

Towards a more prosperous Denbighshire

Denbighshire's Economic Strategy and Action Plan 2025 - 2035

****Draft Work In Progress****



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1. Introduction

- 1.1** *Towards a more prosperous Denbighshire* is our ambitious and exciting new growth strategy and action plan designed to support the County's economy and its future economic development. It presents our long-term vision for creating a more prosperous Denbighshire and a local economy that is increasingly resilient and competitive, skilled and enterprising, and famous for its genuinely distinctive places and experiences. The new economic strategy is, by design, inherently outward facing and seeks to leverage relevant growth opportunities and complementarities emerging elsewhere in North Wales and beyond into North West England.
- 1.2** This document is intended to stimulate and shape the work of all our stakeholders as we come together behind a common vision to enhance the long-term economic prospects of Denbighshire, its business base, workers and residents.
- 1.3** *Towards a more prosperous Denbighshire* is clearly and unashamedly focused on unlocking economic success as we seek to accelerate economic growth across the County so that we can narrow the productivity gap with the performance of the rest of Wales and the wider UK. The strategy brings clarity and consistency to our economic development thinking. However, given the speed of change evident within an increasingly complex and technology-led world economy, it is vital that our new strategy has in-built responsiveness and agility at its core, so that it can be delivered in a dynamic fashion and allow partners to respond quickly and confidently to emerging market, technology and policy opportunities. Linked to this, as a County we also recognise fully our responsibilities in relation to managing the transition to Net Zero and we are excited by the many growth opportunities associated with the emergence of the green economy.

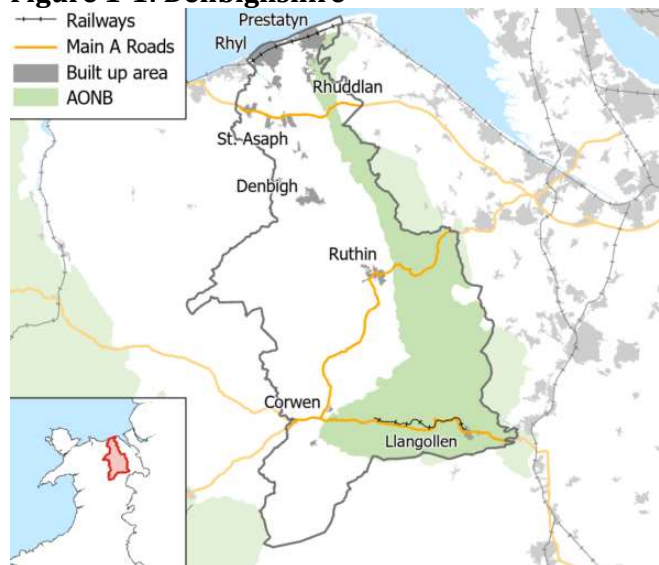
Introducing Denbighshire

1.4 Nestled in North-East Wales, Denbighshire is a predominantly rural county with around 97,000 residents. The local economy has c.3,500 businesses, generating £2bn in economic output annually.

1.5 In the north of the county are the seaside towns of Rhyl and Prestatyn. The rural south and centre of Denbighshire is dotted with smaller towns and villages. This unique mix of coastal and rural landscapes, including the stunning hills of the Clwydian Range, makes Denbighshire attractive to residents and visitors alike.

1.6 In spatial terms, Denbighshire is a long, narrow county bordered by rural areas to the south and west, with important connections to the more urban Flintshire and Wrexham to the east – and into north west England beyond that. This spatial context is crucial in shaping our long-term strategic opportunities for economic growth.

Figure 1-1: Denbighshire



Source: Produced by SQW 2024. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right 2024. Contains National Statistics data

Developing the new Economic Strategy and Action Plan

1.7 The development of *Towards a more prosperous Denbighshire* is the culmination of a rigorous and transparent process. It has sought to explain why our economy has been performing as it has done over recent decades. Additionally, the process has also been designed to enthuse partners and secure real commitment for a new economic trajectory for our County, as well as setting out a route map for getting us to where we want to be.

1.8 The strategy was developed based on extensive stakeholder engagement and desk-based analysis throughout 2024 and early 2025. The first phase assessed the economic and policy context for the strategy, with the findings presented in a comprehensive Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis report. This detailed evidence base informed the selection of our strategic priorities in the second phase, setting out how we want the Denbighshire economy to develop over the coming years. The final phase provided a focused list of new interventions needed to achieve our vision for growing the Denbighshire economy.

Figure 1-1: The 'logic sequence' for the Economic Strategy



Source: SQW

The wider context for the Strategy

1.9 The previous Economic Strategy for Denbighshire was published in 2013. There have been significant changes since then in the national and international landscape which have shaped the development of our economy. Our strategy has been informed by changes in the wider macro-economic and political environment, an evolution of governance arrangements, and the other Plans and Strategies at local, national and UK levels. Six themes are particularly important:

- The **Denbighshire County Council Corporate Plan** which includes “a prosperous Denbighshire” as one of six objectives. The [Corporate Plan](#) aims to “Support economic recovery, capitalising on opportunities to enable residents to access decent employment and income. This will mean having good access to goods and services, and the County will maximise its rich cultural heritage and natural assets to support economic prosperity. We want to use economic growth as a driver to reduce inequality and poverty.”
- The work of Denbighshire County Council – as with all public bodies across Wales – is explicitly influenced by the **Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015** duty to consider the long-term impact of decisions across seven aspects of wellbeing, including prosperity, health and Welsh language.
- There is also an overarching legal commitment by the UK and Welsh Government to achieving **net zero by 2050**, in addition to the Council declaring a Climate Change and Ecological Emergency in 2019 and - through the [Climate and Nature Strategy](#) - committing to be a Net Carbon Zero Council by 2030. The decarbonisation imperative creates opportunities and challenges for our rural communities, offshore energy generation and to support businesses and residents to act decisively in making the necessary changes.
- Increased levels of regional collaboration through the **North Wales Growth Deal** - signed in December 2020 by a partnership including Denbighshire County Council and other local authorities, the universities of Bangor and Wrexham, and two FE providers - and subsequent **North Wales Corporate Joint Committee** (CJC) which has important roles relating to spatial and transport planning. Joint working at a regional level is also promoted through the **Regional Skills Partnership**.

