

# Future Breckland

Thriving People  
and Places





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# Foreword

The objective of the Future Breckland programme was as simple as it was bold – to create a shared vision that everyone with a stake in Breckland’s society and economy could align to. A vision which was tangible and based on real-achievable projects; whilst also being ambitious enough to change the status quo and deliver ‘game-changing’ successes for our residents and businesses.

This work has been delivered against a very challenging, and changing, backdrop – including a pandemic, a global cost of living crisis, three Prime Ministers and a sea of policy changes.

Nevertheless, we are delighted that we have been able to create a vision – formed of multiple parts – which provides a blueprint for the success of our area. This document, the ‘Breckland Prospectus’,

provides the glue and the connections which tie our five detailed Town Delivery Plans into a cohesive approach to prioritised activity across the District.

Its publication marks the move from planning to delivery, and in many ways the start of the far harder task, of achieving a pipeline of ambitions which could take over a decade to come to fruition. We are equally positive and optimistic about meeting this challenge, however, because of the weight, the breadth, and the depth of input which has brought us to this point.

The ethos behind Future Breckland is that the District is made stronger by the diversity of partners that support it. No one organisations has the ability to deliver such a bold plan for the future, but collectively, we can. And we will.

Our key public sector partners in developing this plan

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Our team of independent advisors and experts who guided the plan

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With a special further acknowledgement to the 22,000+ businesses and residents who helped shape, challenge, inform and inspire the thinking that brought this together.





## The Case for Action

Breckland sits at both the gateway and the heart of Norfolk. An area with thriving local businesses, industrious residents, emerging high-value production sectors, and significant agriculture.

With a historic network of towns and villages, parts of this District have played important roles in many of the key chapters of the history of the United Kingdom from the periglacial, to the modern day. Today, like many parts of the country, Breckland's economy faces a period of transition – and we are in the process of writing new chapters.

Our neighbouring cities, Cambridge and Norwich are expanding as technology and manufacturing-related clusters grow. This presents an opportunity for Breckland as businesses seek premises to expand and new residents are drawn to the area.

Many of Breckland's existing sectors and businesses are adapting as technology advances and the skills required of workers is becoming more advanced. Our area has already experienced higher than average population growth and this will continue as 15,000 new homes are constructed over the next few years. This presents both challenges and opportunities.

The pandemic accelerated trends for consumers and businesses which has changed the way people live, work and shop. Now cost of living pressures will likely further challenge, and change, particularly in sectors like retail and hospitality. As a result, the role villages and market towns play in supporting the community is changing. Action will be required to make sure we have the right environment to enable people to live, and work in the ways they want in the future.

## A place where **change and investment** should be made

Breckland has not benefitted from public investment in the same way as comparator parts of the country. The investment need is stark:

- **22%** lower business growth compared to the UK average
- **84%** of households lack access to ultrafast broadband
- **56%** of residents do not hold A-Level or BTEC qualifications
- **99%** of commercial space is classified as low quality
- **£5,000** gap in median annual earnings compared to UK average
- **306<sup>th</sup>** ranked in social mobility out of 346 authorities
- **8x** an average salary to afford a house, above the English average

## A place with **immense potential** to thrive

The flipside to our challenges remains the District's immense potential. This is a place with the scale to grow, and where significant private investment could be unlocked:

- **£2.4bn** of economic activity generated
- **18%** population growth
- **3%** unemployment rate
- **108%** growth in food manufacturing
- Market leading food, manufacturing and engineering businesses

# The Future Breckland Framework

## **Built from the Ground Up**

The Future Breckland programme sets out a comprehensive set of plans, co-designed with residents, businesses/public sector agencies and town council partners, to transition Breckland for the future.

Developed over a period of 18 months through concerted community engagement alongside rigorous data collection and analysis. Through this process we engaged with over 22,000 community members through surveys or public events. With the participation of residents, businesses, town councils, schools, community groups and public sector partners we held workshops, one-to-one interviews, market stall events and discussed emerging ideas with key leaders and stakeholders across the District.

During this process, we published the Breckland Evidence Encyclopaedia, which sets out the data and evidence on how Breckland's economy and towns are performing. We published five Town Delivery Plans, one for each of the market towns. Each plan sets out comprehensive data analysis, community feedback and a list of projects and interventions that make up the Future Breckland plan for each town.

