



North
Northamptonshire
Council

New Ambition:
**North Northamptonshire's
Economic Growth Strategy
2025–30**



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Executive Summary

New ambition

North Northamptonshire is ambitious for economic growth. Located at the meeting point of the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor and the Midlands, we have an expanding workforce, space to build the innovative industries of the future and outstanding heritage and natural assets.

New Ambition is our strategy to unlock North Northamptonshire's potential, so that it becomes a productive, high-value location for innovation and growth at the heart of the nation, where there are opportunities for everyone to progress in work.

It is the first economic growth strategy that North Northamptonshire Council has prepared. We have developed in the context of our longer term Big 50 vision, which looks ahead to 2050 and seeks to create a proud, prosperous and proactive place where "everyone has the best opportunities and quality of life".

Building on this, New Ambition focuses on the next five years. Looking ahead to 2030, it sets out our priorities for economic growth and the actions that North Northamptonshire Council, working with its partners, need to take.

Economic opportunities and challenges

In North Northamptonshire, our population is growing rapidly, including in younger age groups. This has been accompanied by growth in jobs – in fact, over the past twenty years, growth in jobs has been faster than working age population growth). North Northamptonshire is an attractive investment location, supported by its strategic road and rail connectivity, as well as a valuable 'quality of life' offer. Sectorally, there is a nationally significant strength in logistics activity, with a growing advanced manufacturing presence. There is also significant potential for growth in renewable energy generation and clean energy industries, digital technologies (including artificial intelligence) and associated research and development.

But there are important challenges which we need to address:

- Productivity (i.e., the amount of output generated in the economy for every job) is relatively weak and has deteriorated over time. This is reflected in average pay that is around 90% of UK levels, and some significant concentrations of deprivation, especially in the main towns.
- Relatively low productivity is associated with skills deficits that are widely recognised: workforce qualification levels are significantly lower than the national average and there are imbalances between employer demand and workforce skills supply.
- Local public transport connectivity within North Northamptonshire is relatively poor, despite excellent national and international links. This acts as a potential barrier to access to employment and training and impedes the area's ability to maximise the economic benefits of housing and commercial growth and the polycentric approach to development.
- There are also some barriers to wider business growth, including the limited supply of smaller commercial premises.

Despite these challenges, North Northamptonshire has great potential. Some of this is "under the radar": many of our business successes are not as well-known as they could be, and heritage and 'quality of life' assets are sometimes overlooked. But there is much to be proud of, and we need to promote and celebrate the area's strengths.

Our new ambition for economic growth

Within the context of our economy today, we have set a new ambition for:

“a productive, high-value location for innovation and growth at the heart of the nation, where there are opportunities for everyone to progress in work”

From ambition to action

Translating this into actions, our strategy is focused on three pillars of activity: **business, people and place**. These aim to support an economy characterised by high productivity, high pay and high investment:

- **Pillar 1** focuses on strengthening North Northamptonshire as a location for innovative and growing businesses – attracting new investors and enabling businesses that are already in the area to expand.
- **Pillar 2** focuses on North Northamptonshire’s workforce, ensuring that we retain talent and support access to learning and progression, both for people joining the workforce for the first time and those who want to change and develop their careers in an evolving economy.
- **Pillar 3** focuses on North Northamptonshire’s connectivity and quality of place, and on promoting the area’s offer to visitors, investors and local people.

We then define a series of eight priorities for action. These are more specific, and are linked with North Northamptonshire’s distinctive characteristics and opportunities:

- **Mobility for opportunity:** Improving public transport and active travel connectivity between and to centres of employment and learning, recognising the polycentric approach to growth and the spatial distribution of employment sites

- **Space for innovation and growth:** Developing solutions to increase the supply of smaller employment units and innovation space, especially for advanced manufacturing, professional and business services and other growth sectors
- **Value and opportunity from logistics:** Recognising that there are opportunities for innovation and higher-value employment in logistics, especially in the context of decarbonisation, and that North Northamptonshire has distinct local advantages. The priority focuses on capturing greater investment in innovation and realising the opportunities presented by the sector
- **Diverse, competitive businesses:** Supporting greater diversity in the business mix (sectorally, as well as by enabling entrepreneurship among a wider demographic) and technology adoption
- **Net zero technology:** Realising the opportunities arising from renewable energy, clean energy industries and digital technologies
- **Confident and complementary towns:** Developing a clear complementary offer across North Northants’ towns so that together, they provide a shared investment, employment and amenity offer greater than they could individually
- **Raising aspiration; linking people and jobs:** Building stronger employer/provider links, developing pathways at all levels and building capacity for lifetime workforce development
- **Promoting North Northants’ opportunity,** for investors, residents and businesses.

Delivering our New Ambition

Our New Ambition will be delivered in partnership – by North Northamptonshire Council working together with businesses and key institutions locally, as well as with national Government. We will establish a new Business Board to drive our ambition. Investment will come from a variety of sources – but together, we will make a strong case for North Northamptonshire, and we will be creative in exploring opportunities for new delivery mechanisms, including through the emerging proposals for devolution.

We will also measure progress. We have defined six 'indicative quantifiable ambitions': metrics that we can monitor to assess the progress of the economy over the next few years, relating to productivity, pay, workforce skills, jobs and the employment rate, and greenhouse gas emissions. We can't directly control all these. But we are ambitious for North Northamptonshire's future growth and the opportunity it presents for all our businesses and residents.

1. Introduction

At the heart of the nation, with a rapidly expanding workforce and the space to build and grow the clean, innovative industries of the future, North Northamptonshire is ambitious for economic growth. In the context of longer term drivers of change, this Strategy sets out North Northamptonshire Council's ambition and priorities for action over the next five years – working with partners to drive forward our potential and ensure that people and businesses across the area all have a stake in, and benefit from, economic growth.

New impetus, new ambition

Created in 2021, North Northamptonshire is a newly defined area of local government, bringing together towns and communities that have distinct identities, but share economic characteristics, opportunities and challenges. This gives us an opportunity to take a fresh perspective on the area's potential – as well as the chance to build new partnerships and do things differently.

It is in this spirit that we have prepared **New Ambition**, North Northamptonshire's first Economic Growth Strategy, which we have developed in consultation with businesses and other partners across the area. We have already looked ahead to the long term, to consider our shared aspirations over the next 25 years to 2050: this has come together in our Big 50 Vision, which sets out how we can make North Northamptonshire a 'proud, prosperous and proactive' place:

A vision to 2050

North Northamptonshire's long term vision was developed as part of the Big 50 initiative. We aim to be **"a place where everyone has the best opportunities and quality of life"**.

This will be delivered through three priorities:

- A proud place, with clear goals and a plan of how to get there, where people feel inspired and safe
- A prosperous place, full of thriving businesses and a skilled population who can achieve their ambitions
- A proactive place, which understands the issues its people face and how to address them early, so everyone can live the best life.

Towards 2030

In the context of the *Big 50 Vision*, this Strategy focuses on the next five years, looking to 2030. We have chosen this timescale carefully. Many of the trends that will shape the long-term future of the economy are 'known', at least in broad terms: the transition to 'net zero' in the context of climate change; the transformational role of data in changing the nature of work, production and communications; the impact of demographic change. These long term trends shape how we think about the future of North Northamptonshire's economy, and we need to respond to them.

But to make progress in the long run, we need to act today. So as well as setting out our strategic ambitions, this Strategy identifies the areas we need to focus on in the shorter term. In some cases, this will involve early stage feasibility and development work, as well as direct 'delivery' – but by 2030, we aim to measure meaningful progress.

Working together

Although North Northamptonshire Council has taken the lead in preparing this Strategy, it has been co-designed with a wide range of partners, through one-to-one consultations with businesses and a series of workshops and focus groups.

Delivery will also depend on a wide range of partners working together: the next few years will see strengthened partnerships within North Northamptonshire, and further joint working with our neighbours as the opportunity of devolution gathers pace.



River Nene near Wadenhoe

Strategy structure

The remainder of this Strategy is structured in eight chapters:

- **Chapter 2** sets out a 'spatial picture' of North Northamptonshire, highlighting the area's key characteristics and assets, and its important connections with neighbours, the rest of the UK, and internationally.
- **Chapter 3** provides an overview of area's economy, describing its economic opportunities and challenges.
- Building on the analysis in Chapters 2 and 3, **Chapter 4** outlines a 'strategic framework' to guide activity. This identifies three 'pillars', relating to Business, People and Place, which are then each unpacked in **Chapters 5-7**.
- In **Chapter 8**, we turn to some more specific priorities for action in the next five years. The chapter outlines eight priority action areas and the outcomes we might anticipate and explains how they will be taken forward.
- Finally, **Chapter 9** sets out our approach to developing projects and securing investment, working with partners in the (evolving) context of sub-regional devolution, and to measuring the success of the Strategy over time.

In addition, **Annex A** sets out the basis for the 'indicative quantified ambitions' that we describe in Chapter 4.

Further information on North Northamptonshire's economy and the range of other strategies and research that have been considered is contained within the **North Northamptonshire Economic Review**, which is available as a separate document.

The changing policy landscape

This Strategy is developed in the context of a wider economic policy landscape which places a strong emphasis on economic growth, energy security and access to opportunity.

Nationally, this includes a focus on **accelerating housing growth**, including through planning reform, with a national target to deliver 1.5 million homes by 2029¹ – a target towards which North Northamptonshire already contributes to substantially. Consultation is also underway on potential reforms to streamline the development of **critical infrastructure** projects². In relation to accelerating decarbonisation of the energy system, a **Clean Power Action Plan** was published in 2024: recognising the urgency of energy security, the Action Plan (like this Economic Growth Strategy) has a 2030 horizon to drive change in the short-to-medium term³.

