

# Walsall Borough Strategic Economic Plan 2015

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# Walsall Borough Strategic Economic Framework

Corporate Priorities 2015-16

The Walsall Plan 2013-16

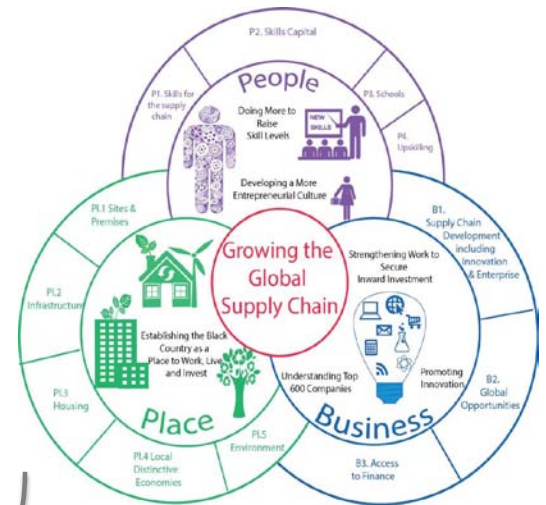
Black Country Strategic Economic Plan 2014

Improve lives and life chances for everyone who lives and works in the Borough of Walsall and in so doing – Minimise the help that residents need from the state

- 1 Supporting business to thrive and supporting local people into work
- 2 Improving health and well being, including independence for older people and protection of vulnerable people
- 3 Creating safe, sustainable and inclusive communities
- 4 Improving safeguarding, learning and life chances for children and young people, and raising aspirations
- 5 Creating a modern, dynamic and efficient workforce designed around what residents need

Walsall will be a great place to live, learn, work and invest

- 1 Supporting business to thrive and supporting local people into work
- 2 Improving health including well being and independence for older people
- 3 Creating safe and sustainable communities
- 4 Improving safeguarding, learning and life chances for children and young people



## Overall Economic Purpose:

Create the conditions for sustained economic growth by supporting the growth of business and jobs in Walsall, ensuring Walsall people have the right skills and environment to make the most of opportunities

## Walsall Economic Board Priorities:

Creating a business environment that supports job creation

Ensuring people possess the skills to enter and progress in work

### Place

Transforming infrastructure & the environment

We will create the conditions that allow our existing businesses to expand and enable new companies to invest and move here. We will ensure that Walsall is well-connected and has the highest possible quality environment that make it an attractive place where businesses want to invest and people want to live, work, learn and visit.

#### Walsall will be a place where:

- **Town and district centres** offer a distinctive and vibrant mix of retail, leisure, business, community, and cultural opportunities
- High quality development **sites and premises** are available, to attract new companies and to allow existing businesses to expand
- The range of **housing** provided is both affordable and aspirational, meeting the needs of existing residents while also attracting new people to move to the borough
- Effective **planning frameworks** are in place that allow our economy to flourish in a sustainable way
- **Transport networks** provide businesses with good connections to the national network, and allow people greater accessibility around the borough and to jobs via public transport
- The **natural and built environment** is a sustainable, vibrant and high quality asset for the borough, attracting businesses and people and promoting wellbeing

### Business

Improving business competitiveness

We will actively support local businesses and provide them with the best possible opportunities to grow and create more jobs in the borough. The number and diversity of businesses in the borough will be expanded through both inward investment and new businesses development.

#### Walsall will be a place where:

- Enterprise, innovation, self-employment and **new business development** is encouraged and supported
- Businesses have the **access to finance and support** they need to flourish
- **Local supply chains** are actively developed and spending within the local economy is encouraged
- **Inward investment** is drawn into the borough, expanding the range and increasing the quality of local jobs on offer
- Opportunities in **foreign markets** are opened up to local companies
- Companies **invest in the future** and wellbeing of their business, their employees, and the borough; through investment in infrastructure, training and skills development, and corporate social responsibility programmes

### People

Raising employability, education & skills

We will equip local people with the skills and attitudes that employers are looking for, and give them the best possible chance of getting into work; those already in work will be given opportunities to continually develop their skills. We will work to understand and address the barriers that prevent people from getting into work and that keep them living in poverty.

#### Walsall will be a place where:

- The **relationship between education and business** enables them to work together to produce the employees of tomorrow
- **Colleges, University and training providers** invest in the facilities and courses that are needed to support growth
- People possess the **skills and attitudes** to meet both today's and tomorrow's business needs, and are encouraged to continually 'upskill' and develop themselves
- **Barriers** that prevent people gaining skills or getting a job are understood and removed
- **Unemployed residents** get the support and training they need to find sustainable work
- People are **lifted out of poverty** by getting into work and gaining the skills needed to progress into better paid work

## Introduction

Walsall's economy has an annual output of £4.35 billion and provides almost 100,000 jobs. The local economy supports a steadily increasing resident population of over a quarter of a million, with three in every five people being of working age. However, only two thirds of working age residents are in employment, and for those in work, earnings are below the national average. Walsall is among the most deprived local authorities in England, with high levels of multiple deprivation affecting many of its neighbourhoods.

The wellbeing of Walsall's economy directly affects the wellbeing of the people who live here; a weak local economy has a massive impact on all the services provided by the local authority and its partners. Finding a job, or increasing the number of hours worked, is one of the main routes out of poverty. Employment also has a clear link to improved mental and physical health, as well as increased independence. The economic downturn highlighted how much Walsall can be influenced by events outside its borders, at a national and even international level. But there are still steps we can take locally to build our resilience to these external pressures and equip Walsall residents and businesses to thrive in difficult times. The challenge for Walsall Council and its public sector partners is increasingly how to address these issues with shrinking resources, and how we can create the conditions necessary for the private sector to grow and flourish.

Walsall has suffered from economic hardship over many decades, with too few active businesses, high numbers of people who are economically inactive, and residents who are poorly equipped to take up work opportunities. These long term issues were evident even before the recession in 2008,

and put Walsall's economy at a major disadvantage. Between 1998 and 2008, while the national economy grew strongly and employment increased by 9%, Walsall's economy experienced a 2.5% decline in employment and lost over 2,500 jobs. The recession just served to further emphasise Walsall's economic vulnerability, with almost 10,000 full time jobs lost between 2008 and 2009 and an unemployment rate that increased more sharply than the national average. Recently however, businesses confidence has started to show signs of recovering, and reliance on unemployment benefits has been falling over the past couple of years. Yet there is still a lot more we need to do to support our residents and businesses to reach their full economic potential.

The problems faced by Walsall's economy today are the result of decades of decline – and there are no quick solutions. New developments can take many years of planning before work even begins on site; businesses take time to establish themselves and expand; and raising skill levels or overcoming the impacts of poverty can take a generation. We need to recognise this, and plan now for the longer term – while at the same time doing our best to support our communities and businesses with the difficulties they are experiencing today.

The importance of the borough's economy is recognised in the priorities set out in a number of different strategic documents: nationally, sub-regionally, locally and corporately. Rather than representing a different set of priorities, this framework draws together all of these existing strategies and shows how they are interlinked – and how we are working with our partners to address a range of difficult and complex challenges.

## Introduction to Walsall

Walsall is a metropolitan borough that covers an area of 40 square miles, with a mix of urban, suburban and some rural communities. The borough is located to the north-west of Birmingham, and is one of the four local authorities that make up the Black Country sub-region (along with Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton). Walsall town centre lies at the heart of the borough and is one of the strategic centres in the Black Country. There are also five important smaller town (district) centres: Aldridge, Bloxwich, Brownhills, Darlaston and Willenhall.

Walsall is home to 274,200 people, living across 20 wards. The number of residents in the borough has steadily increased over the past decade, reversing the periods of population decline seen during the 1980s and 90s – a time when the national population experienced consistent growth. Projections suggest the number of people in Walsall will continue to grow, but with a disproportionate amount of the rise occurring in older age groups, resulting in a shrinking in the proportion of residents of working age. This will make it even more essential that people are supported to be economically active, and that our businesses have a local skilled workforce to draw on in the future.

Like much of the Black Country, the borough has a history of heavy industry (such as iron and steel working, and coal mining) along with craft-based industries (notably leather trades in Walsall and lock-making in Willenhall). However, many of these traditional industries have seen tremendous decline over recent decades with a resulting huge loss of employment. The legacy of this industrial

past has also left the borough with many contaminated and fragmented brownfield sites, inadequate local transport networks and housing that no longer meets the needs of today's residents.

## How do we understand our challenges?

There are a wide range of sources of information on our economy that we have drawn upon. Local Economic Assessments (LEAs) were introduced by government in 2009 as a way of providing local authorities with a sound understanding of their economic conditions and how they affect residents and businesses. Walsall's LEA is now a *process* that goes further than the production of a static document; it represents an opportunity to examine the various elements in our economy in order to establish our key challenges and opportunities, and to help shape the solutions and actions required to develop and transform our economy.