- The **election of a new UK Government** and its publication of [Invest 2035: the UK's Modern Industrial Strategy](#) which identifies eight growth driving sectors and takes a place based focus. The [AI Opportunities Action Plan](#), including the proposals to establish AI Growth Zones which can help to drive local rejuvenation, has also informed our thinking.
- The **continuing impact of economic shocks** caused by the UK's exit from the European Union – with implications for agriculture and land management and the scale of public funding available for economic development interventions – Covid-19 and, more recently, the cost of living crisis.

Structure of the Strategy and Action Plan

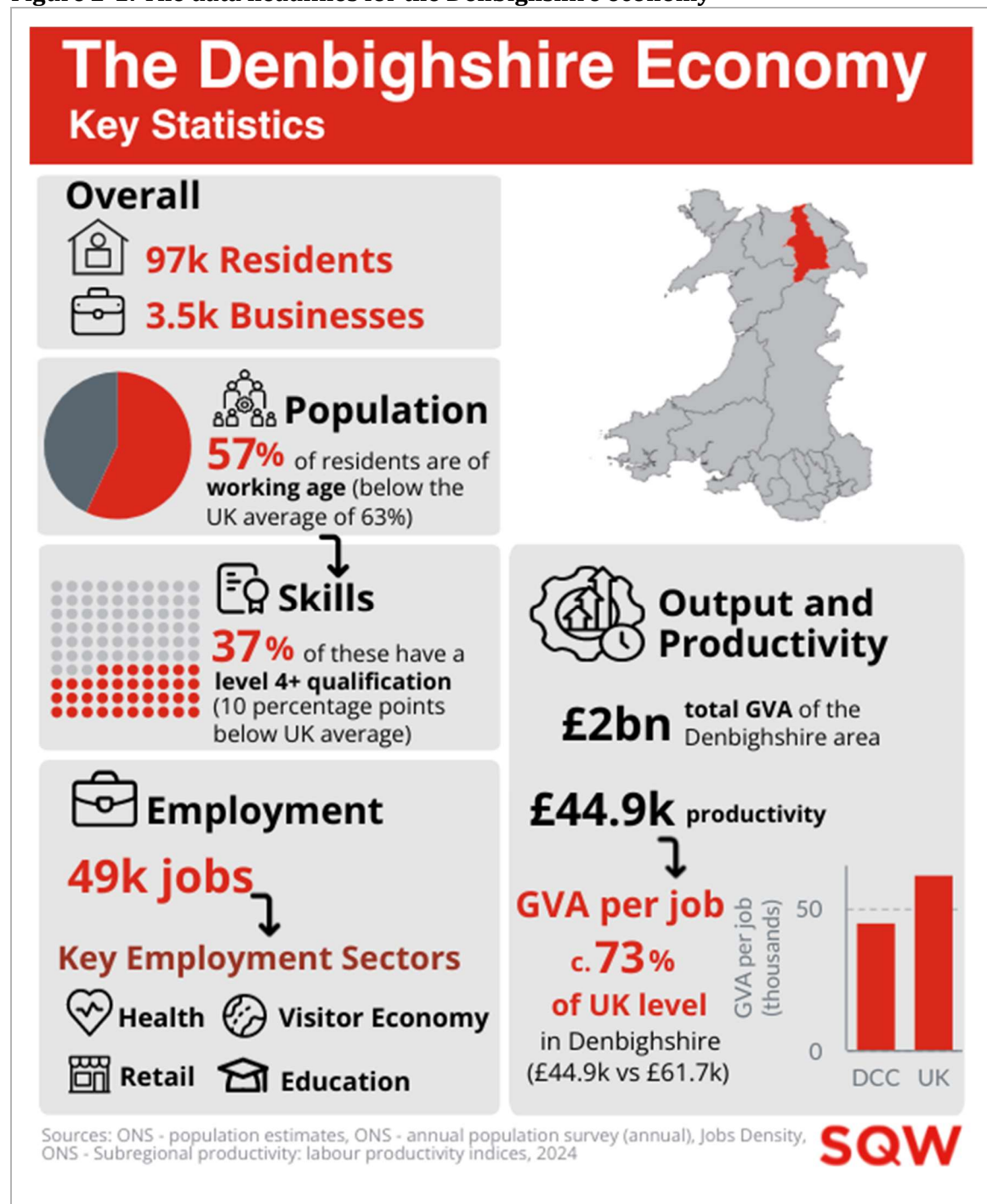
1.10 This document has three main chapters and a supporting Annex:

- Chapter 2 introduces the economic landscape within which the new strategy has been developed, and summarises the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the Denbighshire economy.
- Chapter 3 presents our new Strategic Framework which sets out our priorities for growing the economy across the County.
- Chapter 4 sets out a focussed list of key actions to achieve our strategic priorities.
- Annex A assesses the contribution of this Strategy against the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.

1.11 This strategy and action plan document is supported by a separate SWOT Report that provides a comprehensive evidence base for partners.

2. Denbighshire's economic landscape

Figure 2-1: The data headlines for the Denbighshire economy



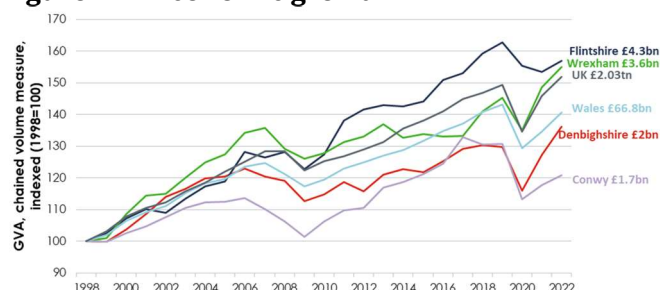
Source: SQW

Economic performance

Long term economic underperformance but an encouraging recovery from the pandemic...

2.1 Our economy generated £2bn in Gross Value Added (GVA, a key measure of an economy's overall performance) in 2022. Encouragingly, the County recovered strongly from the Covid-19 pandemic, with GVA growing at a faster rate than the Wales and UK averages over the 2020 to 2022 period.

