

The Marches Strategic Economic Plan 2018

September 2018

WORKING DRAFT

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Foreword

The Marches is a thriving, successful place to live and do business, with an exceptional quality of life and strong communities. People here collaborate and help each other succeed. As a partnership of businesses, local authorities, education and third sector organisations we are ambitious for growth, keen to grow our economy and improve the prosperity of our businesses and residents.

We are home to natural, cultural and heritage assets, such as the renowned Shropshire Hills AONB, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, key urban centres in Hereford, Shrewsbury and Telford, and beautiful, historically significant market towns. We have excellent schools, colleges and universities.

And we are well placed for growth. Our central location connects us well to nearby economies in the North West, West Midlands, South West and Wales. Technology is changing how people work and how businesses operate, allowing people to work in a much more diverse array of settings. These changes provide huge opportunities for the people and businesses of the Marches.

Our aim now is to work with our partners and businesses to grow our economy to £XXbn in GVA by 20XX. Doing so will add £XXbn to the UK economy, and create approximately XX,000 jobs. Crucially, we will achieve our economic potential by embracing high productivity growth and high value sectors.

In this goal we are building on recent success. Over the past four years the LEP, working with partners, has secured over £195m of investment, with £105m of this from three Growth Deals. Our existing investments will deliver 9,000 jobs, build 16,000 homes, provide 77,000 premises with access to broadband, create 3,025 apprenticeships by 2032.

Alongside these headline numbers the LEP and partners have achieved major successes, including [list to be finalised]:

- Telford Land Deal
- Development of Skylon Park
- Shrewsbury Big Town Plan
- Integrated transport projects and packages in our major centres
- The launch of the Growth Hub, and a new Business Incubation Centre

We are also in the process of delivering some essential infrastructure for growth, including: NMiTE, Shrewsbury Flaxmill, Hereford Cyber Security Centre at Skylon Park, and Newport Innovation and Enterprise Park.

Looking forward, we also recognise that we face challenges. Our population is ageing, and to reach our full potential we need to help residents improve their skills and, in some cases, retrain. We need to attract and retain more young people and skilled people to our area, and we need to ensure that skills training provides the expertise that our businesses need to grow.

We also need to ensure that our businesses have the infrastructure they need to grow. Our transport links are vital to our economy, but they could be stronger. Ultrafast broadband is a necessity for business in the 21st Century and we will work with partners to ensure good coverage and uptake in our key urban centres and across rural areas.

This strategy sets out the actions we are going to take deliver these opportunities and commitments. It has been developed collaboratively by businesses, colleges, universities, councils and our voluntary and community organisations, working together in the way that sets the Marches apart. It means we will continue to deliver and it is how we will make change happen.

Graham Wynn OBE

Chair, The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership

Executive Summary

Our 2018 Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) supports our ambition to become an £XXbn economy with XX,000 more businesses by 20XX. As we look ahead at the technological changes and demographic trends that are driving the global economy and the post Brexit trade and regulatory environment it is the right moment to take stock of our progress and agree the actions that will underpin the success of our communities and businesses in the years ahead, building on the real assets we have in the Marches.

The economy of Shropshire, Herefordshire and Telford & Wrekin contributes £14.3bn to the UK economy and has grown steadily since our 2014 economic strategy. We have high levels of economic activity and employment and:

- We are highly specialised in traditional, high value and high productivity sectors, including advanced manufacturing, food and drink, and have emerging strengths in environmental technology, cyber security and resilience, agri-tech, and innovative healthcare.
- We have a supportive businesses environment with a high business survival rate Our economy is characterised by micro businesses, but we are also home to major international firms.
- We have a very high quality of life with rich natural, cultural and heritage assets, and good quality schools, making us a net attractor of people. But there are also long standing barriers to meeting our potential.
- We have a dispersed, still relatively slow growing and ageing population, which puts pressure on our workforce and key services. However, it also offers the opportunity to develop innovative healthcare technologies and approaches.
- There is further to go to raise skills levels relative to the UK, but we have a strong education offer with excellent further education colleges and employer-led training providers, and have invested in a growing higher education provision.
- As a connecting area, we have key strategic economic links to the North West, West Midlands, South West and Wales.

We have agreed a clear vision of how we want the Marches to be, which will guide our investments and has led to the actions set out in this strategy:

The Marches:

1. A place which is open for business, up for business and pro-growth.
2. At the forefront of changes in how people live and work, using new technology and improved connectivity, to enable businesses and people to succeed.
3. A growing place, attracting more people to come, stay and build their careers and businesses, seen as a supportive place to start and grow a business.
4. A link not a boundary – connecting markets in the Midlands, Wales, South West and North.
5. A pioneer in the provision and testing of digitally driven healthcare for dispersed populations, supporting healthy ageing and economic participation in later life.
6. A global centre of excellence in advanced manufacturing, specifically automotive, cyber security, environmental technology and the next phase of technology development in agriculture and food production.
7. An inclusive place that helps residents from all communities thrive and develop with quality jobs offering good wages, training and progression.
8. A collaborative and proactive place with businesses, FEIs, HEIs and public organisations working together to agree what its needs to do and gets it done.

Increasing productivity is fundamental to meeting our potential and ambitions. Our strategy sets out actions which will drive each of the foundations of productivity defined in the Government's national Industrial Strategy:

- **Ideas** – we will aim to develop incubation and accelerator space with 'test labs' for firms to increase awareness of and test new technologies, support companies to understand opportunities to innovate, and set up an automation task force of business champions who can build understanding of the opportunities, particularly in our cyber, manufacturing and food sectors.
- **People** – we will aim to ensure our FEIs, training providers and HEIs colleges have high-quality facilities, develop business led networks to link with education providers at all levels and improve business-school engagement to highlight job opportunities in our growth sectors and support relevant curriculum development.
- **Infrastructure** – we will continue to invest in priority schemes and growth corridors, building a clear and compelling case for investment, improve broadband connectivity, and address accessibility issues to key training and employment sites.

