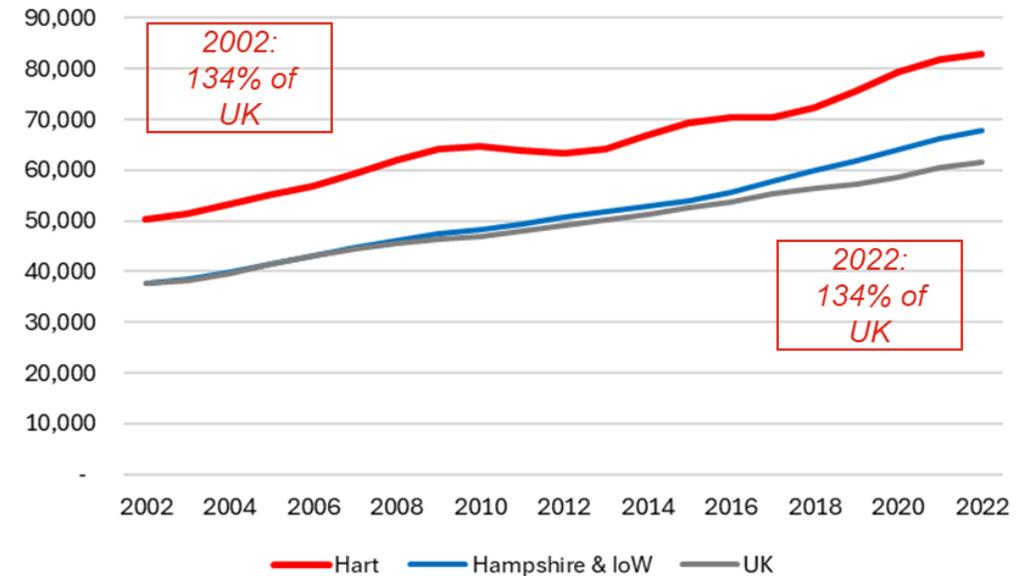
Today, Hart is seen as an attractive place to live, with a generally well-performing economy, which benefits from access to employment and business opportunities in London and neighbouring districts, as well as locally.

Relatively high productivity

Ultimately, productivity is the key driver of economic growth: increasing the amount of 'value' generated for the same amount of time worked is the way in which living standards are most likely to rise in the long run – and it is the route to increasing efficiency and reducing our carbon footprint. In recent years, the UK's productivity performance has been relatively weak, compared with other major economies, and there is a significant national focus on reducing this 'deficit'.

Average productivity is high in Hart. In 2022, the district generated some £82,889 in gross value added for every filled job, about 34% higher than the UK average. This relative advantage has been sustained over time, as Figure 2-2 illustrates, and Hart has similar characteristics to its neighbours.

Figure 2-1: GVA per filled job (current prices, £)



Source: ONS, Current price (smoothed) GVA (B) per filled job

Relatively high levels of pay and income

High productivity is reflected in relatively high level of pay. Gross median resident pay for full-time workers was £858 in 2023 - about 26% above UK average pay levels and placing Hart in the top 10% of UK local authority districts³.

3. ONS, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

Workplace pay – the weekly earnings of people working in Hart regardless of where they live – is somewhat lower, at £756. This is still substantially higher than the national average, but the implication is that some people living in Hart command higher wages through out-commuting. This reflects the district's net commuting outflow, easy access to London and the wider South East and the fact that higher-paid workers commute further on average.

High economic activity and a skilled workforce

Nationally, economic activity rates fell somewhat in the aftermath of the pandemic. In Hart however, **levels of economic activity have been consistently higher than the national average**: in 2023, around 90% of people aged between 16 and 64 were economically active (compared with 78% in the UK overall), and of them, about 88% were in employment⁴. That still leaves perhaps a thousand or so people in the district who are currently economically inactive, but who would like to be able to work if they could: helping them to secure the right health and other support to access work will be especially important in a tight labour market.

Hart has a generally well-qualified resident population. In 2023, 54% of people aged 16-64 were qualified to RQF4+ (essentially degree level), compared with around 47% nationally⁵. This places Hart in the top quartile of local authority districts in the UK.

The qualifications profile has improved gradually over time, as older workers (generally with fewer formal qualifications) leave the labour market and younger ones join. But Hart's qualifications 'advantage' has been consistent over the long term.