Several policies focus on developing key strengths in areas in which the UK has a relative advantage. The emerging **Industrial Strategy** highlights the potential for 'high potential clusters' (including in advanced manufacturing and clean energy) outside the Greater South East⁴. Building on this, the **Artificial Intelligence Action Plan** seeks (among other goals) to increase the UK's volume of computing power and develop and retain talent⁵. The AI Action Plan includes scope for **Artificial Intelligence Growth Zones** to support the accelerated delivery of data centres in locations where there is available land, energy supply and opportunities to generate added value from investment.

There is also a focus in national policy on increasing economic activity and employment. The **Get Britain Working** White Paper targets an 80% employment rate nationally, supported by a series of Local Get Britain Working plans, linked with local growth strategies⁶.

These plans should be seen in the context of devolution. The **English Devolution White Paper** anticipates that everywhere in England will be covered by a 'strategic authority', ultimately including an elected mayor. In that context, North Northamptonshire continues to work closely with the South Midlands authorities and other neighbours⁷.

Within North Northamptonshire, this Economic Growth Strategy forms part of a **wider suite of strategies**. These include the *Big 50* initiative and the evidence base for the new North Northamptonshire Local Plan. A series of other strategies have also been taken forward, including the Cultural Masterplan, Visitor Economy Strategy (which also includes West Northamptonshire), the Communities Strategy and the Climate Change Strategy. All these plans have our vision of a 'proud, prosperous and proactive' North Northamptonshire at their heart.

2. A picture of North Northamptonshire

North Northamptonshire is strategically located, with important outward connections to neighbouring areas as well as the rest of the UK and internationally. It is also a place of diverse communities with distinct identities, and a rich stock of economic, environmental and heritage assets. All these dimensions will be important to the Economic Growth Strategy: this chapter sketches a spatial and economic picture of the area.

Growing and diverse places

No single settlement dominates North Northamptonshire, although about 62% of the area's 360,000 residents live in the four largest towns:

With a population of around 69,000, **Corby** is North Northamptonshire's largest town⁸. Corby was designated a New Town in 1950 and expanded rapidly, linked with the steel industry. Since the closure of the steel industry in the 1980s, the town has diversified as a manufacturing (and, more recently, logistics) centre. Recent decades have also seen successful investment, reconnecting the town with the rail network, regenerating the town centre, and developing extensive new communities at, for example, Priors Hall and Weldon.

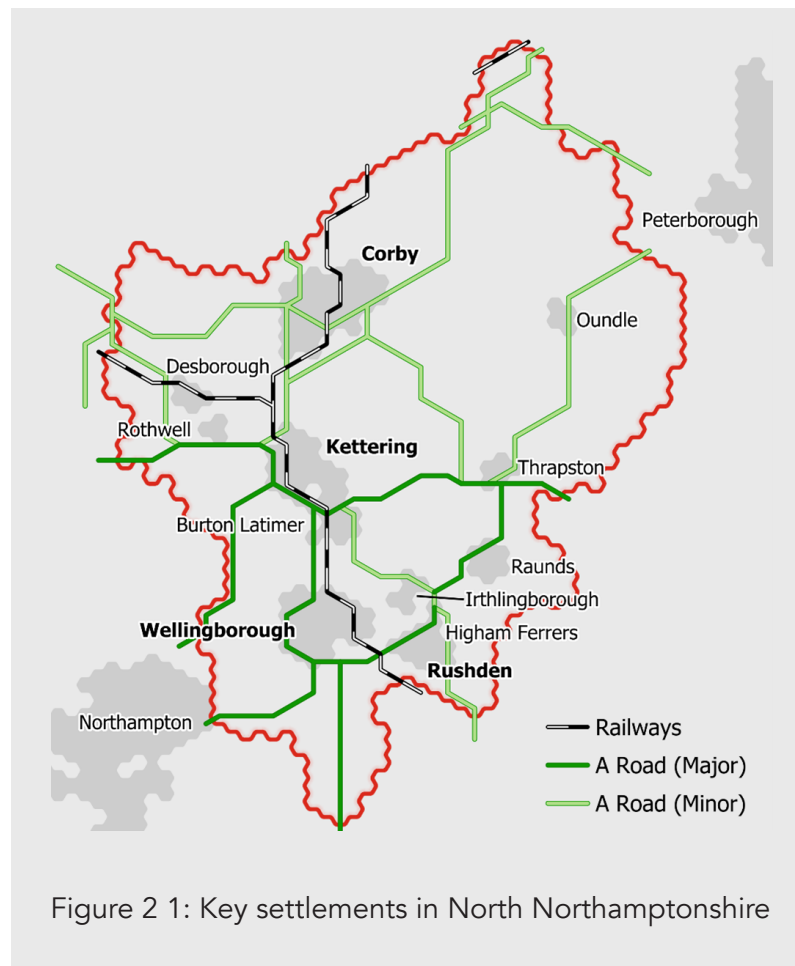


Figure 2 1: Key settlements in North Northamptonshire

- South of Corby, **Kettering** is the second largest town, with a population of about 64,000. Kettering was an important centre of the Northamptonshire boot and shoe industry: with the loss of most employment in the sector, the town has evolved into a logistics, manufacturing and services centre, with its location on the A14 making it an attractive base for some of the UK's largest distribution operators. Kettering also has an important leisure offer at Wicksteed Park. Just to the south of Kettering, **Burton Latimer** is an important industrial and distribution centre, home to Weetabix's main operations. To the east of Kettering, Hanwood Park is a major focus for new housing and mixed-use development.
- A further 55,000 people live in **Wellingborough**. Like Kettering, Wellingborough was a major manufacturing centre linked with the footwear industry, although has subsequently diversified. It has also seen rapid population growth, including through its sustainable urban extensions at Stanton Cross, to the east of the town, and Glenvale Park to the north.

- Rushden is North Northamptonshire's fourth largest town, with a population of 31,500 (and a further 8,000 in the contiguous settlement of Higham Ferrers). Rushden has seen major investment in the past decade with the opening of the Rushden Lakes retail and leisure destination just to the north of the town; other significant businesses include Pharmaron, a life science contract research organisation. There is significant planned growth through the development of the Rushden East Sustainable Urban Extension.



Corby town centre

Each of the four main towns is a distinct settlement. But together, they form an 'urban spine'. They have important similarities: all were largely defined by manufacturing activity in the twentieth century and have seen a process of diversification and restructuring; all form part of a nationally significant logistics and distribution hub; and all are important centres of housing growth.

Places for growth: Sustainable Urban Extensions

A series of Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs) support significant housing and employment growth. The Joint Core Strategy identifies eight SUEs, designed to be integrated with the existing towns, and able to proceed quickly. Each SUE offers scope for at least 2,500 homes, with delivery at North East Corby (Priors Hall and Weldon Park), Hanwood Park in Kettering and Stanton Cross in Wellingborough well underway.

These demonstrate North Northamptonshire's commitment to planned, sustainable growth, and are important in attracting and retaining young people.

Beyond the urban core, the rest of North Northamptonshire is substantially **rural**, supported by a network of smaller towns. These include the former manufacturing towns of **Desborough and Rothwell** on the A6 in the west; Irthlingborough in the south near Wellingborough, and the market towns of **Raunds, Thrapston and Oundle** (famous for its large public school) in the east. There is significant economic activity in rural Northamptonshire, with close links between agricultural producers and food manufacturers⁹, a growing hospitality sector, and a wide range of smaller businesses.

Heritage and environmental quality

The quality of North Northamptonshire's natural environment and heritage is a key asset, and a vital part of the area's quality of life offer. At the heart of this, the **Nene and Ise Valleys** are important 'green and blue threads' linking the main towns, as well as leisure destinations such as Rushden Lakes and Wicksteed Park¹⁰. North of Kettering, **Rockingham Forest** has seen extensive tree planting, as part of the national effort to capture carbon through woodlands. There are also **significant heritage attractions**, such as Boughton House, Kirby Hall, and Rockingham Castle. However, these assets are not as well known to potential visitors as they should be, and the area's offer is often seen as 'under the radar'¹¹.

Links within and beyond North Northamptonshire

Connections between North Northamptonshire and the rest of the country are vitally important. Its position on the national road network shapes its attractiveness to distribution and manufacturing operations. East-west, the area is bisected by the A14, one of the country's most important freight routes, and by the A45. North-south, a network of major roads connects Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough.

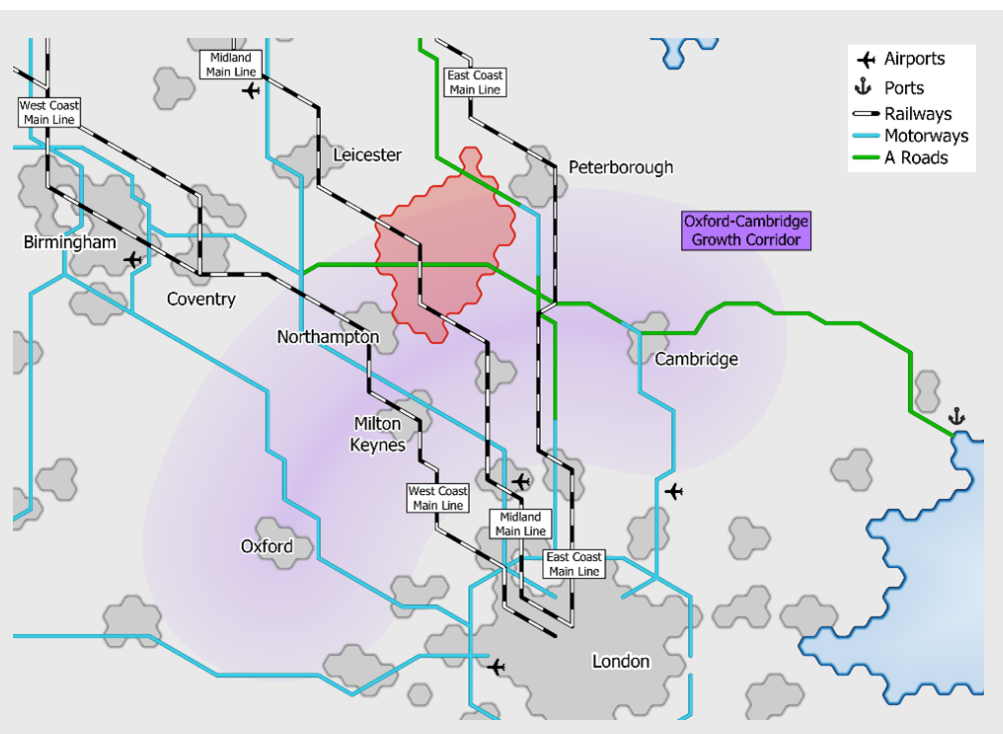


Figure 2 2: North Northamptonshire in the wider context

Rail services run on the Midland Main Line between the three largest towns and London (and to Leicester and Nottingham), with other rail lines accessible from just outside the area via Northampton, Huntingdon and Peterborough. Rail services have been enhanced in recent decades (for example with the opening of Corby station), and rapid links on the Midland Main Line are important in attracting employment and investment.

