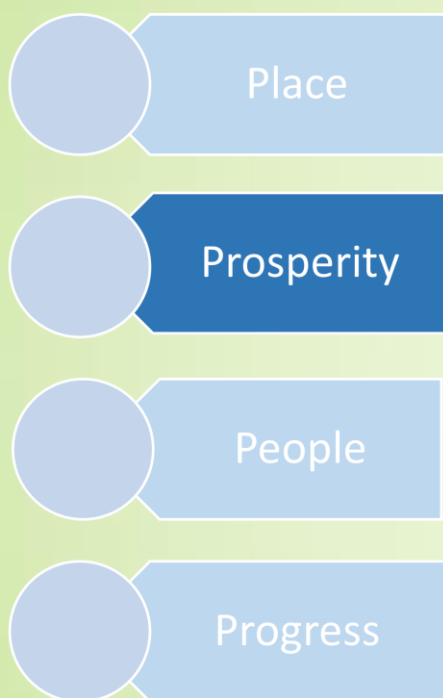


WDC Economic Development Strategy:
Draft for Consultation



Wycombe - A welcome home for business

Wycombe District Economic
Development Strategy
2017 -27

Wycombe: A welcome home for business
Wycombe District Council Economic Development Strategy
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Introduction

Wycombe District Council wants to create a prosperous and dynamic local economy that enables ambitious local companies to grow, attracting new investment and supporting economic development in a sustainable and inclusive way. We want to balance growth with improvements to quality of life securing investment in our town centres and villages to create high quality housing and attractive public realm and green space. We want our District to continue to be one of Europe’s most attractive suburban environments providing easy access to London and the benefits of proximity to the Chilterns’ area of outstanding natural beauty.

We want the District to appeal to a wide range of people, providing excellent cultural, leisure, sporting, retail and recreational opportunities and supporting active lifestyles. We also want to build on the strengths of our cultural diversity, making our District a welcoming place for visitors, enabling all our local communities to benefit from economic growth and share in prosperity. We want to be known as a ‘can do’ community; a connected community; a community that supports enterprise and welcomes creative people and entrepreneurial businesses. And we want to support the growth of a sustainable, low carbon economy that uses clean technology and adapts to the challenges of climate change.

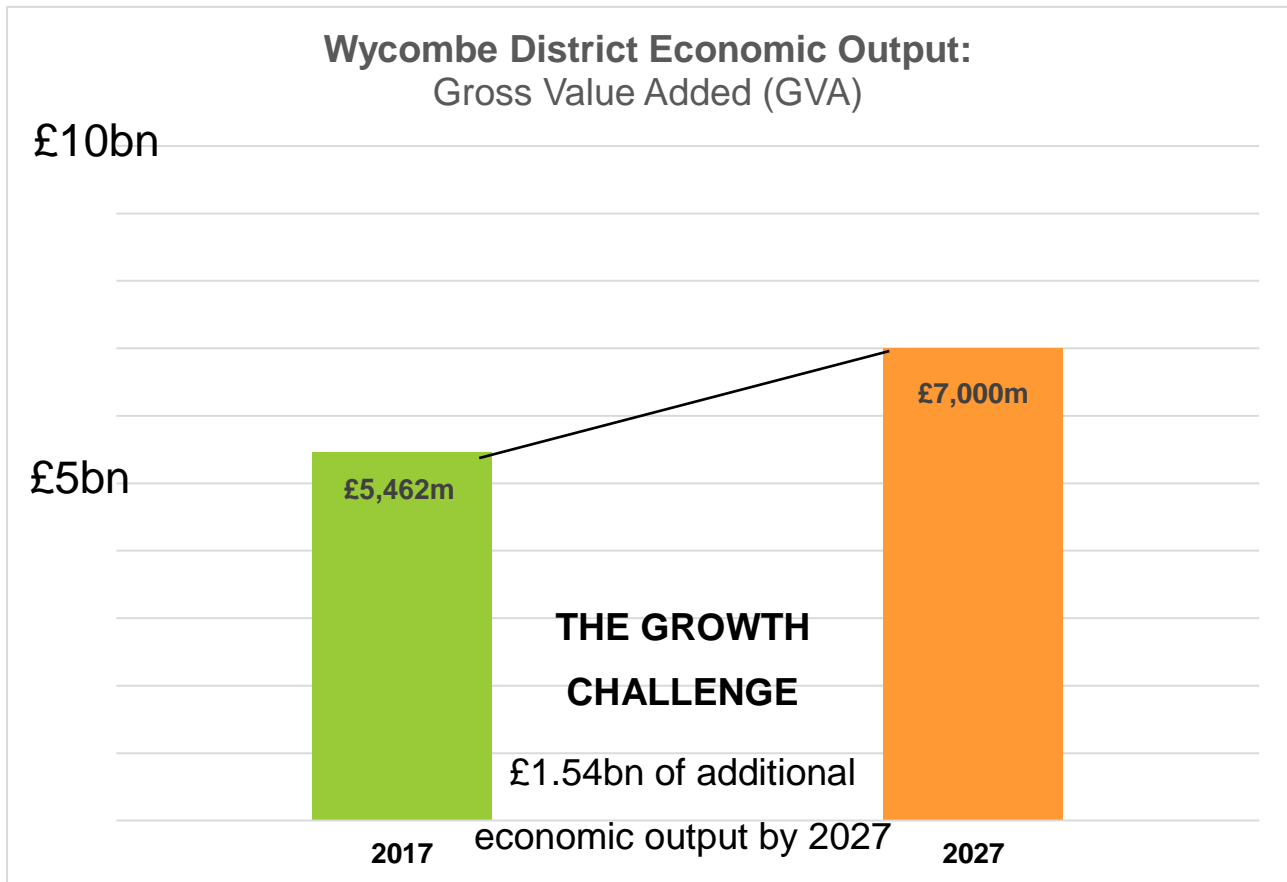
Economic growth is influenced by three primary factors: population growth rates of economic activity and the productivity of employees and businesses. Productivity can be enhanced through investment in innovation, skills and technology.

Our District’s population is set to grow significantly over the next 15 years and the publication version of the local plan anticipates that 10,900 new homes will be built across the District during this period. Growth will be needed to ensure people can secure jobs; fewer are dependent upon benefits and that our companies embrace innovation and technology to boost their productivity and provide higher value products and services.

The District’s economic output in 2016/17 by gross value added is estimated to be £5,462m. We plan to set an ambitious growth target of just under 3% per annum over the next decade. The challenge is for Wycombe to become a £7bn GVA economy by 2027 as shown in table 1. If we are to achieve that challenge Wycombe needs to offer an attractive environment for new business investment as well as a great place for people to live and work in and raise future generations. Our vision is not solely about making Wycombe economically competitive but helping it become a more successful place, with strong and cohesive local communities and a great quality of life.

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Table 1



Vision

If we are to address the challenge of growth we need a clear vision for our District and a strategy for moving forward.

This document—*Wycombe: A welcome home for business*— sets out the Council’s economic development strategy. It explains our approach to economic development for the coming decade and offers a vision for the sustainable growth of the local economy; describing our ambition for the investment, jobs and infrastructure needed to deliver a resilient economy that is fit for the future.

Wycombe is a welcoming, creative and enterprising community: a great place to live, work, play and visit; or to start and grow a business.

The strategy supports the Council’s Corporate Plan objectives and builds upon the Wycombe District Local Plan publication version which sets the land use planning framework for the District over the next 15 years; it also complements the Buckinghamshire

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Growth Strategy and strategic economic plan <http://www.buckstville.co.uk/about-btv/strategic-economic-plan> and the government's Industrial Strategy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/the-uks-industrial-strategy>; The five foundations of the industrial strategy are shown at appendix 1.

Our strategy is built upon 10 strategic objectives. These are set out below and explained in further detail later.

