

Mendip Economic Development Strategy
Consultation Draft
2017 - 2020

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Introduction

Mendip District Council is committed to encouraging economic growth and better opportunities for local communities and businesses across the district. Actions set out in the previous Mendip Economic Development Strategy 2013-2016, broke new ground and set priorities for the Council to work with partners and support local business proactively in a post-recession environment.

Moving forward, economic growth continues to form one of the two key priorities in the new Corporate Plan for the Council 'Shaping the District 2017-2020'. This strategy is also supported by the 'Mendip Socio-Economic Baseline Report 2016' which provides a review of key demographic and employment data. Using this evidence along with feedback from key partners, survey information and a series of interviews with local businesses, the Council aims to ensure a stronger, more business-orientated approach and to make a clear commitment towards creating positive business dialogue to resolve barriers and constraints.

Working with key sectors of the business community, the Council will seek to prioritise new ways to improve local productivity and innovation; to stimulate higher value added business activity, to enhance local prosperity and to encourage a vibrant local economy. We know that by encouraging our local businesses to help create new opportunities for our young people, as well as those seeking employment and career opportunities, and those who may feel excluded from the labour market, we can try to address some of the skills and recruitment gaps faced by local industries

By creating the local conditions for businesses to grow and flourish, the intention is to work towards creating better opportunities for all. The Council cannot achieve this alone but will work flexibly with other Shape Mendip partners and local agencies including Chambers of Commerce, Town Councils, schools and colleges in the area as well as collaborating with Somerset County Council, other District Councils and the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership.

As we prepare for the future there remains an underlying uncertainty as to how the UK Economy will respond and form a new relationship with Europe going forward. We have therefore set out some of the potential risks and challenges ahead, and have also sought to focus on areas where the Council can directly support activities, or play an influencing role, or work in partnership with others. We will continue to monitor national and international events throughout the period of this strategy however, and seek to respond quickly in the face of evolving local needs.

Strategic Economic Context

A Changing Context for Economic Growth

The 2013-16 Mendip Economic Development Strategy was prepared in light of continued economic uncertainty as the country emerged out of the global economic and financial recession. Considerable efforts have since been made to strengthen and support the Mendip economy. Local business prospects continue to be subject to some national and international uncertainties following the 2016 referendum decision to take the UK out of the European Union. National and regional challenges which may affect Mendip's prospects from 2017 and beyond are noted below.

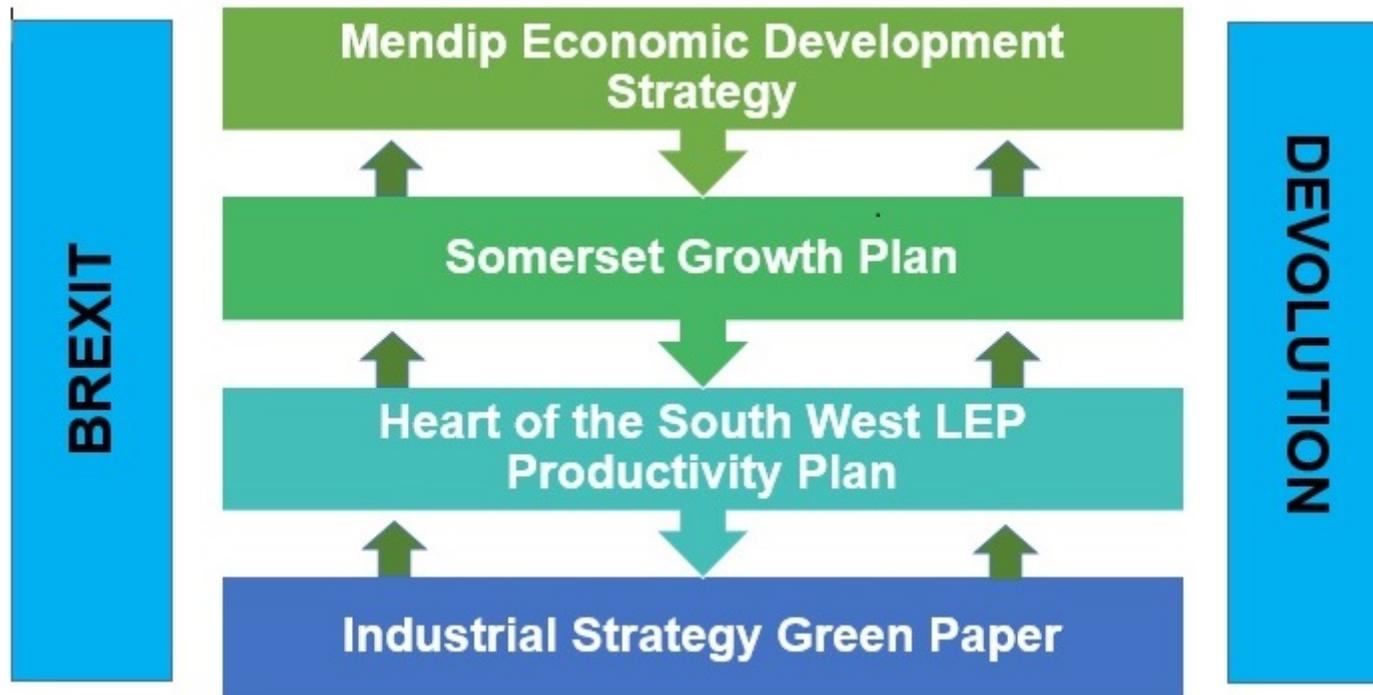
National Economic Prospects

The UK economy grew 2.3% to the end of 2016, which was the fastest rate among developed economies in the world and far better than predicted. Forecasters now anticipate slower growth going forward in 2017, as the UK renegotiates international trade relationships. The Office for Budget Responsibility expect GDP growth of 2.0% in 2017 and 1.6% in 2018; according to the latest available publication for March 2017. All forecasts are very sensitive to macro-economic conditions though and the figures will remain volatile to change.

The value of sterling has fallen against the dollar, reaching thirty year lows at times, and continued pressure on the pound reflects some of the uncertainty over international trade and lower growth expectations. Whilst this provides some good news for export orientated business, it also results in inflationary pressures elsewhere from increasing prices of major imports. Following exceptionally low inflation in recent years, and even a dip into deflation in April 2015, the consumer price index has risen sharply in recent months to 1.6% in December 2016. This is expected to push beyond 2% and even close to 3% during 2017.

As a result, the Bank of England remains in something of a quandary; whether to reduce interest rates from already historic lows of 0.25% to support business investment and economic growth, or to risk rising inflation and potentially weakening currency. Meanwhile, consumer spending has continued to rise despite the initial dip in confidence in the aftermath of the referendum. The retail sales index was up 4.3% to December 2016, again fuelled by personal borrowing/credit card transactions, similar to the pre-recession experience of 2008. Expectations are for a significant tightening in spending through 2017, and some forecasters are predicting a drop to 1.7% for the year. The first quarter figures to March 2017 showed the first quarterly decline in retail spending since 2013.

Figure 1: Visualising the Strategic Context



BREXIT

The UK Government officially triggered Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union at the end of March 2017. This sets the scene for formal negotiations for the UK to leave the EU by 2019. The Government set out [12 key principles](#) to guide the UK's exit from the EU (which reinforced the aim to control immigration whilst securing rights for EU Nationals already in the UK and for UK nationals in the EU). The government is seeking a free trade agreement with European Markets but not necessarily full access to the Single Market, or free movement of labour. The importance of striking new global independent trade deals has also been formed a key part of the narrative, however no trade agreements may be signed before leaving the EU.

The challenge for business continues to revolve around uncertain European and international trade relationships. The nature and scale of trade tariffs on imports and exports alone could take several more years to resolve. Meanwhile, businesses are establishing suitable contingency plans

to maintain global competitiveness and manage supply chains. There are already early signs of companies restructuring to align plant locations with different markets across the EU. Other businesses have made it clear that they have put investment decisions on hold for the time being, as they work through various options and scenarios.