In general, skills provision in Hart is highly dependent on institutions in neighbouring districts, reflecting proximity to larger towns: for example, Farnborough College of Technology is the main further education provider for the area. However, there has been recent success in bringing new FE provision to Hart, as highlighted below:

Hart Professional College

While neighbouring centres such as Farnborough are generally easily accessible to people in Hart, the district itself has a large (and growing) population which could benefit from more immediate access to learning opportunities. Creating a new centre for further education has therefore been a long-standing policy objective.

Following a review of local demand, Farnborough College of Technology established **Hart Professional College** in 2023. Using space within Hart District Council's offices, it represents a partnership between the College and the Council and provides a new facility in Fleet town centre. Currently, Hart Professional College has around 250 students in accounting, education and teaching, management and human resources and marketing, with a focus on adult learners in subjects that are complementary to those on offer at the main Farnborough campus.

There is high demand for the offer at Hart Professional College. There are also opportunities for an adult education and 'social learning' centre, which are currently being explored.

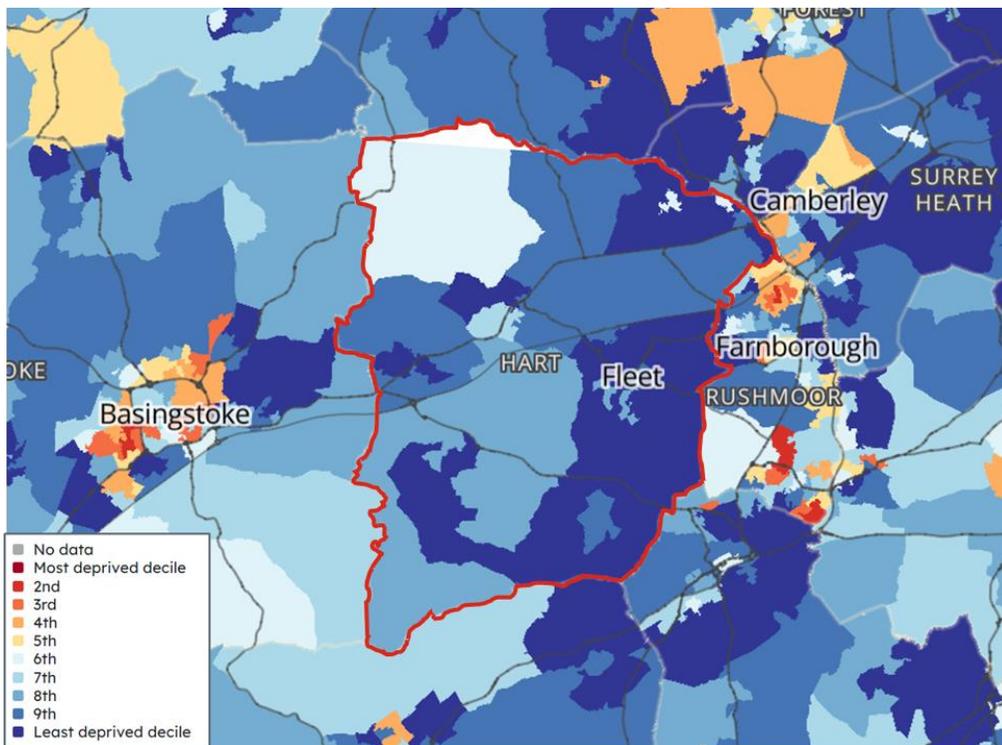
4. ONS, Annual Population Survey

5. ONS, Annual Population Survey

Relatively few concentrations of deprivation...

Reflecting the pay data highlighted above, there are few concentrations of deprivation in Hart (in contrast to some neighbouring districts). According to the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation the most recent Government analysis of estimated relative deprivation levels), all neighbourhoods in the district are in the least deprived 30% nationally:

Figure 2-3: Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019



Source: MHCLG. Output of the Consumer Data Research Centre

... But a rising affordability challenge

However, data can hide specific local issues: during consultation as part of this strategy, partners highlighted the challenges that are often faced by people experiencing disadvantage in places that are generally affluent and often have a relatively high cost of living.

This is reinforced by Hart's very high – and increasing – house prices. The median house price in Hart was £467,000 in 2023 – 61% higher than the England average of £290,000. This differential has remained broadly constant over time, as prices have risen rapidly, both nationally and locally. Consequently, the 'affordability ratio' (the ratio between median house prices and median resident incomes) has also risen: the 2023 data show house prices at 9.92 times median earnings, compared with 8.26 times nationally)⁶.