This informs our activity at a local level, and ensures that Walsall's needs are addressed at a sub-regional level. Along with findings from other key needs assessments, the LEA also feeds into an annual Walsall Strategic Needs Assessment – which provides a comprehensive 'state of the borough' that informs partnership and corporate strategic plans. This allows us to understand our economy in relation to the wider social and environmental circumstances.

This needs assessment process is continually under review and the Strategic Economic Plan will evolve in response – ensuring that the ambitions for Walsall reflect the current situation, and that we have relevant measures in place to track our progress.

## Recent Achievements

Economic activity with Walsall takes place across all three key themes: Place, Business and People. With this approach we have ensured that we are creating the conditions necessary for private sector growth, helping businesses to grow the number jobs in Walsall, and supporting local people to take advantage of these new opportunities. Teams have worked together across themes to achieve maximum benefits for Walsall businesses and residents from any developments in the borough. A selection of some of the 2014/15 achievements are below.

### **Place:** transforming infrastructure and the environment

- Progress continued on a Site Allocations Document for the borough and an Area Action Plan for Walsall Town Centre – with the Preferred Options plans currently out for public consultation – ensuring we can allocate sufficient land to meet our needs for housing, employment, retailing and offices.
- Over 1,100 planning applications and 1,000 building control applications were determined, allowing developments to proceed, supporting economic development and providing facilities. Planning applications were refused to avoid damaging or inadequate developments.
- 5 Planning Obligations were completed, totalling over £300k in developer contributions sought towards highway improvements, improved subway lighting and open space, along with 15 affordable housing units.
- 773 new homes were completed during 2014: over 300 of which were affordable rent homes, with funding secured for more over next few years.
- Active support was given to facilitate developments in Walsall town centre, including the completion of Primark and the Co-op in Digbeth and a new Business and Sports Hub at Walsall College. Support continues for a cinema and restaurants at Walsall Waterfront, offices for Jhoots Pharmacy at Littleton Street, and the over 55's housing scheme at Waterfront South.
- Continuing successful support for district centres saw a reduction in vacant units.
- Three industrial developments were completed, and another 3 in progress. The largest was redevelopment of Universal Point at Darlaston for Lonestar (2.7ha) with others located in Walsall, Willenhall and Aldridge.
- Work on a key transport scheme, the 'Darlaston Strategic Development Area (DSDA) Access Project', started on site in autumn 2014 (for completion in 2016), supporting the physical regeneration and commercial potential of nearby employment sites within the Black Country Enterprise Zone. And a scheme to tackle congestion at M6 Junction 10 has received funding from Highways England and the Black Country Growth Deal.

### **Business:** improving business competitiveness

- Latest figures (2013) showed a net increase of 250 businesses and 1,600 jobs in Walsall.
- 23 local companies were supported to receive £21k revenue and capital grant through the Black Country GOLD small grants programme: generating £48k in investment and 35 job opportunities.
- A successful 'Meet the Buyer' event brought together procurement teams from 3 key developments (Jhoots, Walsall College and DSDA) to meet local suppliers in the construction sector – assisting local businesses to benefit from the development projects happening across the borough. Six businesses have won work locally.
- Relunched [www.walsall.com](http://www.walsall.com) as a single point of entry for online business enquires.
- Employment Growth Team engaged with over 1,780 businesses in and around Walsall, resulting in: 152.5 jobs created, 92 jobs safeguarded, £1million total grant secured, £4.1million total investment (including private sector) secured.

### **People:** raising employability, education and skills

- Walsall saw the greatest reduction in Jobseeker's Allowance claimants in the Black Country from March 2014-March 2015, with an even greater reduction in youth unemployment, driven by the Walsall Works scheme, which in 2014/15:
  - Supported 110 young people into sustainable employment through apprenticeships with local employers.
  - A further 105 completed traineeships to prepare them for full apprenticeships.
  - Engaged with all Walsall secondary schools and participated in a large number of fairs, events, campaigns to promote post 16 options
  - Supported 429 young people into other positive outcomes i.e. work experience, employment, full and part time learning.
  - Supported around 200 adults into employment through a new job matching service
- Overall the Walsall Works programme leveraged in £3 for every £1 spent by the council through funding drawn in from the Skills Funding Agency, National Apprenticeship Grants, DWP and employer salary contributions. It has generated £2m of savings / benefits to government departments and the exchequer.
- Worked closely with key developers and contractors delivering major projects across Walsall to make opportunities available to local residents. This included placements, jobs, training and employer-school engagements with companies such as Morgan-Sindall, Jessups, Interserve, GF Tomlinson and Dawnus.
- Worked to support Primark and Mid Counties Co-op on their recruitment of staff and actively supported residents to participate in pre-employment training sessions

## The Scale of the Challenge

Despite the progress we have made recently, there remains a considerable economic challenge for the borough and Walsall continues to lag behind the national average on a number of key measures. In order for Walsall merely to achieve the England national average, we would need to achieve the following scale of improvements:

- 9,300 more adults who are economically active in the labour market (currently: 121,200)<sup>1</sup>
- 4,000 fewer adults who are unemployed (currently: 11,400)<sup>2</sup>
- 6,650 fewer adults claiming an out-of-work benefit (currently: 22,430)<sup>3</sup>
- 1,350 fewer adults actively seeking work and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (currently: 4,026)<sup>4</sup>
- £78 increase in residents' full time weekly earnings (currently: £446)<sup>5</sup>
- 20,100 more adults with a degree level qualification (currently: 39,200)<sup>6</sup>
- 14,800 fewer adults with no qualifications (currently: 29,100)<sup>7</sup>
- 100 more young people leaving school with 5 good GCSEs (including maths and English) (currently: 1,650)<sup>8</sup>
- 3,000 additional active business enterprises (currently: 7,460)<sup>9</sup>
- 450 additional business start-ups per year (currently: 1,050)<sup>10</sup>
- 20,650 additional jobs available in the borough (currently: 97,800)<sup>11</sup>
- £46 increase in full time weekly pay from local employers (currently: £477)<sup>12</sup>
- 1,500 more households owning their own home (currently: 67,866)<sup>13</sup>
- 25,500 fewer residents living in the highly deprived neighbourhoods (currently: 52,600)<sup>14</sup>
- 4,800 fewer children under 16 living in poverty (currently: 15,200)<sup>15</sup>

## SWOT Summary

The following pages set out the main strengths and weaknesses of Walsall's economy. This is followed by some of the threats and challenges we face, alongside opportunities for growth. These span all three themes: place, business and people.

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<sup>1</sup> ONS Annual Population Survey, *Economically active residents 16-64*, Jul 14-Jun 15

<sup>2</sup> ONS Annual Population Survey, Jul 14-Jun15, *Mode-based unemployment 16-64*, Jul 14-Jun 15

<sup>3</sup> DWP Working Age Client Group, Feb 15

<sup>4</sup> ONS Jobseeker's Allowance Claimant Count, Sep 15

<sup>5</sup> ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, *Earnings by residence, gross weekly full-time pay*, 2014

<sup>6</sup> ONS Annual Population Survey, *Residents 16-64 with qualifications at NVQ4 or equivalent and above*, 2014

<sup>7</sup> ONS Annual Population Survey, *Residents 16-64 with no formal qualifications*, 2014

<sup>8</sup> DfE GCSE and Equivalent Results in England, 2014/15 (provisional)

<sup>9</sup> ONS Business Demography, *Count of active enterprises*, 2013

<sup>10</sup> ONS Business Demography, *Count of births of new enterprises*, 2013

<sup>11</sup> ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, *Employee jobs*, 2014

<sup>12</sup> ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, *Earnings by workplace, gross weekly full-time pay*, 2014

<sup>13</sup> ONS Census, *Household tenure KA402EW*, 2011

<sup>14</sup> DCLG English Indices of Deprivation, *Index of multiple deprivation: most deprived decile*, 2015