Figure 2-1: Economic growth



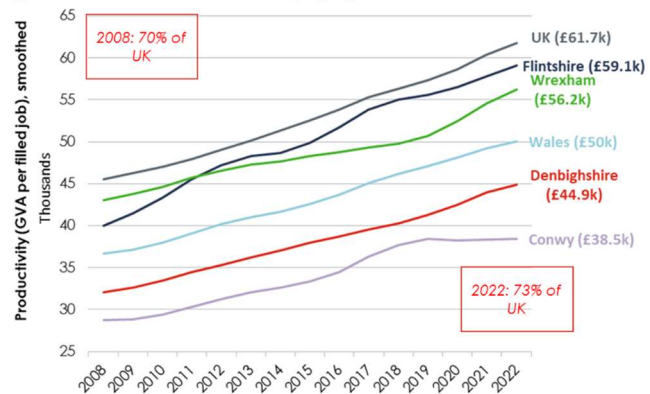
Source: ONS, Regional gross value added (balanced), 2024

- 2.2** Over the longer term, however, Denbighshire has seen slower growth than the Wales and UK averages. Without intervention, GVA baseline forecasts suggest that Denbighshire's economic growth rate will remain slower than national averages in the future.
- 2.3** There were approximately 49,000 jobs in Denbighshire in 2022. Similarly to the positive recent performance on GVA, the number of jobs in our economy recovered more quickly following the pandemic than what was observed elsewhere in Wales and the UK. However – and again mirroring the GVA picture - jobs growth over the 2013-2019 period was also slower than the Wales and UK averages.
- 2.4** Health is by far the largest sector in employment terms in Denbighshire, accounting for a quarter of all jobs in the County. The Health sector has grown by 10% since 2015 and Denbighshire has nearly double the proportion of its population employed by the Health sector compared to Wales and Great Britain as a whole. The Glan Clwyd Hospital in Bodelwyddan is a key employer.
- 2.5** Other key sectors in employment terms include the visitor economy, retail, and education. Manufacturing has declined in recent years. In 2004, the Manufacturing sector employed approximately 6,000 people in Denbighshire, but this fell to 2,600 in 2023. This can be partly explained by the closure of large employers, including the Bodelwyddan Hotpoint site, Arla Llandyrnog Creamery and Honeywell in St Asaph.

...and a significant productivity gap persists

2.6 The County suffers from a persistently large productivity gap to both the Wales and UK levels. Productivity in Denbighshire (measured by GVA per filled job) was £44,900 in 2022, equivalent to only c. 73% of the UK average. More worryingly, this gap has only slightly narrowed over the past 15 years as the chart shows. This is the single biggest challenge facing the Denbighshire economy and is a clear area of focus for the new strategy.

Figure 2-2: Productivity gap



Source: Source: ONS, Subregional productivity: labour productivity by local authority district and labour productivity by UK NUTS2 and NUTS3 subregions, 2008--2022

2.7 However, the determinants of productivity are complex and multifaceted, and can take (significant) time to influence. The new strategy presents us with an opportunity to address some of the underlying structural weaknesses that are contributing to the County's significant productivity deficit so we can boost earnings and prosperity for our communities.

A declining working age population and low rates of economic activity...

2.8 For the 1990s and early 2000s, our working-age population (those aged 16-64) expanded at a faster rate than for the UK as a whole. However, since 2006, a significant deficit relative to the UK has emerged. In 2022, 57% of our residents were of working age which is lower than comparable figures for Wales and the UK (61% and 63% respectively). This reflects an absolute fall in the number of working age residents and an expansion in the population aged over 65. Population estimates suggest this trend will continue, whereby the working-age population is forecast to represent just 53% of Denbighshire's population by 2043 (compared to 57% across Wales). A rising elderly population is likely to place additional pressure on local public services including those related to health and social care.

2.9 In addition, Denbighshire also has a relatively low level of economic activity (the percentage of the working age population that are either in-work or looking for work). In 2023, the County's economic activity rate was lower than for both Wales and the UK. This has been a persistent problem – since 2004, our economic activity rate has generally been lower than for other local authority areas in North Wales. The main reasons for economic inactivity in Denbighshire recorded in the ONS data are long-term sickness, and more recently, the provision of care within the home.

...plus a higher level skills challenge

2.10 We also face a significant challenge with a widening skills gap compared to national averages. In 2023, only 37% of the working-age population in Denbighshire held a level 4+ qualification (such as the first year of a bachelor's degree, HNCs, and higher diplomas). This is 10 percentage points below the UK average and seven points below the Wales average. Back in 2011, these gaps were much smaller, at five and two percentage points, respectively. Consultation evidence suggests that this reflects a 'brain drain', whereby skilled (younger) residents are leaving the County to pursue more attractive job opportunities elsewhere.

We also face challenges across various wider socio-economic indicators

Slow growth in business stock and low levels of entrepreneurship

2.11 In 2022, there were c.3,500 active enterprises in Denbighshire, the vast majority of which were micro-small businesses (employing fewer than 50 employees). However, growth in the business stock has been slower than the Wales and the UK averages since 2017. This may be explained by relatively low levels of entrepreneurship in Denbighshire. In 2022, there were about nine business starts for every 100 active enterprises in Denbighshire – this is below the Welsh and UK averages (both at 12).

2.12 This said, businesses that do start in Denbighshire tend to be relatively successful, with survival rates of businesses created in Denbighshire higher than those for Wales and the UK. In addition, the number of high-growth businesses in Denbighshire mirrors the Wales average, whereby Denbighshire was home to 15 of 400 high-growth Welsh businesses in 2022, reflective of its economic size within Wales.

Insufficient high skilled occupations

2.13 The lower skills base mentioned above is reflected in the occupational profile observed across Denbighshire. Not enough employment is in higher skill occupations. In 2023, approximately 19% of those in employment in Denbighshire were in professional occupations - around eight percentage points lower than the UK average. However, there are some encouraging signs in the data - with an increase in professional occupations of two percentage points since 2012 – but employment remains over-represented in Elementary occupations (defined by the ONS as those which require a minimum general level of education), as well as process, plant and machine operatives.