## **Five Towns, One Strategy**

The anchor to the Future Breckland approach has been to focus the depth of detail on the opportunities presented within Breckland's five Market Towns, and their surrounding hinterlands. Through this prospectus, however, we are broadening the coverage to consider the wider priorities, linkages, and interventions which can be applied across the District as a whole.

As a collectively owned community plan, Future Breckland will inform our future priorities and investment. As further rounds of national and regional funding are made available, we will seek to maximise the funding obtained for these projects, while working with businesses both in and outside of our area to realise them.

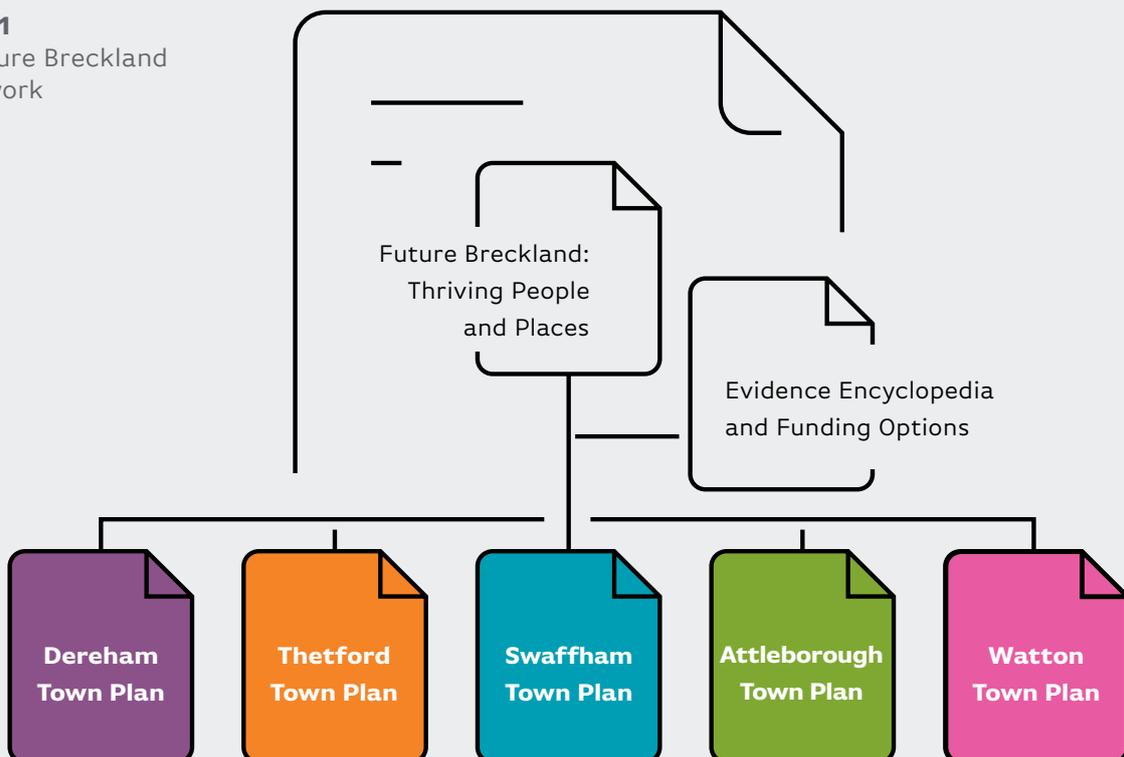
## Evolving Dynamically

Inevitably, with an undertaking of this kind, its first publication represents a snapshot – of feelings, of priorities, and of opportunities. The project pipeline is built to last 10-years; however, elements will change over time. To ensure we are alive to any changes, we will hold annual forums across the District, and in the Towns, to: take stock of progress, consider new evidence, review priorities, and to identify further opportunities.