<sup>15</sup> HMRC Children in Low-Income Families Local Measure, August 2013



Strengths	Weaknesses
<p><b>Locational advantages:</b> Proximity to Birmingham provides access to a large market for companies and a wide range of job opportunities for residents. Proximity to the motorway network provides an opportunity to develop attractive employment locations to attract new investment and employment.</p>	<p><b>Transport network connectivity:</b> Despite the proximity of the national motorway network, many of the local routes within and through Walsall can be heavily congested or do not effectively serve the key employment areas. This prevents Walsall from offering competitive locations to new investors and can also impact upon the operations of existing businesses, particularly those that are dependent upon vehicular and HGV access.</p>
<p><b>Black Country Enterprise Zone - Darlaston:</b> a high profile regeneration opportunity, with good strategic access, in an under-developed location that has the potential to provide a positive image of the Black Country and facilitate new investment. It could dramatically improve the quality of employment land and attract new investment from companies requiring high quality sites near to the motorway network in sectors such as manufacturing and logistics.</p>	<p><b>Size and Quality of Employment land:</b> Much of Walsall’s supply of employment land is of poor quality, difficult to access, faces constraints in its development (e.g. remediation) or is not of the right size to meet operator requirements. This makes it difficult for Walsall to secure new investment both from indigenous companies and inward investors. Landowners are often unwilling to compromise their expectations on cost – and may keep land off the market altogether, or attempt to sell for higher-value uses such as retail or housing.</p>
<p><b>Walsall Town Centre:</b> is the strategic centre for the Borough as identified in the Core Strategy. The presence of Walsall Manor hospital, the Council, New Art Gallery, Gala Baths and Further / Higher Education providers make the town an important centre for services. Walsall Town Centre has also benefited from significant investment and development projects including new retail floorspace, office developments, leisure provision, education facilities, housing-led schemes and public realm projects. As a large and fairly densely populated area, Walsall can support a relatively broad range of retail and other consumer services.</p>	<p><b>Relatively poor catchment area:</b> Many residents and communities suffer from high levels of deprivation and benefit dependency, and those who are in employment have lower average earnings and therefore spending power. The town centre also suffers competition from larger and/or more affluent surrounding centres (e.g. Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Lichfield) and out of centre retail. The result is the town centre’s share of consumer spending on retail, leisure and services is lower than it should be – consequently it is difficult to attract and maintain commercial investment.</p>
<p><b>Urban structure:</b> the borough’s history of separate and diverse settlements provides a hierarchy of places, which can give people convenient access to a range of services and opportunities.</p>	<p><b>Fragmented urban structure:</b> The fragmented nature of the borough’s urban structure means that there is competition between places of resources and investment.</p>
<p><b>Large amounts of residential housing:</b> This generates large economic demand in the local area. There is capacity within the existing urban area to accommodate large amounts of new housing development – and where cost issues have been addressed and resources made available, we have a track record of supporting the delivery of new housing.</p>	<p><b>Geographically variable housing provision:</b> Different types of housing is found across the borough, and we cannot meet all needs in all communities – in general there is a lack of affordable housing in the east and less private sector quality housing in the west. Land for residential development is often of poor condition or has high remediation costs – and where development is financially viable it is often only with reduced contributions to infrastructure.</p>
<p><b>Good quality environment:</b> Extensive countryside particularly in the east of the borough incorporating attractive green spaces such as Barr Beacon, Pelsall Common and Brownhills Common; a number of attractive urban parks notably Walsall Arboretum, Willenhall Memorial Park and Palfrey Park.</p>	<p><b>Poor quality urban environment:</b> Extensive areas of poor quality built environment which represent a legacy of the area’s industrial past and reflect insufficient recent investment.</p>
<p><b>Leisure infrastructure:</b> the Council is currently spending £23.8m on replacing its leisure centres at Oak Park and Bloxwich and a further £1m on Walsall town centre’s Gala Baths. This investment is to help achieve the Council’s aspiration of “more people, more active, more often” to improve mental and physical health and overall health and well-being. Walsall College is also investing £11m in building a new Business &amp; Sport Hub in the town centre.</p>	<p><b>Public transport quality:</b> Walsall has a comprehensive bus network but none of the routes are of the quality needed within an urban area, particularly where those routes connect Walsall to neighbouring areas, including Birmingham and Wolverhampton. Similarly, Walsall’s rail link to the north is poor whilst links to locations other than Birmingham are non-existent. This negatively impacts congestion and car usage in the centre and on busy corridors, which in-turn reduces the attractiveness of central Walsall for inward investors.</p>

<p><b>Minerals and Waste:</b> The borough contains several mineral workings that provide valuable materials and some jobs. The management and disposal of waste is an important industry in Walsall.</p>	<p><b>Mineral working and waste impacts:</b> Mineral workings can often have adverse local environmental impacts. Some waste activities, especially disposal to landfill, can have adverse local environmental impacts.</p>
<p><b>Cohort of Growing Businesses:</b> Around two-thirds of local businesses expect to grow over the next two years, mainly through securing new business in existing markets. Assisting these businesses in their growth and overcoming business constraints through business support and site expansion/relocation activities is a key priority and would help to enable greater levels of wealth generation and increased prosperity in Walsall.</p>	<p><b>Lack of modern business accommodation:</b> a limited offer for both industrial and service based companies in accessible locations. This includes the absence of a Grade A office offer to potential investors, or of a portfolio of high quality land and premises or investment in existing industrial areas.</p>
<p><b>Latent enterprise base:</b> Walsall has a relatively good enterprise record and latent business talent in some industrial sectors and communities. There remains untapped potential to harness this to create new businesses and jobs in knowledge based growth sectors.</p>	<p><b>Limited new workspace:</b> Limited variety of affordable, good quality premises to support new and growing local businesses.</p>
<p><b>Industrial base:</b> Despite employment decline, Walsall retains a strong manufacturing and associated core skills base with a large number of small and medium sized companies - many of whom are reporting forecast growth and expansion over the next few years.</p>	<p><b>Continued dependence on declining sectors for employment:</b> A high proportion of Walsall's employment and wealth generation continues to come from the manufacturing sector, in particular basic and fabricated metals manufacturing.</p>
<p><b>Growth in service sector employment:</b> there has been some evidence of growth within the private sector service economy (although starting from a low base) in sectors such as property and other business activities, health and social care over the past decade.</p>	<p><b>Weak private sector service economy:</b> Walsall remains under-represented in a number of private sector areas particularly property and other business activities, financial services, hotels and restaurants and niche sectors such as the creative and cultural industries. The Borough did not manage to capture its share of growth in these sectors during the period of economic growth.</p>
<p><b>Future Education provision:</b> both local providers (Walsall College and Walsall Adult &amp; Community College) have been rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted.</p>	<p><b>Low adult skills and qualifications:</b> The number of adults with no qualifications is above the national average, and relatively few residents have higher level skills. Basic skills such as literacy and numeracy are also lower than average and GCSE and A-level results need to improve. However, there is significant variation across the borough.</p>
<p><b>Reductions in Jobseekers:</b> claimant levels have fallen steadily for the past 2 years, with reductions in the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) and those seeking work and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance.</p>	<p><b>High levels of unemployment and worklessness:</b> Walsall's labour force is weakened by persistently high levels of unemployment and workless households. This includes a high dependency on health-related out-of-work benefits. The recession also had a more pronounced effect on Walsall than elsewhere, suggesting a labour market vulnerable to external economic pressures.</p>
<p><b>Black Country Joint Working:</b> the four local authorities within the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership have demonstrated they can work together across a range of economic issues, with a Joint Core Strategy and Strategic Economic Plan now in place.</p>	<p><b>Too few employment opportunities:</b> There is a high level of frustrated and unmet demand amongst economically inactive residents who would take up employment if suitable employment were available and was accessible. This indicates that there are too few jobs available for local residents across all skill levels</p>

Opportunities	Challenges/Threats
<p><b>Proximity to Birmingham:</b> local companies can take advantage of the proximity to Birmingham, which provides a critical mass of expertise, markets and suppliers. Improving access could also mean more residents are able to take up employment opportunities across the city.</p>	<p><b>Pulls from Birmingham:</b> higher skilled Walsall residents in particular might be drawn by a wider range of opportunities in the city, reducing the pool of talent available to Walsall businesses. Similarly, local businesses might relocate to take advantage of opportunities such as a wider choice of office space etc.</p>
<p><b>Transport and logistics:</b> Walsall has an established niche and an excellent location at the heart of the UK motorway network, adjacent to the M6. This makes it well placed to meet increased demand for new investment in transport and logistics sectors, building on a small number of recent successes in this area.</p>	<p><b>Lack of sites:</b> A shortage of high-quality sites, of suitable size, that are ‘shovel ready’ means that the borough may be unable to move quickly enough to grab inward investment opportunities.</p>
<p><b>Low cost office base:</b> A number of business and other service employers may prefer to locate away from Birmingham city centre and expensive premises. Walsall has the potential to offer a competitive back office offer to such companies, in particular through the further development of Walsall town centre primarily within the Gigaport area (as with the current Jhoots head office development).</p>	<p><b>Global trends in manufacturing production and employment:</b> the long term trend has been for manufacturing production to move to lower cost economies, although design, innovation and management have often remained in the UK. This could result in an erosion of employment numbers as less labour-intensive processes are introduced in Walsall, or a skills gap in the current workforce as companies introduce new technologies and ways of working.</p>
<p><b>Fresh and innovative approach to creating market-ready employment land:</b> Walsall continues to compete for inward investment opportunities, with end-users seeking readily available sites existing for business occupation within 12-18months. There is the potential to secure such investment through proactive approaches such as acquisitions by the public sector and public-private sector partnerships and funding opportunities.</p>	<p><b>Continued reduction in Government support for economic development:</b> Walsall’s most important schemes require significant up-front public expenditure to make them financially viable. Whilst the Borough does have a good track record in attracting private sector investment, the current economic climate makes the delivery of the necessary economic infrastructure for a competitive economy challenging without public sector intervention to support.</p>
<p><b>Rationalisation of the public sector property estate:</b> the public sector has an extensive and inefficient property portfolio. The location of such assets provides an opportunity to rationalise and use the portfolio more effectively to increase the quality of residential land and enhance provision within district and local centres</p>	<p><b>Budget Cuts:</b> uncertainty over whether budgets will be available to maintain existing levels of maintenance. Reductions in money for highways maintenance, grass cutting or road sweeping could have a negative impact on the quality of the environment and attractiveness to businesses and residents as a place to live, work or invest. Similarly, cuts to other services such as leisure, libraries or cultural amenities</p>
<p><b>Improving design and local distinctiveness of new developments:</b> through scale, layout and design to aid attractiveness and improve long-term take-up and occupancy of end users.</p>	<p><b>Managing development pressures:</b> ensuring that economic development is sustainable through brownfield redevelopment and promotion of natural and built heritage features as opportunities rather than development constraints.</p>
<p><b>Minerals:</b> There may be a need to provide more materials for brick-making.</p>	<p><b>Minerals:</b> The opening of an additional clay pit is likely to generate concerns among local residents</p>
<p><b>Waste:</b> As regulatory requirements increase there is likely to be a need for more investment in waste facilities (and disposal to landfill is set to decrease)</p>	<p><b>Waste facilities:</b> these can be perceived by nearby occupiers as potentially damaging environmentally</p>
<p><b>Housing need:</b> a major and long term new build programme is required to meet affordable and private housing need, with employment implications for the borough’s workforce and</p>	