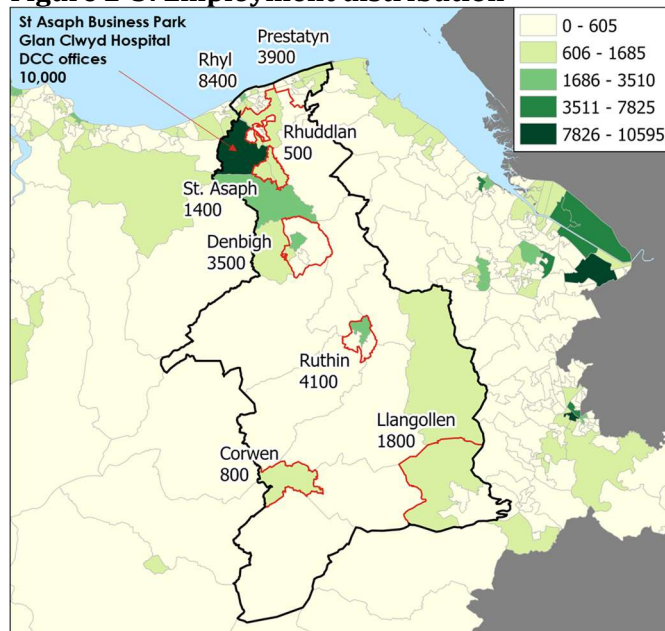
Infrastructure challenges on north-south connectivity and ultrafast broadband

2.14 Denbighshire is a long, narrow county. It has reasonably strong east-west road links, provided by the A55 in the north, the A5 in the south, and the A494 which runs between Ruthin and Corwen. Both Rhyl and Prestatyn have stations on the North Wales coastal train line between Holyhead and Chester/Liverpool/Manchester, but there are no stations in the

south of the County, with the exception of the Llangollen-Corwen heritage railway. Denbighshire County Council's five-year Sustainable Transport Plan recognises some of these challenges, and in response seeks to promote Active Travel links, as well as committing to develop a more sustainable bus networks (including flexible services for deeper rural areas).

2.15 While north-south connectivity is limited, particularly by public transport, the concentration of employment is varied across the County. The major employment locations are situated in the north, stretching in an arc from Prestatyn to Denbigh. Notably, there are approximately 10,000 jobs in the area adjacent to St Asaph and Rhuddlan.

Figure 2-3: Employment distribution



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2.16 Limited public transport connectivity to key employment sites was a common area of concern and identified as a major factor limiting growth. In addition, the recent Employment Site Demand Review identifies a need for additional provision of small and larger industrial and warehouse units (of up to 300sqm and 1,000sqm, respectively) to fully meet demand.

2.17 However, we recognise that our economy does not operate in isolation. Key employment sites (just) beyond our borders include the Tir Llwyd Industrial Estate in Conwy, Colwyn Bay, Deeside and Wrexham. Perhaps unsurprisingly, our strongest commuting relationships are with neighbouring counties in Wales.

2.18 Digital connectivity is relatively low in Denbighshire. Superfast broadband (up to 300Mbps) availability is broadly in line with the Wales and UK averages. However, ultrafast broadband and gigabit connections (up to and over 1Gbps, respectively) are lower than the UK average – with almost a 10 percentage point gap evident on each measure. The North Wales Growth Deal recognises the increasing importance of digital connectivity and has programmes to support 5G connectivity and the roll out of a fibre optic network.

Pockets of entrenched deprivation

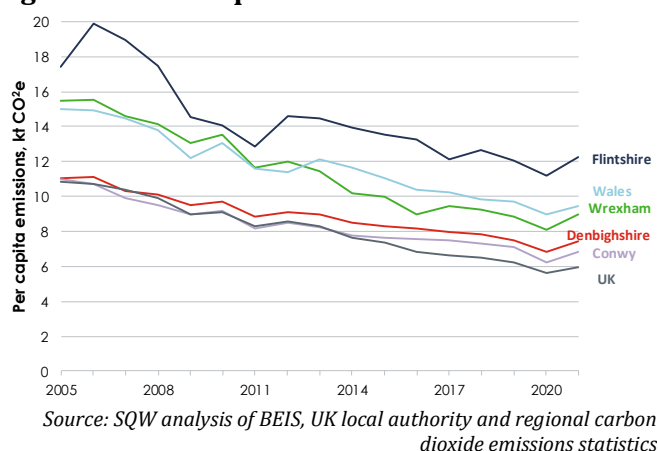
2.19 Denbighshire has high levels of inequality. Rhyl suffers from very high levels of deprivation, with some neighbourhoods amongst the most deprived in Wales. Many of these

concentrations are persistent over time and reflect the long-term impact of industrial change. There are also more affluent areas in the County, notably around Denbigh and Ruthin.

The Net Zero imperative

2.20 The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 sets an ambitious target for the Welsh Government: to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050, using 1990 levels as a baseline. In 2021, Denbighshire's total greenhouse gas emissions were approximately 715 kilotonnes of CO₂, which translates to 7.4 tonnes per person. While this is below the Wales average, it remains higher than the UK average.

Figure 2-4: CO₂ equivalent emissions



2.21 Positively, carbon emissions and emissions per capita have both been falling, marking significant progress towards Net Zero. However, emissions from agriculture have risen by 7.6% locally, in contrast to a 3.5% decline across Wales, largely due to increased emissions from livestock. This mixed picture highlights both the progress made and the hurdles that remain in our journey towards a greener future.

Opportunities for the Strategy

An outstanding natural environment with a rich Welsh heritage and unique culture...

2.22 Denbighshire is primarily a rural county. It benefits from an outstanding and distinctive natural environment, with hills and rivers in the south and beaches to the north. Our Welsh language, history and culture are also important parts of the offer, especially as more Denbighshire residents can speak and read the Welsh language than the average across Wales.