The affordability ratio reflects Hart's very high median resident earnings – so it is actually substantially lower than in some other parts of the South East, even though median house prices are at around the same level. But there will be many people earning much less, perhaps especially in jobs providing goods and services to meet locally-generated demand. The overall affordability ratio is likely to underplay the significant affordability challenge for those in jobs commanding wages closer to the national average, and in attracting younger people to the district.

6. MHCLG

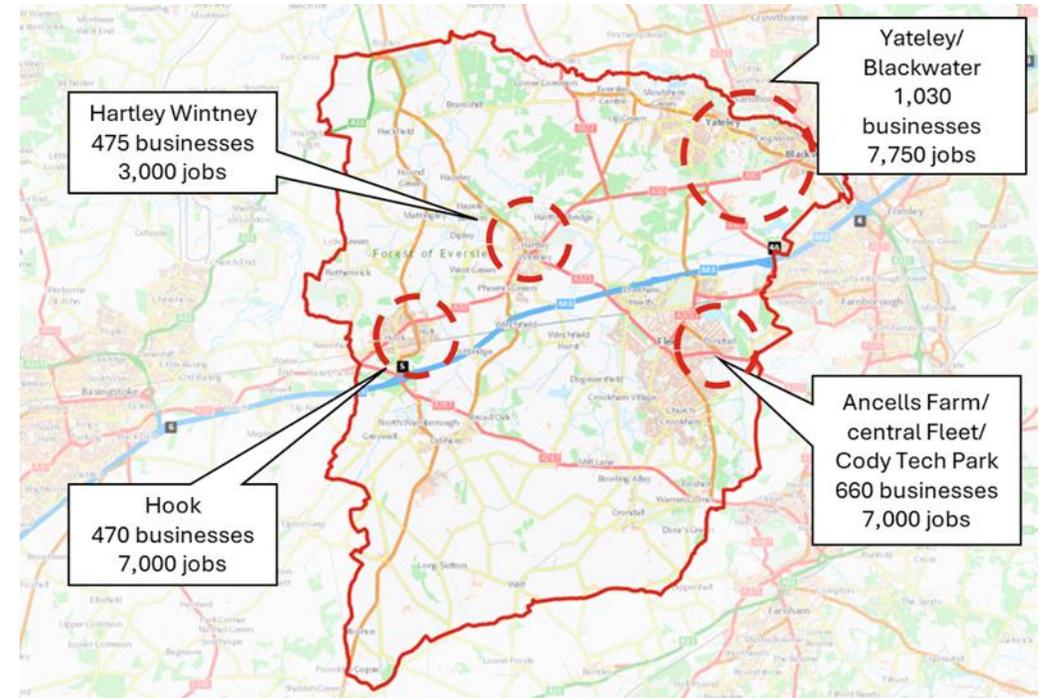
A large and active small business community... but growth in the business stock has been relatively slow

There were around 4,890 businesses in Hart in 2024⁷. Around 87% of businesses were ‘micro’ enterprises employing fewer than nine people – a somewhat higher share of the overall business stock than in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight or the UK as a whole.

The data show a mixed picture in relation to Hart’s business base. On the one hand, the overall stock of businesses was essentially static in Hart in the decade to 2024⁸, the number of business starts as a percentage of total stock was somewhat lower than the national average, and self-employment rates are also relatively low.

On the other, ‘enterprise density’ (the number of businesses relative to the working age population) is substantially higher in Hart than it is elsewhere, and operators of managed business space (such as UBC in Fleet) report high demand. Hart also has several business networks, many of them informal and focused on locally-based collaboration: consultees highlighted how these have expanded in recent years.

Figure 2-4: Key concentrations of employment



Source: ONS, BRES; UK Business Count

7. ONS, UK Business Count
8. ONS, Business Demography

Hart has some distinctive sectoral strengths – and some important larger businesses

Hart has a distinctive sectoral profile, which reflects some important technology strengths. Despite the general orientation to small and micro businesses, this is underpinned by some key larger firms.