These connections, and North Northamptonshire's geographical position, mean that cross-border flows are very important. At the time of the 2021 census, about 83% of working residents in North Northamptonshire either worked in the area or mainly worked from home. Of the remainder, the largest outflow was to West Northamptonshire (mainly Northampton), with smaller flows to Bedford, Milton Keynes, Huntingdonshire, Peterborough and Harborough. Overall, North Northamptonshire experiences a net commuting outflow – but about 18,000 people commuted in, with the largest flow again from West Northamptonshire¹².

Larger centres just beyond North Northamptonshire are important in providing a range of services. The University of Northampton is a key provider of higher education to North Northamptonshire even though it is not physically based there, and other regional universities, such as Cranfield, are easily accessible. Northampton, Peterborough and Leicester are widely used by residents for retail, leisure and other amenities.

A crossroads of sub-regional geographies

There are important relationships with several regional and sub-regional geographies. Looking south, it is part of the established South Midlands economic sub-region, along with Bedford, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes and West Northamptonshire. The **South Midlands** is a growing region, presenting employment and business opportunities for people in North Northamptonshire – and some planned developments, such as Universal Studios' theme park and resort in Bedford, will have significant regional economic impacts¹³.

Beyond that, there is good access to London and the Greater South East. Looking west and north, connections to the East and West Midlands are important too.



The Midland Main Line at Burton Latimer

Cutting across 'established' geographies, North Northamptonshire is also within the **Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor**, an area identified as a national priority for economic growth, and to which the Government recently recommitted, and which is described further below.

International connections

International links are also important. The port of Felixstowe, which handles almost half of the UK's containerised trade, is easily accessible via the A14: an important factor in North Northamptonshire's competitiveness in the distribution sector.

By air, East Midlands, Birmingham, Luton and Stansted airports are all readily accessible, and there are international rail connections via London St Pancras.

The Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor

The Oxford-Cambridge (OxCam) Growth Corridor seeks to build on the science and innovation-led potential of the two university cities by bringing forward additional housing, infrastructure and commercial and research and development space. The core of the Corridor is centred on the planned new rail connection between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge, some way to the south of North Northamptonshire.

The scale of the opportunity is significant. Described as having the potential to create "Europe's Silicon Valley" and potentially contributing £78 billion to the national economy by 2035, the Corridor received new impetus in 2025, with the Government's announcement of a new commitment to unlock its potential as perhaps the UK's most important growth corridor.

North Northamptonshire has an important role in the OxCam Growth Corridor. It offers capacity for growth, with a proven track record of delivery and a strong pipeline of new and consented development. This is vitally important: for many years, the potential of the Corridor has been held back by severe development constraints across much of the corridor, including around the two university cities.

We want North Northamptonshire to play its full part in the success of this nationally important driver for economic growth. That means:

- Recognising and driving forward North Northamptonshire's potential in offering space for the growth of new economic activities. To be successful, the OxCam Growth Corridor needs to make the most of all its economic assets, not just those that are located in the two university cities. North Northamptonshire offers scope for new innovation and production space, linked with our connectivity, site availability, energy generation capacity and growing workforce: this should be complementary to the offer elsewhere in the Corridor. We will engage in the development of the strategy for the Corridor, identifying North Northamptonshire's contribution.
- Ensuring infrastructure for growth. We have been very successful in delivering major developments – but to maintain the pipeline and to ensure that future growth matches the 'world class' aspirations of the Corridor, we will need continued investment in transport, energy and community infrastructure. Engagement with Government over the next five years will be crucial in delivering the ambition of the Corridor over the longer term.

Implications for the Economic Growth Strategy

Four implications for the development of the Strategy flow from this brief description of North Northamptonshire as a 'place':

- First, **opportunities for economic growth must be spatially balanced**. There is no single dominant centre in North Northamptonshire which can act as a focal point for investment. All the larger towns have scope for growth and important economic assets, and future strategy should reflect that. This shouldn't mean 'spreading the jam thinly': rather, it means identifying where there are strengths and opportunities and responding to them.
- Second, **complementarity across the main centres is likely to be important**. Together, the four large towns and their contiguous settlements have a population of over 230,000: a combined urban area similar in size to Northampton and Milton Keynes – and larger than Oxford or Cambridge. Ensuring that investment is complementary rather than competitive, and the towns are effectively linked will be important in making sure that in combination they are greater than the sum of their parts.
- Third, **North Northamptonshire needs to look outwards, in all directions**. Wherever partnership and administrative boundaries are drawn, the area's relationships with Milton Keynes, Peterborough, the OxCam Growth Corridor, and the wider Midlands will all be important, and infrastructure investment and key institutions beyond our boundaries will offer benefits to North Northamptonshire too. We are part of a 'bigger picture' and our thinking is not constrained by boundaries.
- Fourth, **quality of life and quality of place go together with economic growth**. There are important environmental assets in North Northamptonshire, and recent decades have seen a clear strategy in support of sustainable growth and investment in green infrastructure. North Northamptonshire's quality of life offer is a key part of its attractiveness to investors and visitors, as well as to existing residents, and is a key part of our economic growth strategy.



3. North Northamptonshire's economy

In 2022, North Northamptonshire generated around £8.2 billion in annual gross value added, supporting some 170,000 jobs. There has been positive jobs growth over the past decade and employment rates are high. But there is unfulfilled potential, reflected in a significant productivity and pay gap with the rest of the UK. This chapter provides an overview of the area's economic structure and its recent performance.

Rapid growth

North Northamptonshire's population is growing. In the twenty years to 2022, the area's total population increased by about 76,000, equivalent to growth of around 26% (compared with 15% across England). The *working* age population also grew – by 23%, compared with 12% nationally¹⁵.

Looking to the future, North Northamptonshire will continue to grow. Projections for 2018-43 anticipate 17% and 11% growth in the all-age and working age populations respectively (compared with 9% and 3% across England). So although the population is ageing, we have a relatively young population, and our workforce is expanding at a much faster rate than in the rest of the country.

A good record of job creation

Consistent with working age population growth, **North Northamptonshire has a positive record in attracting and growing businesses and creating jobs.** Between 2002-22, the total stock of jobs grew by about 30% (in other words, net job creation outstripped growth in the 'working age' population), albeit with an apparent fall in absolute numbers during the pandemic.

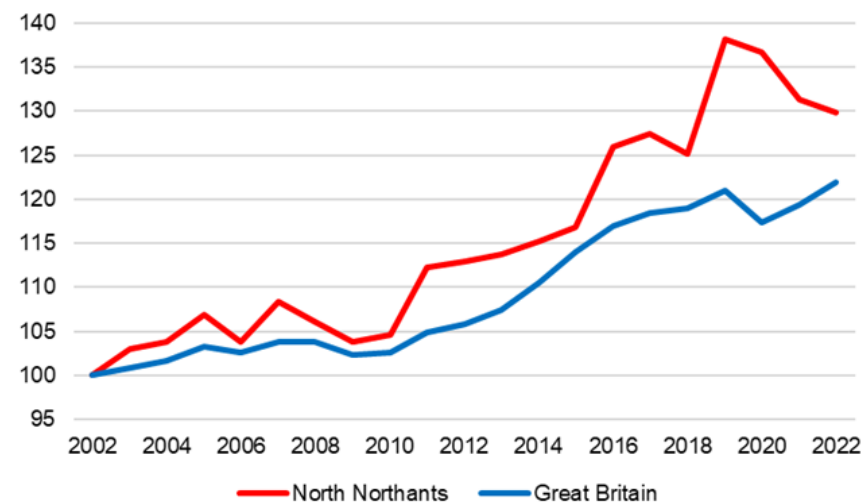


Figure 3 1: Index of total jobs (2002=100)
Source: ONS, Jobs Density

Looking to the future, analysis to inform the new North Northamptonshire Local Plan anticipates continued jobs growth. Economic forecasts anticipate up to 34,000 net additional jobs between 2021 and 2041, sufficient to maintain pace with likely demographic change¹⁶.

High levels of economic activity and employment

Economic activity and employment rates are higher in North Northamptonshire than elsewhere in the country. In 2023, 80.5% of people aged 16-64 in North Northamptonshire were in employment: one of the highest employment rates in the country, compared with 76% in Great Britain. This pattern has been consistent over time.

However, there are still around 7,500 people in North Northamptonshire who are economically inactive, but who would want a job if they could access one¹⁷. Nationally, recent data suggest an increase in economic inactivity due to long-term ill-health, reflecting a continued legacy of the pandemic¹⁸.