2.23 The visitor economy is a key sector for the County, generating an estimated economic impact of £746m in 2023, up 17% from the previous year.¹ Our Tourism Strategy² identifies four key priorities to further grow this sector: promote year-round tourism; encourage tourists to stay in Denbighshire for longer; increase tourist spend in the County; and exceed the expectations of tourists. With the post-pandemic rise in remote working, better promoting Denbighshire's

¹ [Denbighshire sees uplift in Tourism Figures for 2023 | Denbighshire County Council](#)

² Denbighshire County Council (2022) Tourism Strategy Action Plan 2022-2027

distinctive quality of life offer may also be a route to attracting higher skilled, remote workers/entrepreneurs to relocate to the County.³

...which must respond to a changing context

- 2.24** Continued town centre decline detracts from the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. Our urban businesses are also concerned about declining footfall and vacant properties.⁴ The average shop vacancy rate in Denbighshire is over 22%, much higher than the UK average (14.5%).⁵ In fact, only two of the eight town centres in Denbighshire have a shop vacancy rate below the UK average. A desire to enhance town centre offerings, including expanding leisure and entertainment opportunities, was a key theme of the consultations, especially in relation to retaining younger workers.
- 2.25** There are also potential opportunities and threats attached to the visitor economy, notably the proposed 'tourism tax' currently being considered by Welsh Government.⁶ It is estimated that the visitor levy could generate up to £33m per year across Wales, for investment into tourism-related services and infrastructure. However, an economic impact assessment of the visitor levy is inconclusive in whether the bill will bring about net positive change to Welsh GVA.⁷
- 2.26** There are also mixed opinions locally on the potential establishment of a new national park based on the existing Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape (formerly known as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty). A report by the Campaign for National Parks suggests that achieving National Park status will result in 'significant benefit to the local economy' through grant funding, an increase in profile for the region resulting in increased tourism, as well as broader health and well-being benefits.⁸ However, it is a controversial issue locally, particularly amongst rural communities (and especially following protests against the Sustainable Farming Scheme as the post-Brexit successor to the EU Common Agricultural Policy). The proposals are still being assessed by Natural Resources Wales.⁹ We must position ourselves to maximise the opportunities the proposed National Park would bring, whilst also being alert to the challenges it may cause.

External profile and partnership working

- 2.27** Despite our enviable natural environment and quality of life offer, a consistent theme of the consultation evidence was that the County has a rather limited or outdated profile amongst potential visitors, business and inward investors. For example, potential visitors to

³ ONS (2024) [Who are the hybrid workers?](#)

⁴ Lafan Business Consultants (2024) Denbighshire Business Survey 2024

⁵ Denbighshire County Council (2024) [Denbighshire Town Centres Assessment](#)

⁶ Welsh Government (2024) [Visitor Accommodation \(Register and Levy\) Etc. \(Wales\) Bill](#)

⁷ Jones, C. (2024) [The Potential Economic & Greenhouse Gas Impacts of a Visitor Levy in Wales](#)

⁸ Campaign for National Parks (2024) [The value of a new national park in Wales](#)

⁹ Natural Resources Wales (2024) [Natural Resources Wales announce consultation on new National Park](#)

Wales/North West England may not know about Denbighshire's offer, and potential investors commonly perceive the County as "just too far" from economic growth centres in North West England despite there being good connectivity via the A55. This hampers our ability to compete effectively for higher quality investment.

- 2.28** More positively, there was also consistent feedback that we have an opportunity to strengthen linkages with partners outside the County to help attract business and jobs in higher value sectors. This particularly relates to the North Wales Growth Deal, but also the Welsh Government and across the border into north west England following recent devolution deals.

Knowledge economy and high tech employment

- 2.29** As noted above, we do not have enough employment in high tech sectors to help close the productivity gap. The emerging optics and photonics cluster at St Asaph Business Park - centred around Prifysgol Wrecsam/Wrexham University's OpTIC Technology Centre - is our key knowledge economy asset. However, a recent study into St Asaph Business Park found that current premises are not suited to the requirements of high-tech optics and photonics firms. If the Business Park becomes a more general site for employment, e.g. logistics and/or light manufacturing, this would damage the long term growth potential of the cluster and constrain efforts to create high skilled, high productivity jobs for our residents.

Capitalising on existing funding and strategies

- 2.30** Encouragingly, Denbighshire has secured significant amounts of public funding from the UK Government over recently years for town centre regeneration. This includes including £44m across three rounds of the Levelling Up Fund¹⁰, and £20m for Rhyl from the Long Term Plan for Towns. There is also funding from the North Wales Growth Deal for the development of the Former North Wales Hospital in Denbigh into residential and commercial space.¹¹ Future activities delivered through this strategy should leverage and complement these existing/pipeline activities.
- 2.31** In addition, the County Council already has a number of strategies in place which should be delivered as 'business as usual' activity alongside the additional activity set out in this Economic Strategy and Action Plan. In addition to the Tourism Strategy noted above, the following are particularly relevant:
- The Council's Procurement strategy sets out two primary outcomes - to achieve value for money from the goods and services it procures, as well as improving its contribution to

¹⁰ The £13.3m in Round 1 for Clwyd South includes Wrexham as well as Corwen and Llangollen

¹¹ Ambition North Wales (2024) [Ambition North Wales | Our Projects](#)

the local economy by engaging with local suppliers and developing new approaches to create opportunities for local businesses.¹²

- The Working Denbighshire Strategy (2022-2027) sets out the Council's ambition to reduce poverty through employment, helping progress those who are unemployed towards the job market as well as providing in-work support to ensure employment is maintained and careers are progressed.¹³

Summary of key issues for *Towards a more prosperous Denbighshire*

- Our economy has underperformed on Gross Value Added (GVA, a key measure of an economy's overall performance) and employment compared to the Wales and UK averages over recent decades. We also face a stubbornly persistent and significant productivity gap.
- Denbighshire has a declining working age population and low rates of economic activity, which limit the size of our workforce. The qualifications of our workforce are also an issue, with a limited supply of higher level skills.
- We also face challenges on wider socio-economic indicators, including low levels of entrepreneurship and business density. There are infrastructure constraints in relation to north-south transport connectivity and ultrafast broadband, as well as pockets of deeply entrenched deprivation. Encouragingly, we are making progress against the Net Zero imperative.
- We have an outstanding natural environment and rich Welsh heritage and culture, contributing to our important visitor economy and highly distinctive offer.
- There are also opportunities to enhance Denbighshire's external profile, expand our partnership working, support more technology rich, knowledge based employment.

¹² Denbighshire County Council (2023) Procurement & Commissioning Strategy 2023 - 2027

¹³ Denbighshire County Council (2022) Working Denbighshire 2022-2027

3. Our vision and strategic priorities

Our vision for growth

By 2035 we will have created a more prosperous Denbighshire for the benefit of all of our communities. This will be based on a more resilient, competitive and outward-facing economy that embraces innovation and entrepreneurship, and fully leverages our highly distinctive quality of life offer.