1. Support **growth and internationalisation**.
2. Provide quality **business accommodation**.
3. Boost the **business birth rate** and entrepreneurship.
4. Develop our **visitor economy and tourism**.
5. Develop the **skills and talent** that employers need.
6. Deliver **new housing** on Council and Privately-owned sites.
7. Encourage **research and innovation** to boost growth.
8. Use **urban design** to make our town centres better places.
9. Ensure seamless **business support services**.
10. Improve strategic **transport and ICT connectivity**.

Our aim is to secure a strong and sustainable future through a diverse and entrepreneurial local economy with strengths across a range of sectors and high levels of company start up and growth. We aim to take advantage of Wycombe's excellent geographic location (appendix 2) and strengthen our competitiveness on the back of planned infrastructure investment, including the expansion of Heathrow Airport, the development of Cross-rail and East-West rail, the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway and links to HS2.

Wycombe enjoys fantastic locational advantages; it lies on the western spur of the *Golden Triangle*- the world class cluster of Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and London where 48% of the UK's Higher Education research funding is invested. It is also within 30 minutes of the dynamic, commercial heart of the City of London - Europe's most productive urban economy - and close to the high-tech businesses of the Thames Valley and M4 corridor.

Collaboration will be vital to the delivery of the strategy. No one partner or organisation has sufficient influence, power or resources to develop the local economy on its own. We will need a common purpose and shared leadership across businesses, the public sector and local communities to help ensure our local economy continues to prosper. The Council will work closely with its partners in the public sector, the business community, third sector organisations, our local communities and central government towards shared goals and outcomes.

The strategy forms part of the Council's wider corporate plan and role in community leadership which has four key themes:

- **Place:** a great place to live, work and play
- **People:** Happy, Healthy, Independent
- **Prosperity:** Building sustainable growth and prosperity

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- **Progress –which is about how we work and being effective, efficient, easy to do business with.**

We want to create the environment and conditions to support economic growth providing better employment opportunities, greater prosperity and well-being and a better quality of life for all. The Council’s main role will be to invest in development and regeneration and engage with local businesses to address barriers to growth and help companies fulfil their potential. We will also work with Buckinghamshire County Council, Highways England and Network Rail to improve transport links; with the education sector to tackle skills development and the local enterprise partnership to support business innovation.

Economic Background

As District Wycombe has some real strengths to build upon: a culturally diverse community, a strong business base, excellent transport links to London, Heathrow and the UK rail and motorway network and some very attractive places to live both urban and rural.

Our local economy is in relatively good shape. However, in a fast moving world with technology and markets forever changing we cannot afford to be complacent. Office of National Statistics (ONS) data shows that of the 109,300 people in the District of working age (16-64)in 2015, 97,600 were economically active: a rate of 84.8% compared with 81% for the South East (SE) and 77.8% for Great Britain (GB) as a whole.

Earnings

Gross weekly earnings of the District’s residents were £606.70in 2016 compared with £582.00 for the South East and £541.00 for GB.

Across Buckinghamshire gross disposable household income (GDHI) was £25,312 in 2015 the 10th highest of the 173 NUTS 3* regions in the UK. However, recent growth in GDHI has been among the slowest in the country, perhaps as a result of high commuting and housing costs affecting disposable income.

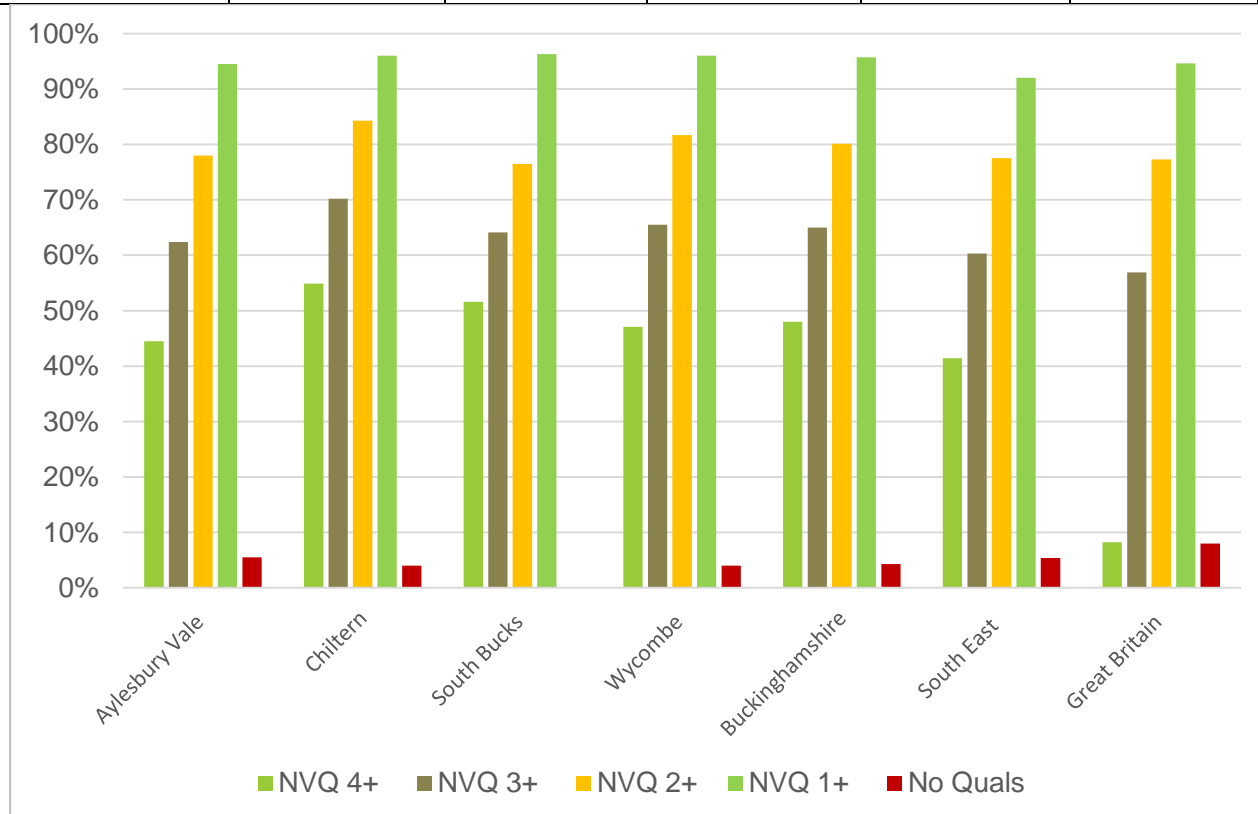
Qualifications

Our District has a better qualified workforce than the South East or GB (Table 2). 47.1% of those aged 16-64 are qualified to at least NVQ4 or above (broadly equivalent academically to Higher National Diploma level) compared with 41.4% for the South East and 38.2% in GB.

Table 2 Source: Annual Population Survey, ONS 2017										
	NVQ4+		NVQ 3+		NVQ 2+		NVQ 1 +		No Quals	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Aylesbury Vale	52,800	44.5%	74,150	62.4%	94,795	78%	112,100	94.5%	6,500	5.5%
Chiltern	30,100	54.9%	38,630	70.2%	47,235	84.3%	52,600	96.0%	2,200	4.0%
South Bucks	20,900	51.6%	26,310	64.1%	32,395	76.5%	39,800	96.3%	-	-
Wycombe	51,600	47.1%	72,240	65.5%	91,830	81.7%	105,100	96.0%	4,400	4.0%

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Buckinghamshire	155,300 48.0%	211,780 65%	266,210 80.1%	309,500 95.7%	13,800 4.3%
South East	2,286,700 41.4%	3,358,490 60.3%	4,421,155 77.5%	5,217,800 92%	300,700 5.4%
Great Britain	15,190,600 38.2%	22,879,930 56.9%	30,720,065 77.3%	36,546,200 94.6%	3,195,300 8.0%



