

North Hertfordshire Economic Strategy, 2025-30

June 2025



**North
Herts**
Council



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Preface

In late December 2024, the English Devolution White Paper was published. It signalled a restructuring of local government in two-tier areas like Hertfordshire. It means that over the 5-year timescale of this strategy, institutional structures are likely to change, and North Hertfordshire Council may cease to exist in its current form.

The Council itself has an important role in delivering this strategy, but not an exclusive one – and wider partners and stakeholders will be key to its delivery. The District Council will help to bring partners together, and it will work hard to ensure that the priorities outlined in this document are advanced.

The **North Hertfordshire Economic Strategy is fundamentally about the place – not the Council**. It should therefore have long term currency. It should inform future strategies at a range of spatial scales.

1. Introduction

This document sets out a new **Economic Strategy for North Hertfordshire** over the period to 2030.

The new **North Herts Council Plan 2024-28** sets out a vision (*‘working with you for a fairer, greener North Herts’*) and four priorities, one of which is Responsible Growth. Within this context, a clear commitment is made to *“support economic growth across the district”*, and also to *“work closely with businesses and other partners to deliver on our key objectives”*.

The new Economic Strategy has been developed by North Hertfordshire Council (NHC) in discussion with key partners, businesses and stakeholders from across North Hertfordshire, and with support from SQW.

The previous Economic Strategy for North Hertfordshire was published in 2015. **Much has changed over the last decade.** The UK has left the European Union and the global geopolitical situation has become more uncertain. The low interest rate environment that characterised the period after the Global Financial Crisis has ended. Digitisation has increasingly shaped how business is done and how people live, work and enjoy their leisure time – a long term transition

which was substantially accelerated by the pandemic, with major implications for processes of economic development in North Hertfordshire and more broadly. Awareness has also grown of the need to adapt to climate change, and to make progress towards (now legally binding) targets in respect of net zero carbon. NHC has declared a climate emergency.

Together, these – and other – changes are shaping the nature of North Hertfordshire’s economy (including in relation to its town centres).

Change is a constant. In economic terms, it is probable that North Hertfordshire will look different in the 2030s and 2040s. **The purpose of this Economic Strategy is to help navigate the journey, set out North Hertfordshire’s current ambitions, and equip North Hertfordshire – and its people, communities and businesses – to build a strong, resilient and sustainable local economy within this fast-evolving context.**

The strategy that follows is underpinned by a substantive Evidence Base (which is available separately). In delivery, it will be supported by a more detailed Action Plan, which will be led by the Economic Development team at the Council and updated annually.

2. Understanding the economy of North Hertfordshire

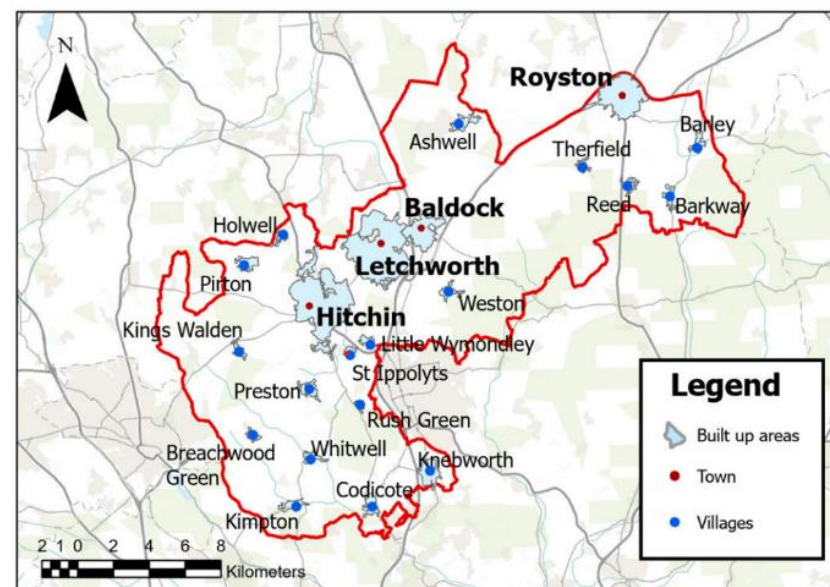
Within North Hertfordshire, there are currently about 6,225 enterprises and 66,000 jobs. The area generated gross value added (GVA)¹ of around £4.8bn in 2023 (in current prices)².

Understanding the place

As the map below shows, underpinning these headline metrics are four towns and a large number of villages within a district that is both predominantly rural and partially within the Metropolitan Green Belt.

In the north, **Royston** is a free-standing town. In the central part of the district, **Baldock**, **Hitchin** and **Letchworth Garden City** are located close to each other, although they are distinctively different settlements (as the economic portraits on page 7 (below) demonstrate). In addition, a significant share of North Hertfordshire's population lives in the **villages and countryside** around the towns. Some larger villages (e.g. Knebworth and Ashwell) are economic hubs; others struggle to maintain local facilities.