Responding to the productivity challenge

3.1 The evidence base highlights that we face a significant productivity gap to the rest of the UK and Wales. GVA per filled job in Denbighshire in 2022 stood at only 73% of the UK average – a position that has remained relatively unchanged over the past 15 years. A central aim of the new strategy is to narrow this gap. We have identified two primary routes to achieving this:

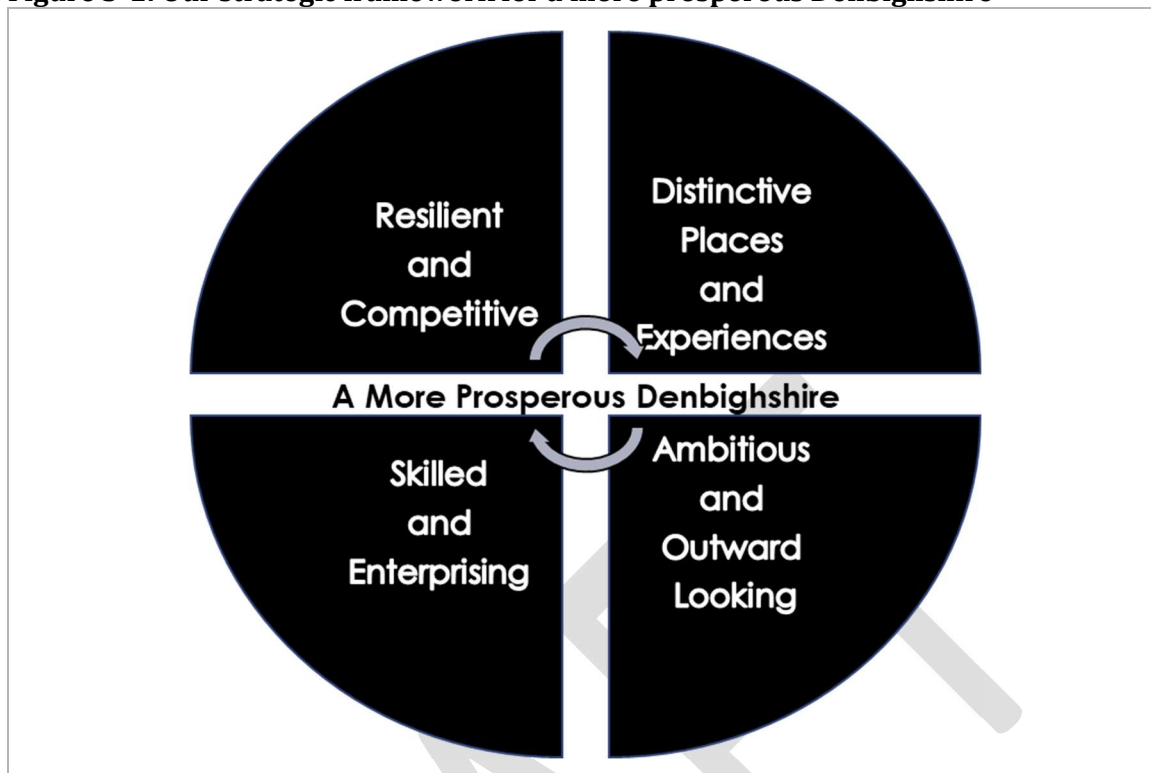
- Developing our knowledge and innovation-led economy to promote growth in higher productivity, higher value sectors. The emerging optics and photonics cluster at St Asaph Business Park will be an important early catalyst for this. In order to progress this strand of the strategy we will need to ensure that we have got the right enabling infrastructures in place including a highly skilled workforce.
- Driving increased levels of innovation and technology adoption across our foundational economy to support decarbonisation, the creation of good jobs and sustained increases in productivity. The Welsh Government definition of the foundational economy includes eight core elements¹⁴, of which food, high street retailers and tourism are particularly relevant to the Denbighshire economy.

Strategic priorities

3.2 We want to build on the distinctive strengths and opportunities identified in the previous chapter to develop a more prosperous Denbighshire. Against this backdrop, we have developed four complementary strategic priorities which act as summary statements of what we want our economy to be like by 2035. Together they are designed to reposition the Denbighshire economy so it becomes more resilient and competitive, skilled and enterprising, known widely for its highly distinctive places and experiences, and ambitious and outward looking.

¹⁴ [The foundational economy | GOV.WALES](#)

Figure 3-1: Our strategic framework for a more prosperous Denbighshire



Source: SQW 2025

- 3.3** Importantly, the four strategic priorities should not be seen as isolated ambitions. Rather, they are intrinsically interlinked. For example, developing a more skilled and enterprising population will provide a better qualified workforce for our businesses, enabling them to be more resilient and competitive. Whilst we explain each strategic priority in turn, they should be seen as a self-reinforcing, integrated package. We will only make significant progress towards the realisation of our ambitious vision for the new Denbighshire economy if we deliver across the totality of what this new framework is calling for.

Strategic Priority 1: Resilient and Competitive



- 3.4** Under this Priority, we want to: increase the size of Denbighshire's private sector business base; ensure our indigenous businesses and in-movers have access to the high quality business support they need to grow, innovate and prosper; and create a larger number of higher skilled and better paid job opportunities for our residents.
- 3.5** This Priority embraces the totality of the private sector, from the foundational economy through to the high tech, knowledge economy. It also applies across the whole of the County; we want businesses in rural areas to be as resilient and prepared for change as their peers in our urban areas.

Operational aims

3.6 To develop a more resilient and competitive economy we will:

- **Build a stronger private sector with a vibrant network of start-ups, scale-ups and large firms embedded across our rural and urban areas.** This will be crucial for creating and sustaining good quality employment across Denbighshire. We must support indigenous firms to ensure they remain embedded in our local communities and reinvest in our economy as they expand rather than moving elsewhere. We will also be open and welcoming to inward investment opportunities, particularly in higher value sectors.
- **Build a tech-rich cluster at St Asaph Business Park as a highly visible focal point for our innovation economy.** This is the part of the knowledge economy where we have the strongest existing asset base to build on, and so the clearest opportunity to specialise, support clustering behaviours and raise productivity levels.
- We recognise fully that the **foundational economy** has a key role to play in relation to the climate emergency, creating a resilient food system, and supporting large-scale job creation across the County. We must **support businesses in our foundational economy** to perform these important roles and help them to innovate and become more efficient given the challenges facing our service industries.
- Across all economic activity we must strive to **compete on knowledge and specialisation rather than cost.** In an increasingly globalised world, there will always be lower cost locations than Denbighshire. Therefore, we must ensure our businesses are able to compete effectively based on their expertise, product quality and R&D capabilities.
- The macro-economic, policy and geo-political landscape is evolving rapidly. We must support **an economy that is more resilient to external shocks** (including the transition to Net Zero). More broadly, our businesses must keep up to date with new technologies, business models and market changes in order to remain competitive and sustainable.
- The private sector can only thrive if we provide **a high quality enabling infrastructure.** This means access to very fast and reliable broadband, good transport connectivity, a secure supply of green energy and an appropriate mix of high quality, flexible commercial premises. **The planning system must be adequately resourced** to support commercial developments that comply with the Local Development Plan. This also applies to residential developments as we need very good quality housing to attract and retain mobile talent and investors.