## Seen in Context

The Future Breckland suite of documents cannot be read or considered in isolation. They are not intended to be all-encompassing, rather supporting and guiding, whilst providing the clarity of specific projects and activity for partners to pursue over the next 10 years. As such they feed into – and are fed by – other key local, district and regional strategies including the Local Plan, District, Town and Parish Corporate Plans, Neighbourhood Plans, the Norfolk Investment Framework and Norfolk Strategic Investment Development Plan and the Regional Economic Strategy.

**Figure 1**  
The Future Breckland Framework



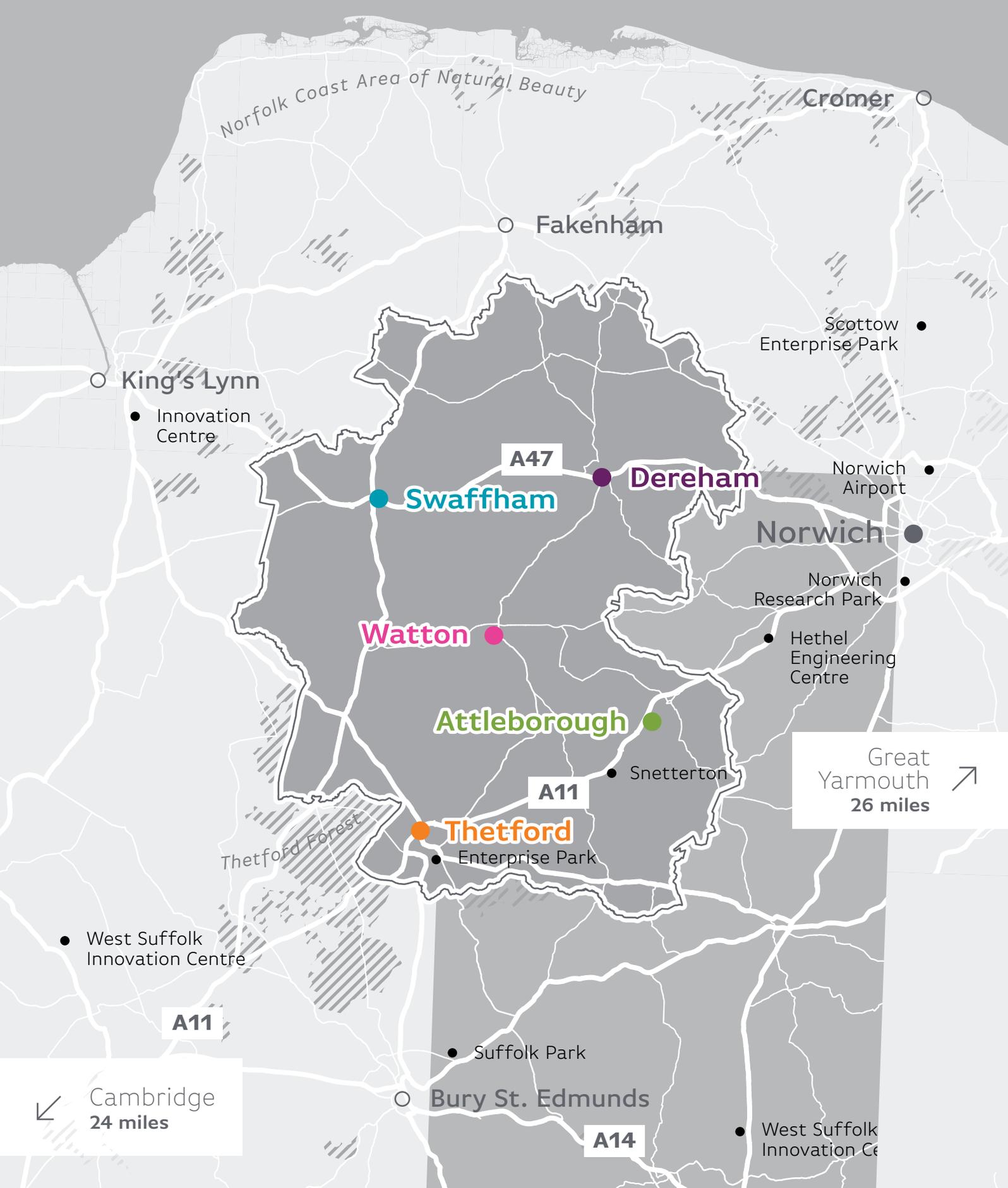
# Breckland's Thriving Places

Breckland is a patchwork of rich agricultural areas, woodlands, villages and five market towns. We have unique place assets that are today under recognised. Our challenge is to protect these assets and leverage them as we transition our economy.