A distinctive sectoral mix

Two major sectors have a relatively large presence in North Northamptonshire. **Manufacturing** accounted for about 22,000 jobs in 2023 - about 14% of all employment, almost double the employment share of the sector nationally. Despite the loss of many of North Northamptonshire's traditional manufacturing specialisms, the sector has successfully diversified and has been resilient in employment terms in recent years. Key firms include the electronics manufacturer RS Components at Corby, several food manufacturers (e.g., Weetabix at Burton Latimer and Corby; Alpro at Kettering) and the paper producer DS Smith, alongside an extensive small and medium-sized manufacturing base. North Northamptonshire has also been successful in attracting significant new investment: Ball Corporation's new factory at Kettering Gateway is the largest aluminium can production facility in the UK.



Ball Corporation, Kettering Gateway

Transport and storage also has a distinctive and very visible role in the local economy, reflecting the area's strategic location. The sector accounted for

some 17,000 jobs in 2023 (11% of all employment, over twice the national share) and has expanded rapidly in recent years. Major centres of activity include Midland Logistics Park and Rockingham Logistics Park at Corby and ProLogis Park at Kettering, with several major retailers (including Sainsburys, Primark and Amazon) and third-party logistics operators maintaining facilities in the area. Investor interest in logistics remains high: Nike is in the process of opening its UK logistics campus at Corby (the second largest investment made by Nike globally), and there are several further planned developments. The national Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport is headquartered in Corby, and there are several firms (such as Logistex Europe at Kettering) which are engaged in the transport and logistics supply chain, supplying equipment and automation systems to the industry¹⁹.

Beyond these distinctive industries, **wholesale and retail** is the largest sector in employment terms (as it is in much of the country), accounting for about 30,000 jobs in 2023 (with modest contraction over the preceding five years, reflecting structural challenges in the retail industry). The mainly **public service** sectors of health, education and public administration accounted for a further 34,500 jobs, with health and social care experiencing especially strong recent growth (and high projected growth regionally²⁰). **Business services** (professional, technical and scientific, financial services and information and communications) are relatively under-represented in North Northamptonshire, although important firms include the long-established research and technology organisation SATRA based at Kettering. **Hospitality** has grown in recent years, linked with local demand as well as the visitor economy, as has **construction**, in the light of the substantial local development pipeline.



Haldens Parkway, Thrapston – a major logistics park at A14 J13

Beyond conventional sector definitions, there are emerging opportunities that are relatively small in employment terms, but which are potentially important for future growth. North Northamptonshire has substantial **renewable energy** potential: Chelveston Renewable Energy Park has developed over the past decade, currently offering 85MW of installed wind and solar energy capacity, with allied development potential and opportunities for hydrogen innovation. There are plans in place for further schemes, for example at the proposed Kettering Energy Park. These contribute to the overall decarbonisation of the UK's energy mix, but they could also help to attract operations seeking a reliable, clean on-site energy supply, including those engaged in advanced digital technologies as highlighted in the Government's recent Artificial Intelligence Opportunities Action Plan.



Burton Wold wind farm

More broadly, North Northamptonshire has a growing stock of firms engaged in the development of the **'green economy'**. These are very diverse: they include renewable energy manufacturing and installation companies such as Marlec and Simplr; the sustainable electronics firm In2Tec; and in food production, Weetabix, which sources its cereal inputs from local farms. Many firms in the major sectors highlighted earlier also have strong green credentials: Over time, all businesses will need to become part of the 'green economy' – but there are businesses with a local presence that are in the vanguard of change.

The productivity and pay challenge

Despite an economy which is buoyant in employment terms and which has important opportunities for growth, **there is a significant 'productivity gap' between North Northamptonshire and the rest of the UK.** Productivity (measured as the amount of GVA generated per filled job) was £46,406 in North Northamptonshire in 2023, equating to about 76% of UK productivity. Over time, the gap has widened, as the graph below illustrates. Productivity in North Northamptonshire is also lower than in all neighbouring local authority districts (apart from Rutland) and productivity growth over the past decade has been slower than the UK average and slower than in our South Midlands neighbours.

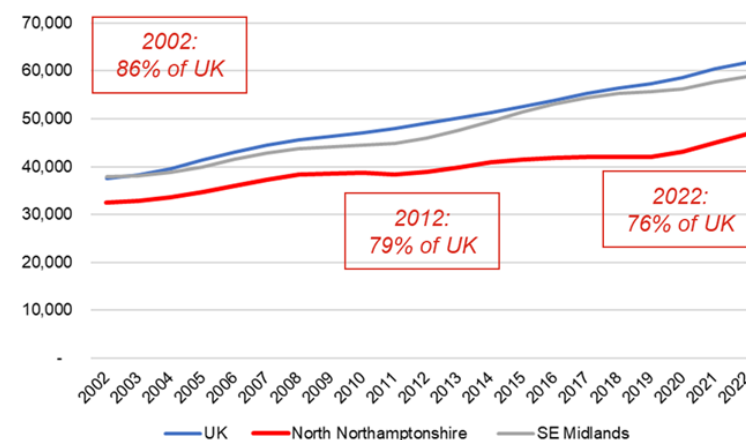


Figure 3 2: GVA per filled job (current prices, £)
Source: ONS, Current price GVA (B) per filled job

There is also a pay gap, which is especially great for people working in North Northamptonshire. Pay is often a more 'relatable' measure than productivity, and the two are linked. Gross median resident weekly pay for full-time workers averaged £648 in North Northamptonshire in 2022-24 – about 94% of UK average pay. But workplace pay (i.e., the wages paid to people at workplaces in North Northamptonshire) was lower, at around £626 – and lower than in the rest of the South Midlands. This was reflected in focus group discussions as part of the development of this Strategy: people working and studying in North Northamptonshire recognised that there are lots of jobs, but

expressed concern about the quality of many jobs on offer, in terms of rates of pay, opportunities for progression and working conditions.

Considering the drivers of productivity and pay
In relation to skills...

There has been a steady improvement in workforce qualifications over time: by 2021, about 30% of the working age population were qualified to at least NVQ4 level, compared with around 20% a decade earlier. Over the same period, the proportion with no formal qualifications almost halved. However, there is still a significant qualifications gap with the rest of the UK. This is especially the case at higher level, although numbers with no qualifications remain higher than the national average. There is also a complicated relationship between workforce supply and demand, with an apparent imbalance between total employment availability and perceptions of opportunities locally, perhaps reflecting the orientation within the economy towards lower-paid employment.

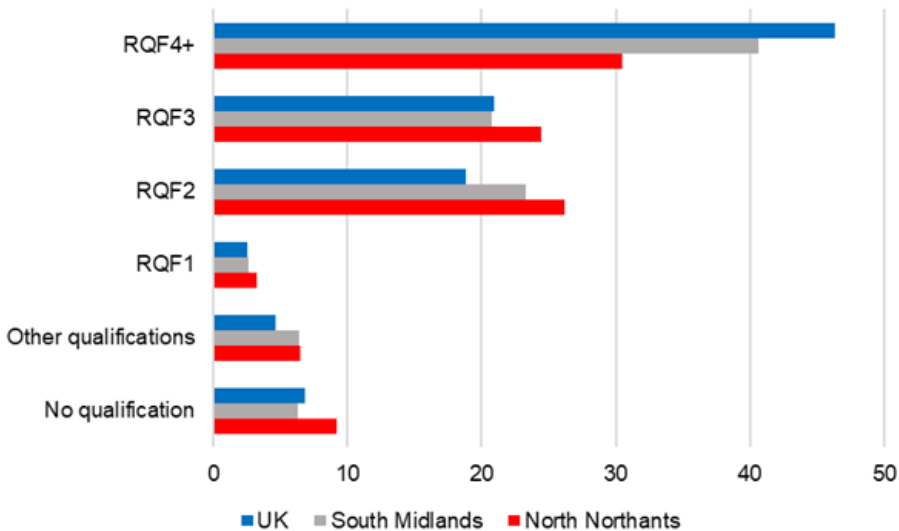


Figure 3 3: Highest qualification obtained (people aged 16-64)
Source: ONS, Annual Population Survey, 2022-23

In relation to space for business expansion...

North Northamptonshire has an expanding business base. In 2024, there were around 17,000 businesses in the area, around 86% of which were ‘micro’ enterprises, employing nine people or fewer, and there has been growth in the total business stock over the past decade²¹.

Business growth has been accompanied by an increase in the supply of commercial space – as evidenced by the recent delivery of major logistics and industrial parks and a strong pipeline of further development. But there is evidence that the supply of new industrial space is not keeping pace with demand: vacancy rates are reportedly very low²². There is also an imbalance between the delivery of large-scale logistics facilities catering to national and regional demand and the apparent lack of smaller-scale supply to support grow-on space for local firms, or to attract a greater diversity of businesses to the area²³.

In relation to connectivity...

Digital connectivity is strong in North Northamptonshire, especially for a substantially rural area. Around 81% of premises were able to access full fibre connections in 2024, compared with 67% nationally²⁴. However, growth in artificial intelligence computing demand will require significant growth in available power supply, in which (as highlighted above) North Northamptonshire has a potential advantage.

In relation to **transport infrastructure**, Chapter 2 set out the advantages of North Northamptonshire’s strategic connectivity. However, **local connections (especially by public transport) are weaker, and can act as a barrier in accessing work and learning opportunities.** This is partly linked with the spatial pattern of urban development in North Northamptonshire: a series of large, but separate towns within which many employment centres are on the periphery and are hard to access by traditional public transport routes. Public transport routes from North Northamptonshire to Northampton and Peterborough are also reliant on bus connections with relatively long journey times. So the benefits of North Northamptonshire’s central location are not always felt locally – and this is likely to be an increasing challenge in the context of population and employment growth and the need to reduce transport emissions.

In relation to innovation...

Recent national analysis of 'innovation clusters' highlights some concentrations of firms, research institutes and other support structures in related industries in North Northamptonshire, principally in advanced manufacturing in the urban west of the area²⁵. Work for the University of Northampton on the Northamptonshire 'innovation ecosystem' identified several firms in the manufacturing and logistics sectors that have achieved high employment and/ or turnover growth, and the data service firm Beauhurst currently tracks some 160 businesses in the area based on indicators of innovation and growth potential²⁶.