Strategic Priority 2: Skilled and Enterprising

3.7 To deliver a more prosperous Denbighshire and to drive productivity gains, we must improve our skills base so that local people can access employment



opportunities created by our increasingly knowledge-intensive businesses. We must also boost levels of entrepreneurship across the County and encourage our residents to start and grow their own businesses here.

- 3.8** Achieving this will need concerted action across all ages: ensuring our schools and colleges prepare young people for, and inform them about, future career opportunities; up-skilling our existing workforce and educating them about opportunities to start businesses; and attracting new entrepreneurial talent to Denbighshire – in part by selling the County’s wonderful and highly distinctive lifestyle offer.

Operational aims

- 3.9** To develop a more skilled and enterprising economy we will:
- **Support a high-quality schools and wider skills system that is aligned fully with the changing needs of businesses.** Our young people must leave the education system with the qualifications, confidence and skills to allow them to secure high quality employment. Enhancing integration and collaboration between schools, colleges and employers will be vital to creating pathways for local employment opportunities for our younger population.
 - **Collaborate effectively with wider partners, notably the North Wales Regional Skills Partnership and Careers Wales,** to ensure our education and careers and guidance offers are aligned fully with best practice to help improve attainment and ambition.
 - **Support those who are economically inactive to (re)enter the workforce** through sustaining the activity of Working Denbighshire. The recent rise in economic inactivity rates have largely been driven by long-term sickness. While it may be difficult to address these structural health challenges at a local level, we must seek to support residents back into work where possible. This will require engagement with both residents and employers to ensure that the needs of both can be met, and that sufficient training and support can be put in place to aid this transition into work.
 - **Develop a workforce that comprises skilled and entrepreneurial people who want to start, grow and develop innovative and nationally competitive businesses.** Not everyone will want to start their own business. However, we must ensure our residents (both young and old) are aware of the opportunity and, where relevant, are supported fully to take the necessary steps. We want more people to have the confidence to start and grow their own businesses here in Denbighshire, creating high quality employment opportunities and investing in our communities.

Strategic Priority 3: Distinctive Places and Experiences



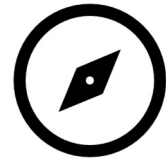
- 3.10** Denbighshire is a county of distinctive places, from our beaches through to the impressive Clwydian Range and Dee Valley National Landscape. Our towns also contribute to this unique offer with their castles and the UNESCO World Heritage site of Pontcysyllte Aqueduct at Langollen. The third important element to this is our rich cultural heritage and Welsh language capabilities; more of our residents can speak and read the Welsh language than is the case elsewhere in Wales. Denbighshire is different and we want to celebrate this.
- 3.11** We want to leverage these distinctive characteristics to: build a compelling quality of life offer / narrative that helps to attract and retain talented individuals, and attract inward investment; and directly create and sustain higher quality employment within our important visitor economy.

Operational aims

- 3.12** To ensure our distinctive places and experiences contribute fully to economic growth, we will:
- **Leverage our world-class natural environment and community character to create a quality of life offer that attracts, excites and retains talent, entrepreneurs and investors.** With the rise of remote working, our quality of life offer is increasingly important in helping to appeal to new, highly skilled residents as well as encouraging existing residents to stay in the County to achieve their goals.
 - **Ensure our network of town centres play their part in creating distinctive places and experiences** for residents and visitors alike. This means capitalising on the grant funding already secured from the Levelling Up Fund and other sources, building local partnerships to facilitate collaborative action and address signs of town centre decline, as well as considering changes of use for high street properties with long term vacancies. We will animate our town centres through a programme of events designed to increase footfall and expenditure throughout the year, thus giving our a welcome shot in the arm for our local businesses.
 - **Market and celebrate our distinctive urban and rural places, culture, Welsh language and heritage effectively to the outside world.** This strategy fully supports the existing Tourism Strategy Action Plan 2022 – 2027 with its four priorities: people visit Denbighshire throughout the year; people stay in Denbighshire longer; people spend more money in the County; people have their expectations exceeded as a result of our coordinated approach. In delivering against these priorities, there are further opportunities to:

- Position **Denbighshire as a leading location in the UK for nature-based and green tourism** (encompassing dark skies activity, promoting more sustainable business practices, and supporting visitors to offset their carbon emissions etc.).
- **Maximise economic growth opportunities associated with the proposed National Park.** Although this is a controversial issue, if the National Park designation is approved it will present a significant opportunity to raise our profile – and one that we must capitalise on.

Strategic Priority 4: Ambitious and Outward Looking



3.13 The Denbighshire economy does not operate in isolation. Data show that our strongest commuting relationships are with neighbouring counties in North Wales, but our partnerships do – and should – extend beyond this to the rest of Wales, the UK more broadly and indeed internationally. Maintaining existing linkages and establishing new strategic ties will be vital in raising our profile to prospective investors and unlocking new growth opportunities.

3.14 In doing so, we will need to be ambitious and focused. We must ensure partners are enthusiastic about the future of Denbighshire and the role that they can play in its new economy. We will need strong and capable leadership to ensure we grasp future growth opportunities and adopt an inherently strategic long term perspective.