- **Business environment** – we will provide business support to SMEs, ensure new employers have everything they need to move to the Marches, encourage local networks and support local supply chains.
- **Place** – we will support the distinctive strengths and needs of our market towns through a new “Opportunity Town Programme” with strong local ownership and partnership to tailor actions based on a detailed understanding of the hyper local economy and wider supply chain links. And we will continue to invest in the urban centres of Telford, Shrewsbury and Hereford.

Draft

1 A Strategic Economic Plan for the Marches

- 1.1 Since we agreed our Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) in 2014 we have secured £105m investment through three Growth Deals. This has led to a range of significant investments across our economy, in partnership with local businesses, local government, and HE/FE institutions.
- 1.2 The national and global context has changed substantially over the past four years. In particular, there is still considerable uncertainty around future regulatory, investment, trading and funding arrangements created by the EU referendum result and subsequent progress towards a Brexit deal.
- 1.3 This has created important challenges and opportunities for our communities and businesses. Our economy is characterised by a large agricultural and food & drink sector, and a strong advanced manufacturing sector – all of which will face important challenges arising from any increase in trade barriers with the EU. Many of our large employment sectors: retail, care and tourism – rely on EU labour to operate competitively.
- 1.4 This is therefore an important moment to take stock of recent investments, reflect on ongoing challenges and address them in a way which builds economic opportunity from the real assets which exist in the Marches.
- 1.5 In November 2017, the UK Government published its national Industrial Strategy, setting out its overall approach to supporting business growth and driving productivity. The national Industrial Strategy sets out five ‘Foundations of Productivity:’ ideas, people, infrastructure, business environment and places. Our strategy reflects these foundations and sets our priorities for action under each.
- 1.6 Recognising that many of our national economic challenges are cross-cutting, the Industrial Strategy also identified four ‘Grand Challenges’: AI and the data-driven economy, Clean Growth, the Future of Mobility, and the Ageing Society. Each of these Grand Challenges is relevant to the Marches:
 - AI and the data-driven economy is increasingly relevant to raising productivity across all sectors, but has particular importance for cybersecurity which is an emerging strength in our area.
 - Clean growth is important to ensure that economic development in the Marches complements and supports our natural assets. We have an emerging strength in renewable energy and we have recently completed an Energy Strategy for the Marches which sets out how we will take advantage of new opportunities around sustainable energy.

- The future of mobility is important because our links to other areas are essential for economic growth. New mobility technologies will be important to enhancing the productivity of our sectors and ensuring that people and goods can get to where they need to be in a timely manner.
- The ageing society is a relevant challenge for the Marches. Our residents are on average older than the country as a whole. Helping support our residents to live productive and healthy lives for longer, in a rural context where people are often further away from services, is essential to supporting productivity growth.

1.7 The Government is also requiring all LEPs to produce local industrial strategies. The aim of local industrial strategies is to develop targeted interventions that support productivity growth in specific sectors of the economy. It has invited a series of LEPs to do this, and we expect that the Marches will be asked to do so in due course.

1.8 Therefore, this SEP sets the foundation for the Marches economic strategy. It is a holistic overview of our economic strengths, opportunities and challenges, and sets out our broad approach to driving productivity growth. In due course, we expect to develop a Local Industrial Strategy that will set out specific actions to increase the productivity of some of our key growth and emerging sectors. The diagram below explains how our local strategies complement national priorities.

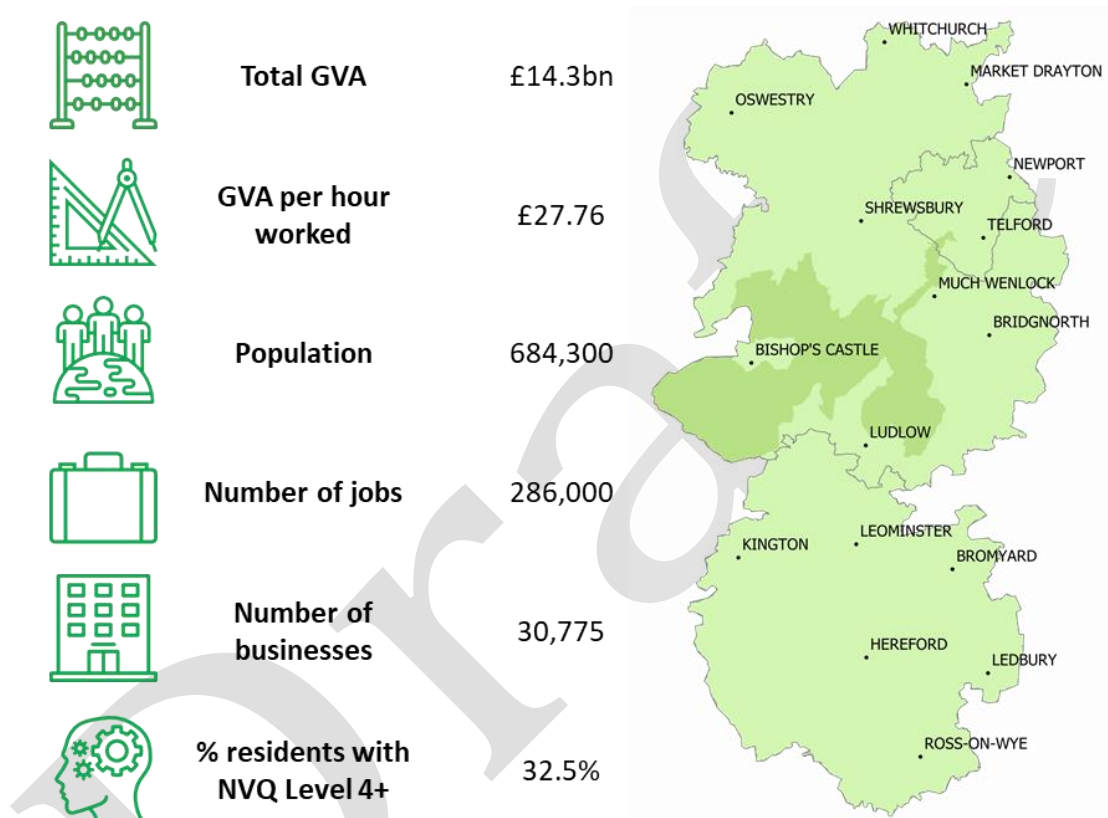
Figure 1. National strategy and local strategies