However, there are some challenges relating to North Northamptonshire's innovation capacity. These include relatively few 'scale-up' firms; limited inter-firm collaboration²⁷; and a limited stock of innovation facilities and support services. This perhaps reflects the widely distributed nature of the business stock across North Northamptonshire: consultees frequently referred to some of the area's key innovation and business assets as 'unknown' or 'under the radar'.

Inequalities across North Northamptonshire

While the analysis in this chapter presents a picture of North Northamptonshire as a whole, averages mask a range of inequalities. Spatially, **there are some significant concentrations of deprivation, principally in the main towns**. These largely map onto average household incomes, which are (generally) lower in the urban west and higher in the rural east and north. Addressing inequalities across North Northamptonshire is important in the context of rapid housing growth and the need to support integration between existing and new communities.

More broadly, low pay has become increasingly salient in the light of cost-of-living pressures. Around 17% of employee jobs in North Northamptonshire earn less than the living wage, slightly above the national average of 16%²⁸.

Implications for the Economic Growth Strategy

Looking across this overview of North Northamptonshire's economy:

- **There are significant strengths on which to build.** North Northamptonshire has experienced changes in its industrial structure over the past few decades, but it has managed the transition well. There is a relatively young, growing population, employment rates are among the highest in the country, the stock of jobs has kept pace with population growth (and is forecast to do so), and there is demand for new commercial development. Overall, North Northamptonshire is a dynamic place, with scope for growth. Our Strategy should recognise and capitalise on these strengths.
- **There is however a significant productivity gap, which translates into workforce pay and incomes.** In short, jobs are plentiful, but the pay they command is often relatively low. Bridging the productivity gap will be important in raising local living standards over time – but it will also be essential to the resilience of North Northamptonshire's economy, as employment becomes increasingly automated and average labour intensity in sectors such as logistics falls over the long term.
- **Addressing the productivity and pay gap will demand action on a number of fronts**, especially in raising workforce skills (for people who are already in the workforce, as well as new entrants to the labour market), addressing local connectivity and access-to-work constraints and increasing innovation and 'added value' in the economy.
- **There is an opportunity to raise North Northamptonshire's profile.** The area has an impressive track record of housing and commercial delivery and important 'quality of life' assets (as the previous chapter demonstrated). Understanding North Northamptonshire's potential in relation to sectoral and business opportunities will be key to securing investment and driving local aspiration.

4. Towards 2030: A strategic framework

Building on the evidence set out earlier, the framework below sets out how we have developed our strategy for the next five years:

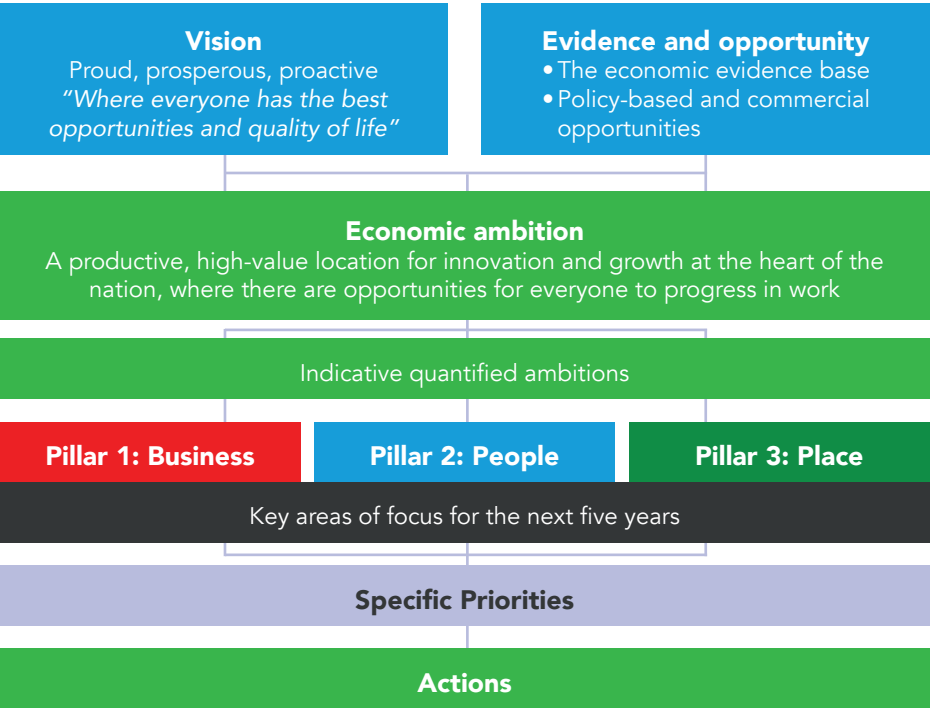


Figure 4 1: Strategic framework

Vision and evidence

The starting point for the strategy is the **vision** developed as part of the Big 50 initiative and set out in Chapter 1. This, in broad terms is where we want to get to by 2050, recognising that *"a prosperous place full of thriving businesses and a skilled population who can achieve their ambitions"* is a central part of the vision. Our vision is set alongside the evidence presented in Chapters 2 and 3 of North Northamptonshire's current economic outlook, recognising its strengths and the challenges that need to be overcome. As the earlier chapters set out, the economic outlook is based on historic data (our record of job creation, investment, population growth, and so on) and *future opportunity*, such as the potential that could be captured from the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor, relatively early investments in energy resilience and our wider plan-led approach to growth.

Economic ambition

Based on the vision and the economic evidence, we have identified an **economic ambition**: a statement of the economy that we want to see developed in North Northamptonshire which can contribute to the Big 50 vision.

Our economic ambition is to become **"a productive, high-value location for innovation and growth at the heart of the nation, where there are opportunities for everyone to progress in work"**.

This ambition recognises the strength of our location: we are already an important national centre for growth, and we play a key role in the OxCam Growth Corridor, the South Midlands and beyond. It addresses our productivity and pay challenge by focusing on our scope for innovation, in both established industries and across the economy. It also highlights the importance of an inclusive approach to growth, in which everyone has the opportunity to access work and progress in the workplace.

Six indicative quantified ambitions

We then translate our ‘big picture’ ambition and our understanding of the evidence base into six quantified metrics that we can use to measure progress. We have called these ‘**indicative quantified ambitions**’: because they are subject to a wide range of influences that are outside local control, they are not ‘targets’, but we can use them to measure the performance of North Northamptonshire’s economy over time and to consider how our strategy should evolve in the light of them. The basis for the indicative quantified ambitions is set out in Annex A.

Our six indicative quantified ambitions are derived from the earlier analysis of North Northamptonshire’s strengths and challenges, and are:

- **Productivity:** £56,200 by 2030 (over a 2022 baseline of £47,815). This represents an additional £2,000 per filled job as North Northamptonshire’s productivity growth rate rises to the UK average. We have included this because the North Northamptonshire’s productivity ‘gap’ is significant.
- **Pay:** £770 median gross weekly workplace pay by 2030 (over a 2022-24 baseline of £626), representing growth of 3.5% per annum in current prices. We have included this because there is a persistent pay ‘deficit’ which reflects the productivity gap – but pay is a more relatable measure.
- **Employment:** 5,700 net additional jobs by 2030 over a 2023 baseline. We have included this because although North Northamptonshire has a successful job creation record, we need to sustain employment growth alongside our growing ‘working age’ population and ensure opportunities locally.
- **Employment rate:** 82% by 2030 (compared with 80.5% on a 2023 baseline, and maintaining North Northamptonshire’s strong performance relative to the rest of the UK). We have included this because employment is the key route to individual opportunity and better living standards – and we need to make sure that everyone is included in economic growth.
- **Workforce qualifications:** 37% qualified to RQF4+ by 2030 (compared with 30.5% in 2022/23). We have included this because our workforce skills challenge is a key driver of our productivity deficit. We want to ensure that as new jobs come forward (especially those requiring new skills and greater knowledge-intensity), people in North Northamptonshire can access them and employers see the availability of skills as a key strength.

- **Per capita greenhouse gas emissions:** 4.1 tonnes of CO2 per capita by 2030 (compared with 5.5 tonnes in 2022). We have included this because economic growth must run in parallel with a greener economy, and our ambition is that the two are fundamentally linked.

Three pillars

To deliver against these ambitions, our strategy describes three pillars, focused on business, people and place. Although the three pillars are presented separately for simplicity, they are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

Ultimately, they seek to support an economy characterised by high productivity, high pay and high investment as a route to achieving the overall vision.

- **Pillar 1** focuses on strengthening North Northamptonshire as a location for innovative and growing businesses – attracting new investors and enabling businesses already in the area to expand.
- **Pillar 2** focuses on North Northamptonshire’s workforce, ensuring that we retain talent and support access to learning and progression, both for people joining the workforce for the first time and those who want to change and develop their careers in an evolving economy.
- **Pillar 3** focuses on North Northamptonshire’s connectivity and quality of place, and on promoting the area’s offer to visitors, investors and local people.

Chapters 5-7 describe each pillar in greater detail, highlighting our key areas of focus.

Specific priorities for action in 2025–30

Building on the broad areas for action described in the three pillars, we then define a series of eight priorities for action. These are more specific, are linked with North Northamptonshire’s distinctive characteristics and opportunities and can be developed further as business cases for action. These are described further in Chapter 8.

5. Pillar 1: Business

Strengths	• Growing stock of 17,000 businesses • Relative strengths in logistics and manufacturing, within the context of a diversified economy • Significant recent commercial development and capacity for more • Mix of established firms and recent investors • Strategic location
Opportunities	• Scope for further employment land development • Potential to capitalise on renewable energy capacity • OxCam Corridor and investment in surrounding areas • Immediate potential to accommodate large scale inward investors
Challenges	• Limited innovation infrastructure • Key opportunities often unknown/ overlooked • Lack of supply of smaller commercial spaces to meet demand
Areas of focus	• Attracting and securing business investment • Innovation and business growth • Realising net zero and digital opportunities

Our aims to 2030

Over the next five years, we aim to continue North Northamptonshire's positive record in attracting new investors and growing local businesses. As part of this, we aim to increase North Northamptonshire's knowledge intensity and innovation capacity, to build an economy that will be more resilient in the long term to technology change and will offer opportunities for more highly paid employment.