Unemployment

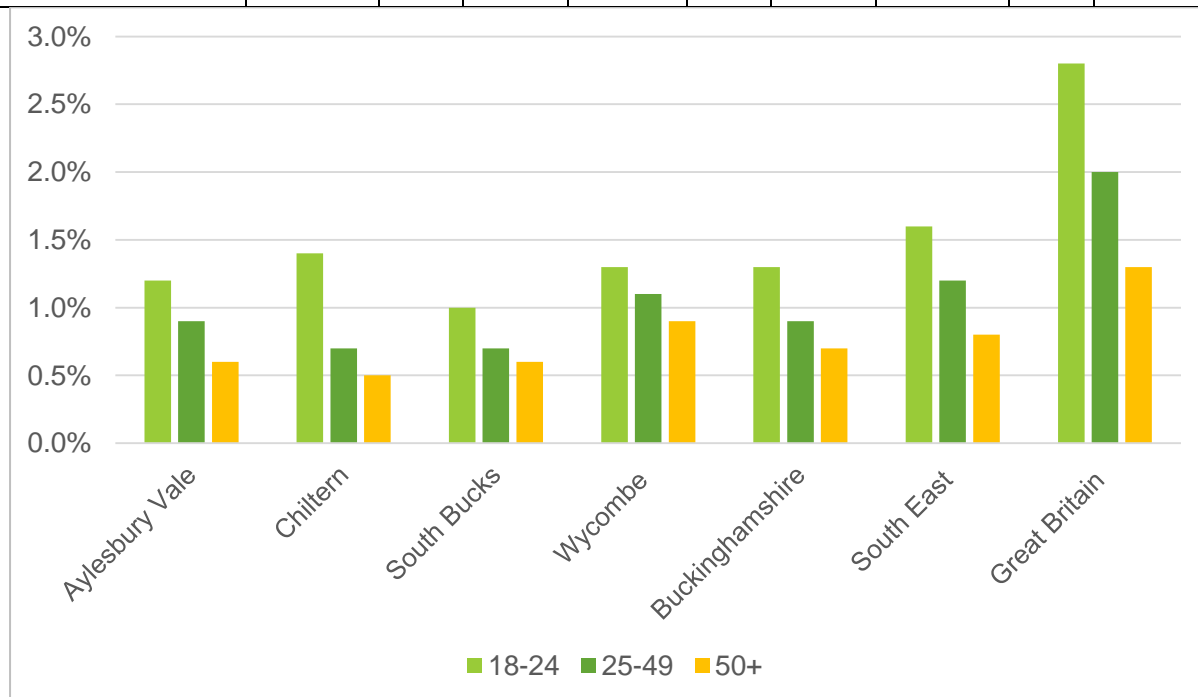
The District has a lower percentage of benefits claimants (6.8%) than both the South East (8.5%) and GB (11.3%) and a lower unemployment rate (3.8%). In May 2017 there were 1,245 people out of work in the District on Job Seekers Allowance or Universal Credit. Wycombe is 63rd out of 380 local authority areas in the UK for unemployment amongst 18-24 year olds but performs less well for the over 50 age group where its ranking is 176th (Table 3).

(*NUTS EU geographic coding system: Nomenclature des unites territoriales statistiques)

Table 3 Claimant Count by age group May 2017 : Source DWP									
	18-24			25-49			50+		
	No	%	Rank	No	%	Rank	No	%	Rank
Aylesbury Vale	170	1.2	51	585	0.9	82	300	0.6	98
Chiltern	80	1.4	79	205	0.7	48	115	0.5	33
South Bucks	45	1.0	36	155	0.7	44	110	0.6	85
Wycombe	185	1.3	63	670	1.1	123	390	0.9	176

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Buckinghamshire	480	1.3	4	1,625	0.9	7	915	0.7	9
South East	12,425	1.6	1	33,955	1.2	1	18,460	0.8	1
Great Britain	160,530	2.8	-	425	2.0	-	198,680	1.3	-



On 15th August 2017, there were 2,558 full and part time job vacancies within a 10 mile radius of High Wycombe that had been posted by JobCentreplus within the previous 30 days on the *Universal Jobmatch* database.

While unemployment is generally below the national average data from JobCentreplus shows there are some pockets of higher than national average unemployment levels in the Desborough and Cressex areas of High Wycombe. The loss of potential economic output represented by people who are economically inactive including around 7,500 or so who are receiving benefits is significant: perhaps as much as £250m per annum. Where individuals want to secure employment and are able to work they should be encouraged to do so; it will be important that investment in training can be targeted on this group to improve their employability and help them gain the skills employers are looking for.

The Business Base

The District is largely an economy of micro and small businesses and has a similar business profile to the South East as a whole. In 2016 there were 10,455 VAT/PAYE registered businesses. 89.8% of all businesses were micro firms, employing fewer than 10 employees, including sole traders. In addition, there were 13,100 self-employed workers.

There were 160 medium sized firms (of 50-249 employees) and 40 large enterprises (with 250 employees or more). Wycombe’s rate of new firm formation of 87.9 per 10,000 residents places the District at 68th out of 380 local authority areas in Great Britain. In April,

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2016 the District had 5,060 rateable properties with just over 1.6 million square metres of floor-space.

The local economy is quite diverse with strengths in advanced engineering; life sciences/ medical devices/biopharmaceuticals; software/ IT/ telecoms; and Food & Drink. In 2014, the most recent available data, Wycombe's exports were worth £1.36 bn.

Population

A key challenge for the local economy over the coming years is its demography. The District has a large group of post war baby-boomers around retirement age. This could exacerbate labour shortages and create skills gaps. Whilst older people can make an important economic contribution the concern is that a larger number of very elderly people will need to be supported by a smaller proportion of employees in the traditional economically active age groups (age 16 -64).

Since mid-2005, the UK population aged 65 and over has increased by 21%, and the population aged 85 and over by 31%; with an increase of 54% in males aged over 85 and an increase of 21% increase for females. Such changing demographics can put pressure on health and social care budgets and increase demand for nursing and care staff. They could also open up opportunities for deploying new healthcare technology applications and keeping older people physically active and digitally connected.

Housing

The District faces a serious housing delivery challenge. Land supply is constrained by the green belt and the area of outstanding natural beauty and the District's topography is quite challenging with a lot of steep sites that are difficult to build on.

The publication version of the local plan anticipates a need for 550 new homes to be built each year over the next 15 year period - around 25% higher than current rates housing starts and completions in the District. At the current rate of construction (Table 4) there will not be enough new homes to meet future demand. There is also a serious shortage of affordable housing both nationally and locally which poses a threat to sustainable growth.