In the interim, funding for established EU capital grant investment projects, such as LEADER and RDPE (Rural Development Programme for England) has been confirmed until 2019, and the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) has been confirmed to 2020. Following this new systems of farming and business support will be critical to ensure sufficient investment continues in rural and agricultural economies, and Mendip District Council will play its part in highlighting the needs of rural communities and businesses.

National Industrial Strategy

The Government published a Green Paper in January 2017 [Building our Industrial Strategy](#) which responds to the Brexit opportunities and seeks to establish a new relationship between government and business. Creating globally competitive industries which invest in technologies; closing the productivity gap across the country and making the UK one of the most competitive places in the world for business, are all key drivers for the Industrial Strategy.

The consultation document identifies [10 pillars](#) to drive economic growth, raise productivity and improve prosperity across the country.

- * Investing in science and research
- * Developing skills
- * Upgrading infrastructure
- * Supporting business to start and grow
- * Improving procurement
- * Encouraging trade and inward investment
- * Delivery of affordable energy and clean growth
- * Cultivating world-leading sectors
- * Driving growth across the whole country
- * Creating the right local institutions

The pillars all reinforce one another. As the document highlights: “an economy with more innovative start-ups will require more highly skilled people, more venture capital and better digital infrastructure”. It also recognises the need to attract inward investment and “the need to be competitive on energy costs and infrastructure, as well as having a strong science base and highly skilled people”.

Devolution

As part of a move towards the greater devolution of powers and budgets away from Westminster, the Government invited all local authorities in England to develop their own local proposals. The Heart of the South West LEP has worked with local councils, the two National Park Authorities and the Clinical Commissioning Group on moving towards devolution and a Devolution Prospectus was submitted to the Government in February 2016. The agreed key local themes were economic growth, health, social care and wellbeing, and infrastructure and local resilience. Following the changes in Government after the EU Referendum, the process of moving towards devolution has slowed, although this is expected to regain momentum in the future. The devolution bid is fundamentally about addressing the productivity gap between Heart of the South West and the rest of the UK, and the LEP is now developing a Productivity Plan to help deliver this aspiration.

Heart of the South West Local LEP Productivity Plan

Key issues identified for the Heart of the South West LEP area, include:

- Growing employment base but lower output
- Higher levels of part-time working and lower average earnings
- Low levels of business innovation/R&D investment

The Heart of the South West LEP (HotSW) is currently undertaking a review of its Strategic Economic Plan (March 2014) and is shaping a new “Productivity Plan” for the sub-region throughout 2017. Productivity is the measure of economic output relative to the number of people employed and/or hour worked and is also a measure of international competitiveness (or efficiency) for business. The productivity gap in the UK is now approximately 20% behind other advanced economies and the HotSW area, which covers Somerset, Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, is below 80% of the UK average.

The HotSW area's productivity gap is not simply a matter of industrial structure but a complex issue revolving around the interplay between Skills/Innovation/Business Formation/Capital Investment and Competitiveness. As well as ensuring there is investment in local and regional infrastructure to ensure competitiveness, there is also a need to support and encourage more innovative and growth orientated businesses. Raising the skill levels across regional labour markets is also a critical issue, identified by businesses across all sectors and locations.

South West Rural Productivity Commission

The South West Rural Productivity Commission has been established as a partnership by four LEPs in the South West of England: The Heart of the South West (HotSW LEP), Dorset LEP, Swindon & Wiltshire (SWLEP), Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly (CloS LEP) to explore the issues around rural productivity and growth. These south west LEPs recognise the importance of rural growth, productivity and prosperity being tackled alongside urban growth, to ensure that improvements impact on all parts of the economy. The commission is currently receiving evidence from a range of sources and stakeholders, including Mendip District Council and local business partners and aims to:

- Frame the south west response to the Industrial Strategy and forthcoming DEFRA 25 year plans for ‘food, farming and fisheries’ and ‘environment’
- Draw out the opportunities for the south west and individual LEPs to drive rural productivity improvements
- Understand the wider economic functioning between rural and urban areas to identify opportunities to drive growth across the whole area
- Secure Government support for specific initiatives in the 2017 autumn statement
- Influence national and local policies where appropriate to improve rural productivity

The commission is expected to report later in 2017, the outcome of which will be monitored closely by Mendip District Council and taken into consideration.

Somerset Growth Plan

The initial Somerset Growth Plan was prepared through 2013/14, and has been refreshed and is due to be adopted in summer 2017. The Growth Plan forms a shared ambition and vision for growth across the County. Overseen by a collaborative public/private Growth Board, the Plan provides a strong statement of intent for working in collaboration with the Heart of the South West LEP and other regional partners. Priorities include:

- Maximising advantage in key sectors – Energy, Aerospace & Agri-Food.
- Tackling infrastructure weaknesses and enhancing strategic connectivity (transport and broadband/mobile)
- Increasing levels of education and skills within the workforce.

The Growth Plan identifies common themes and opportunities for growth as well as local barriers to help prioritise future investment needs. Responding to the productivity challenge, the 2017 Plan recognises three cross-cutting themes; improving infrastructure, especially digital connectivity; increasing growth of businesses, investment and productivity, and a need for higher skills that meet competitive business needs.

The Somerset Growth Plan will be augmented by local delivery plans such as the Mendip Economic Development Strategy which also deals with specific local issues and challenges.

Mendip District Local Plan

Part I of the Mendip District Local Plan was adopted in December 2014. It sets out a framework for development across the District (a spatial strategy) and long-term objectives to be delivered through planning policies and identified allocations. The Plan seeks to deliver 9,600 new homes – including 2,500 affordable homes - over the period 2006-2029. This is based on a housing requirement of 420 dwellings per annum from 2011. Housing and commercial development is focused on the five main towns with more limited development in larger villages.

The Plan identifies a requirement for around 62 Ha of employment land to 2029 to support projected job growth. Key locations include opportunities in town centres, rural sites and strategic employment sites at:

- Commerce Park, Frome
- Cathedral Park, Wells
- Street Business Park, Street
- Royal Bath & West Showground site near Shepton Mallet
- Morlands Enterprise Park, Glastonbury
- Dulcote Quarry situated between Shepton Mallet and Wells

Additional land to meet the requirements for housing and employment growth are under consideration in Local Plan Part II. A formal draft of the Plan is anticipated to be published in September 2017 and should be adopted by mid-2018. A partial review of the Part I Plan will start in 2018 and is likely to include a comprehensive update to the economic evidence base, job targets and review of strategic sites.

Mendip's Economy: Progress and Delivery

Mendip District Council has maintained its commitment to delivering business growth, with this objective forming one of its key corporate priorities since 2013. In order to evaluate progress to date, each of the strategic objectives from the previous Economic Development Strategy 2013-16 is considered in turn below, with a summary highlighting examples of achievements and progress to date.

Aims and Objectives

The 2013-2016 Economic Development Strategy identified 6 priorities to direct local action for business growth and success:

1. Civic Leadership & Improved Business Communication.
2. Promote the Vision, Identity & Sense of Place.
3. Pro-active Development Planning.
4. Invest to Unlock Business and Development Potential.
5. Stronger Focus on Business Starts.
6. Enhance Local Productivity.