Information and communications accounted for some 2,500 jobs in 2022⁹, taking a much larger share of employment than the sector did nationally. There has been quite a substantial loss of employment in the sector in recent years, partly as a result of Virgin Media's decision to relocate its headquarters from Hook to Reading in 2019. But there is still an important concentration of 'digital' businesses in Hart: these include **CV Library**, the online CV database and job applications brokerage service, which was established in Fleet and is still headquartered at the Waterfront Business Park as it has expanded internationally; and the cybersecurity provider **KHIPU Networks**.

Professional, scientific and technical services account for a further 4,000 jobs. There are several advanced technology firms based in Hart: examples include **Surface Technology International**, based in Hook, which develops specialist electronic equipment for use in the satellite and space exploration sector; **Sonardyne International**, based at Yateley, which is an established technology firm specialising in robotics and sensors for underwater exploration; and **Spectro JetCare**, based at Odiham, which provides laboratory services and analysis to the aviation,

marine and industrial sectors.

4,500 people are employed in **administrative and support services**, a large sector which encompasses a wide range of activities. **Serco**, the multinational defence, health and public services management and outsourcing company, maintains its headquarters at Bartley Wood Business Park in Hook.

Hart's largest sector in employment terms is **accommodation and food service**, which has also shown rapid growth in recent years. Within this sector, there is a growing presence in the luxury hotel market, for example at Heckfield Place. Elsewhere in the district, there are other emerging opportunities in the leisure sector, such as in the planned expansion of Blackbushe Airport.

Some of the businesses highlighted above play an important role in the exploitation of new technology, and the presence of some key headquarters facilities and the district's sectoral profile contribute to its strong productivity performance. Consultees considered that these strengths are often unrecognised and are somewhat 'under the radar', given the higher profile of the business concentrations at (for example) Farnborough and Reading. **But the range of larger and technologically distinctive firms in the district demonstrate that it is not (just) a high-quality residential area within a wider innovation corridor: it is a key part of that corridor, and integral to it.**

9. ONS, BRES

Looking to the future: Employment demand...

Jobs growth has been (according to the data) relatively weak in Hart over the past five years, with losses in the district's areas of strength in professional and scientific services and information and communications offset by growth in hospitality and health and social care – the latter reflecting long-term growth in healthcare demand¹⁰.

However, regional projections for the former Enterprise M3 LEP for 2020-35 developed by the *Skills Imperative* project suggest that the future direction of employment growth ought to play to Hart's relative advantages¹¹. Sectorally, growth is anticipated in information and communications and professional services, with the strongest growth forecast in accommodation and food service.

In terms of occupations, net growth is anticipated in managerial and professional occupations (which are already well represented within the Hart workforce), as well as in caring and personal service occupations and customer service.

These will be offset by net declines in administrative and secretarial roles, sales and 'elementary' occupations. But *replacement* demand is much greater than the number of new openings. Taking replacement as well as net demand into account, total demand is positive in all occupational groups, with rising demand over time for higher-level qualifications.

10. Although note that sectoral job numbers are often very volatile at small geographies.

11. Cambridge Econometrics/ Warwick University (2022), [Skills Imperative: Labour market and skills projections 2020-35](#)

... in the context of demographic and technology change

However, the nature of occupations, and that of the workforce itself, is likely to change substantially in the context of demographic and technological change. In particular:

- **Hart's population is ageing rapidly.** National projections anticipate growth of 7% in Hart's population between 2018 and 2043. But the 'working age' population is expected to fall by around 1.7% over the same period. This represents a net loss of about 1,000 people aged 16-64 – although the concept of 'working age' is becoming more fluid as more people expect to work for longer, and more flexibly¹².
- **Workforce preferences are evolving**, especially linked with the choices of younger workers to locate in larger centres, a factor which is suggested as relevant to Virgin Media's disinvestment in 2019, and which was cited by businesses in consultation as a challenge in recruiting skilled staff. Linked with rising housing affordability challenges and a rapidly ageing population, attracting and retaining younger people is likely to be an important challenge.
- **Decarbonisation and technology change will lead to new infrastructure and workforce demand.** This includes potential increased demand for power supply to support Hart's information and communications sector and (in common with the rest of the country) new skills requirements for a range of sectors linked with net zero transition.