Operational aims

- **Build a Denbighshire Growth Partnership to drive forward delivery of the new strategy.** This Partnership will involve key public and private stakeholders related to the three other elements of the strategy – spanning business and enterprise, innovation, skills and employment, infrastructure, sustainability and the environment, as well as land management, planning and development. We will involve representatives from the public, private and third sectors, making sure that the strategy delivers on the needs of local people and businesses. Having a cross-sector partnership will allow us to deliver the strategy coherently by progressing different economic components in tandem, facilitating economic growth.
- **Ensure the Partnership is ambitious, able to compete for investment and promotes the County effectively.** The Partnership will continue to assess Denbighshire's opportunities for investment and economic growth, particularly in relation to optics and photonics and the Green Economy (including agri-food and food systems, wind turbines and green tourism). This will be diverse, and may include (but is not limited to):
 - strengthening relationships with, and providing support for, businesses (including entrepreneurs, small businesses, and major employers) in Denbighshire to help them

realise their growth ambitions and provide well-paid employment opportunities locally;

- fostering collaboration between businesses in order to strengthen networks, increase access to opportunities (particularly for SMEs), achieve shared objectives, and increase profile of activity in the County;
 - engaging with key stakeholders regionally and nationally, to understand their priorities and ensure Denbighshire is well-positioned to deliver on them (for example, through alignment with the forthcoming UK Industrial Strategy).
- **Collaborate effectively with partners** across the North Wales Growth Deal, Welsh Government and across into north west England, to address shared cross border challenges and opportunities. Close alignment with partners will enable a stronger collective 'voice', enhance our identity and profile within North Wales, and help us to benefit from developments elsewhere across the region. This may also present opportunities to collaborate internationally, building strategic partnerships with other regions/nations in order to raise our profile, share our culture, and learn from others.

4. Action Plan

- 4.1** This section presents the Action Plan for *Towards a more prosperous Denbighshire*. It sets out specific actions to address all four elements of the Strategy, described in the previous section, together with an indication of the Action Lead, key supporting partners, and the priorities for each action area.
- 4.2** Whilst the vision and framework set out earlier in this document are for the long-term (taking us through to 2035 and beyond), Action Plans are typically subject to regular review (e.g. every two or three years). The focus of this Action Plan is, therefore, on what can be done in the short to medium-term to progress *Towards a more prosperous Denbighshire* and to help us to achieve our ambitious goals for the place, its business base and communities. Some of these actions are ‘stand-alone’ and can be progressed immediately, whilst others are critical contributions to longer-term restructuring processes that will only be fully implemented over a substantially longer period of time. Furthermore, many of the actions inter-relate, complement and reinforce each other. So, there is a strong recognition that wherever possible, the actions should be progressed in tandem as part of a coherent and carefully sequenced programme of activity.
- 4.3** The focus of our recent action planning work has been on those *new* actions, which, in consultation with partners, we believe are of major importance for Denbighshire’s future economic development, growth and success. They are not, however, the only actions required; through partners’ mainstream obligations and activities, a wide range of activity is already under way across the County (including the implementation of existing strategies for Procurement & Commissioning, Working Denbighshire, Tourism, and Climate and Nature etc.) An important early activity under this Plan will be for partners to collectively review their existing activities in light of what the four Strategic Priorities of our new Economic Strategy are calling for and explore how existing funding commitments can best contribute to this new growth agenda.
- 4.4** However, we recognise that *Towards a more prosperous Denbighshire* is being progressed against a backdrop of a challenging macro-economic and public finance landscape. Therefore, identified Action Leads and their supporting delivery partners will need to be highly innovative, creative and collaborative in bringing together funding packages to implement the priority actions set out under this Plan. Linked to this, difficult choices will need to be made around prioritisation to ensure that new actions remain genuinely strategic and aligned fully with our vision for creating a more productive and prosperous Denbighshire.

Proposed new action areas for Denbighshire

- 4.5** The finalised list of priority new action areas for Denbighshire is set out below:

- **Denbighshire entrepreneurship programme** to support people to start, develop and grow innovative businesses in Denbighshire. This will help to increase the business formation rate and foster a change of business culture across the County. Over time, it will help to boost the resilience of the local economy by increasing the business base (both urban and rural). It is envisaged that much of the training will be delivered online but some modules could be hosted in person at St Asaph Business Park and/or from a network on enterprise/innovation centres (see below).
- **Development of an indigenous business support programme** to support the resilience and growth of our existing businesses from both rural and urban areas. This could be delivered as a mix of one-to-many sessions on common topics with some one-to-one sessions for more bespoke support. As with the entrepreneurship programme, modules could be delivered online with some in person sessions.
- **Create a network of high quality Innovation Centres (not managed workspaces) across Denbighshire** offering flexible start-up and grow-on space for innovative SMEs. Tenant firms will be able to access tailored innovation support, including specialist advice on securing growth finance. These facilities will also act as hubs for sector development activities and the entrepreneurship programme highlighted above. They will proactively support networking amongst businesses to develop local supply chains and boost knowledge exchange.
- **Build a tech-rich cluster at St Asaph Business Park** as a focus for innovation-led growth and the development of Denbighshire's knowledge economy. Explore opportunities to provide 'grow-on' space to complement the existing business incubation provision at Glyndŵr University's OpTIC Technology Centre. There may also be an opportunity to become an AI Growth Zone as announced in the recently published AI Opportunities Action Plan. Further development at the Business Park will require partnership working with Welsh Government (including in its role as landowner) to explore ways to bridge the expected viability gap for physical development schemes.
- **Establish Team Denbighshire.** The need to make a step change in economic performance across the County is unlikely to be fulfilled without taking the opportunity to increase business activity through inward investment, and by attracting increased levels of public funding. However, this is a very competitive landscape. We will adopt a more assertive approach with partners beyond the DCC boundary to emphasise the economic potential of Denbighshire and explore opportunities for increased joint working. This includes partnerships with neighbouring Local Authorities, North Wales Growth Deal, Welsh Government and Local/Combined Authorities in north west England. This should help to attract additional investment into the County and create opportunities outside of Denbighshire for local businesses.
- **Boost investment and footfall in Denbighshire's town centres** – Corwen, Denbigh and Rhyl have Placemaking Plans/Long Term Plan for Towns support. The County's other towns should be supported to form town centre boards where stakeholders can create

compelling visions for the future of each town. These could include enhancing the marketing and positioning of the towns, considering changes of use for high street properties with long term vacancies, public sector led physical regeneration to help unlock subsequent private sector investment, and establishing a programme of makers markets/other events to increase footfall.

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