skills base profile and the construction sector.	
<b>Forecast sectoral growth:</b> up to 2020, growth is forecast in all sectors. The greatest increase is expected to be generated in the health and social care sector, linked to the needs of an ageing population.	<b>Public sector employment decline:</b> a reduction in public sector employment due to reduced budgets is inevitable, and this will reduce spending in the local economy and increase unemployment at least in the short term.
<b>Building on Higher and Further Education provision:</b> in the medium to long term there is the opportunity to build on the existing offer to establish a substantial higher education presence in Walsall. Further education is also demonstrating expansion with Walsall College opening a new facility in 2015. This will help to retain and develop a more skilled workforce in the borough. Continuing to increase the provision of traineeships and apprenticeships will also add to this skills base.	<b>Labour market and skills challenges:</b> moving up the value chain will require a highly motivated and increasingly skilled workforce. Tackling low levels of skills and encouraging an entrepreneurial approach will be crucial. A series of changes in the labour market will present further challenges to reducing worklessness including entry qualifications for jobs which previously required no formal qualifications and the inter-personal skills required in customer facing service sector jobs.
<b>Expanding Local Companies with a Commitment to Walsall:</b> many companies expect turnover to increase over the next few years. There is a cohort of companies needing or intending to move to larger premises but with a strong commitment to staying in Walsall.	<b>Overcoming Constraints to Growth:</b> a number of constraints to business growth were identified through the business survey including the ability to access new markets; obtaining finance; the availability of high quality premises; the costs of training; and skills gaps and shortages.
<b>Market Innovation and Expansion Potential:</b> there is a high degree of innovation amongst some local companies, with evidence that many are seeking to develop new products and move into new markets. There are also a number of companies that already access national and international markets with the potential to further increase sales.	<b>Demographic changes:</b> A growing population, but with growth primarily in the older age groups, will exacerbate our existing dependant population, with only limited growth in the working age groups. Those in the 'baby boom' generation are now at retirement age, leading to a loss of skills.
<b>Local Jobs for Local People:</b> Many of our businesses like to employ local people as they see the benefits of this. There is an opportunity to exploit this further from understanding business needs.	<b>The Worklessness Challenge:</b> despite recent reductions in JSA claimant levels, it remains a major challenge to increase the number of households with one or more income earners, and reduce dependency on out-of-work benefits. This is likely to create an increased threat as the combined impacts of welfare reform and reduced local authority resources are felt.
<b>Wider context climate:</b> lower interest rates and stronger exports benefit local businesses, many of whom have international markets.	<b>Lack of resilience:</b> Walsall's vulnerability to external economic pressures was felt heavily during the last recession. A lack of stability in the Eurozone, or uncertainty surrounding n EU membership referendum, may be felt by local businesses.
<b>Combined Authority:</b> Work on the potential for a combined authority is currently underway between the Black County, Birmingham, and other West Midlands local authorities. Although plans are at an early stage, this could result in significant long term benefits, initially to economic development and transport.	
<b>Improving range of attractive public facilities:</b> Notably the New Art Gallery in Walsall, which has a national reputation as one of the pre-eminent contemporary art galleries in the country and the new Active Living Centres currently under construction at Bloxwich and Oak Park.	

## Strategic Context

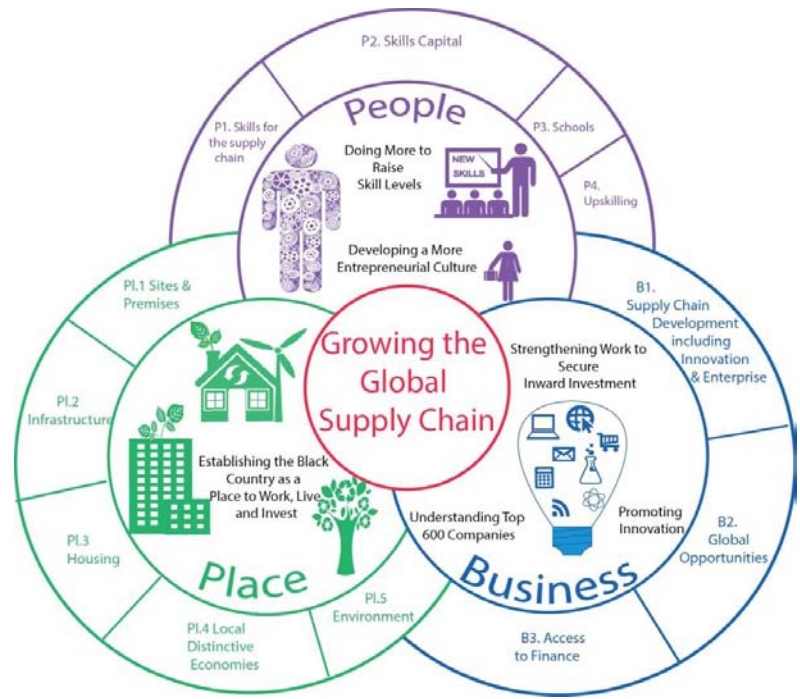
### Nationally

Following the economic crisis in 2008, rebuilding and strengthening the UK economy has been viewed as a priority across the political spectrum (although inevitably with a range of approaches). The coalition government stated its intention in 2010 to “support sustainable growth and enterprise, balanced across all regions and industries”, and strengthening the economy remains a high priority for the current administration. The focus on business as the driver of economic growth and innovation led to policies such as the establishment of Local Enterprise Partnerships. And more recently, there has been a move towards the creation of Combined Authorities, with local authorities in the West Midlands currently exploring how they might work more effectively together in support of economic development and transport.

### Sub-Regionally: Black Country

Walsall has always worked closely with its neighbouring Black Country local authorities (Dudley, Sandwell and Wolverhampton); there is recognition that our individual economy histories and future fortunes are closely bound together, and that aligning what we do at a sub-regional level has the potential to create multiple benefits for all four areas.

This important sub-regional relationship has been further strengthened and formalised following the closure of Regional Development Agencies (including Advantage West Midlands) and the subsequent establishment of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The LEP provides new opportunities for business communities and the public sector to effectively work together in this more challenging economic climate.



Our LEP Board – which includes high profile business leaders and education providers alongside local authority leaders – has identified 12 strategic programmes in the Strategic Economic Plan aimed at:

- ❖ Enabling businesses in our growth sectors to grow and deliver our contribution to the implementation of the UK Industrial Strategy;
- ❖ Ensuring that the Black Country has the economic, social and physical infrastructure to enable those companies to grow.

These 12 programmes are divided into three strands: place, business and people. Together, these programmes form our current growth strategy, and our local growth deal with Government focuses on a subset of these programmes designed to deliver additional jobs, homes and economic growth in 2015-16 to 2020-21. A Joint Committee has been established across the four local authorities to streamline the governance arrangements in relation to Regional Growth Fund and City Deal.

## Locally: Walsall Partnership

*Walsall will be a great place to live, learn, work and invest*

The higher level Black Country agenda is strongly focused on delivering growth and building our economic output. Within Walsall, additional emphasis is placed on ensuring that local people feel the benefit of this growth. For example, this includes a focus on the job-creation that comes as a result of economic growth, and making sure that local people are the ones who are best placed to take advantage of the new opportunities on offer.