Around half of Breckland’s population live in or around our five market towns. Our historic market towns are rich with heritage buildings and traditional high streets. In recent years they have been challenged by traffic and congestion, and several towns are experiencing increases in retail vacancy rates as footfall declines. Particularly for young residents there is a lack of age-appropriate amenities and entertainment, and all residents young and old expressed a desire for our towns to provide more space for social interaction, whether traditional coffee shops and cafes or innovative community-centred meeting points.

Around half the Breckland population live outside the five market towns, in a diverse range of villages and settlements across 500 square miles. In recent years they have been challenged by transport and connectivity issues, as well as digital and infrastructure needs. The future housing needs of the District has created different challenges in different areas, with some more easily able to accommodate growth than others – and many wanting a better mix of local services within close reach of settlements. For young and old residents there is an acute desire to see more easily accessible employment and education particularly.

<p><b>Dereham</b>  19,464  9,100</p> <p>Strategically positioned west of Norwich, with a rich history of brewing, building and manufacturing reflected in its stock of historic buildings.</p>
<p><b>Watton</b>  8,248  2,600</p> <p>A diverse town with an industrious history of craft and trade, home to key employers in manufacturing, business support and public services.</p>
<p><b>Swaffham</b>  8,333  2,600</p> <p>A key service centre with easy access to the north Norfolk coast and strong employment in retail, hospitality and public administration, known for its thriving Saturday market.</p>
<p><b>Thetford</b>  26,837  11,200</p> <p>Home to internationally recognised companies in the industrial and agricultural sectors and Thetford Forest, a popular natural asset attracting thousands of visitors per year.</p>
<p><b>Attleborough</b>  10,036  5,000</p> <p>A growing town with strategic rail links to Norwich and Cambridge noted for its significant estate building programmes and a Sustainable Urban Extension project.</p>



## Centre of the Cambridge-Norwich Tech Corridor

Breckland is strategically positioned within the centre of this 100km of innovation corridor which joins up globally important technology and life sciences research clusters. It plays an important role in underpinning economic growth in East Anglia, connecting the world-leading research centres with a regional ecosystem of manufacturing and engineering businesses.

# Expanding Future Breckland's building blocks across the District

In considering the future of Breckland, the Future Breckland project team focused on six objectives. These six framing objectives were selected following rigorous data analysis, regional comparisons and feedback from the community. These have been applied in the deep dives of each town, and across the District, in setting out key activities that should be pursued in order to meet Breckland's positive growth ambitions.



## Future Breckland Objectives



### **Regenerating and placemaking**

Regenerating Breckland's town centres to help them realise their potential, adapt to changing conditions, and attract people and businesses.



### **Building on our heritage and culture**

Building on Breckland's rich heritage and culture, while enhancing tourism opportunities and bringing our local communities together.



### **Growing our business and enterprise base**

Encouraging new businesses, expansions and relocations by improving the availability of business services and premises.



### **Investing in housing and infrastructure**

Targeted investment in housing, public transport and active travel to improve quality of life.



### **Improving sustainability and wellbeing**

Delivering our net zero commitment while supporting our residents to maintain active lifestyles.



### **Encouraging educational attainment**

Supporting our residents to train and pursue further and continual education to increase employment opportunities and meet ongoing employment needs.



# Regenerating and Placemaking



## Why Act?

This objective is to regenerate Breckland's local centres and establish them as social anchors for the wider area. Our market towns in particular, are today oriented around retail and trade. While this function will continue, the role market towns play is evolving towards community connectivity.

Small businesses, particularly in professional services and digital, will need new kinds of office space. Residents will require more places to come to together and socialise formally and informally during the days and evenings.

And a new generation of health and wellbeing facilities are looking to establish premises in high streets.

Our objective is to preserve the distinctive architectural features and rich heritage of local centres, while developing vibrancy through targeted investment. Each investment is designed to encourage residents and business to use towns more frequently and spend more time in them for a wider variety of purposes.