Areas of Progress 2013-2016

<p>Civic Leadership & Improved Business Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintained Economic Development as a key corporate priority, creating interdisciplinary virtual project service teams to drive 'task and finish' economic projects and investments, and to work on the 'Better Business for All' approach • Launch of e-newsletter and social media to promote funding, investment and business support news with regular communications shared with over 1,000 business and partner contacts • Developed strategic links with local Chambers to develop the Enterprise Mendip programme for start-ups and SMEs, and the Mendip Business Awards, launched in 2015 with a focus on celebrating local business success; particularly the diversity and 'hidden successes' of our small business community
<p>Promote the Vision, Identity & Sense of Place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed an Invest in Mendip approach to highlight our key sector strengths and establish propositions for inward investors (see TePe and Charlie Bigham case studies), leading to the creation of up to 300 new jobs at Dulcote Quarry • Delivered a new property portal and inward investment service in partnership with Into Somerset, HotSW LEP and other district partners • Supporting the Royal Bath & West Society with their concept of a new Agri-Food Centre of Excellence/Food Enterprise Zone at the Showground

Pro-active Development Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a Local Development Order (Simplified Planning Zone) for the Royal Bath & West Showground, with the potential for future roll-out to other areas • Dedicated Economic Growth Planner appointed to provide additional and visible targeted support for major investment projects and schemes • Development Summit held to explore barriers to investment and improve dialogue on key investment sites across Mendip to unlock new speculative development schemes for business
Invest to Unlock Business and Development Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enterprise Area developed for the Royal Bath & West Showground, with a supporting discretionary rate relief policy for new build schemes throughout Mendip • Commitment to £400,000 additional funding to support the roll-out of the Connecting Devon and Somerset Phase II superfast/ultrafast broadband programme • A housing investment company established by the Council to stimulate growth, create opportunities for local residents and generate income
Stronger Focus on Business Starts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Enterprise Mendip programme has delivered and/or supported over 100 events, activities and workshops and a loan fund in partnership with the local Chambers of Commerce and Fredericks Foundation, helping businesses to start-up or expand. These included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Supporting the growth and promotion of Frome's 'Discuss and Do' events and surgeries for start-ups and SMEs. * Annual Work in Wells week by Mendip Hub – B2B trade fair supported and promoted. * Annual B2B support day and trade fair and seminars launched at the Redbrick for Glastonbury and Street, in partnership with Strode College. * Series of training seminars and workshops launched in Shepton Mallet, in partnerships with the Team Experience. * 'Grow with Digital' initiative developed and launched to provide skills development for SMEs and sole traders to improve digital, e-commerce and marketing skills and to demonstrate opportunities to add value to their business
Enhance Local Productivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraged new business investment through working to support businesses submit bids for EU LEADER programme grants across 2 Local Action Groups to support the farming, forestry and rural business expansion. • Worked with HotSW LEP and Somerset Growth Board partners to promote business advice and support services for the Growth Hub, encouraging improved business planning, access to funding advice, sales and marketing, to enhance support for start-ups and increased productivity for SMEs • Partnered with other Local Authorities and the not-for-profit organisation, Cornerstone Mentoring to deliver mentoring to start-ups and SMEs across the district and county

A Flavour of Mendip

Location

Mendip is a rural district, covering an area of 738 square kilometres, situated just south of the major urban centres of Bristol and Bath. Home to the five market towns of Frome, Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet, Street and Wells, the official designations of Wells as a cathedral city and Street as a village, add to local distinctiveness, and all of the Mendip towns are particularly noted for their sense of community, culture and heritage.

A thriving rural economy

Mendip continues to prove an attractive location, with its diverse economy and strong base of micro and small-to-medium sized enterprises. Significant employers in the design and fashion industries, (Clarks, Mulberry, Owen Barry), food and drink sector (Framptons, Brothers, Eurilait, Andros, Dairy Crest), along with renowned private education establishments (Millfield, Wells Cathedral School) advanced engineering and R&D companies (SEA, Wavepower) also add value to the skills and employment base of the local area. Successful high growth companies such as DNA Worldwide, Netitude, Wild Beer and Marston Foods also demonstrate that there is a strong appetite for growth and business development among some of our businesses in considering new markets, export-led growth and technology solutions and innovation.

The district also has a vibrant tourism sector, with retail outlet centres at Clarks Village in Street and Kilver Court in Shepton Mallet; the world famous Glastonbury Tor and Abbey, Wells Cathedral, Wookey Hole Caves, as well as artisan shopping destinations such as St Catherine's Hill in Frome. The outstanding natural environment and unique cultural offer locally, are key to Mendip's appeal for a wide range of domestic and overseas visitors. A superb range of events also play a highly significant role in raising the profile of the local area and boosting visitor numbers, including the iconic Glastonbury Festival and the Royal Bath & West Show, as well as a range of fast-growing local and community festivals and markets.

Our key towns, village and city

Frome

With a population of 26,200 (ONS Census 2011), Frome is a vibrant and historic market town close to the West Wiltshire and Bath & North East Somerset borders, and centred on the River Frome. The town is widely known for its artisan and independent retail sector, with the thriving area of St Catherine's Hill and its highly successful Frome Independent Market often cited in travel guides and the broadsheets. The Frome Festival and many other arts-based and topical events and activities are held throughout the year, with many hosted at the popular Cheese and Grain building. Other significant local industries include engineering and manufacturing, with both rapidly filling and established industrial estates and business parks at Commerce Park, Marston Trading Estate and Vallis Road Industrial Estate.

In addition, the town has a growing creative, artistic and technology base, with Forward Space at the Old Church School acting as a business incubator and hub for many start-ups and established IT, design and services businesses. The town's growing popularity is causing additional pressures to find land to accommodate future employment growth. Exploring options for the regeneration site at Saxonvale, and additional employment sites for the town, will form priority areas for further action.

Glastonbury

Glastonbury is the smallest of Mendip's towns with a population of circa 8,900 (ONS Census 2011) and is famous for its myths and legends. The Tor, the town's Abbey and the Chalice Wells Gardens are popular places of tourism and pilgrimage for visitors with a wide range of spiritual beliefs and practices. The town has a strongly independent and alternative retail offer, which is distinctive nationally as well as locally. Tourism and hospitality along with therapeutic and spiritual healing are key industries for the town. However, Glastonbury is also still home to some of the manufacturing industries arising from its craft leatherskin heritage shared with Street.

Morlands Enterprise Park is the main development site with commercial opportunities for expanding employment. Following Premier Inn's expansion and the new Aldi investment, the site has also benefited from a new speculative light industrial scheme, and has potential for further expansion of the Redbrick Building, as well as additional land options. Glastonbury has also seen new R&D investment from marine technology firm, Wavepower, based at Hartlake, whose ambitious plans include the multimillion pound development of new energy solutions.

Shepton Mallet

At the heart of the district, historic Shepton Mallet is based at the 'cross roads' for the Mendips, with a population of circa 10,400 (ONS Census 2011). It is well known for its cider production and brewing industries, in addition to large-scale food production, both in the town and nearby villages. The town's tourism offer is less centrally connected than in some of the other Mendip towns. Kilver Court Gardens and designer outlet village, and the nearby Royal Bath & West Showground offer year round visitor destinations and events, but they have fewer direct connections to the town's retail offer, which is more noticeably aligned to community shopping than the visitor economy. Efforts to address this include support for the Friday and Sunday markets and these will continue to be a focus, along with proposals to explore the possibility of a new commercial masterplan for the town.

The Royal Bath & West Showground will also continue to be a focus for new investment following the adoption of the Local Development Order and the Society's plans for future redevelopment of parts of the site to support ongoing investment in the Showground and its facilities.

Street

Officially, still a village, Street's population of circa 11,800 (ONS Census 2011) makes it the second largest urban area in Mendip, and home to Strode College; the principal FE centre based within the district. The closest Mendip town to the M5 corridor, Street's economy is closely linked with both Clarks International Headquarters (head office, design and distribution), and Clarks Village, a retail outlet centre with over 90 named brands and which attracted 4.3 million visitors in 2016. The High Street has benefited from its proximity to the attraction, and offers a healthy mix of well-known chains and independents.

The recent sale of Clarks Village to Land Securities may also see additional investment in both the outlet centre and the town centre, with further emphasis expected on improving the visitor experience. Expansion opportunities for other trade, service, manufacturing, and distribution industries are also expected to come forward in 2017/2018 at Street Business Park, with a range of options being explored for speculative units,

following the construction of a new road, service utilities and retail units on the site. The site may also offer potential for associated investment, development, expansion or displacement of industries as a result of the development activity and supply chains for Hinkley Point C at Bridgwater.