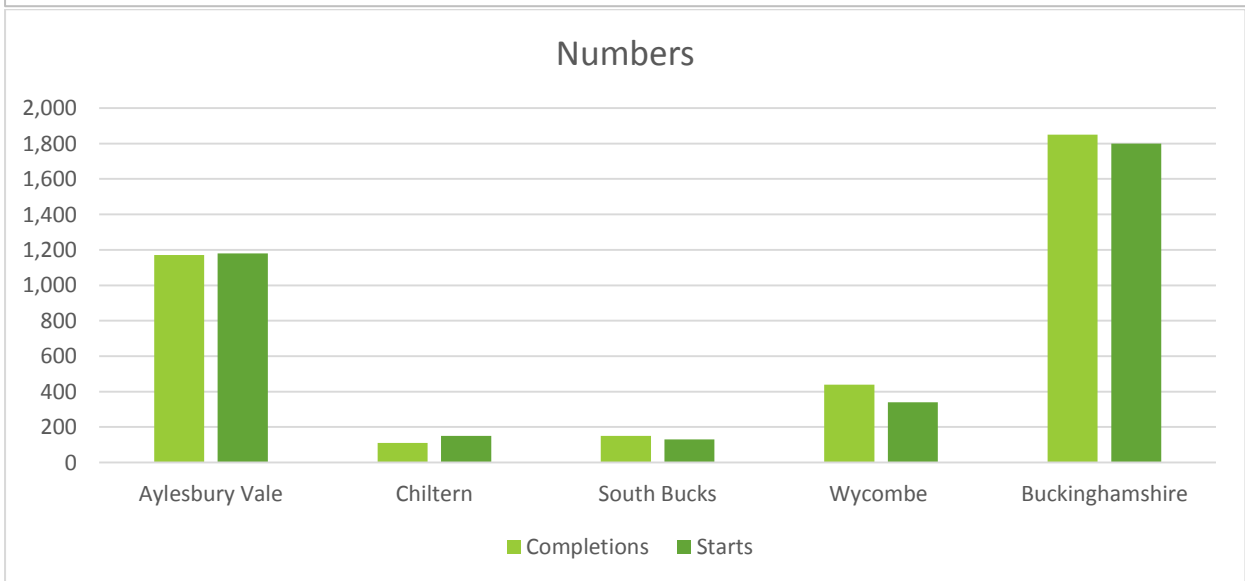
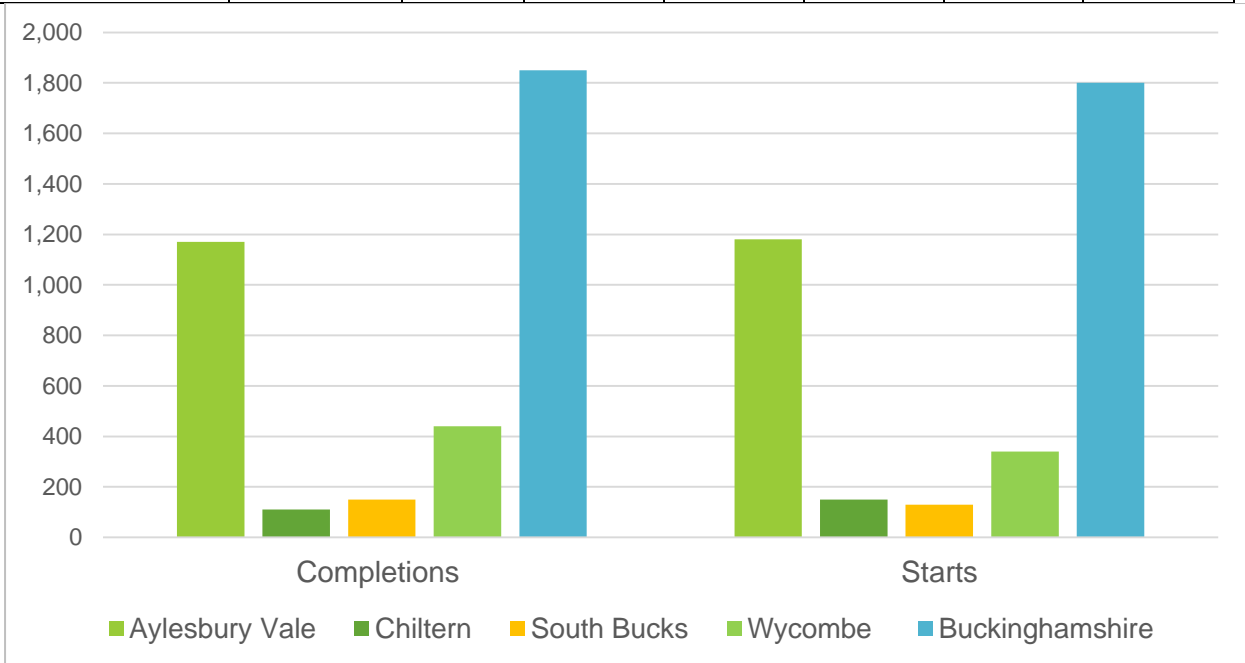
The council is exploring opportunities for modular housing built through off site manufacturing and is considering an investment in high quality modular units in Desborough, High Wycombe to provide temporary accommodation for people at risk of homelessness. We will also work with our partners in local Housing Associations to address the issue of providing more affordable housing.

The Council will address land supply problems where possible by using its planning powers intelligently and attracting grant funding to unlock and improve access to difficult sites. We are keen to work with the Government and Homes England to accelerate the pace of housing development in the District and to explore innovative approaches, such as the formation of a housing delivery company or joint venture arrangements with Housing Associations and Private Developers, where it makes sense to share development risk. The Council also owns a number of sites and commercial buildings that may offer opportunities

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for residential development and we will explore how our role as a landlord can be used more creatively to deliver new homes.

Table 4 Dwellings completed and started to Q1 2017 by LA: Source DCLG							
	Completions				Starts		
	Stock 2016	No.	Rate	Rank	No.	Rate	Rank
Aylesbury Vale	77,520	1,170	1.5	19	1,180	1.5	24
Chiltern	39,220	110	0.3	270	150	0.4	241
South Bucks	28,430	150	0.5	174	130	0.5	214
Wycombe	71,890	440	0.6	143	340	0.5	206
Buckinghamshire	217,060	1,850	0.9	8	1,800	0.8	11



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The pressures from housing, demographic growth and ageing aside the District starts from a position of relative economic strength as the key indicators in Table 5 show.

Table 5: Wycombe District – Key Economic Indicators				
Category	Wycombe	South East	Great Britain	Date & Source
Population (numbers)	176,900	9,026,300	63,785,900	2016 ONS
Population (Aged 16-64) (Numbers)	109,300 (61.8%) (54,500 male) (54,800 female)	5,593,600 (62%) (2,789,800 male) (2,803,800 female)	40,267,500 (63.1%) (20,088,400 male) (20,0179,100 female)	2016 ONS
Economically active population	97,600 84.8%	81%	77.8%	Jan – Dec 2016 ONS
Employees	80,100 70.8%	65.3%	63.1%	Jan – Dec 2016 ONS
Self Employed	13,100 10.6%	12.1%	10.6%	Jan – Dec 2016 ONS
Unemployed	3,700 3.8%	4.0%	4.8%	Jan – Dec 2016 ONS
Qualifications NVQ4 and above	51,600 47.1%	41.4%	38.2%	2016 ONS
Gross weekly earnings (Residents)	£606.70	£582.00	£541.00	2016 ONS
Benefits Claimants	7,450 6.8%	8.5%	11.3%	Aug 2016 DWP

Drivers of Change

Wycombe's economy does not exist in isolation from the UK and wider, global environment, nor can it be insulated from changes in technology and markets; external competition, or economic, political and environmental pressures. A successful strategy needs to anticipate and respond speedily to threats and opportunities. Some of key forces could impact upon the local economy over the coming years are set out below.

- **Brexit** and opportunities to benefit from the future terms of trade with the EU and countries around the world and our own preparedness for this.
- **Housing market pressures** and the shortage of truly affordable homes.

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- **Public spending constraints**- the continuing fallout from the global financial crisis and levels of debt within the UK.
- **Globalisation**-the continuing expansion of international trade, capital and labour mobility and the emergence of new markets.
- **Ultrafast Broadband and the Digital Economy**-enabling new business models, digital media technologies, products and services, and access to new markets.
- **Agile, flexible, mobile and home working practices** and their impact on demand for business accommodation;
- **Technological innovation** – such as stem cell therapies, biotechnology, genetics, artificial intelligence; robotics; low carbon technology; electric vehicles; driverless cars and nano-technology.
- **Major national infrastructure investments**– such as HS2, East – West Rail, the expansion of Heathrow including western rail access, Cross-Rail 2, ultra-fast broadband and the Oxford- Cambridge expressway.
- **Demographic trends** - population ageing, immigration levels and changes in the age profile of the population affecting many aspects of life.
- **Skills for Employment** -workforce skill needs becoming more complex and technologically demanding creating challenges for education providers to tailor learning to the needs of employers and individuals.
- **Environmental Sustainability**–the impact of climate change, access to water, food, energy and other key resources shaping the way we live and do business.
- **Social Cohesion and inequality** - income distribution, poverty, and access to learning and jobs continuing to affect the quality and supply of labour.

While the District’s fundamentals are relatively strong, productivity in the UK remains adrift of Europe’s top performing regions. It is therefore vital that the District continues to retain businesses and attract new investment; especially from high value, growth-orientated companies, operating in international markets.

This will enable Wycombe to grow and diversify its business base and create new jobs to replace those displaced by new technologies, new business models and external competition. Given the rapid introduction of new technologies and the pace of change in highly inter-connected, global markets there is a need for our local economy to be sufficiently resilient to ride out future shock waves and sustain its upward trajectory.