Figure 2-1: Key settlements within North Hertfordshire



Source: Produced by SQW. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right [2024], ONS (licensed under Open Government Licence v.3.0) and Esri data

However, North Hertfordshire also needs to be recognised as a strongly connected place. The close proximity of **Stevenage** and **Luton** present opportunities and challenges: both are growing quickly within tight boundaries, and this is generating some pressure

¹ GVA is a measure of the value of goods and services produced in an economy

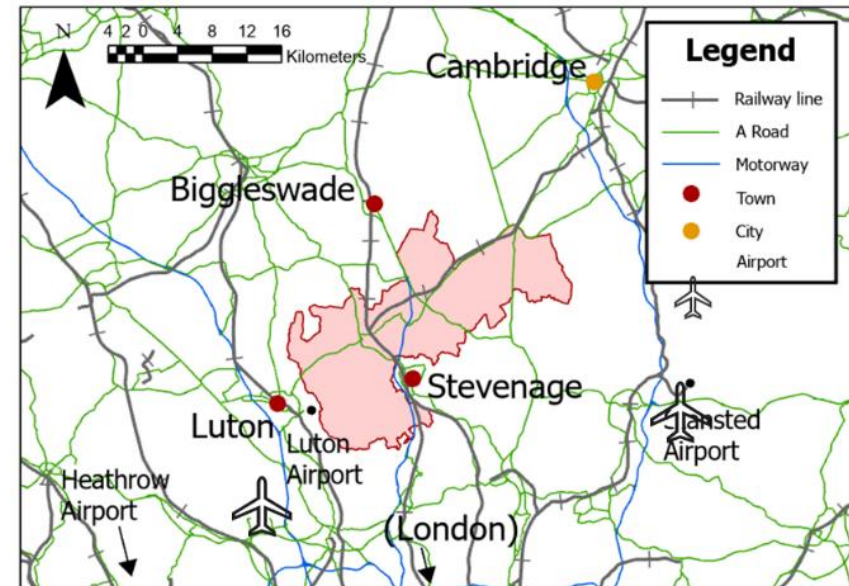
² Data are from ONS. Jobs data are for 2022 (accessed in 2024). Enterprise count data relate to 2024.

for the district, including in relation to housing delivery. There are strong links to **Central Bedfordshire** (which are evident through commuting flows in particular).

North Hertfordshire is also well located in relation to **London** and **Cambridge**, with good rail and road links to both, and strong ‘corridor’ possibilities linked especially to the **A1(M)** and **A505**, and to the **East Coast Mainline Railway** and the ‘Cambridge line’ (from Hitchin to Cambridge).

This spatial context – **looking both within the district and beyond it** – is critical in understanding how North Hertfordshire is performing as a local economy. It also defines some important opportunities in terms of how the district’s economy might change over the next decade (and beyond). It is therefore critical in relation to the Economic Strategy as a whole.

Figure 2-2: Understanding North Hertfordshire’s broader location



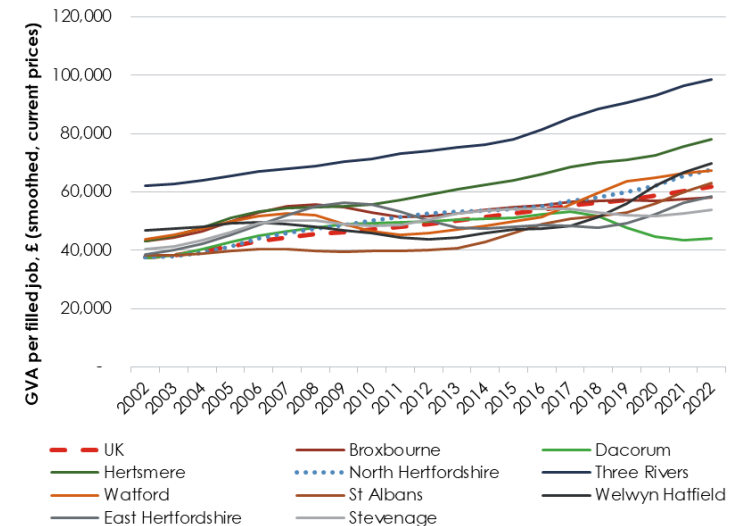
Source: Produced by SQW. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right [2024], ONS (licensed under Open Government Licence v.3.0) and Esri data

Economic performance of North Hertfordshire

Over the last 20 years, North Hertfordshire has grown relatively slowly in economic terms. The **total number of jobs** increased by 12% between 2001 and 2022; this was half the rate seen across Hertfordshire as a whole. During the first half of this period, North Hertfordshire saw employment decline – and it was essentially this backdrop that framed both the current Economic Strategy and the current Local Plan. There then followed a period of more rapid jobs growth until the start of the pandemic. More recently, a return to slow rates of jobs growth has been evident.