We will help to make North Northamptonshire a productive, **high-value location for innovation and growth at the heart of the nation where there are opportunities for everyone to progress in work** through the following areas of focus.

Attracting and securing business investment

North Northamptonshire is already an attractive business location, especially for activities linked with our strategic location and transport connections, and there is a pipeline of planned investment in key sites. Through the planning process and linked with evidence of anticipated demand, we will maintain a supply of employment sites to meet future need, and we will be proactive in engaging with firms seeking to expand and locate in the area.

In addition, we will seek to attract and grow a diverse mix of firms to North Northamptonshire, by:

- **Defining and promoting North Northamptonshire's offer within the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor and the South Midlands.** North Northamptonshire offers space for growth (new homes and commercial), relative affordability and good accessibility. Given the scale of the OxCam Corridor's growth potential, this ought to make a significant contribution to

the proposition. However, as the evidence presented earlier demonstrate, these strengths are not always known to investors or recognised by policymakers. The Government's recommitment to the Corridor provides a new opportunity for North Northamptonshire to reposition itself within a growing and broad arc of high-value activity.

- **Maintaining a proactive and positive approach to attract business investment.** North Northamptonshire is a place that welcomes investment – demonstrated by our strong track record. Linked with an effort to promote the area's investment offer, we will engage with investors at an early stage, through promotional campaigns and by working with business 'ambassadors' for North Northamptonshire.
- **Ensuring capacity for growing firms to scale up:** Although North Northamptonshire has seen substantial development in recent years, our larger schemes have responded to national demand for strategic warehousing and logistics operations. Consequently, there are challenges for smaller firms in scaling up, and despite overall growth in the industrial stock, vacancy rates are very low (estimated at around 3% in the recent Housing and Economic Needs Assessment). In promoting North Northamptonshire's investment opportunity, we will work with developers and businesses to identify scope for smaller units and grow-on space, potentially with an active role for the public sector.

Innovation and business growth

There is an important stock of high-growth and innovative firms in North Northamptonshire, and there are some 'clusters' of innovation activity with a footprint in the area, especially in relation to advanced engineering. However, the evidence is that there are relatively few 'scale-up' firms locally, and a relatively limited innovation support offer, partly reflecting North Northamptonshire's geographically dispersed economy and its prevailing sectoral balance.

To raise productivity and pay over time, we want to increase opportunities for innovation locally, by:

- **Developing a network of innovation facilities and support.** North Northamptonshire has been successful in developing spaces for smaller business growth, such as at Corby Enterprise Centre. Building on this, we will explore the potential for a network of innovation centres that bring together physical facilities and a support offer, and respond to opportunities and demand (current and potential) in North Northamptonshire's towns and communities. This has the potential to be a key part of our 'offer' as part of the OxCam Growth Corridor and the South Midlands: a place with the scope to grow innovative businesses, as well as large-scale facilities.
- **Developing research and development and innovation capacity in our major sectors.** In logistics (for example) there is substantial investment being made in automated systems, autonomous vehicles and so on, there are firms in North Northamptonshire that are at the leading edge of this, and industry bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport have an important presence. There is an opportunity to build on our nationally significant concentration of activity and to support future resilience: we will explore the potential for further investment in collaborative research facilities where there are recognised local industrial strengths and build engagement with employers, industry organisations and further and higher education.



Corby Enterprise Centre

- **Building links with the regional knowledge base.** North Northamptonshire does not have a higher education presence within the area itself. But the University of Northampton has an important footprint locally and there are opportunities to engage with other universities – and of course, the concept of the OxCam Growth Corridor is predicated on the links between the universities and their regional knowledge spillovers. We will seek to maximise the benefit of the physical and virtual higher education presence within our wider region, within the other innovation actions highlighted above and by working together on new joint programmes that will support opportunities for businesses in North Northamptonshire.

Realising net zero and digital opportunities

Decarbonisation and the digital transformation of the economy are having a fundamental impact on all jobs and businesses in North Northamptonshire, and this will accelerate over the next five years.

Capturing the benefit of industrial transformation is at the heart of our economic ambition. We will drive this forward by:

- **Linking energy capacity with industrial opportunities.** North Northamptonshire already has significant renewable energy generation capacity, through the energy park at Chelveston and wind and solar facilities elsewhere in the area. These will be further augmented by the development of Kettering Energy Park, and there are opportunities to develop research and development activities at these facilities. Linked with our approach to attracting business investment, we will work with developers and industry to secure uses that can benefit from reliable on-site clean energy supplies, in manufacturing, data facilities to support rising demand for computing power and the research, development and innovation activities that are associated with these.
- **Supporting wider growth in clean industries and the green economy.** This is a key component of North Northamptonshire's Climate Change Strategy, recognising the strengths that the area has both in renewable energy and in manufacturing, installation and circular economy activities. It is also central to the national Industrial Strategy. Linked with our ambition to become a national centre for clean industry, the 'green economy' will be a central component of our investment promotion approach, aligned with the need to focus on increasing the supply of skills for net zero discussed in relation to Pillar 2.

6. Pillar 2: People

Strengths	• Well performing labour market: strong record of job creation, high employment and economic activity rates • Growing working age population • Good access to employment opportunities in the wider region • Strong local further education offer
Opportunities	• Growth in job opportunities driven by technology change (especially in digitally advanced functions and the green economy) • Anticipated future employment growth
Challenges	• Current workforce skills deficits • Relatively high prevalence of low paid work • Imbalances/ information gaps between business demand and perceptions of opportunity • Higher paid opportunities elsewhere
Areas of focus	• Access to learning and progression in work • Recognising opportunities; changing perceptions • Retaining and attracting talent

Our aims to 2030

Our second pillar of activity focuses on how we can support the development of North Northamptonshire's workforce, so that more people can access and progress in work, and businesses can access the skills that they need.

There is a substantial body of work setting out future skills demand, most recently in the North Northamptonshire Skills Needs study commissioned by Bedford College Group as part of the Big 50 initiative, and in the South East Midlands Local Skills Improvement Plan. These highlight:

- Rising demand for **digital skills**. While this is important at all levels (the Skills Needs study highlights a greater need for digital literacy in parts of the retail sector, for example), the key future demand is on more complex digital capabilities, in the context of automation, digital health, the use of data in supply chain management, and so on. While increasingly sophisticated digital skills will impact all sectors, North Northamptonshire's areas of relative strength in manufacturing and logistics are likely to be especially affected. This holds out the prospect of higher-skilled, probably more productive jobs in the future, but a risk of dislocation if people already in employment lack the opportunity to re-skill and up-skill.
- Resilient demand for **personal service** occupations in sectors such as health and social care, in the light of changing demographics.

The need to enable **"targeted strategies for workforce engagement"**, to bring more people (back) into the labour market and to overcome barriers to work²⁹.

Looking to 2030, we will help North Northamptonshire become a **productive, high-value location for innovation and growth at the heart of the nation where there are opportunities for everyone to progress in work** through the following areas of focus:

Access to learning and progression in work

Building on the Skills Needs Report and the Local Skills Improvement Plan, we will:

- As a route into learning and the labour market, support an enhanced basic skills offer. Work is currently underway to develop a Literacy Strategy for North Northamptonshire, recognising the barriers that many face in progressing beyond entry-level or low-skilled employment. This will be important: while the area has done well in recent years in generating high volumes of employment, we want to enable people to progress out of low pay, and future projections indicate that jobs requiring elementary skills will diminish over time – perhaps at an accelerated pace as the possibilities of digital transformation evolve. As the devolution agenda develops over the next few years, there may be opportunities to shape the future direction of adult skills provision to reflect this need.
- **Seek to increase the range of flexible and modular learning options**, including short course, online, part-time and blended learning provision, with the aim of engaging a wider range of people in learning, including those that are already in work.
- **Linked with this, encourage employers to invest in workforce development, including through Apprenticeships.** This can be challenging for smaller employers, given the cost of training and the demand on management capacity, but there ought to be opportunities to support collaboration between firms and with training providers.
- **Widen access to the labour market.** Even though economic activity rates are relatively high in North Northamptonshire, there are still some 38,000 people of working age who are outside the labour market, many of whom would want a job if they could access one. Linked with the Government's Get

Britain Working White Paper, we will explore local opportunities to enable people access work, through a targeted approach that addresses wider barriers as well as learning and skills.

Across all these activities, there will be an important role for digital skills, in support of a resilient workforce.



Tresham College, Corby

Recognising opportunities, changing perceptions

There is evidence of a mismatch between opportunities for work and progression and awareness of them. There are several dimensions to this, relating to:

- Lack of aspiration, and a perception that some people do not always feel that opportunities in new and emerging roles and sectors are “for them”
- Lack of awareness of the types of roles that are available beyond familiar sectors
- Associations of some sectors with poor pay or conditions, which may be outdated as industries become more highly automated
- Employer expectations of new entrants to the market

This means that a tight labour market is less flexible than it should be, and many employers report skills shortages and difficulties in recruitment at the same time as many of those in work or entering the labour market perceive a dearth of good opportunities.

To overcome these barriers, we will build on existing successful employer engagement programmes (such as that operated by Tresham College) to:

- **Engage employers more effectively in working with learning providers.** We recognise the challenges associated with some traditional forms of work experience (such as increased health and safety requirements), and we will explore with employers and providers ways of inspiring young people in relation to new opportunities locally
- Building on our focus on “defining and promoting North Northamptonshire’s offer”, **ensure that key employers and industries are given greater prominence.** The perception that many of the area’s assets are ‘under the radar’ applies locally as well as to external investors and visitors: changing this will be an important part of raising aspiration.