12. Note that Hampshire County Council's Small Area Population Forecasts (which take account of dwellings supply) anticipate 2.7% growth in the 16-64 population in 2023-30 (compared with 5.% in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight)

Implications for the future supply of employment space

Hart has some important employment locations. Recent investment in the Meadows Business Park at Blackwater and Cody Technology Park demonstrates that there is a market for continued improvement and expansion. Vacancy rates are relatively low (reported at 7.8% of total Grade A stock in the Blackwater Valley¹³), reinforced by the loss of some older stock to residential uses.

Agents and developers consulted as part of this strategy considered that there is evidence of demand for smaller-scale office space and growth in the flexible managed workspace market, for which Hart's town centres could offer an attractive proposition, if linked with a wider range of amenities: *"The focus has shifted from simply providing a place to work to creating an environment that makes the journey worthwhile through enhanced amenities, collaborative spaces, and engaging workplace cultures"*¹⁴.

However, there is much weaker demand for larger offices. This is consistent with the national picture, but it also relates to the tendency for demand to coalesce around the larger centres locally, for example in Farnborough, where there is a greater choice of product. Recent analysis of the market also noted that *"with continued increases in build costs, even modest refurbishments are looking unviable without rental levels increasing significantly... [So] with no significant new developments and with offices sold for alternative uses, there has been a reduction in overall office stock"*¹⁵.

Industrial demand is seen as generally stronger – see, for example recent investment in redeveloping a former office park at Bartley Junction in Hook. This is consistent with the wider, sub-regional picture, which recognises 'grow on' demand from locally based firms.

Supporting national growth priorities

The National Planning Policy Framework notes the need for development to "meet the needs of a modern economy, including by identifying suitable locations for uses such as laboratories, gigafactories, data centres, digital infrastructure, freight and logistics"¹⁶.

The evidence base for the new Local Plan will need to consider potential demand for these uses carefully, recognising that some sources of demand will be national and regional, rather than purely local. In relation to logistics, the M3 is not generally a prime logistics corridor (compared with the M1/M6 triangle in the Midlands or the M4 around Swindon). However, Hart does have an established presence in information technology, and stakeholders consulted as part of this study highlighted the need to ensure sufficient power capacity to enable future data centre and related development. It will be valuable to consider this further as part of the Local Plan evidence base.

13. Churchod & Co (2024), [Office Market Update – Q4 2024](#)

14. Vail Williams (2025), [Market Insight](#)

15. Churchod & Co (2024)

16. NPPF (December 2024), para. 86(c)

Bringing it together: Hart's economic opportunities and challenges

Looking across this overview of the state of Hart's economy and its future prospects for growth:

- **Overall, the district has a well-performing economy.** It is highly productive, and this is reflected in high levels of pay, economic activity and workforce skills.
- **There are high levels of representation in relatively 'high value' activities,** with some important headquarters facilities and technology businesses. There are indications that job numbers have fallen in some key sectors like information and communications – but they remain areas of relative strength.
- **There is a strong small business base.** There is a relatively large number of businesses per capita, and the SME community benefits from several informal and business-led networks.
- **Hart is strongly integrated into the surrounding sub-regional economy.** There is a net commuting outflow, and connections across the Blackwater Valley, Basingstoke and the wider South East are important.
- **Some of Hart's strengths are 'under the radar',** and are perhaps not as well recognised as they should be, in the context of larger neighbouring centres.

Looking to the future:

- **There should be no complacency, but Hart's areas of relative strength should align with future growth opportunities.** Digital and defence-related industries (for example) are highlighted as important in the new national industrial strategy, and Hart (and North Hampshire more broadly) is likely to be important in the context of national strengths. There should be scope to raise Hart's profile as an investment location.
- **There are challenges ahead linked with relative affordability and demographic change.** Attracting and retaining younger people is likely to be increasingly critical. In that context, the right mix of housing and investing in Hart's environmental, cultural and quality of life offer will be important. But an older population will also mean a changing market for services – and an older workforce that will be economically active for longer, in the context of a potentially shrinking 16-64 population.
- **The mix of demand for employment space is changing.** Structural changes have led to a contraction in demand for general office space. But there is still a need for flexible space for smaller businesses and for industrial space.
- **In a growing economy, it will be important to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to reach their potential.** Economic activity rates are very high – but there are still people who want a job but are unable to access work, and there are people in low-paid work who would benefit from progression in workplace – benefiting businesses within the Borough as well as wider community prosperity.