The District’s main town is High Wycombe. Unlike other towns to the west of London, such as Reading, Maidenhead and Slough, High Wycombe is not well established as a commercial office location or high tech centre. This is reflected in local office rental levels. A July 2017 report by Chandler Garvey shows these averaged around £250 per square metre in High Wycombe compared to £400 per sq. m in Reading and Maidenhead. This differential could become a source of competitive advantage for the District if the right commercial office accommodation can be delivered. It will take some time to develop a stock of Grade A commercial office accommodation in High Wycombe town centre. However, the Council is already active in developing managed workspaces for smaller businesses and will in the next

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two years deliver *DesBox* a new facility in Desborough aimed at creative businesses and *H-Qube* in Hughenden providing ‘maker spaces’ for artisan and craft workers.

There is a growing number of self-employed individuals and micro- businesses in the District some of whom maybe based here while spending part of their week in London or elsewhere visiting customers and suppliers. Many such businesses operate out of home offices or small serviced office accommodation. We want to help such small entrepreneurial businesses grow by encouraging homes that can provide suitable office or studio space. In rural areas we’ll also investigate the case for providing shared office accommodation and serviced business centres.

The District has a high level of out-commuting to London, the Thames Valley and Heathrow. Local residents are able to use fast, frequent train services to London and motorway connections from the M40 to the M25, M4 and M3. In 2013, around 92,000 people (38% of the economically active population) commuted out of Buckinghamshire to their place of work and over 40% of Wycombe’s economically active residents are estimated to commute to locations outside the District to work. Forecasts made in 2016 by Oxford Economics for the local plan suggest that jobs in Buckinghamshire will grow at a rate of only 0.8% per annum over the next decade; this means that productivity improvements will need to drive the growth of the economy.

There is a danger that growth will cause additional traffic congestion, undermining the District’s competitiveness. As a valley town with difficult topography High Wycombe already experiences traffic problems. And these are mirrored at peak times in Bourne End, Marlow and Princes Risborough.

Research for BCC showed the average speed of traffic on local A roads in Buckinghamshire fell from around 28 mph to just over 26 mph between January 2010 and June 2015. Traffic delays lower economic productivity, increase pollution and have negative consequences for population health.

The District’s local plan aims to ensure that new housing and employment sites are located close to public transport and that broadband coverage can support remote and flexible working. Access to high speed broadband and Wi-Fi is especially important for entrepreneurs in software, design, consultancy and similar businesses. We want to encourage a creative, dynamic ecosystem that will allow creative people to connect with each other both physically, through shared spaces such as *DesBox*, and digitally, through access to ultrafast broadband links. This will include the Council’s own services which will migrate to *Digital First* as the default position of service delivery using data intelligently to provide better services for our customers.

The growth of a more knowledge intensive economy favours the clustering of companies and talent. Areas with good physical and digital connectivity are especially well placed to accommodate knowledge based employment. The selection of High Wycombe as one of 26 trial locations in the UK for the roll out of 5G mobile telecommunications technology will boost the town’s credentials as a hub for digital technology based businesses.

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High Wycombe Rail Station is Buckinghamshire's busiest with 2.8 m entries and exits in 2015/16. Given the population within one hour's travel of High Wycombe and the speed and frequency of train services to and from London it should be possible to attract high-tech international companies and skilled talent just as Reading and Maidenhead have done. As a District Wycombe should benefit hugely from the expansion of Heathrow and future links to Crossrail and HS2, as well as East-West rail and the proposed Oxford – Cambridge Expressway.

Attracting new talent is influenced by quality of life considerations. As the District's principal urban centre High Wycombe can improve its offer by providing higher quality office accommodation, investing in its public realm and making the most of its cultural and leisure amenities. There are also opportunities for public realm and 'place making' interventions to make the most of the intrinsic quality of towns such as Marlow and Princes Risborough. The availability of truly affordable housing is also a key challenge for the District and makes it difficult for young people to get a start on the housing ladder.

Wycombe also has a limited supply of new employment land as a result of the need to preserve the green belt conserve and enhance the Chilterns' Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty by minimising encroachment into it. This means focussing, where possible, on redundant brown field regeneration in the District's urban settlements.

As master-planning in High Wycombe moves forward there is an opportunity to create a new commercial district in the heart of the town encouraging the growth of businesses in the area from the rail station to the University and investing in public realm improvements in the High Street.

There are also good opportunities to attract new businesses Marlow on the M4 – M40 corridor and more rural locations such as Stokenchurch and Princes Risborough where there are opportunities to combine a country lifestyle with running professional service or tourism and leisure businesses using digital technology. The M40 corridor provides scope for growth over the medium term as high tech businesses based around Oxford, West London and the Thames Valley begin to expand. However, investment in infrastructure around key junctions will be needed if new employment sites are to be opened up.

High Wycombe has a proud history in numerous areas including and outside of economic factors but it is particularly well known for being a creative and skilled centre of furniture making. The town has coped well with the contraction of its furniture manufacturing industry and the District as a whole is in the process of transition towards a knowledge-based economy fuelled by the growth of entrepreneurial companies that can scale up and venture into international markets.

The District already has some companies of genuine scale and ambition in sectors such as advanced engineering; life sciences; medical devices; software; telecoms; and food & drink. Wycombe also has an active creative industries sector and is close to the UK's major film and TV production cluster at Pinewood, and the centre of UK motorsport at Silverstone.

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Future opportunities for smart, specialised businesses are expected to emerge in sectors such as big data, low carbon energy, autonomous vehicles, artificial intelligence, satellite and space technology, robotics and personalised medicine. The decoding of the human genome in 2003 required over a decade of work to sequence some 3 billion base pairs: modern computing power enables that much data to be sequenced in a single day.

McKinsey forecast that the 'internet of things' – the next wave of the internet- will see 28 Billion smart devices connected to the Internet by 2020 with early adoption in wearables, cars, homes, cities and industry heralding a new wave of economic growth.

Whilst the District has quite a small base of companies involved in research, development and innovation there are opportunities to develop high value, research-based business by working with SMEs and improving collaboration between local companies and Further and Higher Education.

And as the transition to online shopping continues the District's proximity to Heathrow and the south east motorway network, means the District will be well placed as a distribution and logistics hub, notably along the M40 corridor.

There is also an opportunity to grow the District's visitor economy benefitting from its' beautiful, accessible areas of outstanding natural beauty and building upon the success of its programme of music, food, festivals and events—e.g. Frogfest, Pub in the Park, the Kop Hill climb and nearby Pennfest. However, there are also threats to growth such as a shortage of employment sites and affordable housing; traffic congestion and traffic congestion on the arterial routes through High Wycombe, Marlow and Princes Risborough. Table 6 highlights some of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of potential relevance to future growth and prosperity.

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Table 6 SWOT Analysis	
<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent strategic location and motorway links • Fast regular train services to London • Highly qualified workforce • High level of economic activity • Diverse economic base • New local plan provides clarity for investors • High performing local schools • Track record of major capital projects delivery • A ‘can do’ Council – open for business • A good Higher and Further Education Base • Local quality of life and access to green space • Sports and Leisure facilities • Technology based firms • Marlow’s ‘foodie’ reputation and leisure potential 	<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low carbon technologies • Big data applications • Hosting tourism and sports events • Nearby film and media cluster • Expansion of Princes Risborough • Creative and cultural industries • Entrepreneurial education • Expansion of business workspace • Rural economy and ‘live / work’ units • International trade post Brexit • Strengthen Wycombe’s Brand identity • Appropriate densification of development around transport hubs • Potential to release new employment sites for inward investment • Entrepreneurial contribution of older population • Alliances with LEP and key economic partners
<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordability of Housing • Limited restaurant and hotel offer • Transport connections within Bucks • Need for Public realm improvements in our principal town centres • Limited sites and expansion space for industry • Limited local R&D and Innovation activity • Low brand awareness and identity/USP • Broadband ‘not spots’ in rural areas • Quality of available town centre office stock • Difficult topography: steep gradients 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automation of retail and routine jobs • Growth in online shopping • Constrained Public sector funding • Rising health and social care costs • Uncertainty of the Brexit process • Growing pressures on Infrastructure • Emerging Skill shortages • Loss of young people due to unaffordable housing • Growing Traffic Congestion • Impact of climate change • The District’s high carbon footprint • Global competition • Loss of employment land to residential uses