Wells

The cathedral city of Wells has a population of circa 10,500 (ONS Census 2011) and is internationally renowned for its mediaeval architecture, Cathedral and the Bishops Palace, which also form the backdrop to many popular film and TV drama locations. The city also has a thriving retail and hospitality base; complemented by regular popular markets, and an annual programme of events, including Comedy, Food and Literature Festivals. The city was formerly a high-tech base for engineering however this has significantly reduced over the years with the departure of a number of major employers prior to the recession. Instead Wells is now more noted for its growing service sector, and it has a natural affiliation for a range of professional services, creative and IT based enterprises, a number of which are based in or associate with the Mendip Hub, a small business centre and incubator, which hosts popular networking activities, as well as the annual 'Work in Wells' business support week.

Cathedral Park, the main business park on the outskirts of the City, has recently seen new investment with the UK headquarters of Swedish firm, TePe, being developed on the site, along with a new Premier Inn. Further applications for speculative office and light industrial development have also recently been submitted. Other key sites include Priory Park, and Underwood Business Park, both providing important space for local business. Dulcote Quarry nearby will also be the site for a further 300 new local jobs over the coming years, with a new food production campus in development by Bighams. With allocated sites starting to fill up in the next 2-3 years, the challenge for Wells will be the identification of future land for employment purposes.

Case Study: Bighams

Charlie Bigham, founder of the eponymous brand of high quality ready meals, approached Mendip District Council in December 2016 and subsequently took the decision to purchase Dulcote Quarry, near Wells, from former owners, Hansteen Holdings. Working closely with food and pharmaceutical construction experts, TSL Projects and Feilden Fowles Architects, the business was keen to gain support from the Council, for their vision for a major food producing campus with a strong focus on protecting and enhancing the natural ecology of the quarry site. The site would be brand new development in addition to the company's existing facilities in North London, and would have the potential to create over 300 new jobs in future years.

The isolated nature of the quarry, and its lack of existing service infrastructure and utilities, made it a complex and, at times, challenging and at times, project. However the decision by Mendip District Council to form a virtual internal team to help project manage the scheme meant that they worked closely with the company and contractors, as well as members, officers at Somerset County Council, the Environment Agency and other stakeholders, to ensure the investment project would go ahead. Bighams now expect to complete construction and commence recruitment of the first 100 jobs, during the second half of 2017.

Mendip Population Trends and Challenges

Mendip has demonstrated significant resilience following the recession of 2008, and despite the loss of a number of key employers continues to thrive. However, as with many other rural areas, it is not immune from some of the wider challenges relating to demographic shifts in line with an ageing population, and the pressures for young people on the availability of affordable housing relative to local wages.

In 2015 the district had an estimated population of 111,700, reflecting growth of 5% over the previous ten years. Compared to Somerset and the South West, this population growth has been at a slightly slower pace, and is rather different to the GB average which has accelerated and was slightly ahead of the County rate in 2015.

Table 1: Population Age Structure Mendip 2010 - 2015

	2010	2015
Aged 0 – 15	19.4%	18.0%
Aged 16 – 64	61.1%	60.0%
Aged 65 and over	19.4%	22.0%
Total	100%	100%

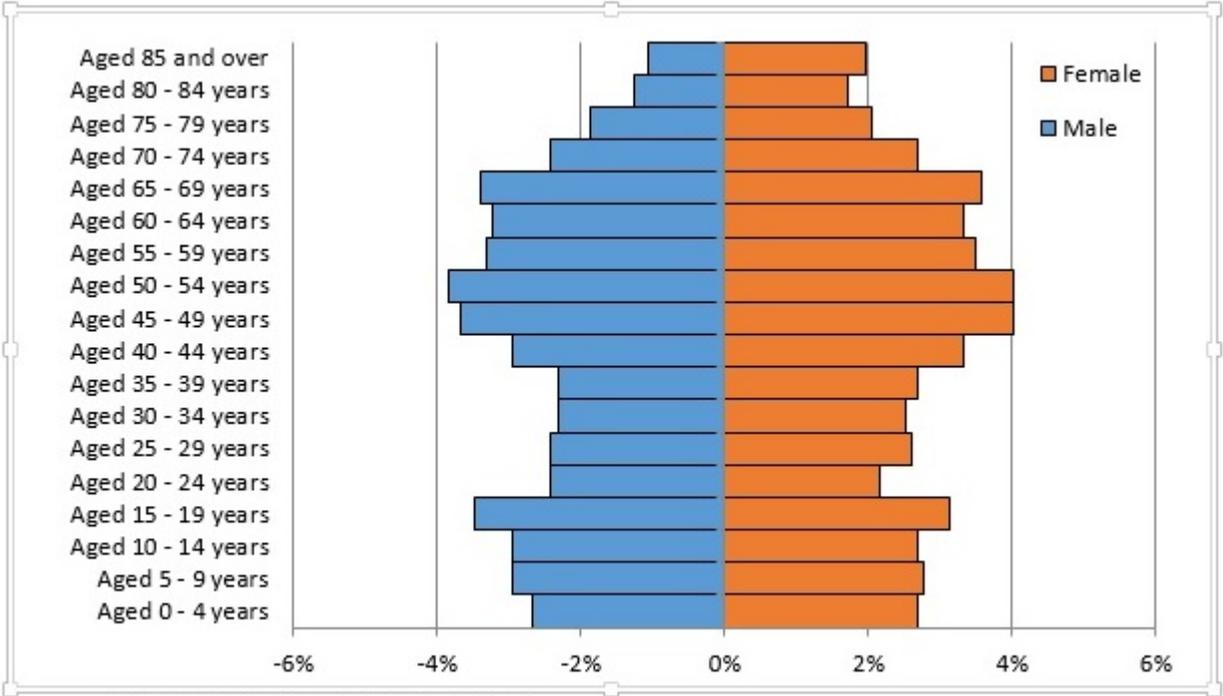
Source: ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates

Over the last five years, Mendip's population has aged, and there are now fewer young people in Mendip (0-15) than the national average, which contrasts less favourably than with the situation in 2010.

With 22% of the district now aged 65 or over, up from 19.4% in 2010, and forecast to rise further, there is a recognition that this will continue to have an impact both on local services, and across the wider economy. Additionally, the working age population has also fallen slightly since 2010 (-1.1%), although it remains marginally higher than the County's rate (59%).

Another challenge for Mendip moving forward, is to tackle the ‘hollowing out’ of the core working age population of 20-39, as these age groups are significantly under-represented in Mendip, compared to the national picture. (Figure 2) This group is most likely to reflect the effects of young people moving away from the area to university and wider employment opportunities, and may be exacerbated by additional difficulties in accessing affordable housing, while seeking work in the local area. Wells, and now Frome increasingly, are experiencing significant pressure over the availability and affordability of housing for local residents. In reality though, no part of the District is immune to this growing concern.

Figure 2: Mendip Population by Age and Gender – 2015



Mendip Employment Growth Trends and Skills

The Mendip economy has sustained overall employment growth consistently for the past fifteen years. Whilst the rate of employment growth slowed to just 2.4% over the five years 2005-10, it has picked up again in the five years to 2015 to 7.2% overall. In 2015, there were a total of 45,000 employees in employment. This represents an increase of 3,000 since 2010 and 8,500 (23.3%) over the fifteen years since 2000.