In 2022, **productivity** (measured as the overall value of output per filled job) was £67.4k (in current prices) – close to the national average. Although below the highest performing areas in Hertfordshire, productivity growth rates have been close to the UK average over the last two decades, as the Figure 2-3 below shows.

Figure 2-3: Productivity in North Hertfordshire and other districts in Hertfordshire and nationally



(Source: ONS)

In practice, North Hertfordshire has a mix of high and low productivity businesses and sectors.

In terms of the former, it is home to some major research-intensive advanced manufacturing businesses. Overall, **manufacturing accounts for about 13% of employment in North Hertfordshire. This is double that found nationally and close to three times the county average.** It really is quite distinctive. Among the advanced manufacturing businesses, Johnson Matthey and Sartorius, both in Royston, are two important examples. Letchworth Garden City also has a concentration of manufacturing businesses and employment

(including, for example, Altro Whiterock, Aalberts Surface Technologies, Ogle Models and Prototypes). For some of these businesses, links to the Cambridge sub-region appear to be important.

Another sector in which North Hertfordshire has substantial employment relates to **accommodation and food services**. This reflects both major attractions (e.g. Knebworth House) and the changing nature of town centre employment. However whilst employment levels are high, productivity in the sector tends to be low.

North Hertfordshire has several **major head/regional offices** – for example, Willmott Dixon (construction) in Letchworth Garden City and Hitchin and LV= (financial services and insurance) in Hitchin. The presence of these companies owes much to North Hertfordshire's accessibility and connectivity, particularly to London.

At the same time, there is a **very high incidence of small firms** in the district. Overall, around 5,500 enterprises – just under 90% of the total – employ 0-9 people. There are also about 8,800 self-employed people in North Hertfordshire, about 10% of those in employment. These patterns are very similar to those observed across Hertfordshire as a whole.

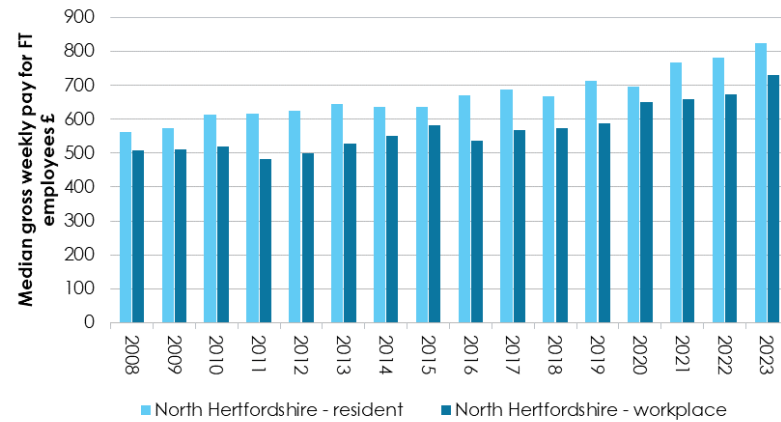
Workforce skills in North Hertfordshire are good overall – certainly as measured through the proportion of the working age population qualified to degree level or above.

However the connectivity of North Hertfordshire means that many of those with the highest level of skills **commute** out of the area to work (whilst it is often the case that those with lower level skills commute in). The 2021 Census took place mid-pandemic and the recorded volume of commuting was substantially affected by lock down restrictions and guidance. Post-pandemic there is little to suggest that the patterns observed a decade earlier have materially changed. At the time, North Hertfordshire was characterised as a net exporter of labour, with an overall net outflow of 12,385 persons and approximately 22.9% of working residents commuting to Greater London³. Today, hybrid working is likely to feature much more strongly, but the links to Greater London – through both the labour market and the housing market – continue to be strong.

One consequence is that the **pay of employees** who live in North Hertfordshire is generally higher than that of those who work there – as Figure 2-4 shows. Between 2008 and 2022, the pay of full time employees who were resident in North Hertfordshire increased by 39% (in current prices); the pay of those who worked in the district increased by about 32%.

³ *Functional Economic Market Area Study*, Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners, 2015

Figure 2-4: Median gross weekly pay



(Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings)

This has implications for the **affordability of housing**. Overall North Hertfordshire has become progressively less affordable than the national average – despite new housing developments.

Economic portraits of North Hertfordshire's towns

BALDOCK

Baldock is an historic market town, with a population of about 10,600 people (Census, 2021). It is very close to the A1(M) motorway and the A505 – and it also has good rail links.

Baldock has a range of town centre services within a small town centre which is very close to (in particular) Letchworth. In 2023, a major fire affected one of its principal industrial areas; and the Council is continuing to work with landowners to develop proposals for its redevelopment (for employment uses).