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Land Use Planning

The publication version of the Council's local plan (2017) sets out a long term vision for Wycombe District identifying where new homes, jobs and infrastructure will be created and how the local environment will be protected. The local plan follows the principles of 'smart growth' and promotes efficient land use; active community engagement in the planning process; walkable, close knit communities; the preservation of open space; a variety of transport choices; and a sense of place. The plan provides a land use framework for the period to 2033 and sets eight strategic objectives:

- 1. Cherish the Chilterns** – conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape of the Chiltern Hills;
- 2. Strengthen the sense of Place** by protecting and enhancing the District's natural and built environment, using Green Belt to keep main settlements separate, and securing high quality design in new developments;
- 3. Foster economic growth** ensuring our employment sites remain attractive, unlocking the potential for High Wycombe as an office location; providing a limited release of green field land for major inward investment and promoting rural business hubs;
- 4. Improve strategic connectivity** – building upon the strengths of the District's proximity to the M40 and M25, central London, Heathrow and the M4 by enhancing connections within Buckinghamshire and to the South East Midlands;
- 5. Facilitate local infrastructure** –by ensuring improvements to local infrastructure are delivered using the Community Infrastructure levy and by securing appropriate benefits from new development;
- 6. Deliver Housing** –by focusing on brownfield sites in High Wycombe; the introduction of new housing in Princes Risborough and the release of smaller sites on the edge of village settlements;
- 7. Champion Town Centres** – ensuring the environmental quality of the District's town centres, strengthening their economic attractiveness and making them pleasant, people friendly places to visit; and
- 8. Mitigating Climate Change** by reducing the need for travel by private car, and supporting public transport by re-using brownfield sites, locating development in settlements with the widest range of services and facilities and clustering new developments together.

The local plan highlights the need to:

- guide and shape developments in a sustainable way 'future proofing' development to cope with climate change and flooding;
- promote place making, good health & well-being and active lifestyles;
- progress the delivery of housing reserve sites released for development; and
- ensure that Green Belt reviews are technically robust and transparent enabling the Council to prevent distinctive settlements from merging together.

The local plan provides a strong foundation for economic development ensuring that growth can be managed sustainably and supporting the objectives of this strategy.

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Strategic Objectives

Our vision describes the economic future we want to achieve for the District. Its realisation will require hard work to be done by the Council and its partners in business, government and local communities. Our aim is to work with our partners to deliver the following strategic objectives.

1. Support **growth and internationalisation**.
2. Provide quality **business accommodation**.
3. Boost the **business birth rate** and entrepreneurship.
4. Develop our **visitor economy and tourism**.
5. Develop the **skills and talent** that employers need.
6. Deliver **new housing** on Council and Privately-owned sites.
7. Encourage **research and innovation** to boost growth.
8. Use **urban design** to make our town centres better places.
9. Ensure seamless **business support services**.
10. Improve strategic **transport and ICT connectivity**.

The Council's role in addressing these objectives is explained below.

Strategic Objective 1: Support business growth and internationalisation

Business growth and internationalisation are important to a healthy economy. And there are increasing opportunities for UK businesses to trade internationally, especially through specialisation in high value services such as design, life science and digital media. Wycombe's proximity to Heathrow is a distinct advantage for businesses seeking to enter international markets. There are opportunities to improve rail links from High Wycombe to Heathrow, Crossrail and HS2 with an option to provide connections via Old Oak Common. In addition, we will lobby the government and work with Highways England and our neighbouring authorities for improved access to the M40 and the M4 and associated improvements to the A404 that link the two.

Exporting helps companies build their capability in new markets and grow in scale. The opportunity to grow new markets will increase following Brexit and it is imperative that our businesses can strengthen their trading links both physically and digitally. The council will signpost businesses to organisations such as Bucks Business First, the Marlow and Thames Valley Chambers of Commerce and DIT for assistance with plans for exporting and internationalisation. We will work with these organisations to help provide better access to advice for companies in areas such as:

- Market research
- Statistical and demographic data
- Potential sources of grant funding support

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- Overseas Suppliers, Agents and licensing
- Foreign language support and translation
- The development of export action plans
- Logistics and fulfilment
- Selling online
- Overseas trade and market access visits
- Resources for internationalisation and exporting.

Strategic Objective 2: Provide quality business accommodation

The Council has a good track record of supporting growth through regeneration and development and has facilitated a £200 million town centre regeneration programme including the £125 million Eden Centre and £45 million Sainsbury's redevelopment. Over the past 10 years 45 major deals have been completed including a £25 m Sports and Leisure Centre and Waitrose Supermarket as Phase 1 of Handy Cross Hub.

The Council will aim to secure a supply of sites and premises in attractive, accessible locations offering a range of suitable business accommodation as well as protecting and improving the existing supply of business accommodation.

Inward investment enquiries also need to be handled professionally ensuring that investors get the information they need about accommodation options without having to go through different contacts and organisations.

The Council will also aim to tackle and overcome constraints to growth in existing locations such as the Globe Business Park in Marlow and the Cressex Business Park in High Wycombe where traffic congestion, limited public transport services, parking problems and the quality of the public realm environment can act as disincentives to new investment.

Globe Business Park supports around 3,130 jobs and produces £213m of Gross Value added per annum. The Business Park has a number of a void office spaces that need to be filled by attracting new tenants. Void office space is a missed opportunity for growth. We will work with the Globe Business Park BID Company and Bucks County Council to find solutions for parking and make improvements to access and egress to ensure Globe becomes a more attractive location for inward investors.

At Cressex the Council supports Basepoint, a managed office workspace facility that accommodates around 70 businesses on flexible terms. New managed workspace in High Wycombe is being planned in bespoke units at Baker Street ('DesBox') and at Hughenden ('H-Qube') to assist the next generation of start-up businesses.

Wycombe Air Park provides space for specialist businesses notably in logistics, distribution and the aircraft servicing industry. The council will work closely with the operators of the Air Park and local stakeholders to help attract new businesses to the Air Park.

Stokenchurch located close to junction 5 of the M40 also offers good access to the motorway and opportunities for new businesses. The publication version of the new Local Plan has identified an extension to the existing employment area to provide new land for industrial and logistics uses.

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Princes Risborough is less well situated in terms of attracting large new business investment but as part of the housing expansion proposals for the town the Council has identified new land for business growth.

High Wycombe offers very competitive rental levels although this makes the viability of new office development more challenging. We will explore ways of attracting investment in commercial office accommodation in High Wycombe town centre, alongside residential and leisure uses.

Strategic Objective 3: Boost the business birth rate and entrepreneurship.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (or SMEs) are the mainstay of the District's economy with almost 90% of enterprises employing fewer than 10 people. A vigorous rate of new business formation and entrepreneurship is a positive indicator of a vibrant economy. There is a direct link between the number of new businesses set up and those that survive and prosper and an element of 'churn' in the start-up rate is therefore understandable. Some of the UK's best known entrepreneurs have had more than one experience of setting up business before achieving real success.

Active local business networks are vital to the take up and transmission of new ideas and technologies. They can also be potential sources of finance for business growth e.g. through crowd funding and Business Angel networks. The council will work with the Marlow Chamber of Commerce, Bucks Business First, Business Improvement District Companies and Bucks New University and others to help ensure that enterprise and new business formation remains vibrant across our District.

The Council will develop a programme of engagement with businesses, focussing upon key industry sectors and growth orientated SMEs, to help our local businesses flourish and prosper. We will promote business breakfasts and networking events working with business support organisations to make it clear that Wycombe is Open for Business.

The Council will help young businesses secure suitable premises as well as signposting companies to appropriate partner agencies such as Bucks Business First, Buckinghamshire New University, or BTVLEP for assistance with growing their business and entering new markets.