3. Towards 2035: A vision for the future

“Hart will be a prosperous and vibrant area, with an excellent environment and quality of life. At the heart of one of the UK’s leading innovation corridors, new investment will complement a dynamic local business community. People will choose to live and work in an area that positively builds on its success and is sustainable for the future”

Unpacking the vision

The vision statement above builds on the evidence outlined in the previous chapter. It seeks to secure widespread **prosperity**: economic growth is a necessary element of this, but environmental quality and the conditions for quality of life are fundamental too.

The vision places Hart within its wider sub-regional context, recognising the role of the M3 corridor and links across North Hampshire and into Surrey and Berkshire. It welcomes new external investment as well as local business growth, and it seeks to sustain and build on Hart’s current success.

From the vision to action

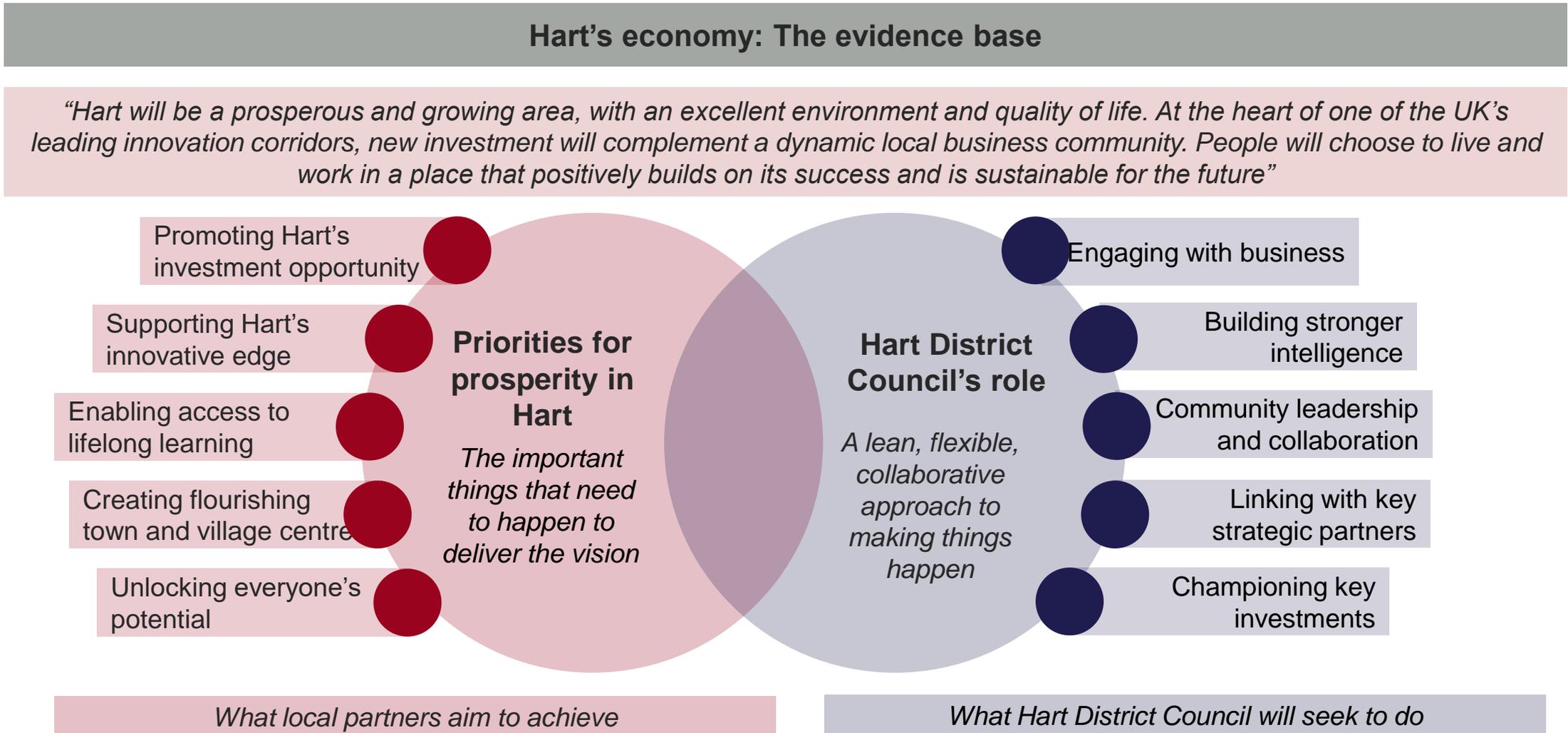
The diagram on the next page outlines a series of priorities to deliver the vision. These are structured in two categories:

- First, **priorities for prosperity in Hart**: the key areas of focus and the actions that will need to happen to deliver the vision. Hart District Council will have a role in directly delivering *some* of them, but all will involve a range of partners, and in most cases, the Council will not be the lead delivery organisation.
- Second, **local government’s role**: the specific things that Hart District Council can do to help realise the vision, described as a *“lean, flexible approach to collaboration and making things happen”*

Chapters 4 and 5 introduce the actions and priorities under each of these categories, explaining why they are important and what needs to happen.

Across all of these, we also need to be flexible. The next decade will see changes in the economic cycle and in Government policy and funding, and we need to be agile and responsive to new opportunities. So our priorities aren’t prescriptive: they provide a framework to guide what we will do.

Figure 3-1: Strategic framework



4. Priorities for prosperity in Hart

The first set of priorities relate to *“the important things that need to happen to deliver the vision”*.

Promoting Hart’s investment opportunity

Hart is a highly successful district, with leading, technology-focused businesses and recent investment in key assets such as Cody Technology Park. But there is evidence that its assets and opportunities are less well known than they should be. There is a risk that these become overlooked, opportunities to take forward more ambitious plans for the redevelopment of commercial space are missed, and investments that could sustain and drive Hart’s productive economy deteriorate over time.

In the first instance, a key action is to **develop a prospectus** setting out the district’s potential, including specific sites and emerging projects, as well as cross-district opportunities, and ensuring that this is promoted and understood. Given the wider functional economic area of which Hart is an integral part, this should be integrated with the wider opportunity in the Blackwater Valley and Basingstoke.

Building on this, **early and proactive engagement with investors** will help to identify specific barriers to growth – in relation to power supply, for example – and could enable more ambitious and integrated schemes to come forward over time.

Supporting Hart’s innovative edge

The vision to 2035 sees the district *“at the heart of one of the UK’s leading innovation corridors”*, and Hart has a strong track record of commercially-driven innovation, especially in the digital and defence sectors.

Sustaining and enhancing this will be important for local prosperity and national productivity. Alongside the promotion and understanding of Hart’s investment opportunities, it will be important to:

- **Enable smaller, innovative businesses to grow locally.** There is already a dynamic local business base and Hart is an attractive place to live and work, and while conventional office demand has changed fundamentally, there is still high demand for smaller business space. Enabling a supply of managed workspace (office and industrial) will help to support this, linked with efforts to build links between Hart’s active business networks.
- Alongside this, there may be scope to **develop enhanced innovation provision.** For example, an innovation centre combining space and innovation support could also contribute to the town centre offer (for example, in Fleet) and help to evolve perceptions of Hart as a location for growth. This may require some form of external public funding, although demand is likely to be positive.

Creating flourishing town and village centres

Hart is fortunate in having an attractive network of towns, larger villages and small rural communities that offer a good range of services and contribute to an excellent quality of life. Over the past decade, town centre functions have changed as a result of structural changes in the retail market, and while Fleet and Hart's other centres have been relatively resilient, they have faced challenges in adjusting to changing demand.

Hart's town and village centres form an important part of the district's investment offer, as places where there is scope to locate cultural, leisure and commercial opportunities in accessible locations and as places that reflect local diversity and distinctiveness. Over the next decade, it will be important to:

- **Concentrate services in the town and larger village centres** to build 'critical mass' and create a more diverse offer (for example, through the expansion of further and adult education in Fleet, alongside the town's popular cultural facilities at the Harlington arts centre and potentially (as in the earlier priority) some form of innovation offer).
- **Develop private sector and community leadership in supporting town and village centre development and transformation.** In Fleet, there is already a successful Business Improvement District focused on the retail core, which has helped to drive forward joint working and shared initiatives in the town centre on relatively limited budgets. Hart is fortunate in having active community and business networks: alongside targeted project interventions, there is opportunity to build on this further.

Enabling access to lifelong learning

There is a highly-qualified workforce in Hart. But historically, the district has lacked further and higher education provision, and for sixth form provision most students travel outside the district.