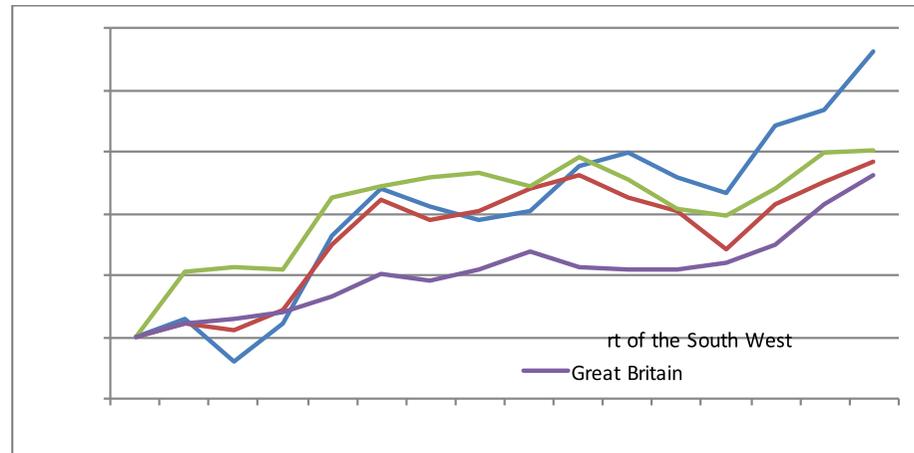
Table 2: Mendip District Employment Growth

Year	Total Employees	5 year Change	5 Year % Change
2000	36,500		
2005	41,000	+4,500	+12.3%
2010	42,000	+1,000	+2.4%
2015	45,000	+3,000	+7.2%

Source: ONS Annual business Inquiry (pre 2008) Business Registration and Employment Survey (post 2008)

Mendip's overall rate of employment growth has outperformed the national trends since 2003 and has exceeded the regional rates of growth since 2010. (Figure 3)

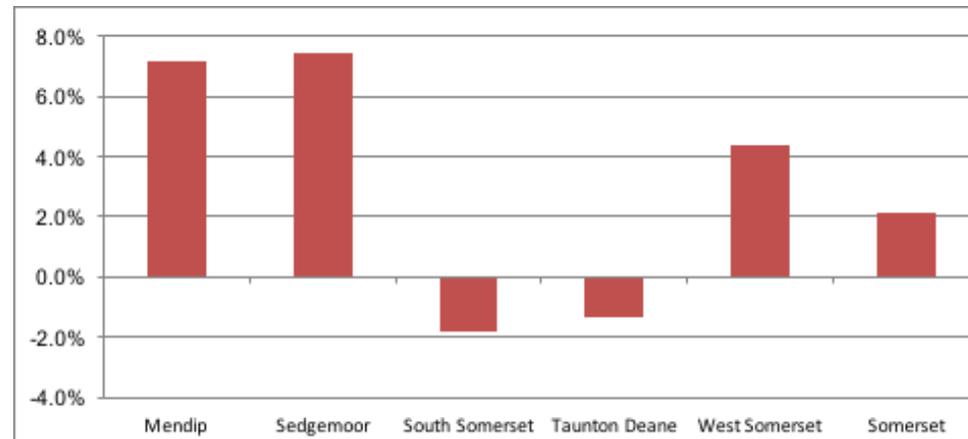
Figure 3: Employment Growth Rates 2000-15



Source: ONS Annual business Inquiry (pre 2008) Business Registration and Employment Survey (post 2008)

Indeed, employment growth in Mendip has been on a par with growth in Sedgemoor over recent years and considerably higher than other districts in the County, as highlighted in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Employment Growth Rates 2010-15



Source: ONS Business Registration and Employment Survey

Although subject to change year on year, the level of part-time working in the Mendip economy in 2015 was comparable with the rest of Somerset, accounting for around one-third of all jobs. This is more than the national average (30%) but slightly lower than the regional average for the Heart of the South West LEP area (35%).

Table 3: Mendip Skill Levels 2015

Ages 16-64	No qualifications	NVQ 1+	NVQ 2+	NVQ 3+	NVQ 4+
Mendip	6%	93%	79%	55%	36%
Sedgemoor	7%	87%	75%	52%	28%
South Somerset	5%	92%	83%	66%	36%
Taunton Deane	n/a	92%	81%	64%	44%
West Somerset	n/a	86%	73%	50%	29%
County of Somerset	5%	91%	79%	59%	36%

Source: ONS Annual Population Survey

Skill levels across Mendip continue to hold up reasonably well against the county averages, except in Level 3 qualifications, where it dips considerably beneath South Somerset and Taunton Deane, where Level 2 and 3 qualifications are the strongest in Somerset. For Level 4+, only Taunton exceeds the county average, with Mendip and South Somerset jointly equivalent with the county average.

Most importantly though, skill shortages continue to form one of the key concerns of employers, whether across Mendip, Somerset or nationally. Matching delivery of appropriate skills to local businesses will be just as vital in the future as ensuring the achievement of specific levels of qualifications. Consultation with business and partner organisations highlighted this as one of the most significant issues facing the economy.

Mendip's Key Sectors

The Mendip economy has a strong presence of employment in Wholesale/Retail (19.4%), Finance & Business Services (16.7%), Education and Health & Social Work (both 11%). The data excludes farm based agriculture which is also expected to be strong locally. Although relatively small in overall employment terms, Food & Drink processing in Mendip is three times the national average level of employment making it locally significant. Other sectors above the national and/or regional levels include Wholesale/Retail (reflecting the regional significance of the market towns as well as specialist outlets including Clarks Village), Education (reflecting Mendip's strong independent schools), Construction and Mining & Quarrying (reflecting local resources).

Table 4: Employment by Sector 2015

% by Sector 2015	Mendip	Somerset	HotSW	GB
Agriculture & Fishing*	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.8%
Mining & Quarrying	0.9%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%
Food & Drink Processing	3.8%	3.4%	1.9%	1.3%
Other Manufacturing	6.1%	9.5%	7.9%	6.9%
Utilities	1.3%	1.4%	1.1%	1.1%
Construction	6.6%	5.5%	5.3%	4.5%
Wholesale & Retail	19.4%	18.4%	18.0%	15.7%
Transport	5.5%	4.6%	4.5%	4.6%
Hotels & Restaurants	8.8%	7.8%	8.8%	7.2%
Information & Communication	2.2%	1.8%	2.2%	4.2%
Finance, Business Services, Real Estate & Administration	16.7%	14.9%	15.4%	22.3%
Public Admin	1.3%	3.2%	4.3%	4.4%
Education	11.0%	9.2%	9.5%	9.2%
Health & Social Work	11.0%	15.7%	16.6%	13.2%
Arts, Entertainment & Other Services	5.0%	4.1%	4.3%	4.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: ONS Business Registration and Employment Survey

*Note: These figures excludes Farm Based Agriculture and Self Employed **Shading represents Mendip's sector strengths in employment terms

Since 2010, the strong growth sectors in Mendip included Construction (+71%) and Professional/Business Services (+31%). Other sectors demonstrating employment growth include Wholesale/Retail (+13%), Transport and Storage (+11%) and Health & Social Services (+11%) over the period 2010-2015. In contrast to national trends where employment has declined, manufacturing in Mendip has remained stable in overall employment terms, across the Food & Drink sector as well as other manufacturing activity.

Table 5: Mendip Employment Change by Sector 2010-2015

Sector	2010	2015	2010-2015
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	125	150	20%
Mining & Quarrying	500	400	-20%
Food & Drink Processing	1,725	1,725	0%
Other Manufacturing	2,775	2,775	0%
Utilities	250	250	0%
Construction	1,750	3,000	+71%
Wholesale & Retail	8,000	9,000	+13%
Transport & Storage	2,250	2,500	+11%
Information & Communications	1,750	1,000	-43%
Hotels & Restaurants	4,000	4,000	0%
Finance, Professional & Business Services	5,800	7,600	+31%
Public Admin	1,000	600	-40%
Education	5,000	5,000	0%
Health and Social Work	4,500	5,000	+11%
Other	2,250	2,100	-7%

Source: ONS Business Registration and Employment Survey

Sectors which have contracted in the five year period include Information & Communications (-43%), Public Administration (-40%) and rather surprisingly Mining and Quarrying (-20%), although this sector is known to fluctuate periodically.