**The Walsall Plan 2013-16** is the refreshed Sustainable Community Strategy for the borough of Walsall. The Walsall Plan provides the vision for Walsall as *a great place to live, learn, work and invest*. It provides the top priorities and ambitions for the borough that are shared between key agencies from the public, private and voluntary sector – who are all seeking to improve the quality of life experienced by our residents. It also sets out in overview the arrangements for getting there, with progress overseen by the Partnership Tasking and Co-ordination Group, who report to a high-level Borough Management Group.

The Plan was informed by a range of information: building on the experience of the last plan; analysis of key needs assessments (including the Local Economic Assessment); information from the six Area Partnerships; consultation with residents; inspection judgements; and national priorities – importantly the Marmot Review, *Fair Society, Healthy Lives*.

### Walsall will be a great place to live, learn, work and invest

- 1 Supporting business to thrive and supporting local people into work
- 2 Improving health including well being and independence for older people
- 3 Creating safe and sustainable communities
- 4 Improving safeguarding, learning and life chances for children and young people

Of the four priority themes, economic wellbeing is regarded as the most important, and which is directly relevant to the economic priorities set out in this document: *Supporting business to thrive and supporting local people into work*. However, much activity also helps to address the other three priorities to some extent.

## Corporately: Walsall Council

*Improve lives and life chances for everyone who lives and works in the Borough of Walsall, and in so doing – Minimise the help that residents need from the state.*

Cabinet have been developing a new Corporate Plan alongside the budget setting process, to set out their priorities for the next four years. It is anticipated that this plan will be presented to full Council for approval alongside the Budget in February 2016, following consultation and scrutiny. However in order to assist in-year planning for 2015-16, Council adopted a new, high level purpose and priorities in September 2015.

So while the detail of the Corporate Plan will not be agreed until 2016, the economic priorities set out in the Walsall SEP are informed by the clear purpose and set of priorities that have already been stated.

### Improve lives and life chances for everyone who lives and works in the Borough of Walsall and in so doing – Minimise the help that residents need from the state

- 1 Supporting business to thrive and supporting local people into work
- 2 Improving health and well being, including independence for older people and protection of vulnerable people
- 3 Creating safe, sustainable and inclusive communities
- 4 Improving safeguarding, learning and life chances for children and young people, and raising aspirations
- 5 Creating a modern, dynamic and efficient workforce designed around what residents need

These priorities are very similar to the four adopted by local partners in the Walsall Plan, with the addition of a fifth priority that focuses on creating an Council workforce that is fit for the future challenges the local authority will face. Economic development and

regeneration activity impacts directly on the first priority, and this document details exactly how businesses will be supported to thrive, what steps will be taken to support local people into work, and how the Council and its partners will help to create and shape the local conditions in which these things can happen.

However, the priorities cannot be tackled in isolation to one another. The economic priorities inevitably have a much wider impact, and there are links across all of the Corporate priorities; for example in addressing health issues that prevent people from entering employment, improving life chances for young people through training and apprenticeships, or strengthening communities by increasing accessibility to jobs and services.

### Private Sector: Walsall Economic Board

The Walsall Economic Board was established to strengthen the relationship between the public and private sector, and ensure that local businesses were more closely involved in local decision making. Members are senior business leaders drawn from a range of different sectors to represent the diverse nature of the borough's economy. Working with the support of local economic officers, the Board has adopted two broad strands of activity:

Creating a business environment that supports job creation

Ensuring people possess the skills to enter and progress in work

### Economic Purpose

The creation of the Economy and Environment Directorate represents an opportunity to expand the regeneration purpose into a wider *Economic Purpose* for Walsall. This recognises the vital interdependencies between the economy and the wider environmental and social conditions of the borough and its communities.

#### **Economic Purpose:**

To create the conditions for sustained economic growth by supporting the growth of business and jobs in Walsall, ensuring Walsall people have the right skills and environment to make the most of opportunities.

A range of other plans and strategies contain economic priorities, for example the *Health and Wellbeing Strategy*, *Black Country Joint Core Strategy*, *Green Space Strategy* and saved policies from our Unitary Development Plan. These have also been taken into consideration in establishing a single set of strategic priorities for Walsall.

### Walsall Strategic Economic Framework

We have taken these different strands and drawn them together into a single Strategic Economic Framework that reflects the priorities that are expressed in various documents and at a range of geographical levels. There are 18 priorities, setting out our ambitions for Walsall across 3 theme areas: place, business and people.

**PLACE:** transforming infrastructure and the environment

**BUSINESS:** improving business competitiveness

**PEOPLE:** raising employability, education and skills

While these three themes mirror those used in the Black Country Strategic Economic Plan, the individual priorities reflect the specific nature of the challenges faced in Walsall. The ambitions are set out in more detail in this Plan, along with some of the key activities that are taking place.

An overview of how priorities and how they relate to the sub-regional, local and corporate priorities is shown as a 'framework on a page' on page 3.

## Underpinning Principles

Running alongside the three key priority areas that will ensure Walsall's economic future, there are cross-cutting principles that must be built into all our activities in order to achieve our ambitions.

### Building Strong and Diverse Partnerships

The financial challenges facing the public sector, and local authorities in particular, are well known. The public sector does not have the capacity to create jobs, and the majority of new employment will come from the private sector. Walsall Council needs to continue to build strong relationships with business at all levels (local businesses, investors, land owners, agents, developers and education providers) – working together to achieve growth. This includes continuing to engage with business at a high strategic level through the LEP or the Walsall Economic Board, as well as at a more local level such as through the Town Centre Partnerships. It also means coordinating and simplifying the 'customer relationship' that businesses have with the council when they deal with one of our many services: for example business rates, environmental health and through the business-friendly planning charter.

As well as working with the private sector, there is an increasingly important role to be played by the voluntary sector. Developing stronger community partnerships will also be important. With financial constraints facing all public sector partners, we need to look at opportunities to combine or share resources, recognising that in doing so the rewards may be greater than the sum of the parts.

### Raising Aspirations

'Aspiration' or 'ambition' is difficult to quantify, but is clearly crucial to Walsall's long-term prosperity. It applies to residents and businesses alike: young people need to aspire to success in their education and a future where they are not dependent on benefits; adults need to aspire to continue to learn new skills and improve their earning potential; people need to aspire to live and stay in Walsall and housing developers need to build both affordable and

aspirational housing to meet these needs; local businesses need to aspire to expand into new markets, to innovate, to increase their productivity, and to operate from fit-for-purpose and sustainable buildings. Similarly, people working in economic development must have ambitions for the borough that are challenging, but allow us to strive for continual improvement.

### Promoting a Positive Image

Along with the rest of the Black Country, Walsall has suffered for many decades from a negative image based largely on its legacy of heavy manufacturing. This can unfairly act as a barrier for new investment and deter people from living here. It is therefore essential there is a strong and consistent approach to marketing and communications, building a positive image of Walsall and a clearly defined offer to investors and business, enabling them to grow markets and attract skilled staff and investment.

### Building Resilience

The recent recession highlighted Walsall's vulnerability to external events. We need to ensure that we grow our economy in such a way that we build-in more resilience to prevent growth being wiped out in any future economic downturn. For businesses, this includes building on existing local strengths while also diversifying across a broad range of sustainable growth sectors. For residents, it means making sure they have the range of qualifications and transferable skills that will make them (and keep them) employable. For sites and premises, this means ensuring there is a continual pipeline supply for the future, across a range of size requirements.

### Utilising Council Assets

Walsall Council is a major local employer, and spends millions of pounds each year. There is much we can do to make sure our own assets are utilised to maximise the benefit to the local economy. This includes maximising spending with local companies and using our influence to encourage others to do the same; offering work experience and apprenticeship



opportunities to local people; using council-owned assets to support economic growth; and providing resources (e.g. financial and land assets) and support to enable land assembly and comprehensive development. We can also promote key council facilities and cultural assets that contribute to the quality of life in the borough, such as the New Art Gallery, the new Active Living Centres currently being built at Oak Park and Bloxwich, and premier parks like the Arboretum and Willenhall Memorial Park.

## **Maximising External Funding**

With the public sector facing severe budget constraints, it is vital we explore and maximise our income from external funding to allow us to carry out the activities needed to address the borough's problems. Walsall has a long tradition of drawing in additional public funding from a variety of sources, particularly in support of economic development. The public sector also has a key role in promoting and facilitating the private sector to access funding opportunities to aid business development, relocation and growth (for example through the Regional Growth Fund, Growing Places Fund, Local Growth Fund, and European Regional Development Fund).

## **Sustainable Development**

For all actions we take in supporting our economy, we must weigh any potentially short-term gains against the longer-term consequences. Environmentally sustainable developments will enhance the quality of our local environment and not prove harmful to its future condition. Economically sustainable development will not require additional financial commitments in the future, and ideally will eventually become self-sustaining or even return a profit to the public purse in the form of business rates. Socially sustainable development will build the capacity of individuals and communities to support themselves into the future, for example by equipping people with new skills or breaking inter-generational patterns of worklessness.