In the Local Plan, provision is made for major growth close to Baldock. This includes an allocation of employment land, alongside provision for some 3,000 homes, which could provide opportunities for the small town centre to develop and thrive. Hertfordshire County Council owns these sites. It is working with Urban & Civic to deliver the 'Growing Baldock' scheme.

HITCHIN

Hitchin is a vibrant town – and it is the only one of the four towns in North Hertfordshire to be on the East Coast Mainline Railway (providing enhanced connectivity). It has a population of 35,200 people (Census, 2021).

It is one of three locations nationally for LV= and a key site for ReAssure (both financial services/insurance businesses). There is a suite of local service businesses too.

Willmott Dixon has a significant presence on Wilbury Way which – together with Burymead – is the focus of the town's key industrial areas.

There is a major redevelopment opportunity in the town centre. The Churchgate Regeneration Zone (CRZ) comprises the Churchgate Centre, Hitchin Market and various surface carparks. The future vision for the CRZ is likely to comprise a blend of options – reflecting in part the possibilities surrounding the area's heritage and riverfront – to create a resilient, vibrant and sustainable town centre. CRZ is a key project, both for Hitchin and for North Hertfordshire as a whole.

Hitchin has a well-established town centre Business Improvement District (BID), which is helping to reinforce its role as a visitor destination within North Hertfordshire.

LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY

Letchworth Garden City has a population of around 34,000 people (Census, 2021). Known around the world as the first garden city, it is quite different from North Hertfordshire's other towns.

The Heritage Foundation is a major owner of land and property, and there is a substantial stock of office and industrial premises – although the stock is dated. Levels of occupancy are higher for industrial than office premises, and there is vacant space above shops in the town centre, which should be better used.

There are some significant businesses in the town – in engineering and traditional manufacturing, but also medical technology and additive manufacturing, and there are some links to pharmaceuticals (services). Letchworth has a BID which, with the Heritage Foundation, has an important role in transforming the retail-based town centre into the 21st century hub of the town. Businesses in Letchworth include Kwik Fit's HQ, Benchmark Fabrications, Altro Whiterock, Aalberts Surface Technologies, Ogle Models and Prototypes.

There is an ongoing focus on the cultural and creative assets and foundations of Letchworth. There is also significant housing development.

ROYSTON

Royston has a population of about 17,500 people (Census, 2021). It is located in the extreme north east of the district, on the edge of the Hertfordshire Chalk Downs. It is at the cross-roads between the A505 and the A10, and it has good rail connections.

Royston is home to some major knowledge-intensive employers – including Johnson Matthey, Mettler-Toledo and Sartorius. These are located within a substantial (and well-performing) industrial area on the northern side of the town, close to the Royston bypass. The wider Royston Gateway – already home to businesses like M&S, Aldi, Screwfix, Greggs, Costa Coffee, Toolstation, Jardine Motors, PA Consulting Group and Grant Instruments – is also being extended and there is scope for further potential expansion in due course.

Royston has a BID covering both the town centre and the Royston Gateway. This is active in promoting the town and it has support from the major businesses; improving connections between the Gateway area, the station and the town centre is a priority. The town centre needs to develop attractions which complement those of the Gateway in order to capitalise on the growth in the residential population and the growing attraction of the Gateway for work and shopping.

3. Opportunities and challenges

Overall, North Hertfordshire has some **major economic strengths and opportunities**. These have been identified by drawing both on economic data and also discussions with a sample of local businesses and stakeholders. They include:

- a **diverse local economy** which is shaped, fundamentally, by its connections to elsewhere – particularly to Cambridge and London.
- potential **opportunities (but also pressures) linked to investment in Stevenage and Luton** – both have seen significant change over recent years, and more is proposed/planned (e.g. around Luton Airport, and linked to GSK's site/Gunnels Wood Road in Stevenage).
- a suite of **knowledge intensive businesses** investing in the district, particularly in Royston – but a limited wider footprint (cluster) associated with them.
- **relatively strong workforce skills** among those resident within the district – although the flow of people (exporting well qualified people and importing lower level skills) is a factor (suggesting that more could be done to attract/generate businesses that might use the resident skills base).

- a predominantly **SME-based economy** – with enterprise and entrepreneurship, albeit of a diffuse and scattered form.
- a **strong visitor and leisure economy offer** – Hitchin town centre, Knebworth House, etc. – although more could be done to increase dwell time and spend (e.g. by promoting the district's wider leisure and hospitality offer).
- an **outstanding natural landscape** (including part of the Chilterns National Landscape) – which creates a great place to live and work – but also the constraints linked to Green Belt.
- exciting plans for the **future of Hitchin town centre/market** through the **Churchgate Development**.
- possibilities linked to **major growth at Baldock** – albeit without a clear economic vision currently.