While there remains significant potential for growth in Food & Drink processing, some of the employment sectors (such as Retail and Education) where Mendip is strongly represented, may prove harder to raise productivity in the future. This contrasts with those sectors such as Finance and IT, which are expected to show strong growth nationally, but are less prominent within the Mendip economy.

The retail sector which also represents an employment strength for Mendip, is also potentially vulnerable to competition from growth in other regional centres/new outlets, and therefore a focus on improving and expanding the visitor 'offer' will form an important part of future discussions with the towns.

Sectors where Mendip is under-represented compared to national/regional levels include: Public Admin, Health & Social Work, which suggests the District may be less exposed to public spending cuts in overall employment terms. Finance and Business Services are important to the Mendip economy (16.7%) and higher than both the Somerset (14.9%) and the LEP averages (15.4%), but it is still under-represented compared to the national average (22.3%). This is widely regarded as a key growth sector nationally and one that contributes to higher value output and improved productivity, and although there may be some limitations as a rural area to attract substantial growth in this sector (particularly for sub-sectors such as financial services), it still offers significant opportunities for local growth and to encourage and engage new business start-ups.

Key Sectors: Opportunities and Challenges

A focus for the strategy moving forward will be to identify areas where value may be added across a range of sectors, whether through increased promotion for investment, stronger links to the Department for International Trade and export growth, continued planning for commercial land and premises or connections to institutions offering apprenticeships, skills growth, talent retention and innovation support.

Agriculture and Food & Drink (Agri-Food)

One of Mendip's areas of competitive advantage is in the field of Agri-Food, and despite the uncertainties faced over Brexit, the future opportunities for the sector are strongly demonstrated through a recent investment by Bighams in a high quality food campus at Dulcote Quarry, with the potential to create more than 300 new jobs over the coming years. Equally, planned expansion into a new build brewery by Wild Beer at the Royal Bath & West Showground, has been linked to the future redevelopment of the Royal Bath & West Society's offices into a new Agri-Food Centre of Excellence, along with an ambitious programme of business support. Locally, Kingshay Farming Trust is part of a new research base into agri-tech excellence in robotic milking systems and new precision cow welfare management systems, along with Cranfield and Harper Adams Universities and Bristol Robotics Laboratories. Recruitment into these food and drink industries, and developing investment and skills in new technologies to support these sectors, will be critical priorities for the future.

Business Services and Creative Technologies

An increasing number of local companies have expressed an interest in future collaborations, expanding their business locally and for some, creating a stronger local technology 'cluster'. There is notable competition from Bristol and Bath for many of these companies. However, with more choosing locations in Frome, Wells, Glastonbury and other locations across the district to settle in, a key feature for retaining these companies will be in ensuring new innovative solutions for their expanding accommodation needs. The further roll-out of superfast and ultrafast digital connectivity will also be a particularly critical feature for this sector, where Mendip District Council will continue to work with the Connecting Devon and Somerset programme, to drive further improvements, along with access to improved mobile connectivity.

Engineering, Construction and Manufacturing

Mendip has a core of small to medium enterprises in the engineering, construction and manufacturing sector, with a number of the smaller precision engineering companies forming part of wider UK aerospace, oil and gas and defence component supply chains; with several offering bespoke and custom made services. These SMEs may benefit from further integration into the Hinkley Supply Chain portal and are sectors where apprenticeships and higher apprenticeships will form a key work strand for developing and encouraging future skills development. Promoting the benefits of the Apprenticeship Levy for smaller employers will be a priority across a range of sectors; particularly where businesses may find it challenging to recruit workers with the appropriate STEM skills.

Tourism, Retail and Hospitality

With a greater reliance on retail, tourism and hospitality, Mendip is recognised as home to some of the most iconic visitor destinations in the South West. Although these often form lower wage and productivity opportunities than in some sectors, these industries still form one of the backbones of the local economy, and are complementary to the natural landscape and lifestyle of the Mendips. As the retail sector continues to struggle nationally, Mendip's retailers have proved relatively resilient to some of the problems besetting other high streets, with a blend of independent retailers and national chains still forming a core for most of the towns, with the exception of Shepton Mallet, where constraints on unit size and footfall still exist. As visitors continue to move towards 'experience' rather than shopping alone, we will need to continue to evolve and refresh our town centre 'offers', and a key strand of this strategy will look towards forming new town working groups to explore fresh thinking and solutions, along with Mendip Tourism Ltd, the operator of our Mendip Tourist Information Centres.

Mendip SWOT Analysis

There has been considerable progress in tackling local economic weaknesses and responding to external threats through the delivery of the Economic Development Strategy 2013-2016. Whilst many challenges remain, Mendip is in better shape to respond, building on recent success. This has particularly been recognised through a much stronger business identity, and with the attraction of new business investment, as well as greater engagement with regional and national business agencies. The Council is also working with local partners, including the Chambers, Cornerstone Mentoring, Heart of the South West Growth Hub and other partners, to provide better business communication, advice and support. Other areas of focus include stronger networking, mentoring for new starts and digital business skills.

Looking to the future, many of the previous economic strengths remain the same, although the skills gap and overall productivity challenge will continue to be priorities. Whilst access to finance has improved, some businesses remain cautious about investing and many businesses work on short-term contract cycles. Mendip's commercial property market is under-invested and can be challenged by marginal returns. There is limited new business space available and this tends to be mainly bespoke for owner occupation or pre-let basis. This can constrain the area's ability to respond to new foot-loose business enquiries seeking immediate occupation; even where there are other compelling reasons to locate in Mendip. More positively, new planning applications are starting to come forward for smaller light industrial, warehouse and trade counter schemes, and if realised within the next 12-24 months may offer some new stimulus to the local market.

Mendip SWOT Summary

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>A resilient and thriving local economy</p> <p>Business start-ups and survivorship success</p> <p>Distinctive and diverse towns</p> <p>Excellent educational opportunities</p> <p>Highly regarded quality of life and strong visitor economy.</p> <p>Business strengths in food & agri-tech sectors.</p>	<p>Fewer high level skills and constraints on career development</p> <p>Low value employment</p> <p>Retaining young people in the local employment market</p> <p>Challenges of rural connectivity and road infrastructure</p> <p>Availability of flexible and 'grow on' business space</p>	<p>Emerging business identity</p> <p>Superfast and ultrafast broadband roll-out across rural areas</p> <p>Supply chain, skills growth, and higher wage opportunities from Hinkley C</p> <p>Creating stronger education-business links to support vocational career pathways</p> <p>Regional connectivity with the West of England area</p>	<p>Labour market constrained by high levels of employment and demographic age structure</p> <p>Local competitiveness in uncertain economic context</p> <p>Competition for employment sites with housing developers</p> <p>Disproportionate impact on agriculture if subsidies lost</p> <p>Potential for increased investment in automation without increasing/upskilling workforce</p>

Strengths

Mendip must capitalise on its core strengths. Its strengths are its competitive advantage and will be the foundations from which future economic prosperity can be realised.

A Resilient and Thriving Local Economy

Mendip's economy continues to grow and continues to show resilience despite the local impact of some business closures and restructuring. Total employment in the District increased 7% over the past five years to 45,000 employees; more than double the growth rate across Somerset (2.4%) and the wider South West region (3.5%).

Business Starts & Survivorship Success

A key priority in the previous Economic Strategy, Mendip continues to out-perform the County and South West Region for the rate of new business starts and business survivorship. Small workspace areas, however, remain in short supply across Mendip, despite expansion of Forward Space Work Hub in Frome and the Mendip Business Hub in Wells. Furthermore, the lack of "grow-on" space across the District risks constraining future business potential.