2 Our economy¹

2.1 The Marches is a large area, covering 2,300 square miles and a population of 684,300 people, 286,000 jobs and 30,775 businesses. Our economy contributes £14.3bn in economic output measured as Gross Value Added (GVA) or £21,178 per person. Our economy also generates exports worth £1.8bn.

Figure 2. **Headline economic statistics**



2.2 More residents here are engaged in the economy with an economic activity rate of 80% compared to 78.2% nationally. Employment is also high at 76.7% compared to the UK average of 74.7%. There are low levels of benefits dependency with only 0.7% of 18 to 64 year olds claiming Job Seekers Allowance, which is slightly lower than the national figure of 1.2%. Employment and Support Allowance claimants make up 5.3% of the working age population in the Marches, compared to 5.9% nationally.

2.3 We have significant sectoral strengths in advanced manufacturing with specialisms in metals, machinery and automotive, and food and drink, particularly meat and dairy

¹ Our strategy is underpinned by a comprehensive and detailed evidence base available online at: <https://www.marcheslep.org.uk/what-we-do/economic-plan/>.

processing. And we have emerging, nationally important strengths, in environmental technology, cyber security and resilience, agri-tech, and innovative healthcare.

- 2.4 Overall, our productivity is lower than the UK average at £27.76 per hour worked and has been relatively static since 2004. The productivity challenge is not unique to the Marches, but its causes here do reflect our demographics, skills and connectivity.

A supportive business environment – micro businesses and major international firms

- 2.5 The Marches economy is characterised by micro businesses (those with fewer than ten employees), which make up 89.7% of the Marches business base. This is similar to the UK average of 89.4%. Many of our businesses operate in rural areas, and many reflect the growing culture of working remotely and from home.
- 2.6 We are a supportive business environment with strong, closely networked SMEs, and active local Business Boards. We have the highest two-year business survival rate (80.2%) of all LEP areas. This reflects a business culture that is established and mature, and provides a stable environment for further increasing the number of businesses that are started here.
- 2.7 The Marches is also home to major international businesses in a range of advanced manufacturing specialisms, logistics, and food and drink – including: BAE Systems, GKN, Ricoh, Special Metals Wiggin, Kuehne and Nagel, Cargill, Avara Foods (the new joint venture between Cargill and Faccenda), ABP Food Group, Müller and Heineken. Other large companies in the area include Capgemini, Culina and CML.
- 2.8 We export £1.8bn of goods, 76% of which are to the European Union. Germany is our largest export market making up 23% of our exports (£415m). Also, Germany has the largest share of foreign owned companies in Telford.

Centres of population growth

- 2.9 The population of the Marches is 684,300. The three main urban centres: Hereford (60,825 population), Shrewsbury (71,864) and Telford (147,698), are home to roughly 41% of the population.
- 2.10 Over the past five years, the Marches has seen population growth roughly in line with that of the UK as a whole, though the population of Telford has grown much more rapidly and Shropshire has seen slower growth. In a few areas, including Shrewsbury, north of Ludlow and east of Bridgnorth, there has been some population decline.
- 2.11 Our population is older and ageing more rapidly than the national average. Across the Marches 22.1% of the population are aged 65 and over compared to 18.2% nationally. This figure is as high as 24% in Herefordshire and 23.9% in Shropshire. In the Marches, the proportion of people in this age category has increased from 16.8% in 1997.

Between 1997 and 2017, the number of over 65s has increased on average 2.1% per annum, compared to 1.3% in the UK.

- 2.12 There is also a lower proportion of young people. Only 16.6% of the population are aged 20 to 34 compared to the UK average of 19.9%. The lowest proportion of this age group is in Shropshire (15.6%).
- 2.13 The demographic profile of the Marches presents both challenges and opportunities. A slow growing, ageing population contributes to an ageing workforce and puts pressure on health and social care. But it is also an opportunity to pioneer new healthcare and ageing related technologies in a dispersed population.

A strong educational offer – tackling low skills levels

- 2.14 The Marches has a strong further education (FE) offer with three FE colleges: Herefordshire and Ludlow College (currently undertaking a merger with North Shropshire College), Shrewsbury College (which is the largest in England) and Telford College, providing significant HE level provision. We also have nationally leading, business-led training providers, such as the Marches Centre of Manufacturing and Technology (MCMT), Hereford Group Training Association (HGTA) and members of Marches Skills Provider Network (MSPN). Recent investment has increased provider capacity to deliver programmes that meet business needs, including across the advanced manufacturing and engineering sectors. Our college and other provider base primarily support people who go on to work in our SMEs or are already in that workforce. This places particular requirements and parameters on developing both business relationships and retaining contact with students once they enter the workforce.
- 2.15 In recent years we have developed our dedicated higher education (HE) provision and there are now four HE institutions: Harper Adams University, University of Wolverhampton's Telford Innovation Campus, and University Centre Shrewsbury. The most recent addition to the Marches HE offer will be the New Model in Technology and Engineering (NMiTE) with its first cohort starting in 2020.
- 2.16 Despite these strengths, the Marches has a lower skill base relative to the UK. For instance, 32.5% of working age residents in the Marches have qualifications roughly equivalent to degree level or higher, compared to the national average of 38.4%. Equally, 19.5% of working age residents in the Marches have no qualifications or NVQ Level 1 compared to the UK average of 18.6%. In parts of south Hereford, north Shrewsbury and Telford, over one third of residents have either no formal qualifications or NVQ Level 1.
- 2.17 There are lower than average levels of people in higher level jobs. In the Marches 26.9% of the working age population are managers and top professionals which is lower than the UK average of 31.0%. Almost 13% of the Marches working age population work in elementary occupations compared to the national average of 10.5%.