## Connections across the Delivery Plans

Set out in the respective five Town Delivery Plans is approximately 30,000 sqm of changes to public realm, spread across 10 interventions. The golden thread here is supporting new quality anchor spaces in Town centres which help create a destination and focal point in the Towns.

### High Potential Projects

#### Reconfigure Dereham Marketplace D

Reconfigure the marketplace to reduce traffic, promote pedestrian footfall and increase the vitality of the town centre, establishing a place for regular events.

£5-7 million | 5-10 years

#### Reinvigorate Swaffham Marketplace S

Deliver public realm masterplan; reducing traffic impact whilst improving public realm and running a programme of activity to increase footfall.

£3-4.3 million | 0-5 years

#### Gateway to Watton Town Centre W

Create better visual and physical links within Watton Town Centre, creating new quality public spaces and increasing the number of visitors and footfall.

£3-4.4 million | 5-10 years

### District wide 'Big Idea'

#### Meanwhile in Breckland Programme

##### Objective

To coordinate and deliver a programme of meanwhile uses for spaces in town and village centres.

##### Overview

Meanwhile use projects offer a way of addressing vacancy rates and experimenting with new retail formats and service offerings. Breckland Council can take an active lead by working on the supply side - liaising with landlords, creating a database of available premises, coordinating interim insurance; and on the demand side; working with entrepreneurs and community groups to help them see opportunity in new space.

##### What does success look like?

- Reduced high street vacancies
- New and flexible commercial space
- Local employment and training opportunities
- Increased footfall and enlivened high streets.



# Building on our heritage and culture



## Why Act?

Breckland has a rich cultural heritage. However, the rich history of the area is under recognised and not well known outside of our borders. For some age groups there is a lack of community amenities for performance and cultural events, whether in traditional performing arts or in emerging areas such as online.

Through this objective we will better leverage our local heritage to differentiate our place and to provide a wider range of cultural amenities for our existing residents. These will range from formal centres to vibrant historical markets where locally produced small-batch products are featured.

## Connections across the Delivery Plans

Set out in the respective five Town Delivery Plans is treatment and reimagining of over 47 historic buildings and assets, with a further common theme of supporting and enhancing the market and marketplace activity.

### High Potential Projects

#### Brand Thetford T

Improving perceptions of Thetford through a programme of festivals, events and place branding, alongside a new cultural masterplan for the Town.

No capital costs | 0-5 years

#### Inclusive Watton W

Deliver public realm masterplan; reducing traffic impact whilst improving public realm and running a programme of activity to increase footfall.

£12.5-18 million | 5-10 years

### District wide 'Big Idea'

#### Breckland Asset Activation Revolving Fund

##### Objective

To breathe new life into heritage buildings and underused assets across the district by bringing them into new use.

##### Overview

There are a number of disused and underutilised historical and heritage assets across Breckland. These buildings can be prohibitively expensive to develop by end-users, given the greater financial risk. This project would enable the Council to acquire assets in order to repurpose them. Any sales of buildings would be reinvested back to support other redevelopment opportunities.

##### What does success look like?

- Neglected and historic buildings are reinvigorated and bought back to life, responding to current and future needs
- High quality placemaking within the market towns
- New homes and commercial space



# Growing our business and enterprise base



## Why Act?

Breckland has a strong base of local businesses. However, the business growth rate in Breckland has been 20% lower than the national average. This means the rate of new business creation has been lower than the national average and the flow of businesses relocating into the area is slower than seen in other areas.

Encouraging the growth of the Breckland business base is an objective as a significant number of residents commute outside of the area for employment in higher-wage sectors.

The creation of Breckland-based businesses in higher-wage sectors will give our residents local employment options while safeguarding our future economy.

There are some immediate steps we can take to encourage businesses to set-up or expand in Breckland. For instance, the creation of high-quality office space will help. Today 99% of all commercial property is classified as 'low quality'. Alongside this Breckland's business creation and support ecosystem will be supported through the creation of dedicated business support services and space.

## Connections across the Delivery Plans

Set out in the respective five Town Delivery Plans is approximately 110,000 sqm of new employment space, spread across 6 interventions. These cover a spread of types and use classes, with particular provision targeted around manufacturing, engineering, food, technology – as well as support for start-ups and office-based expansions.