Distinct & Diverse Settlements

Mendip benefits from its rural distinctiveness and the cultural diversity offered by the five individual settlements of Frome, Glastonbury, Shepton Mallet, Street and Wells. Most centres are in good health and report a positive outlook in consultation. The continued weakness of Shepton Mallet, however, remains a concern; although there are positive signs of new investment in the wider area.

Highly Regarded Quality of Life

The environment of Mendip is prized by those who live, work and visit the area. The area is rich in landscape, culture and built heritage and renowned for the quality of both public and private education standards and facilities which is a major draw for many families moving into the area. There is also a cost advantage relative to the nearby cities of Bristol and Bath which inevitably brings a different challenge and risk of forming dormitory towns as people commute back to higher paid jobs outside of Mendip.

Business Strengths in Food and Agri-Technology

Mendip's strength in the agri-food, processing and cider/brewing production industries creates a strong narrative for both local and potential investors. The sector is identified as an area of potential risk through the loss of migrant workforce and skills, and would benefit from additional support to promote its many career opportunities to young people, and those looking to find new work or training opportunities.

Weaknesses

Despite its success, if Mendip wishes to establish itself as a competitive place in which business choose to locate, there are challenges which still need to be overcome.

Low Value Employment

The national and regional challenge for improved “productivity” is especially acute in the Mendip economy. Local employment is dominated by low value activities and growth in part-time working is perhaps compressing overall earning capacity. The resident wages to local workplace earnings gap has also increased to approximately 16% over the past five years or so.

Fewer High Level Skills

Although formal skill levels have improved across Mendip over the past ten years or so, local business continue to report challenges in matching business needs with local skills availability. There is also concern that people may be “under-employed” and/or “under-valued” and not necessarily working to their full potential.

Challenges in Retaining Young People

As young people move away to University or for other employment opportunities, it can be difficult to encourage them to consider the local area as a hotbed of opportunity, and often they are unaware of both local companies, and career entry pathways to access opportunities. Many young people and parents still consider apprenticeships to be inferior to degrees, although rising fees may be starting to tip the balance for some families.

Rural Connectivity

Whilst the rural context and individual settlements are critical features of the charm of Mendip, the poor connectivity (roads and public transport, as well as digital infrastructure, broadband and mobile connections) across the district can tend to weaken the capacity and flexibility of the labour market. Difficulties in accessing work places, through reliable and timely transport options, combined with possible family/care responsibilities may well be part of the reason for high levels of part-time working across Mendip. Better transport and digital connectivity will continue to help develop and diversify rural businesses and start-ups to help overcome the continued challenge of mobility and isolation in rural areas.

Availability of Flexible and ‘Grow on’ Business Space

Unlike larger, more mature economies, Mendip’s commercial property market is relatively “contained” with very little vacant space available to respond to businesses with immediate accommodation needs. There is also very little speculative business space being provided locally with developers relying on pre-let agreements to be able to secure funding and establish confidence in commercial viability. Those planning applications which are coming forward tend to be for light industrial and distribution purposes, rather than for small or flexible office schemes.

Opportunities

The Mendip economy has real potential to grasp emerging opportunities to enter a new era of economic prosperity and growth.

Emerging Business Identity

There is a sense that Mendip is cultivating an emerging business identity through coordinated local efforts to promote opportunities and stronger business networking across the District. There is a stronger “business vibe” and much greater dialogue between local partners and businesses. The Mendip Business Awards programme has gone from strength to strength and is now firmly placed on the annual business calendar. Mendip has also successfully attracted major inward investment and continues to deal with wide ranging business enquiries with strong future potential.

Superfast Broadband & Mobile Connectivity

Provision of high quality IT infrastructure is a pre-requisite to encourage modern business formation and investment and to improve existing business efficiency and productivity. The Mendip economy has to some extent been constrained by poor IT infrastructure and mobile connectivity but is beginning to benefit from the roll-out of new technology. Phase 1 of the Connecting Devon & Somerset programme is now complete providing 85% coverage of the rural areas. Phase 2 of the delivery programme has recently been contracted with specialist internet provider, Gigaclear with the aim to reach 95% of homes and businesses by 2020.

Supply Chain and Skills Growth for Hinkley Point C

Mendip businesses have been slightly slower than some of their competitors across Somerset to join the Hinkley Supply Chain portal to access opportunities arising from the new nuclear build development. Some have attributed this to other customer contracts and opportunities, and others have felt they were too small or aligned to other geographies, however there are still businesses who could benefit from registering and also those who can take advantage of the need to ‘backfill’ other work during key periods of development and construction. In addition, the opportunity for local apprenticeships in construction, engineering and other sectors are likely to grow significantly.

Stronger Education-Business Links

The rising cost of University fees and pressures on recruitment arising from Brexit, may act as a catalyst for employers to want to engage more strongly with local education providers in order to promote careers and opportunities in their field. Work with Sector Skills Councils may help to develop further frameworks and occupational standards, for new apprenticeships, and also for further higher and degree apprenticeships. This could help to strengthen vocational career pathways to young people, as well as older workers considering a change of occupation.

Regional Connectivity with the West of England

Mendip’s proximity to Bath and Bristol, offers opportunities as well, as threats from outbound commuting. Expanding businesses constrained by congested cities and transport systems may be attracted by a less constrained environment. Links with Bristol Airport and other cross-LEP infrastructure, as well as building better links with world-class universities could also offer significant benefits to Mendip businesses.

Threats

Global and local economies are constantly in a state of change and although there are opportunities there are also a range of external threats.

Labour Market Constraints

While presenting a confident picture of economic resilience, continued “full-employment” can constrain economic capacity due to lack of mobility and flexibility in the workforce. The nature of an ageing demographic and workforce can stifle new opportunities coming forward for young people, particularly as fewer may choose to retire at 65 following the changes to employment law. Further training opportunities will become necessary throughout people’s working lives in order to stay current with new technologies and industries.

Local Competitiveness in Uncertain Economic Context

Continued uncertainty over the future of EU workers is also a growing concern. Many important local business sectors such as Hospitality/Catering, Agriculture, Food Processing, Health Care and Construction have either experienced or expect to experience some impact following the referendum decision to leave the EU. Although many companies are attempting to put contingencies in place, recruitment will continue to be a concern.

Competition for Employment Sites

Encouraged by national planning policy, employment sites and commercial premises face strong competition for redevelopment or conversion to housing. To ensure sustainable growth and development for Mendip’s towns and connected rural areas it is vital that existing employment areas are retained and additional employment allocations will need to be identified in the Mendip Local Plan to accommodate businesses who are expanding, and to attract new investment and jobs growth.

Disproportionate Impact on Agriculture

Any future loss of subsidies for the farming sector, could have a disproportionate impact for the Mendip economy, and the wider South West region. Employment in the sector, and natural stewardship of the countryside could be affected as the dairy sector continues to face mounting pressures and costs. Without support, there are also concerns over the potential future food security for the UK.

Increased Automation in a Low Wage Economy

Also an opportunity, but taking a longer term view and with constraints on labour markets, there will be increasing pressure on businesses to consider further automation to improve business productivity and efficiency. While positive for overall business growth and productivity, this could lead to future employment pressures unless workers are appropriately re-skilled and have access to better training opportunities. While robotics and the adoption of artificial intelligence by some companies may lead to expansion and growth, for example in the agri-tech sector, increased automation could also cause future contraction of jobs in large-scale employment sectors such as food and drink processing.

The Way Forward

Responding to current economic conditions, the Mendip Economic Development Strategy 2017-2020 is structured around three key interdependent themes: Business, Place and People. These themes effectively form the corporate economic development priorities for Mendip and will help provide a clear agenda for co-ordinating activities, and engaging with strategic partners, investors and the wider business community. Each of these priority themes is addressed in turn and are addressed through a series of strategic actions that will underpin Mendip's economic performance. These will form the framework for the Economic Development Operational Plan, and for monitoring, reporting progress and evaluation, moving forward.