2.18 The skills challenge in the Marches is linked to the difficulty in attracting and retaining young people. Between June 2015 and June 2016, there was a net outflow of 1,380 15 to 19 year olds and a net inflow of only 190 people aged 20 to 34. This suggests that many young people are leaving the Marches to either to attend university or to work.

A high quality of life with rich natural, cultural and heritage assets

2.19 The Marches is a great place to live with a high quality of life. Many people wishing to settle down, buy a house and have a family choose the Marches because of this.

2.20 We have abundant and rich natural, cultural and heritage assets. Our picturesque natural landscape is well known for the range of leisure activities which take place there. The Shropshire Hills are a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The Ironbridge Gorge is one of the UK's Two of the UK's 31 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and, along with are located in the Marches: the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal, just over the border in Wales and the Ironbridge Gorge. These sites preserves and tells the story of the area's role as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution. We are also home to many beautiful and historically significant market towns.

2.21 The attractiveness of the Marches as a place to live and work is indicated by high levels of positive net migration. The Marches had a net inflow of 14,540 residents between 2012 and 2017, and moreover the net inflow of people per year has increased over fivefold since 2012.

2.22 Due to these strengths, housing affordability is mixed in the Marches. There are areas of high affordability, particularly in Telford, where house prices are 3 to 4 times higher than annual household incomes. However, this increases to a ratio of over 10 in the low affordability area north of Ledbury, near Malvern Hills.

2.23 Affordability is particularly an issue in Herefordshire with significant potential for further provision of starter homes and smaller houses to support inward migration and retention of talented young people and families. To address these challenges, all three local authorities are taking action to provide affordable, mixed tenure housing for key workers.

Strong economic links but connectivity challenges

2.24 The Marches economy has excellent strategic economic links with other parts of the UK and beyond. By being centrally located we have close economic ties to the North West, West Midlands, South West and Wales based on our major transport corridors. This provides us with good access to key cities including Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol and Cardiff.

- 2.25 Our transport links are essential for linking our sectors and businesses to other economies, as supply chains and business transactions extend beyond administrative borders. For instance, our manufacturing strengths in the east of the Marches around Telford and Bridgnorth are closely linked to automotive supply chains in the West Midlands. Connections to surrounding economies also extend to the flow of people. There is a net outflow of 3,000 people leaving the Marches for work each day with over 42% going to Birmingham. We attract workers from bordering areas including Mid Wales, Wolverhampton, Worcestershire and Staffordshire.
- 2.26 Our ability to utilise these economic links is hindered by connectivity challenges. These challenges impact the movement of people, goods and services both within the Marches and beyond, hindering the productivity and success of our businesses. Transport challenges predominantly are caused by a lack of dual carriageways, alternative road routes, and reliable, frequent rail services.
- 2.27 There are also challenges with digital connectivity, which is increasingly important given the growth of the digital economy in recent years, the importance of technology across every sector, and the prevalence of remote working in the Marches. Connectivity to broadband is particularly problematic in rural areas. Much of south and north Shropshire and west Herefordshire has slow broadband (0-10 Mbit/s). In some areas, this accounts for over 80% of premises. Issues are also reported in urban areas despite ostensibly better connectivity. There are also issues with poor mobile phone coverage.

3 Our potential

3.1 The strengths and assets that we have give us a strong basis on which to further drive growth and productivity. We do not underestimate the challenge and complexity of doing so, but the prize is significant. If we were to work with our partners to invest in delivering our potential by 2038 then the Marches economy would be:

3.2 [This section will set out our economic potential in terms of specific metrics – including GVA, jobs, business starts, skills levels, population and homes – based on some assumptions about how our economy could grow and become more productive. The aim of this section will be to underline the importance of contribution that the Marches can make to the UK economy].

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4 Our vision

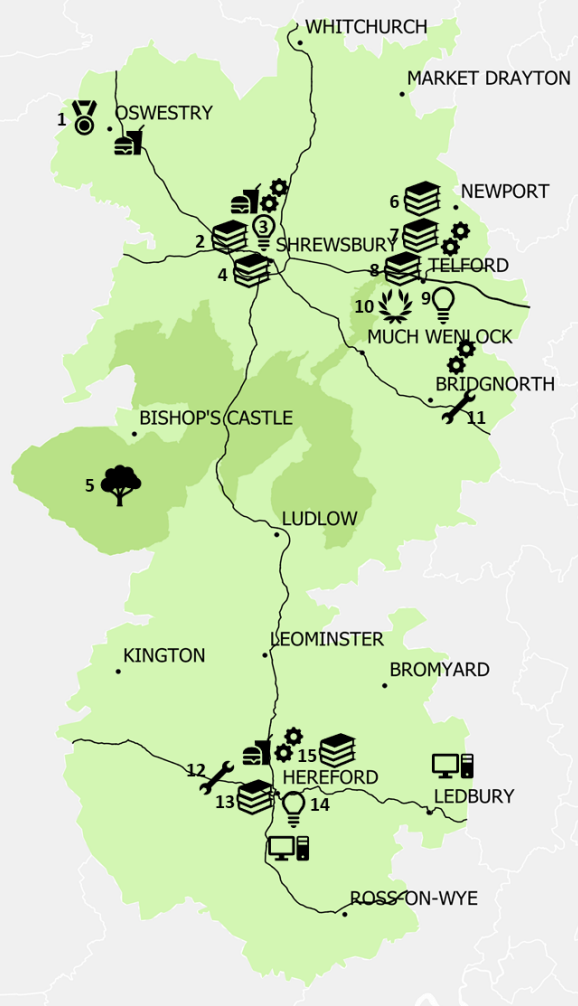
- 4.1 The Marches is a high-quality place to live, work and visit. Businesses started here are more likely to survive and flourish. Residents and visitors experience our wonderful landscape, with a host of outdoor sports and leisure, historic towns and high-quality arts and renowned food. We are historically a boundary but increasingly well connected, with our firms in national and global supply chains and at the cutting edge of new industries in business security and resilience and environmental and agricultural technology. Our population is also growing more slowly (and in some areas declining), it is ageing faster than other areas of the UK and we have lower skills levels. But we are pro-growth and determined to build on our strengths, using our demography and quality of life to clear opportunities.
- 4.2 Building on these strengths and based on clear evidence and engagement with partners we have developed a clear set of ambitions.