### High Potential Projects

#### Snetterton Heath

Almost 200 HA development potential, one of Norfolk’s largest commercial sites. Potential to support substantial food, technology, manufacturing and logistics growth – as well as expansion of existing regional visitor and entertainment offer.

#### Strengthening the Dereham Economy D

Redevelopment and intensification of Breckland Council’s industrial units on Bertie Way Ward and development of new commercial space behind Elizabeth House.

£94-135 million | 5-10 years

#### Commercial Attleborough A

Development of a new commercial hub in the centre of the Town around the train station and bringing forward new employment land to meet needs of growing population.

£29-32 million | 5-10 years

### District wide 'Big Idea'

#### Manufacturing Enterprise Park

##### Objective

Creation of a new Manufacturing Enterprise Park in the District, to facilitate the expansion of high-value manufacturing jobs.

##### Overview

Part of an integrated offer for the wider Norfolk economy, the Manufacturing Enterprise Park (MEP) would provide a single site to enable supply chain excellence and development around manufacturing, enabling large scale anchor tenants to co-locate alongside smaller and early stages businesses. Mixing both availability of commercial space with wrap around business support, the MEP would provide plots from 5,000 to 500,000 sq ft.

##### What does success look like?

- Development of new high-quality employment spaces
- Joined-up with other sites along A11 growth corridor, providing expansion and grow on space and supply chain development
- Potential to create over 1,000 new jobs



# Investing in housing and infrastructure



## Why Act?

As a predominantly rural area, Breckland has connectivity limitations and a traditional housing stock.

Whilst house prices in many areas are comparatively low nationally, affordability remains a significant challenge locally. The District needs to ensure the right mix of types and tenures of housing are available to meet the different needs of the growing population.

Residents are heavily reliant on private cars and for those without, travelling to employment areas or appointments can be a challenge. Digital connectivity is improving slowly with the roll-out of the Government's rural broadband programme.

This objective is to make targeted investments in key infrastructure. The purpose of these investments is to ensure residents benefit from the right kinds of infrastructure to support needs in the future.

## Connections across the Delivery Plans

Set out in the respective five Town Delivery Plans are interventions designed to enhance the delivery of almost 10,000 already planned houses. They also include over 114 miles of new walking and cycling routes, and over 4050 sqm of new public green space infrastructure.

### High Potential Projects

#### **Breckland Active Travel**

With over 114 miles of new walking and cycling routes spread over the five towns, and creating connections across the District.

#### **Thetford Riverside**



With the wider scheme incorporating the regeneration of the Abbey Estate, one of the largest housing and commercial regeneration schemes in Norfolk.

£14-20 million | 0-5 years

#### **Integrated Attleborough**



Creating the physical and community connections which will enable the development of 4,000 new homes in Attleborough as part of a joined-up vision for the Town as a whole.

£5.6-8 million | 5-10 years

### District wide 'Big Idea'

#### **Breckland Shuttle**

##### **Objective**

Introduce a rolling shuttle service running between towns, employment areas and major district assets.

##### **Overview**

Today it is a challenge for residents without cars to travel within the district. This limits the opportunities for young people to work or attend training classes and for people who cannot drive to shop or attend appointments. This is also a barrier to businesses as employees must have access to a private vehicle. Breckland Council will establish a low-cost shuttle service that provides an alternative for those without cars and markedly improve public transport provision.

##### **What does success look like?**

- Rolling shuttle service with high usage rates
- Co-investment by local employers and business parks



# Improving sustainability and resident wellbeing



## Why Act?

Breckland Council declared a state of climate emergency in 2019, and through the extensive Future Breckland engagement programme the priority of the natural environment was clear. As with all parts of the country, Breckland faces a significant undertaking to realise the ambitions of reducing the level of greenhouse gases within the District to net zero by 2035

As a whole the District has a large volume of strong natural assets, and nationally significant green spaces – particularly around the Brecks. However, access to green spaces is mixed, with the lowest levels seen in the Market Towns.

Further, over two thirds of Breckland's residents are classified as overweight or obese. This is significantly higher than regional and England averages, as well as comparator regions such as the North West and North East.