Retaining and attracting talent

There is a net commuting outflow from North Northamptonshire and, since there is no higher education presence physically located in the area, there is a net loss of young people to university cities (meaning that they often start their careers elsewhere).

While this is sometimes seen as a weakness, it is not necessarily so: North Northamptonshire’s proximity to other major employment centres gives a wider choice of employment opportunities (and gives local employers a wider pool to draw from), and although people leave to access university, many return - and are attracted to the area - as a place to develop a career and start a family.

In attracting and retaining talent, we do not therefore (just) mean graduate retention. Instead, we mean attracting and retaining people across their working lives, in the context of an open and dynamic local economy.

To support local talent retention, we will:

- **Seek to expand the higher education offer locally, so that more people are able to access it,** including those accessing higher education later in life who already have work and family commitments. This could mean improving links to higher education centres just over the border in Northampton, and with other regional universities such as Cranfield, expanding the University Centre offer at Tresham College, and developing additional (e.g., online or modular) routes along the lines suggested in relation to ‘access to learning and progression in work’ above.
- **Promote North Northamptonshire as an area of opportunity,** linked with our ambition, our position in the OxCam Growth Corridor and the wider South and East Midlands, and North Northamptonshire’s housing and quality of life offer.

7. Pillar 3: Place

Strengths	• Network of distinct towns, with strong local identities • Strategic accessibility to the rest of the UK (by road) and via the Midland Main Line • Commitment to sustainable growth (e.g., via Sustainable Urban Extensions), track record of delivery and a welcoming approach to growth • Quality natural environment and heritage
Opportunities	• Scope for further investment in/ better connections to town centres • Future phases of SUE delivery
Challenges	• Local public transport connectivity constraints • Rising congestion/ pressure on road network • Lack of awareness of local visitor offer • Limited complementarity across the main towns
Areas of focus	• Connecting North Northamptonshire sustainably • Place building • Promoting and enjoying North Northamptonshire

Our aims to 2030

Our third pillar of activity focuses on North Northamptonshire's environment and quality of life as a driver of investment.

Capital investment has a lengthy lead-in time, so we would not expect new infrastructure propositions to be delivered by 2030. But North Northamptonshire has a very strong track record in planning for the long term (and delivering) sustainable development. Over the next five years, we will seek to develop and promote North Northamptonshire's offer through the following areas of focus:

Connecting North Northamptonshire sustainably

Strategically, North Northamptonshire is very well connected, and this is a central part of its offer. However, local public transport connections are often weaker: for example, scheduled bus journey times between Corby and Northampton are around 90 minutes, and congestion means that local journeys are often subject to delay. North Northamptonshire's peripheral distribution of employment sites also means that access to work can be challenging.

Investing in better transport connectivity therefore complements the actions proposed in Pillar 2 in relation to increasing access to work. To support this, we will:

- **Develop tactical and innovative responses to support access to employment.** North Northamptonshire Council has already had success in bringing forward new ideas, such as the popular e-scooter trial and a scheme to enable employers to trial e-bikes. We will explore further opportunities to improve public and sustainable transport options to employment locations, working with employers.

- **Progress planned investment** in active and sustainable travel. Substantial work has been done in developing local walking and cycling plans for the main towns, and in developing the **North Northamptonshire Greenway**, a strategic network of walking and cycling routes that can be delivered incrementally over the long term. We will make the case for investment in these strategic plans, understanding their economic as well as transport and environmental impacts.
- **Consider the scope for longer term investment in public transport infrastructure** consistent with the planned growth and ultimate scale of the 'urban spine'. This will mean a concerted effort to 'make the case' for investment, in the context of North Northamptonshire's growth potential.
- **Explore the potential of future devolution.** In some parts of England, bus franchising is a key part of local devolution deals. As part of the devolution process, we will consider the potential benefits of this to North Northamptonshire.

Place building

The new North Northamptonshire Local Plan will be the core place making strategy. From the perspective of this Strategy, place building is focused on:

- **Supporting the complementarity of North Northamptonshire's towns.** While there is a positive record of regeneration (especially in Corby), the main towns collectively underperform in terms of the collective range of services they offer, relative to their aggregate scale and growth potential. Linked with better connectivity between them, there is an opportunity to promote a complementary offer associated with each town's identity.
- **Linking new communities with their towns and with the wider ambition for North Northamptonshire.** This might involve the provision of innovation and business space within Sustainable Urban Extensions, as well as physical links to employment centres including connections to the Greenway and other networks.

Promoting and enjoying North Northamptonshire

In Pillar 1, we highlighted the need to promote North Northamptonshire's investment offer. This needs to be closely aligned to the offer to visitors and residents: people investing in the area will want to live here (and many will already do so), and promoting its potential is a key element in raising local pride and aspiration. North Northamptonshire was identified by Arts Council England as a Priority Place for Culture³⁰ looking at need, opportunity, and overall balance.

In that context, we will:

- **Support a more diverse cultural and leisure offer.** Building on the North Northamptonshire Cultural Masterplan, this will help to drive additional activity in our town centres and rural areas, promote the development of a creative industries offer (which is currently relatively small in the local economy), and complement our efforts to attract and retain talent.
- **Promote North Northamptonshire's visitor economy**, developing the 'Northamptonshire brand' and linking promotional activity with product development.



Lyveden New Bield

- **Capitalise on opportunities taking place just outside the area's borders.** For example, the Universal Studios theme park and resort planned for Bedford will be a major attraction, creating around 8,000 jobs when operational. This ought to present opportunities for North Northamptonshire's visitor economy, as well as the creative supply chain.

8. Priorities for the next five years

Introduction

Between now and 2030, significant progress needs to be made in pursuit of our overall vision and ambition

Building on the three pillars, eight key priorities have been defined as a focus for action – both for North Northamptonshire Council and for its principal partners and stakeholders. These priorities are broader than individual actions, and they demand a system-wide response. Yet they are sufficiently specific to guide investment and other decisions, and to frame emerging policy priorities at a local and strategic level.

Priority 1: Mobility for opportunity

North Northamptonshire is outstandingly well located relative to the national transport infrastructure. It is bisected by the improved A14 and flanked by two major motorways, the M1 and the A1(m). It is also reasonably well connected by train, with direct links to London St Pancras and Eurostar services. However, connectivity by public and sustainable transport within North Northamptonshire is more challenging, especially between settlements. Employment sites are often hard to access from residential areas, and as the population has grown, the challenges of moving around a widely distributed economy have multiplied. This can mean that residents are unable to access available employment and training while businesses are unable to recruit the workers they need.



Corby station

In response, there is a need to expand provision linked to sustainable transport and sustainable mobility. This means, potentially, new bus routes or other solutions, such as demand responsive transport, which reflect the imperatives around travel – whether to work, to learn and or to access leisure and culture. It also means a greater emphasis on active travel – through provision of local networks and the Greenway for cycling, walking, and other modes. Looking to the longer term, many of these themes will be addressed in a new Local Transport Plan and the economic case for change is a strong and compelling one. But action will be needed in the shorter term as well.

Priority 2: Space for innovation and growth

Baseline data suggest that North Northamptonshire has performed very poorly on metrics linked to productivity. It has succeeded in creating jobs, but it has been much less successful in generating high value jobs. Over the next five years, it will be important that that some progress is made.

Building on the successful network of Enterprise Centres across North Northamptonshire, the intention is to increase innovation provision, especially focused on advanced manufacturing, professional and business services and other growth sectors. This will require animation and facilitation. Alongside the provision of appropriate managed workspace, there will be a need for active innovation support. The intention will be to develop networks of innovators and entrepreneurs who might support each other and start to create scale and critical mass. More or less formal innovation centres should be vibrant and lively, and places where ideas, networking and a range of businesses can thrive.

A network of innovation hubs will need to be developed with reference to North Northamptonshire's town centres. Some consideration should also be given to links to major centres of knowledge and learning, including potentially to the University of Northampton, Cranfield (especially in relation to engineering and opportunities in the green economy) and other regional universities.

Priority 3: Value and opportunity from logistics

One of the sectors that has thrived in North Northamptonshire is logistics, and further investment is probable. The sector is very diverse, and often it gets a 'bad press'. However, within it there are some very sophisticated businesses using leading edge technologies: and in many cases, these rely on foremost digital skills and know-how, and North Northamptonshire also benefits from the presence of the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport. The logistics sector is also a source of some highly paid jobs.

Looking ahead, the opportunities linked to high end logistics need to be recognised and embraced more fully. School leavers in North Northamptonshire need to be better informed about the range of career opportunities linked to the sector, and more provision should be made to meet the sector's skills needs. Further innovation within logistics should be actively stimulated and encouraged – linking to a wider narrative of innovation across the strategy as a whole. As a sector, logistics is large and important, and the opportunities linked to it need to be harnessed to the full.



Iron Mountain at Symmetry Park, Kettering

Priority 4: Diverse, competitive businesses

Across North Northamptonshire, there is a need to support the development of competitive businesses and encourage technology adoption. These take many different forms and – with appropriate support – they can be an important route to both greater creativity and wealth creation, but also to broader approaches to socio-economic inclusion. For example, people who are neurodiverse may thrive in setting up and running a business. As the importance of creativity and the use of technology grows, the value of different perspectives is likely to increase further.

More generally, the intention must be to stimulate and support the growth of businesses, including social enterprises, from across a wide range of sectors. These will help to ensure that the economy of North Northamptonshire continues to evolve and that the seeds of new sectors and clusters are planted. North Northamptonshire's economy has changed substantially over the last four decades – with the demise of the steel industry as a major employer and the closure of footwear factories – yet it has adapted and responded, and this is a journey that needs to continue apace.