We want the Marches to be:

1. A place which is open for business, up for business and pro-growth.
2. At the forefront of changes in how people live and work, using new technology and improved connectivity, to enable businesses and people to succeed.
3. A growing place, attracting more people to come, stay and build their careers and businesses, seen as a supportive place to start and grow a business.
4. A link not a boundary – connecting markets in the Midlands, Wales, South West and North.
5. A pioneer in the provision and testing of digitally driven healthcare for dispersed populations, supporting healthy ageing and economic participation in later life.
6. A centre of excellence in advanced manufacturing, specifically automotive, cyber security, environmental technology and the next phase of technology development in agriculture and food production.
7. An inclusive place that helps residents from all communities thrive and develop with quality jobs offering good wages, training and progression.
8. A collaborative and proactive place with businesses, FEIs, HEIs and public organisations work together to agree what needs to happen and to get it done.

5 Our assets

- 1. Robert Jones & Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital**
A global centre of excellence in orthopaedics, leading innovation in musculoskeletal surgery, medicine and rehabilitation. Extensive in/outpatient wards, operating theatres and diagnostic facilities.
- 2. Shrewsbury Colleges Group**
Shropshire's largest provider of post-16 education with almost 10,000 students a year, teaching academic and vocational courses. Recent investments of £15m.
- 3. Shropshire Food Enterprise Centre**
One of ten Food Enterprise Centres in the UK providing incubation/grow on space for food and drink firms.
- 4. University Centre Shropshire**
A new university focusing on environmental technology, health management and care, and digital. Recently launched £1.9m Centre for Research into Environmental Science and Technology (CREST).
- 5. Shropshire Hills AONB**
One of the first areas to be designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the Shropshire Hills are 310 square miles of pristine rolling hills, woods and valleys. Known for the high quality of life it offers.
- 6. Harper Adams University**
Largest land based HEI in the UK leading research into global food production, processing, animal science, engineering and land management. Equipped with labs and farm land. It attracts students from across the UK.
- 7. Uni of Wolverhampton (Telford Innovation Campus)**
Recently £10m investment into facilities to support new engineering courses and industrial projects. Also home to the International Academy and the Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT).
- 8. Telford College**
Over 8,000 students on academic, vocational and HE courses, and apprenticeships in over 70 different industry areas. New 7th form links students with universities and local businesses.
- 9. T54**
A 31.6ha site of landscaped grounds for industrial, warehouse, and R&D use. It has had significant inward investment success.



- 10. Ironbridge Gorge**
One of the first UK World Heritage Sites with designated status in 1986. It celebrates the contribution of the area to the birth of the Industrial Revolution. Now home to ten visitor attractions.
 - 11. Marches Centre of Manufacturing & Technology (MCMT)**
MCMT is an employer-led training provider focused on advanced engineering and automotive. It aims to address the skills gap in manufacturing
 - 12. Hereford Group Training Association (HGTA)**
HGTA was set up by seven local metal engineering companies to train engineers. Over 50 years later, it still works with leading firms to provide high quality apprenticeships and courses.
 - 13. New Model in Technology & Engineering (NMITE)**
NMITE will be the newest UK university in 40 years. Its engineers will solve complex global challenges: food production, cyber security and artificial intelligence. Its 'agile' campus will foster collaboration and innovation with high-tech labs and incubation space.
 - 14. Skylon Park, Hereford Enterprise Zone**
The only Enterprise Zone in the country focused on defence and security. Will be home to the Centre for Cyber Security with incubation space for 20 businesses, secure testing facilities and access to research expertise.
 - 15. Herefordshire and Ludlow College**
A college of 2,000 students with a mostly vocational programme reflecting the local area and A level courses. It has a specialist land-based campus and 257ha estate.
- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| FEI/HEI | World Heritage Site |
| Training centre | Advanced manufacturing |
| Innovation centre | Food and drink |
| Centre of excellence | Cyber security and resilience |
| AONB | |