These linked priorities of sustainability and wellbeing are heavily focussed on ensuring that the District is able to lead and be confident about its environmental future, whilst ensuring that people have access to green space and other assets they need to live happy and healthy lives.

## Connections across the Delivery Plans

Set out in the respective five Town Delivery Plans there is a significant theme around sustainable travel, and better access to employment without need for a car. There is a consistent theme around creating more and better green spaces in Towns, and there are actions in each Town to improve the fitness and health provision.

### High Potential Projects

#### Engaged Attleborough

Enhancement of existing, and creation of new outdoor, leisure and community facilities in the Town.

£1.5-2.2 million | 0-5 years

#### Watton Loch Neaton

Enhancements to the Loch in Watton, protecting a key natural asset and growing its impact on the local community and visitors.

£1-2 million | 0-5 years

#### Swaffham Leisure

Increasing the reach and scale of leisure provision in the Town, through development of a new leisure centre.

£7.4 million | 0-3 years

### District wide 'Big Idea'

#### Breckland Retrofit Academy

##### Objective

Create a new Retrofit Academy offer in Breckland, to help spearhead retrofit activity across the District and County.

##### Overview

Retrofit is the process of upgrading our existing buildings to make them more energy efficient. This usually involves improving the fabric of the building through installing insulation, upgrading the services, introducing renewable energy and heat sources such as solar panels and heat pumps. The role of an Academy is to provide the training and coordination to enable that activity to happen locally.

##### What does success look like?

- Accredited provider(s) offering Level 2 to 5 qualifications
- A local industry-based stakeholder forum with members including installers, local authorities, housing associations, SMEs and national developers.
- Significant reduction in emissions (around 27% of all CO2 emissions come from the heating, lighting and electricity used in our homes).
- Significant job creation potential.



# Encouraging educational attainment



## Why Act?

Skills, and the ability to attract and retain a workforce with the right skills, is the most commonly cited challenge for employers in Breckland.

We can see that attainment levels do not compare favourably with other parts of the country, and this is particularly stark when it comes to higher education participation, where Breckland is amongst the lowest in the country. Today just 27% of Breckland residents are educated to degree level compared to 40% nationally.

This is partially the result of long-standing social mobility issues with Breckland ranking 316<sup>th</sup> out of 346 local authorities for social mobility in the country. The result is average earnings are £26,613 compared to £31,800 nationally.

This objective is to enhance the educational infrastructure, creatively link local economic need with skills support, and inspire our young people to invest time in education and to develop our future economy.

## Connections across the Delivery Plans

Set out in the respective five Town Delivery Plans are interventions designed to enhance the skills offer through multiple routes – with innovation activity proposed in each of the five towns, and at least two new standalone facilities offering adult and young people training. All of these are heavily linked into the business growth priorities for Breckland.

### High Potential Projects

#### Watton Digital and Creative Media Centre

The new facility in Watton will provide 2,500 sqm of space for digital and creative start-ups, including a large cinema for online gaming competitions.

£8-10 million | 5-10 years

#### Innovative Thetford

Developing an innovative new learning Hub in Thetford. The Hub will focus on providing sector-specific skills development and training for young people, including provision of higher-level training, whilst bringing together additional employment and enterprise support services for adults and young people into a single offer.

£4.5-6 million | 0-5 years

### District wide 'Big Idea'

#### Breckland Children's Multiversity

##### Objective

A bespoke educational facility – with potential to cover multiple sites over the District - that provides a high quality extra-curricular educational support programme available to all Breckland children.

##### Overview

The Multiversity will be structured to help children engage with out of school learning, both academic and non-academic. The curriculum will align with Breckland's future growth ambitions in the STEM sectors with support in the form of teaching and site visits by local companies. The Multiversity will also provide courses in the arts and organised sport. It will have deep links with local businesses and enterprises, who will help shape the curriculum and deliver innovative activities and approaches to learning.

##### What does success look like?

- Engaged and inspired children
- Increase levels of educational attainment and participation in further education
- Co-sponsorship and funding provided by locally-based research and STEM businesses
- Skills better aligning with key local growth sectors

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