Overall delivery will be co-ordinated by the Council's Economic Development team under the guidance of the portfolio holder for economic growth and monitored closely by the cross-party and departmental working group. Mendip District Council will also meet regularly with project partners, including local heads of Chambers of Commerce, Town Council representatives, and Mendip Tourism Ltd.

Key Aims

- Business:** To grow and develop our **Enterprise Mendip** programme – to support new business start-ups, and promote leadership, management and training opportunities, as well as mentoring, innovation and business support activities across our diverse micro and SME base.
- To work with significant, high growth, and key sector employers across the district to promote strategic opportunities for business retention and expansion, collaboration, innovation and international trade.
- Place:** To communicate and expand our **Invest in Mendip** approach, by providing positive planning for competitive employment locations, premises, connectivity and skills to attract new, high quality inward investment, improve prospects for expanding and relocating local employers and create better job opportunities for all.
- To drive new town working groups to explore strategic economic plans and encourage a destination management approach, reflecting the diverse strengths and identities of our market towns and the positive benefits of our visitor economy.
- To champion improved transport, broadband and mobile connectivity to benefit Mendip's economy and address strategic network issues, by lobbying on future priorities for infrastructure funding.
- People:** To develop an **Opportunity Mendip** initiative to promote career opportunities for all across Mendip; broadening and strengthening industry and education links across the district to support young people, and helping to create and communicate a range of opportunities for individuals of all ages and abilities aspiring to enter or re-enter the workplace.
- To attract and develop skills within the local labour market to realise opportunities within the digital market-place and strengthen a culture of innovation across all sectors of our economy.

Business: Strategic Action Plan

Strategic Priority 1: To grow and develop our **Enterprise Mendip** programme – to support new business start-ups, and promote leadership, management and training opportunities, as well as mentoring, innovation and business support activities across our diverse micro and SME base.

Strategic Priority 2: To work with significant, high growth, and key sector employers across the district to promote strategic opportunities for business retention and expansion, collaboration, innovation and international trade.

BU1	<p>To further grow and develop the Enterprise Mendip programme and brand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work with the Chambers and other partners to develop new events and initiatives to support business start-ups and our diverse SME community • Work with Heart of the South West Growth Hub and Cornerstone Mentoring to grow business and start-up referrals to the service across Mendip, and to support them to hold regular events and offer access to finance and funding advice and guidance, business planning and sales and marketing • Work with Strode College and other training providers to develop a programme of new enterprise and skills activities for business • Promote leadership and management training via support for LEP’s ESF Skills for the Future contract
BU2	Work with the Heart of the South West LEP to explore new business support provision for Mendip and Somerset, beyond March 2019 (Brexit) and funded EU support programmes
BU3	Develop links with regional Universities and other research institutes to encourage potential spin-off opportunities and identify speakers/outreach for enterprise and innovation workshops/events
BU4	Explore Dept. for International Trade links to host business advice/export workshops for food and agri-tech at the planned Bath & West agri-food centre of excellence
BU5	Work in partnership with the LEP’s Better Business For All team to develop a business guide for the support and advice available from the regulatory services in Mendip and Somerset.
BU6	Work with partners including HotSW Growth Hub, Cosmic, Strode College, Somerset Skills & Learning, town and parish councils, and local Chambers to further develop and promote business planning and advice(and digital skills/cyber security awareness) among SMEs across Mendip

Place: Strategic Action Plan

Strategic Priority 3: To communicate and expand our **Invest in Mendip** approach, by providing positive planning for competitive employment locations, premises, connectivity and skills to attract new, high quality inward investment, improve prospects for expanding and relocating local employers and create better job opportunities for all.

Strategic Priority 4: To drive new town working groups to explore strategic economic plans and encourage a destination management approach, reflecting the diverse strengths and identities of our market towns and the positive benefits of our visitor economy.

Strategic Priority 5: To champion improved transport, broadband and mobile connectivity to benefit Mendip's economy and address strategic network issues, by lobbying on future priorities for infrastructure funding.

PL1	To further grow and develop an Invest in Mendip approach and brand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Into Somerset to develop case studies, news and e-bulletins to drive awareness of new opportunities • Grow the distribution and outreach of the Invest in Mendip newsletter to create segmented news items for developers and agents and key intermediaries • Developing links and materials for the Bath & West Enterprise Area in partnership with the developer and the Society
PL2	Engage with Into Somerset, the Heart of the South West LEP and the Dept. for International Trade to develop regional and sub-regional sector propositions for the Agri-Food Sector and inward investment opportunities for the low carbon/nuclear and advanced engineering sector
PL3	Co-ordinate and support 5 town working groups to explore strategic economic priorities and actions plans, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new Boxworks workspace facility for Frome and renewed priority for tackling regeneration at Saxonvale • Additional commercial land identification for the Local Development Plan (Part II and Part I review), with Frome, Wells and Shepton as priority areas • Explore opportunities to develop a commercial masterplan for the regeneration of Shepton Mallet town centre • Encourage future development opportunities for Morlands Enterprise Park in Glastonbury • Encourage additional investment in the visitor experience at Clarks Village and for the Crispin Centre at Street
PL4	Convene a further planning and economic development 'summit' to communicate further opportunities and intelligence to local investors and developers, to consider future employment needs, and solutions to potential barriers
PL5	Consider and identify where planning tools and mechanisms including Local Development Orders, Planning & Design Briefs, Masterplanning and Planning Agreements, may be effective and appropriate, to help with the local delivery of economic growth.
PL6	Develop and agree a three year funding proposal for Mendip Tourism Ltd to unlock future investment in the TICs and to co-ordinate a destination management approach (including support for Wells' City of Culture bid)
PL7	Identify, research and lobby for funding on priority infrastructure schemes to improve connectivity for road improvements and broadband and mobile coverage

People: Strategic Action Plan

Strategic Priority 6: To develop an **Opportunity Mendip** initiative to promote career opportunities for all across Mendip; broadening and strengthening industry and education links across the district to support young people, and helping to create and communicate a range of opportunities for individuals of all ages and abilities aspiring to enter or re-enter the workplace.

Strategic Priority 7: To attract and develop skills within the local labour market to realise opportunities within the digital market-place and strengthen a culture of innovation across all sectors of our economy.

PE1	<p>Develop an ‘Opportunity Mendip’ brand and targeted communications to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote sector-specific apprenticeships and local employment opportunities to businesses and individuals, in partnership with FE colleges and training providers. • Promote work experience and ‘tasters’, traineeships, and support employers and employees with help for physical and mental wellbeing issues in the workplace. • Promote digital skills training and opportunities for businesses and individuals, to increase awareness of cyber security, e-commerce, career opportunities and online services.
PE2	Engage with Somerset Employment & Skills Group (E&SG) and the Enterprise Advisers Network, and work with SMEs and larger local employers and business groups, such as the Chambers and FSB to improve business links with schools.
PE3	Encourage and evaluate local E&SG pilot schemes, such as the ‘Teachers in Industry’ project, and potential new Education Business Partnership for Somerset, and provide support as appropriate to help rollout in Mendip.
PE4	Support the LEP and its contractors to deliver the ESF Skills for Future Workforce scheme, offering skills training and funded qualifications for employees in SMEs.
PE5	Establish key contacts in regional Universities/HE to promote understanding and links for graduate recruitment and to promote and signpost companies with an interest in higher and degree apprenticeships.
PE6	<p>Build on the Shape Mendip partnership and DWP’s work with key client groups, to establish links with HR managers and SMEs to highlight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best practice in tackling skills gaps and developing internal career progression routes and recruitment and retention strategies • Volunteer and work opportunities for clients on Universal Credit, and people facing barriers to re-entering the workforce
PE7	Work with the Growth Hub, Strode College and other colleges and training providers in partnership with local Chambers to strengthen and further develop local skills in enterprise, innovation and digital, for businesses and individuals.