However, as the evidence confirms, North Hertfordshire also faces some **challenges**. These include:

- a business base across the district that is widely regarded as **extremely fragmented and lacking in 'critical mass'**.

- **commuting distances may be increasing** (with hybrid working arrangements) – so local business embeddedness and commitment may be eroding.
- **major businesses which are quite ‘disconnected’** – ‘in’ rather than ‘of’ North Hertfordshire whilst benefiting from the location of North Hertfordshire (and the potential talent pool linked to London and Cambridge).
- the **vibrancy of both Stevenage and Luton which is causing competition for (and pressures on) North Hertfordshire**, as – in a different way – is Central Bedfordshire (where labour and land costs are generally lower).
- all the **town centres need to attract more customers to sustain local businesses** given changing shopping patterns and different patterns of living and working.
- Hitchin, Baldock and Letchworth Garden City are **in close proximity but fiercely independent** – considered together, their visibility (and profile) in economic terms could increase, whilst recognising that each town has a distinctive offer.
- the district’s **commercial property stock** has weaknesses
 - there is **surplus office space** which is not well aligned with current demand
 - much of the **industrial stock** is of poor quality: it is providing low cost solutions for businesses that are failing to modernise (which may not be sustainable)
 - **lack of sites for inward investment and marketing purposes** is a challenge – and if there is demand, it is from logistics.
- there is currently a **lack of actively managed and ‘animated’ innovation provision and few ‘anchor’ points** to value-added local economic drivers.
- there are **substantial pressures on development land relating to housing provision**.

4. Wider drivers of change

Looking ahead, there are wider factors to consider – which take a particular form in North Hertfordshire.

Key issues which have informed this strategy include:

- **Automation and AI** – some key local sectors might be especially vulnerable to change (e.g. low value manufacturing/assembly), meaning that the resilience of North Hertfordshire's economy needs to be considered.
- **Ageing population** – North Hertfordshire has a relatively old population and there may be increasing pressures linked to service delivery within the district, and changing patterns of labour supply (as older workers choose to, or need to, work for longer).
- **Climate change** – North Hertfordshire District Council has declared a climate emergency: adaptation is urgent – but this requires investment.
- **Net zero carbon** – the rurality of North Herts presents immediate challenges, and the district is car-dependent locally; also, large parts of the commercial estate (especially in Letchworth Garden City) will struggle as expectations in relation to net zero carbon increase. Conversely, recent investment in Royston is a clear response to emerging opportunities linked to hydrogen fuels.
- **Geopolitical uncertainty** – the economic performance of North Hertfordshire relates in part to international markets (including via nearby Luton Airport) which brings some vulnerability. However, any re-commitment to re-shoring might benefit the district.
- **Changing nature of work** – North Hertfordshire's towns may be too small to be work hubs when the option to work from home/London is a strong one: innovative solutions will be needed (and there is some evidence that these are starting to emerge – e.g. hotdesking within cafés).
- **Mobility and Gen Z** – does North Hertfordshire offer rich experiences that might appeal to Gen Z (especially as they head towards their 30s)? Hitchin appears to do better than other areas in this regard, but throughout, there is a need to understand – and respond to – what Gen Z may be seeking, particularly as the population changes.

5. Strategy

The overall aim of this Economic Strategy is for **North Hertfordshire to thrive – with greater economic resilience and well-being for people, communities and businesses across the district.**

North Hertfordshire has assets and major opportunities, but also some vulnerabilities – and this Economic Strategy has been formulated in response.

Reflecting North Hertfordshire's distinctive character – both the towns, villages and countryside within it, and its wider connectivity and regional/national positioning – two main themes shape the Economic Strategy as a whole. Both are critical.

Theme 1: 'Looking in'

North Hertfordshire has an outstanding natural environment and for many, it offers a good quality of life (although there are communities experiencing deprivation too, particularly in Letchworth Garden City). It has a sizeable business stock with high levels of business density. It has many micro enterprises, most of which will be locally focused. In relation to the Economic Strategy and across a predominantly rural district, these businesses – and the people who run them – are the lifeblood. They need to be encouraged to 'do business well' – and to invest and grow, including through local supply chains across the local economy.

Some of these businesses – especially those in the cultural and creative sectors – are likely to play a key role in relation to North Hertfordshire's town centres, which need to be an ongoing focus. In parallel, there is a need to recognise the importance of workforce skills within North Hertfordshire – and to encourage and equip more residents to work locally, and to do so for longer (as the population as a whole ages).

Putting these strands together, **much could be achieved by 'looking in', strengthening economic linkages, building local multipliers, celebrating local enterprises and countering what many regard as 'fragmentation'.** This might be advanced through greater networking and investment within the district and by supporting different aspects of local business growth.