Strategic Objective 4: Develop our visitor economy and tourism

As a District Wycombe has a growing range of events and festivals that attract visitors from further afield such as the Marlow Regatta; the Pub in the Park food festival; the Kop Hill climb; Aero Expo; Frogfest; and nearby Pennfest. Local tourism assets include Hughenden Manor, the Hell Fire Caves and nearby Cliveden. Some two-thirds of the District lies within the Chilterns' Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which is a great attraction for cyclists and

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walkers. We will work with the Chilterns' Conservation Board to promote the use and enjoyment of this wonderful natural asset.

The value of sport and culture to the UK economy has grown substantially and the country is known worldwide for its culture, sport and creative industries. Wycombe has regionally significant sporting and cultural assets including a new 50m International Standard Swimming Pool, the Marlow Athletics track, the Dashwoods shooting range, Wycombe Air Park and the Swan Theatre. High Wycombe is only 15 minutes by train from Wembley Stadium and there is a good opportunity for the town to act as an accommodation base for fans attending sporting events at Wembley. There is growing evidence that affluent consumers are spending an increasing proportion of their disposable income on services and 'experiences'. The recent success of the 'Pub in the Park' Food Festival shows that well-targeted events can attract visitors to the District, boosting the local economy.

Given the District's excellent location and transport links there is scope to increase day visitor spend and build its capacity as a tourism, events and conference destination hosting sporting and cultural events and attract tourism and leisure based inward investment especially given its proximity to attractions such as Legoland at Windsor and the Warner Bros Studio tour in Leavesden. There are also opportunities to attract business and educational conferences to the District building upon the charm of Marlow and its growing reputation for excellence as a food and drink destination.

High Wycombe itself has a shortage of premium visitor accommodation. There is a need to encourage new and better hotels and restaurants into the town. As plans for the development of High Wycombe progress there will be an opportunity to attract new hotel, restaurant and leisure investment. The Council will also play an active role in working with events promoters to ensure that visitors gain a positive impression of the District. We will work with the High Wycombe Bid Co and local sports organisations to attract new events and activities to the District and encourage tourism businesses to invest here.

Strategic Objective 5: Develop the skills and talent employers need

The District's schools have a strong track record in delivering good academic results and helping young people progress into further and higher education. However, the costs of Higher Education are a barrier for some young people and employers express concerns about a shortage of technical, vocational, digital and business management skills.

There is also a group of young people who are disconnected from the labour market and lack the formal qualifications, personal confidence, resilience and softer skills that many employers are looking for. We will work through our community engagement activities to help such young people into access level jobs where they can build their confidence and improve their skills and employability.

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There is also an outflow of graduate talent from the District and some underemployment with some local graduates failing to secure high value jobs. Bucks New University (BNU) is developing a market connected curriculum that will ensure higher education is better connected to the local economy. This will see degree level apprenticeships promoted to local employers allowing people who are unable to access full time higher education to benefit from advanced study through work based learning and continuing professional development supported by University teaching staff. This will help to widen participation in higher education, as well as boosting the skills and capability of local businesses.

The University will also promote entrepreneurship as a career route and offer incubation space for graduates who want to set up their own businesses. The Council will work closely to strengthen connections between businesses and education and provide 'grow-on' space for spin out businesses formed by graduates. We will also work with our local FE Colleges to help target skill shortages and prepare students for employment in areas such as Healthcare, Construction, Tourism and Leisure.

Strategic Objective 6: Deliver new housing on Council and Privately-owned sites

Improving the supply of housing across the District is vital to sustainable growth. The Local Plan has identified sites for 10,900 new homes within the District of different housing types, ownership and rental models by 2033. There is a pressing need for more truly affordable homes, and housing to meet the needs of a growing elderly population. Housing construction brings opportunities for job creation. The Council will promote new homes on the sites it owns and has been working with developers on several reserve sites that have been released for housing development.

The Council will take active steps to unlock the development of more complex, major sites, such as the Princes Risborough Expansion Area, where the local plan anticipates 2,480 new homes will be delivered by private housebuilders. In delivering new housing we will promote low carbon development and apprenticeship opportunities for young people. We will also work with local Housing Associations to accelerate the delivery of affordable homes and explore new housing delivery models. Key housing proposals identified in the publication version of the local plan are summarised in table 7.

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Table 7: Major Housing Sites - WDC draft local plan		
Site	Indicative Dwelling units	Lead role
Gomm Valley & Ashwells	530	WDC
Abbey Barn South	505	Private Sector
Abbey Barn North	100	WDC
Easton Quarter High Wycombe	150	WDC/ Private Sector
Terriers Farm	500	Private Sector
Slate Meadow	150	Private Sector
Bellfield	62	WDC
Hollands Farm	467	Private Sector
Land off By Amersham Road Hazlemere	350	Private Sector
Leigh Street	275	Private Sector
Land off Mill Road Stokenchurch	100	Private Sector
Princes Risborough	2357 New Homes	Private Sector

Strategic Objective 7: Encourage research and innovation to boost growth.

In 2015 22% of all jobs in Wycombe were in the wholesale, retail and motor repair trades followed by 11.0% in professional, scientific and technical activities, around 10.0% in healthcare and social work; 8.5% in education and 8.5% in information and communications.

Whilst retail and local service sector jobs are important to the local economy the growth of higher value employment will require investment in research and innovation in sectors such as life sciences, information technology, digital media and low carbon technology, where there is scope for specialisation based around knowledge, expertise and the application of new technologies. As we encourage the development of key sectors there may be opportunities to attract investment through the proposed sector deals in the Government's industrial strategy.

Bucks New University offers courses in subjects such as games development, business management, animation, product design, cyber security, computing and web development that can provide a strong base for innovation and the University is planning to develop incubation space that will allow graduates to develop and commercialise new business ideas, products and services.

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Wycombe lies half way between the world-class resources of Oxford University and London's leading Universities. There is an opportunity for knowledge exchange between industry and higher education to stimulate innovation, boost commercialisation and help local businesses develop new and improved products, services and processes. For early stage companies there is an opportunity to accelerate the journey between concept and commercialisation.

The Council will work closely with BBF, BTVLEP and BNU to link growth orientated businesses to expertise within the Higher Education sector so as to support product, process and business model based innovation. We will also encourage better use of labour market intelligence so that the skills and knowledge gained by students are matched more effectively to the needs of the future economy.

Strategic Objective 8: Use urban design to make our town centres better places.

High quality infrastructure and public spaces are vital to competitiveness. Investment in public realm can transform town centres; strengthen retail performance; boost the visitor economy and make places more attractive for residents and visitors. We want to improve Wycombe District as a place in which to live, work and visit by ensuring good public transport connections, well-designed housing, high quality public realm and green space. Through the Local Plan the Council will work with developers to ensure that new development is sustainable and of high quality, and complements the natural landscape setting especially in areas of outstanding natural beauty, such as the Chiltern Hills.

Development is not just about the built environment but also the creation of new green infrastructure which is good for people and safeguards wildlife. In developing new homes, jobs and infrastructure we cannot afford to compromise the quality of our natural environment and rural areas.

In an economy that increasingly revolves around knowledge, ideas, technologies and networks we need to attract the best and brightest talent to our urban centres and attractive rural areas.

Creating a sense of place and distinctive identity for our town centres is vital. The Council's masterplan for High Wycombe aims to transform public spaces and make the town a more attractive place for shopping and leisure; strengthen the economy - by creating new opportunities for businesses, jobs, shops and leisure; and bring the town together - by making changes to the road network. The masterplan aims to make the town more 'pedestrian-friendly'; changing the traffic flow, downgrading the use of Abbey Way flyover and improving our key streets and pedestrian spaces.

High Wycombe's office market is outdated with several vacant premises that are unlikely to be of interest to contemporary occupiers. A number of offices have been converted to

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residential accommodation uses under the government's permitted development scheme. The regeneration of brownfield sites in High Wycombe can help create new locations for commercial offices, retail, leisure and residential development. Newly regenerated urban neighbourhoods can also provide a better environment for office workers and knowledge based businesses with good access to shops, restaurants, cultural and leisure amenities making it easier to attract the skills and talent that businesses need to support their growth. The Council has significant land and property holdings and we will look to take a more active role as a landlord to encourage growth and support new enterprises.