6 Our sectors

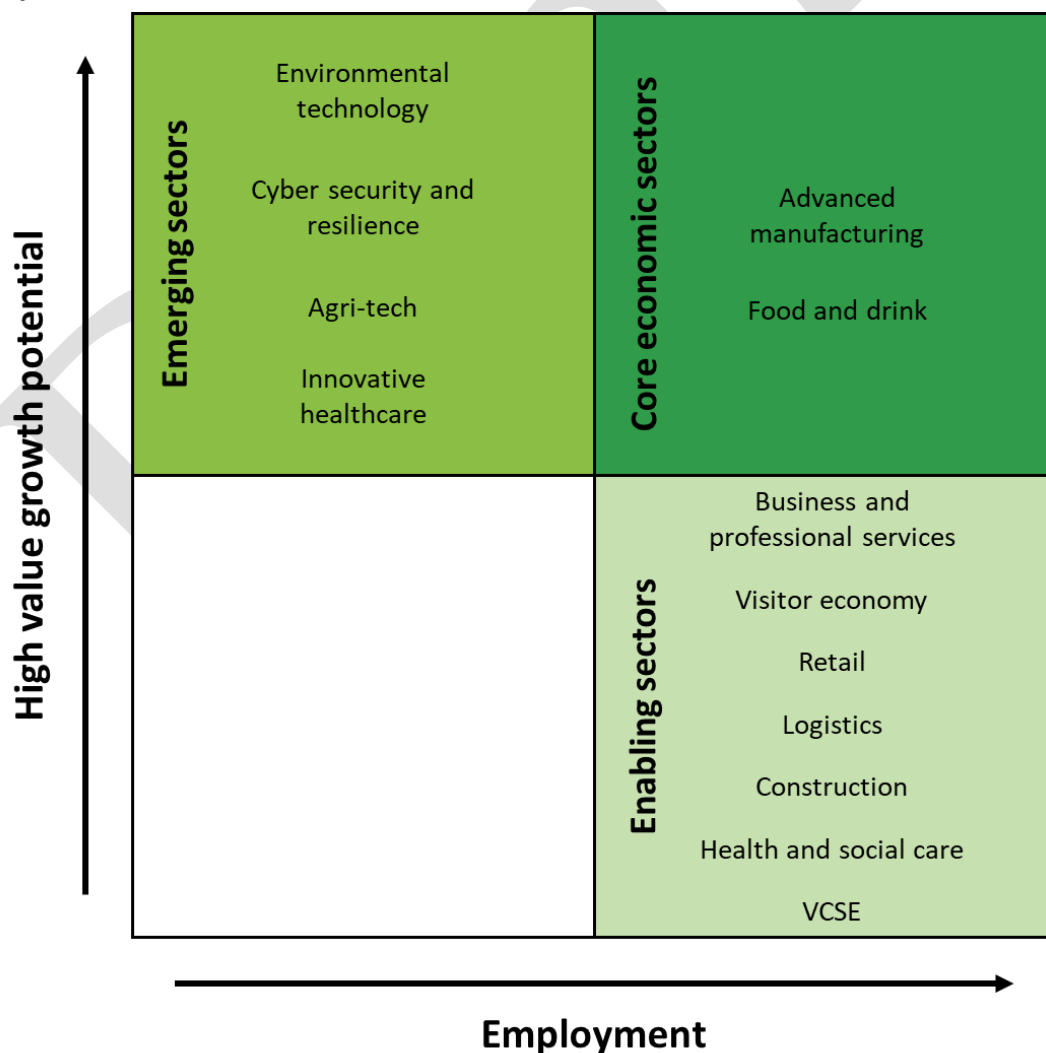
6.1 Our businesses define our economy with distinct existing and emerging specialisms. The purpose of our strategy is to support growth in high productivity businesses.

6.2 Taking our sectoral strengths, there are three areas of focus:

- **Core economic sectors** – high productivity with high levels of employment and specialisation
- **Emerging sectors** – high future economic and productivity growth potential but lower employment and fewer, smaller companies
- **Enabling sectors** – high employment, particularly for entry level jobs, and vital to supporting our economy’s function, but low productivity

6.3 These areas of focus are illustrated in the diagram below:

Figure 3. Sectors in the Marches



Core economic sectors

Advanced manufacturing

- 6.4 **Home to global manufacturers and well-established supply chains of SMEs in the diverse and distinct strengths of metals, machinery, plastics and rubber products, and automotive.**
- 6.5 With the birthplace of the industrial revolution at Ironbridge, the Marches has a long history of engineering innovation. The Marches today has a significant manufacturing sector with over 26,800 jobs, contributing £2.3bn to its economy (including Food & Drink). With diverse specialisms in metals, machinery, plastics and rubber products, and automotive, there are several large manufacturing firms in the Marches including Special Metals, Ricoh, BAE and GKN.
- 6.6 The Marches is a key part of the West Midlands automotive supply chain with a range of Tier 2 and 3 companies in Telford and the surrounding area supplying the large OEMs in the West Midlands. These companies operate in niche areas of automotive, producing a range of parts including batteries.
- 6.7 Quality skills providers operating a business-led model successfully supply Marches manufacturing firms with highly skilled workers. Hereford Group Training Association (HGTA) has a 50 years' experience of providing high quality apprenticeships in engineering, as well as courses in leadership and management, customer services, accounting and business administration.
- 6.8 The Marches Centre of Manufacturing and Technology (MCMT) is a new employer led initiative which has been developed to contribute to closing the skills gap to support the manufacturing sector. Growth Deal funding has supported this and other training providers in increasing their capacity to deliver advanced engineering and manufacturing programmes. In addition, recent investment in the University of Wolverhampton's Telford Innovation Campus has increased the number of undergraduate, postgraduate and professional qualifications available in the Marches.
- 6.9 The New Model in Technology and Engineering (NMiTE) is a new university in Hereford entirely focused on manufacturing and engineering. It is an integral step in overcoming a shortage of engineers and narrowing the gender gap in engineering. NMiTE takes a radical and innovative new approach to learning, whereby students will solve problems set by industry experts through collaboration and practical experience. The first substantially sized cohort (200-300) will start in September 2020, with the intake increasing in the years thereafter to 350.

Food and drink

- 6.10 **Our rich agricultural sector provides the base for a strong food and drink sector characterised by international companies.**

- 6.11 The legacy and heritage of the Marches as a farming region has evolved into a nationally significant food and drink sector with over 9,000 jobs.
- 6.12 With specialisations in cider and fruit wines, meat and dairy processing, a number of international companies have a presence in the Marches, including Cargill and Heineken, based in Hereford, ABP Food Group, which has sites in Shrewsbury and Oswestry, and Müller, which has its head office in Market Drayton.
- 6.13 Food and drink processing are part of a complex agri-food supply chain in the Marches. Companies of a range of sizes are involved in the supply side, producing raw materials from farming, feed and other inputs. A highly specialised food packaging cluster exists in Telford, linked to manufacturing specialisms in plastics, with firms such as Sirane and TCL Packaging. Together, all components of the agri-food supply chain culminate in the Marches producing high quality food and drink products for the UK market. The presence of Harper Adams University further strengthens this cluster.
- 6.14 The Shropshire Food Enterprise Centre in Shrewsbury is one of only ten centres nationally. It offers fledgling food production start-ups and SMEs excellent production units equipped to the highest standard with on-site business support.