Theme 2: 'Looking out'

North Hertfordshire is well-connected to Stevenage and Luton, but also to Cambridge and London (by road (A505 and A1(M)) and rail), and into the Midlands. **This connectivity presents the district with substantial opportunities for transformational economic change – recognising that it is located in the midst of a key economic growth corridor, defined particularly around the A505.** Whilst growth needs to be done well, these connections could – and should

– be ‘worked’ to create a case for renewed investment and economic purpose within North Hertfordshire.

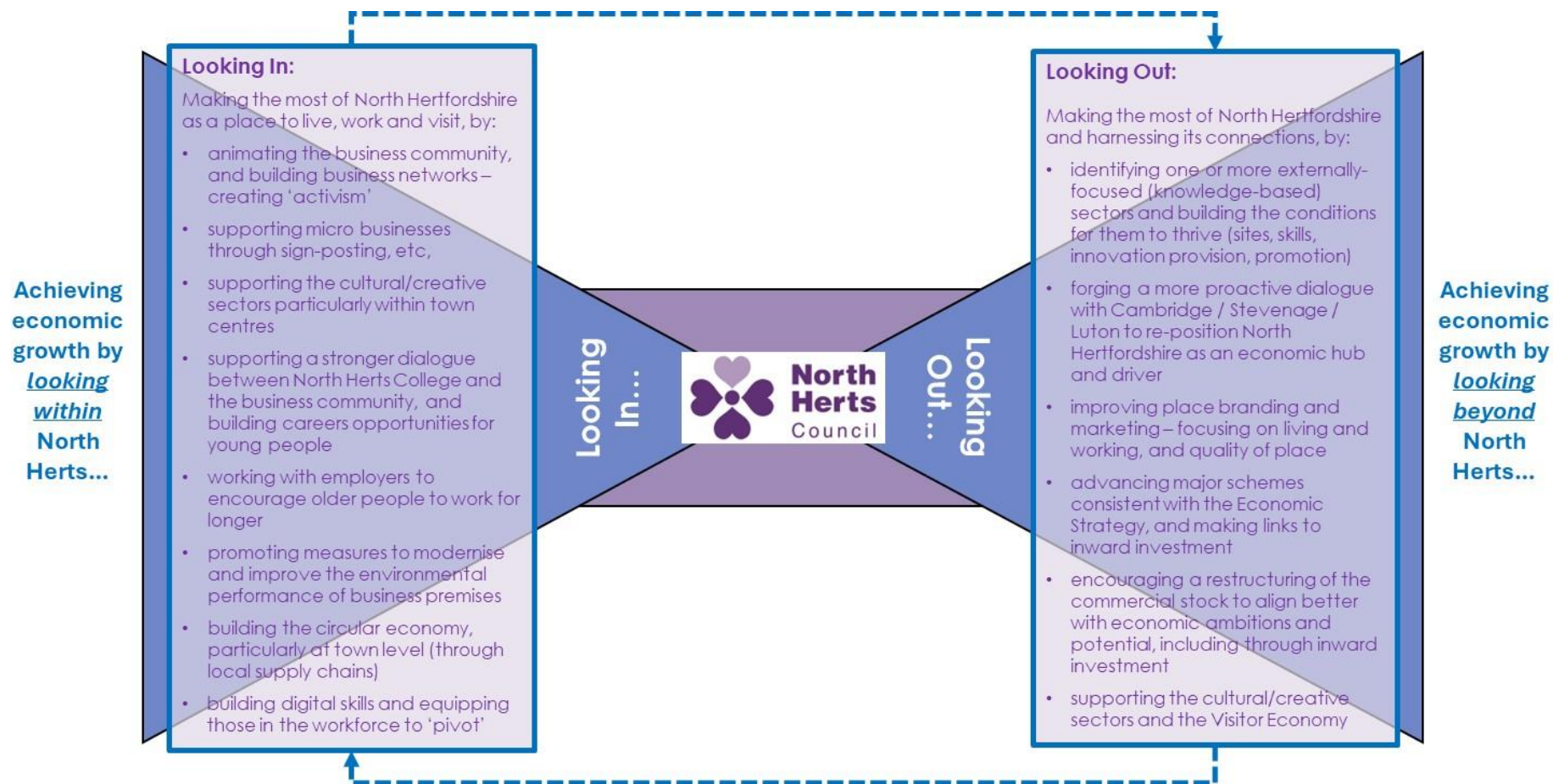
Potentially, this could be linked to some key sectors which are of national importance – perhaps most especially advanced manufacturing but also major business/financial services, construction and elements of the visitor economy. Particularly in these sectors, consideration should be given to the scope for inward investment – from elsewhere in the UK and internationally. Given its international significance, advanced manufacturing needs a canvas that is bigger than North Hertfordshire – but if the district’s asset base is aligned in response (including in relation to employment land and workforce development), much could be achieved.