# Place

## *Transforming infrastructure and the environment*

### Our Vision

We will create the conditions that allow our existing businesses to expand and enable new companies to invest and move here. We will ensure that Walsall is well-connected and has the highest possible quality environment that make it an attractive place where businesses want to invest and people want to live, work, learn and visit.

- **Town and district centres** offer a distinctive and vibrant mix of retail, leisure, business, community, and cultural opportunities
- High quality development **sites and premises** are available, to attract new companies and to allow existing businesses to expand
- The range of **housing** provided is both affordable and aspirational, meeting the needs of existing residents while also attracting new people to move to the borough
- Effective **planning frameworks** are in place that allow our economy to flourish in a sustainable way
- **Transport networks** provide businesses with good connections to the national network, and allow people greater accessibility around the borough and to jobs and opportunities via public transport
- The **natural and built environment** is a sustainable, vibrant and high quality asset for the borough, attracting businesses and people and promoting wellbeing

### Our Challenge

Transforming infrastructure and the environment is essential in driving an increase in wealth creation, economic prosperity and wellbeing for all sectors of Walsall's economy and communities. Creating the conditions to attract inward investment, business and innovation are key to growing business confidence and providing an incentive for delivering new development. This is reflected in specific outputs including job creation, new business floorspace, new homes built and business rates generated, as well as direct outcomes such as local supply chain opportunities, increased local spending power and reduced reliance on public resources.

Our local places must also be attractive options for people to live and work in – helping to draw in and retain the workers who will be key to our future prosperity:

- planning for healthy, safe, clean, attractive and sustainable communities into the future is essential to ensure the long-term wellbeing of our residents;
- transport must consider accessibility to jobs and opportunities as an important element in reducing social exclusion;
- we will require a supply of high quality and affordable housing that meets a diverse range of local housing needs;
- good and inspiring schools are needed as part of a strong learning offer;
- and the quality of public facilities such as the New Art Gallery, leisure facilities such as the new Oak Park and Bloxwich Active Living Centres, improved Gala Baths, and major parks and open spaces must remain high so as to be attractive to residents and prospective house buyers.

Many activities for delivering our vision for Place are concentrated within strategic locations, which include Walsall Town Centre and district centres, the Darlaston area of the Black Country Enterprise Zone, and key employment areas across the districts of the borough as informed by Planning Policy and Local Growth Deal priorities.

Priority area	What we will do to achieve it	Who we will work with	When by?	Related Strategies
1) Town & District Centres	Develop the investment pipeline at a Black Country level to fully understand the scale of opportunity in Walsall Town Centre.	Invest Black Country, Black Country Local Authorities		Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan
	Identify Town Centre priorities through the Area Action Plan (AAP) and prepare a Town Centre delivery/investment plan.	Investors, land owners, developers, end users		
	Continue to maximise the use of Council assets to support the delivery of sites in the Town and District centres through strategic acquisitions and disposal of sites, utilising our best consideration powers.	Landowners, developers, end users		
	Build relationships with landlords and landowners and create innovative property solutions, including the use of council assets and facilitating site preparation works, to stimulate investment and development.	Landowners, developers, end users		
	Strengthen and extend local business networks, such as through the Town Centre Partnerships, and provide leadership in bringing sectors together to deliver services that support and enhance the economy and visitor experience.	Independent and national businesses, Local community and voluntary groups		
	Promote and market the centres' retail and business offer and improve the shoppers' experience / environment using appropriate publicity, marketing campaigns and digital technology.	Local residents and visitors to the town centre		
	Continue to maintain the fabric and cleanliness of the public realm to an appropriate standard conducive to attracting shoppers and businesses.	Shoppers, businesses and prospective inward investors		
2) Sites and Premises	Black Country Enterprise Zone: Deliver the Junction 10 cluster of sites, including Phoenix 10, through collaborative working with land owners and investors.	Businesses, investors, land owners, developers, residents, agents, Invest Black Country. Black Country LEP		Walsall Sites Allocation Document <i>(in preparation)</i>

	Black Country Local Growth Fund priorities and Regeneration Corridors - creating innovative property solutions with landowners	Land owners, Black Country LEP	
	Utilise investment and funding, such as the Black Country Investment Fund and Black Country Local Growth Fund, as match to private sector investment and provide development viability funding to unlock potential high quality employment sites.	Businesses, investors, land owners, developers, residents, agents, Invest Black Country. Black Country LEP	
	Develop the high quality employment land supply and investment pipeline at a Black Country level to fully understand the scale of opportunity in Walsall's Regeneration Corridors.	Businesses, investors, land owners, developers, residents, agents, Invest Black Country. Black Country LEP	
	Utilise the Council's resources to support the appropriate acquisition of sites in support of the assembly and comprehensive development.	Businesses, investors, land owners, developers, residents, agents	
<b>3) Housing</b>	Develop the housing land supply and investment pipeline at a Black Country level to fully understand the scale of opportunity in Walsall's Regeneration Corridors.	Investors, land owners, house builders, RSLs, residents, agents, Homes and Communities Agency	Walsall Council Housing Strategy
	Utilise investment and funding, such as the Black Country Local Growth Fund and PWLB Strategic Housing Infrastructure Investment Fund, as match to private sector investment and provide development viability funding to unlock potential housing sites.	Investors, land owners, house builders, RSLs, residents, agents, Homes and Communities Agency, BC LEP	
	Continue to maximise the use of the Council's assets to support the delivery of housing sites through the disposal of sites and utilisation of our best consideration powers.	Investors, house builders, RSLs, residents, agents, Homes and Communities Agency,	

	Goscote Lane Corridor: Provide continued support and resources to the delivery of this strategic housing development, supporting the creation of 750 new homes in a high quality environment.	Walsall Housing Group, land owners, developers, residents, BC LEP, HCA		
	Support Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to deliver their development programmes, including facilitating discussions with land owner and house builders around land supply and affordable housing provisions and supporting applications to the national Affordable Homes Programme.	Walsall Housing Group, CaldmoreAccord Housing, HCA		
4)	Planning Frameworks	Black Country Core Strategy review.	Black Country local authorities, Black Country Consortium, partner and government agencies, local communities, businesses, interest groups	2016 'Saved': keep under review 2016 2016 2016
		Walsall Unitary Development Plan		
		Walsall Site Allocation Document		
		Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan		
		Walsall Community Infrastructure Levy		
	Darlaston Local Development Order- renewing and promoting the simplified planning regime that covers the BCEZ and wider Darlaston area in support of the expansion and development of industrial property			Ongoing
5)	Transport Networks	DSDA Access project - improve access to key sites in the Enterprise Zone	Businesses, land owners, residents, contractors	Completed 2016 Walsall Transport Strategy 2015 ( <i>to be approved</i> )
		M6 Junction 10 - improve access to national motorway network and reduce congestion on key local routes	Business, land owners, residents, Highways Agency, Black Country LEP	Construction Start 2018 Completed 2020 West Midlands Local Transport Plan 2011
		Access to Growth Programme- Utilising the Local Growth Fund to secure access improvements to unlock key development opportunities	Business, Land owners, residents, Highways Agency, Black Country LEP	Rolling programme Highways Maintenance Strategy ( <i>to be approved</i> )
		Chase Line rail electrification -	Network Rail	Completed end 2017
		Improve access and egress to, from and throughout the town and district centres including the provision of high quality car		Ongoing small-scale interventions

	parking in the right locations.			
	Effective parking enforcement to ensure the maintenance of a safe and uncongested environment around our town and district centres	Local businesses		
	Enhancing the public transport network - utilising potential future public funding to deliver high-quality public transport improvements on routes to and from Walsall.	Centro	TBC	
6)	Natural and built environment	Continue to commit reducing public resources to maintain the local environment, creating innovative models (e.g. stewardship arrangements) and re-prioritising key locations.	Public sector service providers, land owners, developers and end users.	Local Development Framework and National Planning Policy Framework
	Enhance the natural and built environment through securing grant funding, such as Townscape Heritage Initiative and stewardship funding, and support implementation by property and asset owners	English Heritage, DEFRA, English Heritage property and asset owners, end users, Sport England, Heritage Lottery Fund		Birmingham and Black Country Biodiversity Action Plan
	Protect the natural and built environment through effective planning policy, pre-application guidance to developers and end users and the preparation and implementation of management plans for key Council sites	English Heritage, Natural England, Amenity Societies, Wildlife Trust for Birmingham, asset owners, Friends Groups		English Heritage Conservation Areas at Risk Survey
	Deliver the new Active Living Centres at Oak Park and Bloxwich at a cost of £23.8m with a further £1m investment to improve Walsall's Gala Baths	Sport England, Football Association, ISG Construction		Green Spaces Strategy Health and Wellbeing Strategy

# Business

## Improving business competitiveness

### Our Vision

Local businesses are actively supported and provided with the best possible opportunities to grow and create more jobs in the borough. The number and diversity of businesses in the borough is expanded through both inward investment and new businesses development.