Emerging sectors

Environmental technology

- 6.15 **Nationally significant strengths in anaerobic digestion coupled by the opportunity to become leaders in water management and natural capital management.**
- 6.16 Population growth, and the growing demand for and depletion of natural resources mean that environmental technology is taking an increasingly more important role in sustainable development. More areas will require management to avoid pollution or ecological damage, or to addressing the changing conditions associated with climate change. Environmental technology refers to both renewable energy generation and the application of environmental sciences, environmental monitoring and electronic devices to manage the natural environment.
- 6.17 With over 13% of the UK's anaerobic digestors located within the Marches, we are leading the UK in this form of alternative energy and embracing principles of the circular economy by utilising waste products from agriculture and food production.
- 6.18 The Centre for Research into Environmental Science and Technology (CREST) at University Centre Shrewsbury puts the Marches on the map in terms of natural resource management and natural capital management. The centre researches how best to manage the natural environment in line with societal and economic needs.
- 6.19 There is huge potential for the Marches to develop strengths in natural resource management through the use of environmental sensors, energy efficiency techniques,

energy requirement minimisation, waste management, water supply management, and air pollution management.

- 6.20 There is also opportunity for the Marches to become a test bed for the development of Natural Capital Management techniques. The Marches has the ambition to become a national leader in natural resource management and natural capital, beginning with water.

Cyber security and resilience

- 6.21 **An internationally recognised defence and security sector with an emerging cyber cluster in 'Cyber Valley' specialising in business security.**

6.22 In our digital economy, cyber security has become a global priority, with increasing threat from cybercrime and terrorism. The UK Government has estimated that in 2017, over four in ten of all UK businesses suffered at least one cyber-attack. It is important that we protect our businesses, data and networks from cyber security threats.

6.23 Home to the Special Air Service and G4S HQ, the Marches has a long-standing tradition of defence and security. Bridging this existing strength and the new digital sector is the emerging cyber security and resilience.

6.24 Along with neighbouring Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, Herefordshire is part of 'Cyber Valley', a highly specialised cluster of cyber companies around Great Malvern. Innovative companies in this sector are at the forefront offering B2B solutions to companies to address matters of 'everyday' security.

6.25 Hereford Enterprise Zone at Skylon Park is the only enterprise zone in the UK with a specialism in defence and security. A joint £9m investment from the University of Wolverhampton, Hereford Council, Marches LEP and ERDF has established the Centre for Cyber Security. Opening in 2020, it will provide incubation space for 20 new companies. Acting as a hub of research and development, it will encourage collaboration between businesses, NMiTE and the University of Wolverhampton. The centre will also provide secure testing facilities and specialist cyber security training for local residents and businesses.

Agri-tech

- 6.26 **A nationally significant agri-tech cluster characterised by engineering and precision farming with world renowned Harper Adams University at its core.**

6.27 Agriculture is an important sector in the Marches. In 2016, there were 20,634 farm labourers with 49.6% of these workers employed in Herefordshire and a further 47.2% employed in Shropshire. In the Marches, there is 460,000 hectares of farmed land, which makes up 77.2% of total land. Of the 6,731 holdings in the Marches, a large percentage are relatively small, between 5 and 20 hectares (27.0%).

- 6.28 Global population growth has put increasing pressure on the environment, particularly by increasing demand for food. Agri-tech addresses this challenge by using technology to sustainably increase agricultural yields and productivity.
- 6.29 Linked to our strengths across agri-food, the Marches is developing a nationally significant agri-tech cluster. At the heart of agri-tech in the Marches is Harper Adams University, the world leader in agri-tech research and the largest specialist land-based institution in the UK. Surrounding Harper Adams are many small companies operating in distinct niches, as well as some larger firms and multinationals
- 6.30 Our specialisms include advanced engineering and precision farming. The National Centre for Precision Farming, based at Harper Adams, is developing automation, drones and autonomous systems. We have ambition to grow our expertise in autonomous vehicles used for crop production to a larger scale, creating a 'hands free farm' building on the success of 'hands free hectare'. Collaboration with other areas through the Agri Tech West Alliance (ATWA) is increasing access to innovation support for businesses within the sector.

Innovative healthcare

- 6.31 **An ageing population in a rural area offers opportunity to pioneer new innovative healthcare approaches and technologies.**
- 6.32 The UK, along with much of the Western world, has an ageing population. People are typically living for longer, but not necessarily living healthily. Healthy ageing in rural areas have specific challenges as patients may have to travel considerable distances to access key services and domiciliary care providers may not deliver services to certain areas due to the extra resources it would require.
- 6.33 Innovative healthcare offers the opportunity to overcome the application of health and social care in dispersed populations. It can revolutionise care commissioning and provision through data driven prevention and remote monitoring.
- 6.34 The Marches has at least 870 jobs in innovative healthcare. There are emerging capabilities in assistive technology and digital health. Companies operating in assistive technology in the Marches include Chunc Wheelchairs and TPG DisableAids, both of which produce mobility equipment. There are smaller companies working with healthcare related data. The Living Circle provides cloud-based services for health and care organisations. Bronze Labs, a company with expertise in the Internet of Things and cloud computing software, has recently launched The Tribe Project. This aims to support NHS and Adult social care resourcing through a machine learning to identify areas of high resource need and better allocate resources.