Over the next decade, it will be important to:

- **Build on the adult further education offer currently made available at Hart Professional College.** The College is relatively new, but has expanded steadily and there is high demand: there ought to be scope for growth, linked with employer demand and where complementary to the wider FE offer in North Hampshire.
- **Link learning opportunities with the needs of an ageing population.** This applies both to the increasing need for re-skilling and up-skilling as people work for longer (much of which will be delivered commercially), and to the role that learning can play in promoting community participation – as noted earlier, potential has been identified for an adult education offer in Hart alongside Hart Professional College.

Unlocking everyone's potential

Finally, despite a generally buoyant jobs market, there are people who are unable to access work, but would wish to do so if conditions enabled them to – perhaps up to 1,000 people in Hart¹³. There are also far more people who would benefit from more opportunities to progress in work, or to take more hours. In a place characterised by low unemployment, recruitment challenges and, over the longer term, a static or falling working age population, making best use of everyone's potential is likely to be increasingly important.

In a relatively affluent place, with relatively small numbers experiencing disadvantage, there could be opportunities to develop innovative solutions, linked with Hart's active voluntary and community sector and its business networks, building on recent experience of delivering employment support activity funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

13. Data relating to the number of people currently economically active but who would want a job are not available for Hart. However, based on the data for Hampshire, numbers in Hart are likely to be 700-1,000. ONS, Annual Population Survey.

Hart District Council's role

The second set of priorities relate to Hart District Council's role, taking a “lean, flexible, collaborative approach to making things happen”.

Linked with the principles set out at the start of this strategy, the focus here is not on the Council's role as a major investor or funder. Instead, the Council should have a catalytic effect: working alongside other organisations to 'make the case' for Hart, securing external funding where possible and using its civic leadership role to bring partners together and identify solutions. This role recognises that *all* parts of the Council impact in some way on the district's future prosperity.

Over the next decade, Hart District Council will continue to:

- **Engage with business**, via the private sector-led networks that already exist, to facilitate good communications between the Council and business leaders.
- **Build intelligence** about the local economy. There may be an opportunity to do this over the next couple of years as a new evidence base is prepared to support the new Local Plan – updating (for example) the Council's intelligence on the demand and supply of employment sites and premises. There should also be scope to link with the intelligence base of Hampshire Prosperity Partnership as it becomes better established.

- **Support community leadership and collaboration**, recognising role that every part of the Council can play and linking up business relationship management.
- **Link with key strategic partners:** There are several key partners with which the Council needs to continue working. These include organisations with specific responsibilities that impact the priorities outlined in this strategy – such as Farnborough College of Technology in relation to further education, Hart Voluntary Action in respect of the district’s important community sector, and the business representative and networking groups.

In addition to these, ‘outward-facing’ partnerships will continue to be important, in relation to Basingstoke, the Blackwater Valley and the rest of Hampshire. Whatever the outcome of local and strategic governance arrangements in the context of the Government’s devolution agenda, Hart’s economy will continue to be integrated with that of its neighbours

in North Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire, and effective partnerships to make the most of these connections will be essential.

- **Champion key investments:** Finally, the Council has an important role in engaging with major proposed investments and ensuring that they are as ambitious as they can be in securing future prosperity, and in ensuring that barriers to delivery are overcome, linked with the first strategic priority to *promote Hart’s investment opportunity*.

5. Moving forward and keeping track

Although this strategy sets out a series of high-level priorities and 'ways of working' within the Council, rather than a series of specific projects, it is important that progress is monitored.

To do this, it is proposed that:

- A **high level framework** linked with the five 'priorities for prosperity in Hart' will capture those shorter term, specific actions arising from the strategy (such as the delivery of an investment prospectus). This can then be regularly updated as new and sequential actions are identified.
- In parallel, a **regular review** of the 'priorities for prosperity' will help to take stock of progress against each area, and consider the extent to

which the Council is evolving its role. While this could be undertaken internally, it may be helpful to discuss progress with the business networks.

- It will also be helpful to refer to a **contextual 'dashboard' of economic indicators**. To avoid duplication, this should be readily available from Hampshire County Council or Hampshire Prosperity Partnership, but it would be useful for the Council and key business partners to review it, perhaps alongside the regular review of progress against the identified priorities.



Hart District Council

Civic Offices

Harlington Way

Fleet GU51 4AE

01252 622122

enquiries@hart.gov.uk

www.hart.gov.uk