#### Walsall will be a place where:

- Enterprise, innovation, self-employment and **new business development** is encouraged and supported
- Businesses have the **access to finance and support** they need to flourish
- Local **supply chains** are actively developed and spending within the local economy is encouraged
- **Inward investment** is drawn into the borough, expanding the range and increasing the quality of local jobs on offer
- Opportunities in **foreign markets** are opened up to local companies
- Companies **invest in the future** and wellbeing of their business, their employees, and the borough; through investment in infrastructure, training and skills development, and corporate social responsibility programmes

### Our Challenge

The private sector is essential for Walsall's sustained economic growth; while the public sector can help to create the necessary conditions for growth, it is only through the private sector that the scope, number and

range of jobs that the borough needs can be created and sustained.

Walsall has too few businesses and local job opportunities to support its population. Encouraging new business formation and inward investment will help to increase the stock of businesses in the borough and the jobs available to residents.

However, existing businesses also need to be supported to continue to grow and thrive in Walsall. This includes ensuring they can take advantage of financial support that is available to them in the form of grants; supporting them to find suitable premises that will give them the opportunity to expand; helping them to move into foreign markets; or strengthening supply chains by bringing local companies together with developers operating in the borough.

Much of this business support is co-ordinated at a Black Country level, and the Local Enterprise Partnership ensures businesses are at the forefront of sub-regional economic decision-making. However, there is an important role for business engagement within Walsall. The Walsall Economic Board allows representatives from a diverse spectrum of Walsall businesses to influence strategic economic priorities, and there are strong Business Partnerships operating across the district centres.

Businesses may be involved with many different arms of the local authority, and it is important that we simplify these interactions as far as possible and deliver a co-ordinated and consistent service for our business customers.

We want businesses to build roots in Walsall and invest in their future in the borough. This includes investing in both physical premises and infrastructure, and investing in their employees through continuing staff development or apprenticeships. But beyond that, corporate social responsibility schemes will help to ensure that businesses also invest in our local communities and become key partners in the future prosperity and wellbeing of Walsall.

Priority area	What we will do to achieve it	Who we will work with	When by?	Related Strategies
1) New business development	<p>Focusing on growth sectors, the team will undertake a number of activities to raise awareness of the support and provide information, advice and guidance to individuals / groups, to support new businesses growth.</p> <hr/> <p>Ensure Walsall's position is captured in the development of a Black Country Enterprise programme, which may include incentives that will assist new targeted business growth</p>	<p>Black Country Growth Hub</p> <p>Black Country LEP</p> <p>Black Country Investment fund programme</p>	Ongoing	BC Strategic Economic Plan
2) Access to finance and support	<p>Promote any and all incentives to Walsall companies. Working closely with the companies to provide guidance and support with applications</p> <hr/> <p>Ensure Walsall's position is represented in any future new funding rounds</p>	<p>Black Country Growth Hub</p> <p>Black Country Consortium</p>		BC Strategic Economic Plan
3) Supply chain development	<p>To provide visibility of Walsall's companies, focusing on construction, aerospace and automotive, to key procurement contacts</p> <hr/> <p>To establish a programme of support to assist companies to be 'fit to supply', to enable them to access supply chains</p> <hr/> <p>Provide opportunities for suppliers to meet contractors at "Meet the Buyer" events</p>	<p>Key sector leads – Tiers, OEM's and development leads</p> <p>Manufacturing Advice Service</p> <p>UKTI</p> <p>Black Country Growth Hub</p> <p>Morgan Sindall, ISG Construction, Willmott Dixon etc</p>	Ongoing	BC Strategic Economic Plan
4) Inward investment	<p>To ensure Walsall's investment 'offer' - place, people and business – are included within the wider Invest Black Country programme of promotion and place marketing</p> <hr/> <p>To engage with companies based in Walsall who are foreign owned, to identify and assist growth</p> <hr/> <p>Support inward investors by ensuring a</p>	<p>Invest Black Country</p> <p>UKTI</p> <p>Prospective inward</p>		BC Strategic Economic Plan



		coordinated and supportive approach from relevant regulatory services within the Council (environmental health; pollution control; trading standards; highways; planning etc)	investors	
<b>5)</b>	Foreign markets	Facilitate support to assist companies to access new or increase their current overseas market presence	Black Country Growth Hub	
<b>6)</b>	Investing in the future	To develop and deliver a community engagement programme to facilitate the relationship, focusing on creating long term partnerships between the businesses and the community of Walsall	Local businesses, Walsall Economic Board	Walsall Plan, Corporate Plan

# People

## *Raising employability, education and skills*

### Our Vision

Local people will be equipped with the skills, behaviours and attitudes that employers are looking for, to give them the best possible chance of getting into work; those already in work will be given opportunities to continually develop their skills. The barriers that prevent people from getting into work will be understood and addressed.

### Walsall will be a place where:

- The **relationship between education and business** enables them to work together to produce the employees of tomorrow
- **Colleges, University and training providers** invest in the facilities and courses that are needed to support growth
- People possess the **skills and attitudes** to meet both today's and tomorrow's business needs, and are encouraged to continually 'upskill' and develop themselves
- **Barriers** that prevent people gaining skills or getting a job are understood and removed
- **Unemployed residents** get the support and training they need to find sustainable work
- People are lifted **out of poverty** by getting into work and gaining the skills needed to progress into better paid work

### Our Challenge

Poor economic growth over recent decades has resulted in the fall of available jobs in Walsall, which has seen our working age population become increasingly dependent on out-of-work benefits.

Recent stability in the economy has led to reductions in those actively seeking work, but there are still parts of the borough where unemployment remains very high, and some groups of residents who struggle to enter the job market. Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claims remain particularly high, suggesting many residents who are unfit for work

There is a shared recognition and understanding of how participation and social inclusion in the economy and in society can help and strengthen individuals, families, communities and the borough as a whole.

Our challenge is how to allow people to enter the employment market through a range of alternative pathways, such as traineeships and apprenticeships where individuals carry out work receiving training towards an accredited qualification. Youth unemployment remains an issue, and programmes such as 'Walsall Works' have proven that providing financial investment can help to create the conditions for sustainable employment growth.

People's ability to gain access to employment is further limited in Walsall due to lack of skills and opportunities, and the situation is worse than the national and regional position. This has a knock-on effect on worklessness, income levels and hence poverty; there is also a strong correlation between poverty and poor health outcomes.

A significant number of local businesses in Walsall have indicated that lack of skills, poor attitude and low aspiration acts as a barrier to recruiting new staff. School sector performance has seen some improvements, but lower than average GCSEs coupled with low basic skills and qualification rates amongst the adult population mean that overall the borough performs below the national average: one in six Walsall adults have no formal qualifications. We must ensure that at the same time as we support businesses to create jobs, we also equip local people with the skills they need to take advantage of these new employment opportunities.

Priority area	What we will do to achieve it	Who we will work with	When by?	Related Strategies
1) Education and Business relationship	Enhance and strengthen employment engagement through better links between education and the local business economy as a mechanism to improve schools performance	Schools, Education Business Pship, Employers, BC Skills Factory, Children's Services, 14-19 Partnership	Rolling Programme	BC SEP, 14-19 Strategy
	Develop the capacity of local employers to respond to challenges and new opportunities by using schools links to help them innovate and respond	Schools, Education Business Partnership, BC Careers Company	Rolling Programme	BC SEP, 14-19 Strategy
	Create a ambitious and proud Education Business Partnership with effective partnership working between the private, public and voluntary sectors	All Private, Public and Voluntary Sector Partners	Rolling Programme	BC SEP, 14-19 Strategy
	Improve perceptions of careers through better IAG as well as building confidence and motivation of young people to consider careers in non-traditional sectors using work placements	Schools, Education Business Partnership, BC Careers Company	Rolling Programme	BC SEP, 14-19 Strategy
2) Further and higher education provision	Deliver bespoke training on modern and specialist equipment in high quality training facilities which meet the specific and future needs of businesses in our growth sectors (construction, logistics, health and social care)	FE / HE Colleges, Training Providers, BC LEP, BC Skills Factory	2015/16	BC SEP
	Increase our capacity to deliver high quality training to fill skills gaps faced by businesses in our growth sectors through closer working relationships.	Employment Growth Team, Employers	2015-2018	
3) Skills development	Use skills funding effectively to ensure those that the unemployed and those in the labour market have the right attitudes to work and the right levels of skills and qualifications to meet the needs of our growth sector businesses	Skills Funding Agency (SFA), Employers, BC LEP	2015/18	SFA Adult Skills Plan, BC SEP, City Deal , EUSIF
	Use funding effectively to remove barriers ensuring those who are unemployed and workless are equipped with basic functional and softer skills	SFA, EUSIF, Employers, BC LEP	2015/18	SFA Adult Skills Plan, BC SEP, City Deal
	Increase business investment in skills and training through the provision of more subsidised bite-sized training and contribution from employers	SFA, Employers, Training Providers, BC Skills Factory	2015/16	SFA Adult Skills Plan, BC SEP
	Increase number of local SME's and strategic companies participating in apprenticeships and traineeships as a mechanism to create opportunities in the local labour market for local people	FE / HE Colleges, Training Providers, BC LEP, BC Skills Factory, SME's, Strategic Co.'s	2015-18	BC SEP, BC EUSIF, SFA Adult Learning Apprenticeship Strategy