...and the relationship between them

In practice, the two Themes need to be advanced together. North Hertfordshire will be a far more attractive choice for potential inward investors if its town centres are thriving and its cultural offer is strong. Equally, some of the physical challenges facing the district – especially in relation to commercial property and major development opportunities – are unlikely to make significant progress unless North Hertfordshire draws in investor interest from elsewhere.

The two Themes should not therefore be seen as ‘competing’ – albeit they provide different vantage points and at times, there may be some tensions between them. They both need to be navigated effectively. It is in this context that local leadership is extremely important. The role of NHC is critical – alongside other key partners and stakeholders (including, *inter alia*, North Herts College, Hertfordshire Futures, and Hertfordshire County Council).

Figure 5-1: 'Looking in' and 'Looking out': Key themes for North Hertfordshire's Economic Strategy



6. Action Areas

In response to the two key strategic themes, five main ‘Action Areas’ are identified. For the most part, these both ‘look out’ and ‘look in’, and they are defined to help NHC and its partners do likewise.

The Action Areas will be advanced through an Action Plan which is being developed by the Council.

Support for business and enterprise

A first Action Area is concerned with support for business and enterprise. Given the sense of ‘fragmentation’ across the business community, this needs to be a priority. **Actions to animate the business community and build business networks will help in terms of creating critical mass and encouraging more businesses to feel part of a vibrant business community across North Hertfordshire.** This in turn will help to build confidence, precipitate knowledge exchange and innovation, and potentially help develop local supply chains. Often vibrant business networks can be a catalyst for would-be entrepreneurs taking the first step – and they are a key feature of dynamic local economies.

Micro businesses need to be better engaged through (formal and informal) networking. However, it is not just micro businesses that feel ‘disconnected’. Some of the larger firms appear currently to

have few local links and some recognise that this is a missed opportunity; they want, positively, to engage and to play a greater role within the local community.

Within this context, there may be particular opportunities in relation to **cultural and creative businesses in the town centres**. All North Hertfordshire’s town centres are continuing to adjust to major changes to the retail sector and to behaviours post-pandemic (particularly shopping and leisure habits); the cultural and creative sector has an increasingly important role in this context. Building on existing initiatives, there is scope to reposition town centres as hubs for the creative and cultural industries – a move that would generate both social and economic benefits.

The significance of the wider **Visitor Economy** should also be recognised and supported. Within North Hertfordshire there are important attractions (e.g. Knebworth House and Hitchin Lavender). The urban and rural landscape is also highly valued – including as a location for filming. Efforts should be made to increase the dwell time of visitors and increase resident participation in cultural, sporting and other recreational and leisure activities in the district.

In addition, particular regard will need to be given to North Hertfordshire’s **rural businesses** (both those in sectors which tend to be defined as rural (e.g. agriculture) and those that are simply

based in rural parts of the district). There is evidence that the sense of fragmentation may be extreme for rural businesses – and there is a need to recognise that these enterprises often play a key community role as well as generating jobs and economic output.

Finally, there is a need, through the Local Plan, Town Centre Strategies and other routes, to think again about **enterprise and innovation provision**. There is some in North Hertfordshire – particularly in Letchworth Garden City – but more could be done with this. ‘Designing in’ enterprise provision needs to be a key element of planned new mixed use developments across North Hertfordshire as well as a core part of the approach to town centre regeneration.

People and skills

North Hertfordshire has well-qualified working age residents. However there is a mismatch between the skills and qualifications of residents and those who work in the district’s businesses. In practice, there are local opportunities for high value employment, but the links need to be made.

In response, **there is a need to support a strong ongoing dialogue between North Herts College, NHC and businesses (of all sizes), and to build careers opportunities for young people and older workers**. Both strands could potentially benefit local businesses very significantly.

In parallel, two further interventions are likely to be important across North Hertfordshire in respect of people and skills.

First, there is a need to **continue to invest in digital skills**. This is partly because digital skills are universally important, including within micro businesses. It is also because digital skills are likely to matter as businesses change and individuals face several career changes through a working life. Many of the jobs that will characterise the 2030s do not yet exist – in part as a consequence of AI and automation. Equipping businesses and people with the wherewithal to respond is therefore important.

Second, employers and individuals will need to think about **an older workforce**. Across Hertfordshire as a whole, the working age population (as currently defined) is forecast to decline and assumptions about retirement are changing, for a range of different reasons. Developing job opportunities that are appropriate for older workers is therefore important.

Innovation and economic change

Particularly in advanced manufacturing, North Hertfordshire can already claim some of Hertfordshire’s (and the UK’s) leading businesses. There ought to be growth opportunities linked to these – especially given the district’s outstanding location and its connections both to Cambridge and London. **Steps need to be taken to get to know these businesses/sectors better and to help create local conditions in which they can thrive - whether through**

investment in sites, innovation provision, supply chain initiatives or through novel approaches to workforce skills.