The Council's priorities in High Wycombe town centre will be to continue its investment in master-planning, regeneration and public realm improvements in a number of priority areas including:

- **High Wycombe Town Centre** creating mixed use development with commercial, housing and retail uses and higher density development close to High Wycombe rail station;
- **The Arts and Education Quarter** improving the public space and cultural offer through better public realm connections between the Swan Theatre & Bucks New University;
- **Desborough Road Area Renewal** encouraging mixed use development with business start-up workspace;
- **Frogmoor Regeneration** encouraging new residential development and public realm improvements;
- **Hughenden** delivering extra care residential facilities and managed workspace.

The planned expansion of Princes Risborough provides an opportunity for improving the retail and leisure offer. The Council will work closely with the Princes Risborough Town Committee to help progress the exciting proposals emerging through the Princes Risborough town centre masterplan. Marlow is already a successful town centre and there is an opportunity to build upon its intrinsic charm by finding long term solutions to the problems of traffic congestion and car parking that can impact upon the visitor experience.

The District has two major employment sites where the Council is working actively to improve the environment for local businesses. These are the Cressex Business Park which is home to 216 businesses, supports 4,869 jobs and generates £331*m in GVA each year.; and Globe Business Park in Marlow which is home to 73 businesses, supports 3,130 jobs and produces £213*m in GVA annually. (*source BBF 2017).

The Council will take the steps needed to support our major employment locations.

- **At Cressex Business Park** the Council will work to establish a local Business Improvement District to tackle challenges including access and car parking;
- **At Handy Cross Hub** the Council will continue to progress individual phases of mixed-use development;

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- **At Globe Business Park** the Council will work with the Business Improvement District Company and BCC to improve access, car parking, landscaping and signage.
- **At Wycombe Air Park** the Council will promote employment uses that are well suited to the site and the amenities it can offer.
- **At Stokenchurch** the Council will expand the existing employment site; and
- **At Prince Risborough** the Council will promote new employment land to help the expanded town to become a more sustainable business location.

Strategic Objective 9: Ensure seamless business support services

It is important that business support services are easy for local businesses to access. Our aim is to provide a 'First Stop' service for inward investors and local businesses. We want to ensure a single point of contact for all business-facing Council services and a clear referral process for enquiries better handled by organisations such as the local Business Improvement Districts, Bucks Business First, BCC or the BTV LEP. The Council wants to complement rather than duplicate services provided by partner organisations.

The Council's primary roles will be to offer information, support and guidance on local planning and building standards and help with sourcing office or factory space including 'start up' and 'move on' accommodation. We will also offer signposting to other services so that businesses know where to go for other forms of help e.g. with skills training or access to finance. The Council will appoint a dedicated economic development officer to support these and related activities and a tourism and events officer to work with partner agencies on the District's tourism offer.

At the new Hughenden Quarter and in the Desborough area of High Wycombe we will invest in workspace for start-up businesses targeting those in design, crafts, digital media, and the creative industries. We will also work with BNU to help young businesses spinning out from Higher Education secure 'grow on' space.

In addition we will engage with local companies through business breakfasts and networking events to stay in touch with their views and discuss how we can support their plans for growth.

Strategic Objective 10: Improve transport and ICT connectivity

Wycombe has an excellent strategic location well served by the M40 motorway; fast train links to central London and some 40 minutes from Heathrow, the UK's major hub airport. However, local road congestion can create traffic delays and lost economic productivity. Broadband coverage is approaching 95% across Buckinghamshire but remains patchy in some rural areas. The section of High Wycombe by BT as a trial location for the roll out of 5G ultrafast broadband is a major boost to the District's digital connectivity and has the

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potential to unlock new growth opportunities. The Council will also work closely with Buckinghamshire County Council, Highways England and Network Rail to achieve improved transport connections. In this context, some of the priority opportunities for future development that will need to be considered include:

- Ensuring a Chiltern Line connection to Crossrail and HS2 with a potential Heathrow Airport link at Old Oak common;
- Working with BTVLEP and BCC on district-wide infrastructure priorities including the strategic route between High Wycombe and Aylesbury;
- Lobbying to secure our preferred route alignment for the proposed Oxford – Cambridge Expressway;
- Promoting the case for a link from the Chiltern Line to Maidenhead and Thames Valley;
- Improving the frequency and speed of rail services to Oxford;
- Improving vehicular flow on the London Road in High Wycombe through modernised traffic signalling;
- Improving the Westhorpe junction of the A404 and the A4155 at Marlow to ease peak hour congestion on traffic flows around Globe Business park;
- Improving public transport services to Heathrow;
- Improving the pedestrian and cycling routes in our Town Centres;
- Developing a network of park and ride sites to enable drivers to shift to public transport;
- Improving traffic movement at Handy Cross roundabout and in the approach to High Wycombe station; and ,
- Enabling new road and bridge infrastructure to open up the Princes Risborough expansion area for housing development.

Measuring our success

It will be important to track our progress over the next 10 years. To do this we will use a performance scorecard to measure key performance indicators including those listed below. Some will be tracked on an ongoing basis: others will be tested periodically, using sample surveys.

1. New business start-up and survival rates.
2. Inward Investment projects landed by capital value and jobs
3. Changes in the District's business stock
4. Gross value added per capita
5. Median earnings of residents
6. Economic activity and employment rates
7. Households dependent on benefits
8. Qualification levels among the working age population.
9. Value of new investment in the District's regeneration

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Strategic Partnerships

The delivery of the District's economic strategy will require the Council to work with a range of organisations to deliver the outcomes we want to achieve. This will call for shared leadership and commitment, aligning the public sector and businesses towards a common vision.

We will work closely with partners in areas that will be critical to the successful delivery of this economic strategy especially where they have powers and resources to make a positive difference e.g.:

- Buckinghamshire County Council to ensure that necessary investment in highways improvements and transport infrastructure is carried out;
- Stronger collaboration across Council Ward and Party lines to drive new developments and infrastructure;
- Schools and Colleges to support enterprise education, employability and apprenticeship training;
- BTVLEP on our strategy for growth and economic development;
- Bucks New University to encourage graduates to set up new businesses and spin out commercial opportunities from research and innovation; and
- BBF to improve access to business information and market intelligence;
- The Globe and High Wycombe BID Cos to help improve the environment of Globe Business Park and High Wycombe town centre;
- The extended Connected Counties programme to secure the roll-out of super and ultrafast broadband across the District;
- Highways England to influence their route investment strategy and secure junction improvements on the A404; and
- DfT, Network Rail and Chiltern Railways to improve train services and connections.

Funding and resources

The Council will set up a small project team to coordinate its resources in support of the objectives set out in this strategy. We will aim to attract external funding e.g. through the national productivity investment fund and the housing infrastructure fund to supplement investment from the Community Infrastructure Levy and S106 contributions to address the costs of new economic infrastructure.

The Council will also use its own land and property assets to help create new job opportunities, improve retail, leisure and transport facilities and make our District a better place for local residents and visitors to the District.

We will use our assets not only to deliver regeneration and growth in a sustainable way, but also to generate revenue to support our services to the public and reduce our reliance on central

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government. In this way the Council can protect its essential services and support local jobs and facilities for people to enjoy.

Conclusion and next steps

Over the coming years the Council will work with its partners to deliver the key projects and programmes that will move the District towards the vision set out in this strategy. We aim to support the growth of the local economy in a sustainable way, balancing the need for greater prosperity, with the development of active and enterprising local communities and the use of low carbon, clean technologies to ensure that growth is not achieved at the expense of the environment.

We will consult with local people and businesses before we implement the strategy so that we can focus on the issues and opportunities that will help us make a positive difference in securing the future prosperity of our District in fast changing economic times.

Appendix 1



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Appendix 2