	Use payment by results models and financial incentives to improve the access to and provision of training to meet the identified skill gaps ie Sector Skills Council Levy's, BC Skills Factory, Walsall Works, AGE Grant, Sandwell Guarantee, CITB Levys	Walsall Works, National Apprenticeship Service, BC Skills Factory	2015-2018	BC Plan
	Focus on Skills for Growth Funding in particular in those aged 19+ who are current employed in the workplace	SFA, BC LEP	2015-16	SFA Adult Skills Plan, BC SEP
	Increase and retain the number of people with higher skills and in particular retain graduates in the region	SFA, BC LEP	2015-16	SFA Adult Skills Plan, BC SEP
	Use the Social Value Act to encourage major contractors, procurers and developers to the increase the number of jobs and opportunities in the local area for local people to access	Developer, Major Contractors, Procurers	2015/16	Walsall Plan, Corporate Plan
	Increase income levels by encouraging employers to rise income levels to the national average by encouraging apprentices are paid national minimum wages and employees are paid the living wage	Walsall Works, Training Providers, NAS,	2015-18	Walsall Plan, Corporate Plan,
	Improve IAG, skills and progression for young people through leading on the skills development theme of the 14-19 Action Plan	Children's Services, 14-19 Partnership	2015/16	Walsall 14-19 Plan
<b>4)</b>	<b>Removing barriers</b>			
	Support the number of young people who are vulnerable (ie LAC, teenage parents, young offenders, those with physical or mental disabilities) to move into positive outcomes that lead to learning, apprenticeships and employment	NHS, Walsall & Dudley Mental Health Services, Public Health, Voluntary Sector, Talent Match	2015/16	Walsall Plan, Walsall Health & Wellbeing Strategy, Care Act
	Improve mental health and wellbeing of young people who are NEET through a pilot employability project funded through the Public Health transformational funding	Public Health	2015/16	Walsall Health & Wellbeing Strategy, Care Act
	Work in partnership with statutory bodies ie Police, Probation, Offender Management, Health, Housing in order to improve outcomes to residents	Statutory agencies	2015/16	Walsall Plan
	Mapping and promotion of health services to increase access to health improvement services reducing barriers to sustained employment	Public Health	2015/16	Walsall Health & Wellbeing Strategy
<b>5)</b>	<b>Support for the unemployed</b>			
	Development of the Walsall Works programme to work closely with partners in workless communities	Social Housing Providers, Community groups	2015/16	Walsall Plan, Corporate Plan

	<p>Ensure that new ESF funding responds to the local needs of the unemployed through delivery on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting Social Inclusion Among Disadvantaged Groups</li> <li>• Tackling NEETs and Youth Unemployment (Aged 15-29)</li> <li>• Employment Support for the Over Adults who are long term unemployed</li> </ul>	<p>BC Local Authorities, BC LEP, FE / HE Colleges and Training Providers, Big Lottery, SFA, DWP</p>	<p>2015-2020</p>	<p>BC EUSIF, Youth Unemployment Initiative</p>
6) Tackling poverty	<p>Participation and input into the Child Poverty agenda through close working relationships across teams in Children Services</p>	<p>Children's Services</p>	<p>To 2020</p>	<p>Walsall Plan, Corporate Plan, Walsall Health &amp; Wellbeing Strategy</p>
	<p>Enhancing family learning in local community settings in order to improve outcomes for parents</p>	<p>Children's Services</p>	<p>To 2020</p>	<p>Walsall Plan</p>
	<p>Participation and input into the Early Help Steering Group in order to secure outcomes for families with complex needs and barriers</p>	<p>Children's Services</p>	<p>To 2020</p>	<p>Walsall Plan</p>

## Monitoring our Progress

In tracking how effective our activity is at delivering our ambitions, it is important to make the distinction between *outputs*, *outcomes*, and *impacts*.

At an individual team or service level, there may be many *outputs*, which record the activity the team carries out in the course of their day to day work. These may also be more customer-focussed: for example, “% of complaints resolved within 5 days” in preference to “number of complaints dealt with”.

Key to making a difference to our economy is adding value through our work, and ensuring that *outputs* translate into *outcomes*: for example, turning an output of 30 business visits into an outcome of 3 companies taking on an additional local apprentice. This often requires a service to work in partnership with others.

Making the transition from *outcomes* to *impacts* and thus achieving *ambitions* is more challenging, as these are often highly dependent on external factors such as national policy or international economic conditions, and data is produced with a very significant time lag. This makes it essential that we are clear how our activity, and its outputs, map to our ambitions.

Assessment of the economy highlights our priorities – and we can track backwards to the outcomes necessary to achieve these ambitions, and similarly back to the outputs that each team needs to work towards.

## Performance measures

We will measure success in achieving our ambitions by a variety of means, to ensure we have a complete picture of progress:

1. Statistical performance indicators
2. Tracking delivery of actions against a regularly updated delivery plan
3. Mapping service plans to strategic priorities
4. Economic impact assessments and project evaluations
5. Ongoing engagement with partners, the community and businesses
6. A rolling refresh of the Local Economic Assessment

We have selected a basket of indicators that taken together give a broad understanding of our progress towards addressing our priorities. This single list includes all the measures in the Black Country Performance Framework, in order to track our local contribution. Similarly, it includes measures to be reported corporately and to partners.

Rather than setting targets – and then working primarily to meet those targets – these indicators will be used alongside activity-specific outputs and outcomes to ensure we are moving in the right direction. Measures will be compared to previous trend data in Walsall, and to comparators (national, Black Country and statistical neighbours) with the aim of closing the gap. Where Walsall already outperforms comparators, the focus will be on sustained improvement.

	<b>Outputs:</b> <i>What did we do?</i>	<b>Outcomes:</b> <i>What happened as a result?</i>	<b>Impacts:</b> <i>What changed?</i>	<b>Ambition for Walsall</b>
<b>What?</b>	<i>The activities we carried out (or milestones achieved)</i>	<i>What happened as a direct result of our output activity</i>	<i>The high-level change occurring (in part) due to our outcomes</i>	<i>How this has contributed to achieving our ambitions</i>
	<i>Examples include:</i> •Events put on •Young people signed up •Business visits carried out	<i>Examples include:</i> •Business accesses funding •Apprenticeships created •Young person enters employment	<i>Examples include:</i> •Lower level of youth unemployment	<i>Examples include:</i> •Companies invest in the future and wellbeing of their business, their employees, and the borough
<b>Who?</b>	<b>Single Service</b>	<b>Multiple services/partners</b>	<b>Multiple agencies</b>	<b>National</b>

Mainly **LOCALLY** defined and collected performance measures

Mainly **NATIONALLY** defined and collected performance measures

## Basket of Performance Indicators

Theme	Performance Measures	Preferred Direction	Black Country	Corporate Plan
PLACE	Overall £ of investment attracted	↑		
	Town and district centre vacant units	↓		
	Amount of high quality employment land available	↑	Y	
	New office floorspace created	↑	Y	
	New retail floorspace created	↑	Y	
	Net new homes (and affordable new homes)	↑	Y	
	Hectares of local nature reserves	↑	Y	
	A sustainable environment - CO <sub>2</sub> emissions	↓	Y	
	Number of visitors to the area	↑	Y	
BUSINESS	Size of Output Gap (GVA total and indexed to UK)	↓	Y	Y
	Productivity (GVA per filled job)	↑		Y
	Business rates generated / collected	↑		
	Number of local jobs	↑	Y	Y
	Number of local enterprises / businesses	↑		Y
	Business' birth' rate	↑	Y	Y
	Business 'death' rate	↓		Y
	New business survival rate (at 3yrs)	↑		Y
	Weekly earnings - workplace-based	↑		Y
	Employer skills gaps	↓		
PEOPLE	Growing population and reversing net outward migration	↑	Y	
	Achieving a better population balance	↑	Y	
	Proportion of knowledge workers	↑	Y	
	Weekly earnings - residence-based	↑	Y	
	Adults with no qualifications	↓	Y	Y
	Adults with degree-level qualifications	↑	Y	Y
	Pupils achieving 5+ A*-C GCSEs including maths & English	↑	Y	
	16-18 year olds Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)	↓	Y	
	Young people (18-24) claiming Jobseeker's Allowance	↓		
	Number of apprenticeships	↑		
	Residents claiming out-of-work benefits	↓	Y	Y
	Total employment rate	↑	Y	Y
	Workers claiming sickness benefit	↓		
	Children living in poverty	↓		
	Residents living in most deprived neighbourhoods	↓		

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**Walsall Council**