Priority 5: Net zero technology

As North Northamptonshire looks to the future, the challenges and opportunities linked to net zero technology need to be a priority. Already the area has some nationally significant assets in these terms. For example, Chelveston Renewable Energy Park blends wind and solar power at a scale that is sufficient to meet the needs of over 60,000 homes and producing green hydrogen. The proposed Kettering Energy Park will similarly provide both solar and wind power, and substantial employment space for high energy users.

Against this backdrop, there ought to be scope to accelerate North Northamptonshire's position as a key location for clean energy industries, digital technologies and associated research and development opportunities within the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor and as a key part of the UK's response to the global opportunities of artificial intelligence.

Priority 6: Connecting the towns

Within North Northamptonshire, there is a series of medium-sized growth towns located within a relatively short distance of each other – including Corby, Wellingborough, Kettering and Rushden. These are distinctive in character and similar in scale. Looking ahead, it will be important that the distinctive character and role of each of the major settlements is recognised and celebrated. Cultural assets need to be developed, and each town should be a visitor destination in its own right – thereby encouraging a more vibrant visitor economy, including at night time.

To this end, the intention is to invest in each of the town centres – particularly in the areas around railway stations – and to grow the leisure and cultural offer. This will help ensure that North Northamptonshire is a great place to live, and it will provide more reason for the residents of (say) Kettering to visit Corby and Wellingborough, building the cohesion and profile of the area as a whole.



Street market in Rushden

Priority 7: Raising aspiration: linking people and jobs

In many respects, North Northamptonshire's economy is now unrecognisable from forty years ago, and there has been significant economic restructuring and change. However, perceptions of the area – including locally – can be more difficult to shift. There are many different opportunities for employment of different forms and within North Northamptonshire, it is possible to find a range of entry level jobs as well as opportunities for progression. At a local level, house prices are perceived to be high – but affordability ratios are a good deal more favourable than in places nearby – meaning that North Northamptonshire is a place in which individuals, households and families can progress.

There is always more to do – and at the core of Priority 7 is a recognition that more and better careers advice, information and guidance needs to be provided and that there is a need for greater engagement between employers and training providers and pathways at all levels, including through the development of Apprenticeships. However, there is a very strong foundation on which to build.

Priority 8: Promoting North Northamptonshire's opportunity

North Northamptonshire Council is new and – as a distinctive place – North Northamptonshire is also new. Many businesses – including those that could be future investors – simply do not know where it is. But as this Strategy has set out, there are very significant opportunities, with major investors such as Nike and Iron Mountain choosing the area as their key national location.

There is a need therefore to promote North Northamptonshire as a vibrant area within the broader Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor, and one that is fully 'open for business'. North Northamptonshire is a place that welcomes new businesses and welcomes in-moving households. It provides a good quality of life and – relative to elsewhere – it is quite affordable. It is a place where ambitions can be realised. North Northamptonshire needs to be promoted actively and confidently – and as a place that is, and will remain, proud, proactive and prosperous.



Camgrain, Kettering

9. Delivering the Strategy

We are ambitious for a North Northamptonshire that is *“a productive, high-value location for innovation and growth at the heart of the nation where there are opportunities for everyone to progress in work”*, supporting our long-term vision. This means an active role for the public sector, working alongside business and partners in education and the community.

Working in partnership

North Northamptonshire Council has a leading role, in working with others to develop projects, assembling funding packages and in direct delivery. As outlined elsewhere in this strategy, we have a strong track record, in delivering major regeneration and economic development projects and in joining up services across the authority, combining the regeneration impacts of leisure, planning, housing, transport, cultural, skills and other services, in line with our ‘One Council’ principles.

However, the Council is also a partner, supporting and enabling delivery by others, as well as directly, and it will be important to galvanise support from a wide range of organisations with a stake in North Northamptonshire’s success. This has been important in driving forward the Big 50 Vision, which will depend on the contributions of a wide range of partners, working together. Building on this, we will establish a **North Northamptonshire Ambition Board** to drive forward the actions and priorities we have set out.

Securing investment

Over the past decade, public investment has come from a range of sources. While greater funding certainty is welcome, the likelihood is that most projects will involve a package of funding sources. Private sector investment will be very important too, especially in the context of North Northamptonshire’s growth potential: we will seek to capitalise on this and identify where additional public support can make a difference.

Building delivery capacity

As well as funding, we will also need a step change in delivery capacity if we are to unlock North Northamptonshire’s opportunities in the next five years and set the foundations for the longer term. We have successful experience of establishing and working with a range of different delivery mechanisms (such as Catalyst Corby, the former urban regeneration company), and we will explore the potential for future ‘special purpose’ vehicles, including through devolution. However, delivery capacity requires investment: raising the profile of North Northamptonshire and demonstrating the national significance of the area’s growth potential will be key to this.

The opportunity of devolution

The Government’s commitment to devolution presents a new opportunity for North Northamptonshire. In particular, a devolution agreement presents the prospect of greater local influence over some of the key areas for action outlined in this strategy – for example in relation to adult skills, energy and transport. We will work together with our neighbours to drive forward and maximise the impact of a devolution settlement, and we will ensure that North Northamptonshire has a strong voice within it.

Monitoring success

Finally, we will ensure that we monitor our progress. The six indicators set out in Chapter 4 are ambitious: with our New Ambition, we will seek to deliver them for North Northamptonshire.

Annex A: Indicative quantified ambitions

The four indicative quantified ambitions are developed as follows: **Table A 1: Indicative quantified ambitions**

Ambition	Metric	Basis for quantified metric	Baseline
Employment	5,700 net additional jobs by 2030	The quantified ambition assumes that employment growth keeps pace with projected growth in the working age population. ONS forecast population growth (2018-43) is 0.51% per annum. This is applied to total employment (BRES Employment measure) from a 2023 baseline. This is within the range of the employment scenarios set out in the Housing and Economic Needs Assessment.	157,000 (2023)
Employment rate	82% employment rate by 2030	The target employment rate in the Get Britain Working White Paper is 80%. Currently, the UK employment rate is about 76%. North Northamptonshire's employment rate is above the UK average, at 80.5%. The indicative quantified ambition is to maintain a relative advantage, recognising the impact that efforts to increase employment and access to work will have	80.5% (2023)
Workforce qualifications	37% qualified to RQF4 by 2030	This assumes an increase in the proportion qualified to RQF4 at the same level as the national historic trend.	30.5% (average 2022/23)
Productivity	£56,200 per filled job at current prices by 2030	Over the past 20 years, North Northamptonshire's productivity has deteriorated relative to the UK average. The quantified ambition assumes that productivity growth in 2022-30 is at the 10-year UK historic average (2.33% pa). This results in a productivity gain of c.£8,400 (or £2,000 per filled job greater than would be the case if productivity growth followed the 10-year North Northamptonshire historic average growth rate of 1.87% pa).	£47,815 (2022)
Pay	£770 gross median weekly wage (workplace based) by 2030	This assumes growth of 3.5% per annum, consistent with the ten-year historical trend in the UK	£626 (average 2022-24)
Greenhouse Gas Emissions	4.1 tCO2e per capita by 2030	Assumes a 3.8% fall in per capita emissions, consistent with the historic reduction since 2005	5.5 tCO2e (2022)

Notes

1. MHCLG (2024), [Our Plan to Build More Homes](#)
2. MHCLG (2025), [Planning Reform Working Paper: Streamlining Infrastructure Planning](#)
3. UK Government (2034), [Clean Power Action Plan](#)
4. UK Government (2024), [Invest 2035: The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy](#)
5. DSIT (2025), [Artificial Intelligence Action Plan](#)
6. UK Government (2024), [Get Britain Working White Paper](#)
7. MHCLG (2024) [English Devolution White Paper](#)
8. Urban populations are based on ONS-defined Built Up Areas and are 2022 estimates
9. For example, Weetabix sources its wheat production from local farms
10. North Northamptonshire Joint Core Strategy, para. 7.10
11. North Northamptonshire Council/ West Northamptonshire Council (2024), [Northamptonshire's Tourism Strategy](#)
12. The 2021 census took place while Covid-19 restrictions were in force, so numbers working from home were higher than they would otherwise be.
13. Universal Destinations and Experiences, [World class Universal theme park and resort planned for the UK](#)
14. HM Treasury (2025), [Speech by Chancellor of the Exchequer](#)
15. 'Working age' is used here as shorthand for the population aged 16-64 (although the concept of 'working age' is changing, as the state retirement age increases and more people continue working for longer).
16. Icen Projects (2023), [North Northamptonshire Housing and Economic Needs Assessment](#)
17. ONS, Annual Population Survey. This is based on a three year average 2021-23 to smooth volatility in data.
18. UK Government (2024), [Get Britain Working White Paper](#)
19. Whitecap for University of Northampton (2024), Northamptonshire Innovation Ecosystem Report
20. NFER (2024), Skills Imperative: Labour market and skills projections 2020-35
21. UK Business Count (based on local units)
22. For industrial premises. Office demand is reportedly much weaker.
23. Icen (2023), North Northamptonshire Housing and Economic Needs Assessment
24. Ofcom (2024), [Connected Nations](#)
25. DSIT (2024), [Identifying and describing UK innovation](#) clusters. Innovation clusters are defined as concentrations of firms and other organisations that are: (i) R&D active; (ii) spatially co-located; (iii) engaged in related activities; and (iv) actively engaged on publicly-funded R&D projects
26. Whitecap (2024), Northamptonshire Innovation Ecosystem Analysis
27. Whitecap (2024), Northamptonshire Innovation Ecosystem Analysis, Workstream 3 Report: "In logistics, our research found no local cross-sector strategy to capitalise on market trends and build new value propositions..."
28. ONS, Employee jobs with hourly pay below the Living Wage
29. Chalkstream/ Bedford College Group (2024), North Northamptonshire Skills Needs Summary Report
30. Arts Council England, [Priority Places and Levelling Up for Culture Places](#)



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