Ventures of this type are ambitious at the scale of a single local authority district – but a well-functioning place itself does much to retain businesses, and to encourage them to invest. North Hertfordshire has both opportunities and responsibilities in this context. NHC will need to work with other partners and stakeholders – notably Hertfordshire Futures and University of Hertfordshire.

Sites and premises

North Hertfordshire is facing some **challenges in relation to commercial land and premises, most especially in Letchworth Garden City**. The stock is sizeable (Icknield Way, Works Road, etc.), but there is a need to modernise and to improve the environmental performance of business premises. Currently there is more demand for industrial sites/premises than office buildings, but both need to be better aligned with the district's economic ambitions and potential.

Given its proximity to both Cambridge and London, the district's asset base ought to be valuable – albeit there is a long term programme to work through. The York Way industrial area in Royston is already home to some major advanced manufacturing and life sciences businesses and in developing it further, **every attempt should be made to forge wider and deeper links to the Cambridge Sub-Region**.

Beyond that, some specific – albeit long term – schemes will be important for North Hertfordshire over the next decade. These sit at the core of the Economic Strategy (in terms both of 'looking in' and 'looking out'):

- The **regeneration of Churchgate Shopping Centre area** (in Hitchin town centre) is a major project for NHC and for North Hertfordshire as a whole. The scheme is likely to involve many different elements including some residential development but also cultural and leisure-related amenities. Plans for Churchgate are still being formulated, but they will need to be seen as fully part of the Economic Strategy.
- The **regeneration of the town centre within Letchworth Garden City** – with a particular focus on arts, culture, heritage and creative activities – will be important for both the town and the wider district.
- Although a long term venture, the **major site at Baldock** is one of Hertfordshire's prime development opportunities. Potentially, the further expansion of **Royston Gateway** could be another.

These and other schemes should be advanced in a way that recognises North Hertfordshire's economic ambitions, particularly those linked with 'looking out'. In principle at least, the employment elements of these schemes could be aligned with the district's key sectors, positioning North Hertfordshire as a core location in relation to sectors identified by government in the Modern Industrial Strategy.

Investment, positioning and promotion

The fifth Action Area is concerned with investment, positioning and promotion. North Hertfordshire has real assets and real economic strengths – including a highly skilled resident workforce and access to a wider specialist labour market; these need to be codified, positioned and promoted to external investors.

Several strands are likely to be important. The imperative will be to advance these as a core part of the wider Economic Strategy. In so doing there will again be a need to reflect on both the ‘Looking in’ and ‘Looking out’ themes:

- First, there is a need for a **more proactive dialogue with Cambridge, and also with Stevenage and Luton, to re-position North Hertfordshire as an economic hub and driver**. These relationships are not helped by administrative boundaries, but

the imperative will be to look beyond them and recognise the potential of the area as a whole.

- Second, whilst respecting the distinctiveness of the towns in North Hertfordshire, **a single economic vision for Hitchin, Baldock and Letchworth Garden City** could be enormously powerful. This would have scale. In combination the three towns have a population of about 80,000 people – and scale alone would create visibility and impact. The three towns are different and there ought to be clear and valuable synergies between them.
- Third, there is a need to emphasise again the **assets of North Hertfordshire in terms of its quality of place**. It benefits from beautiful countryside alongside great connectivity – and together, these should set it apart. In so doing, it will be important to build on the existing ‘Place Narrative’ already established by NHC.

7. Delivery and implementation

NHC is committed to developing an Action Plan to advance each of the five Action Areas.

The Action Plan will be underpinned by:

- A commitment to **greater resourcing of economic development functions within NHC**, particularly in terms of animating the interface with the business community.
- A commitment to **working closely with other functions across NHC** so that actions are aligned with the ambitions set out in this Economic Strategy, the Local Plan, the Town Centre Strategies and other corporate documents.
- A commitment to **stronger and more consistent partnership working** (recognising that this itself needs to be resourced) with

the business community, key partners and stakeholders. These are likely to include Hertfordshire Futures, BID Managers, North Herts College, Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce, Visit Herts, University of Hertfordshire and local business groups, as well as neighbouring district and borough councils (including those outside Hertfordshire) and Hertfordshire County Council.

- A commitment to **developing targeted project concepts and business cases**, so that they are well researched and evidenced, ‘ready to go’ when appropriate bidding opportunities arise.

Throughout, the commitment will be both to ‘look in’ and ‘look out’ – galvanising North Hertfordshire’s assets and opportunities and ensuring that they continue to work effectively for current and future generations of people, communities and businesses across North Hertfordshire.