Enabling sectors

Business and Professional Services

- 6.35 There are 25,275 jobs in the business and professional services sector. This sector has grown 3.4% since 2011, which is slower than the national average of 12.5%. The highest number of jobs are in employment activities (8,500 jobs), real estate activities (4,750 jobs), and legal and accounting (4,000). Renting and leasing activities, which has 2,125 jobs, is relatively specialised in the Marches with an LQ of 1.45.
- 6.36 The fastest growing sub-sector is other professional, scientific and technical activities, which has 1,625 jobs and grew by 80.6% since 2011. In 2017 there were 3,170 businesses in this sector. Over 92% of these are micros, which is similar to the UK average. All of the businesses operating in financial services and insurance are micro businesses. There are also large companies in this sector including Capgemini, Staffline Group and ReAssure. The finance and real estate sub-sectors contribute £2.3bn to the Marches economy.

Visitor economy

- 6.37 The Marches has a diverse visitor economy offer comprised of our beautiful natural landscape, World Heritage Site and historic market towns. The visitor economy plays a supportive role in our economy. Our natural, cultural and heritage assets are essential to attracting people to live and work in the Marches. It is also a large employer with almost 4,250 jobs in accommodation, supporting thousands more jobs in related sectors such as restaurants, museums, transport, and visitor and leisure attractions.

Retail

- 6.38 Retail is a large employer. There are 33,700 retail jobs across the Marches, amounting to over 12% of total jobs. This sector grew almost 5% between 2011 and 2016. Retail provides entry level jobs and long-term careers for people, as well as part-time, flexible work for older people. Retail is also important for our town centres. Our shops are often the front-end for local farming and food production. Without our retail sector, made up of major brands and individual shops, we would be unable to provide such a compelling lifestyle offer to people choosing to locate to the Marches.

Logistics

- 6.39 Our logistics sector, employing almost 8,000 people, is closely related to our supply chains in advanced manufacturing, agriculture and food and drink. Almost 80% of jobs are in activities related to freight and road transport, including warehousing. Key companies in logistics include Kuehne and Nagel, Culina Logistics and CML.

Construction

- 6.40 There are 18,500 jobs in construction in the Marches. Of these jobs, 6,500 are in specialised construction activities, including electrical installation, plumbing, joining, roofing, painting, scaffolding and plastering. The construction sector is central to

driving economic growth by enabling the development of infrastructure, employment sites and housing delivery.

Health and social care

6.41 A high number of people are employed in health and social care. The sector has 41,000 jobs, 23,500 of these are in human health and a further 10,500 are in residential care. In the Marches, as well as across the UK, this sector is expected to experience an increase in demand as the population ages.

Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE)

6.42 There are over 4,000 registered VCSE organisations with a further 2,418 small informal groups in the Marches. The sector employs 6,760 people and has over 700,000 volunteers contributing over 6 million to the local economy. The VCSE sector in the Marches provides a broad range of functions including helping unemployed and economically inactive people access employment, training carers, providing relief to health and social care services, supporting skills and reducing absenteeism, and finding innovative ways to overcome transport restrictions.

Draft

7 Ideas

- 7.1 Innovation is essential for our businesses to grow, be competitive and succeed. We have highly innovative firms at the forefront of new technology and techniques in agri-tech and cyber security and resilience. We need to ensure that more of our businesses have the opportunities to both understand the technology and processes that could benefit them, and have access to the leadership and management skills needed to take advantage.
- 7.2 Innovation is also central to creating opportunities for businesses and individuals from the long-term trends of an ageing population and the combined effects of high levels of employment and shortages of some skills. Improving productivity is both a goal and an opportunity, particularly in those sectors such as agriculture and food production where we have both high concentrations of firms and centres of innovation and research, such as Harper Adams University.
- 7.3 And in an economy with such a high level of small businesses, and high level of economic activity, there is a real opportunity to strengthen the overall business environment to support growth and innovation, including through the right kinds of space, networking opportunities and support for smaller scale commercial research projects and business/FEI/HEI links to engage with real world technical and business solutions.
- 7.4 We will:
- Develop incubation and accelerator space at our key employment sites, such as Hereford Enterprise Zone, the Flaxmill, and Newport Innovation Park, offering resources, mentoring and business support for new businesses at the early stage of their development and those which are rapidly growing.
 - Create 'test labs' linked to the incubators and accelerators where firms can be creative, learn about new ways of doing things and try new technologies.
 - Bring together SMEs and larger firms (starting with construction and agri-tech), as well as our HEIs, to develop business-led networks, events and workshops for companies to understand the opportunities which exist in their sector to innovate and boost productivity.
 - Set up an automation task force to help companies apply new technologies, for instance in AI, automation and robotics, building on successful schemes like the work of Harper Adams in connecting farmers to new innovations in autonomous crop production.
 - Work with local authorities, Primary Care Trusts, the NHS and businesses to trial new innovative healthcare technologies.

- Support innovation in cyber security at the Hereford Cyber Security Centre, the development of a hub for composites and digital in Telford and digital health in Shrewsbury.

Draft

8 People

- 8.1 Our people are fundamental to our future success. The education offer in the Marches is a significant strength and vital in driving growth and attracting people to the area. In a tight labour market our firms risk struggling to recruit, whilst at the same time people already in work are having to learn new skills as new technology and techniques drive new ways of doing business – particularly in our food production and manufacturing businesses.
- 8.2 There is clear evidence from the UK and overseas of the crucial role that skills institutions play in the success of towns and cities. Investing in the skills, knowledge and experience of our people, and in high-quality provision is a major priority, as is ensuring that our colleges and universities are working ever more closely with businesses and people at all stage of their careers. Our schools have a vital role to play in allowing young people to understand the careers available and to experience work, particularly in our more rural and less connected communities.
- 8.3 We will:
- Work with our HE and colleges to ensure that private and public investment is targeted at providing the high-quality facilities and provision needed to reflect the opportunities that exist locally and nationally, and that existing and future students have the information they need to understand the opportunities available.
 - Work with SMEs in our major sectors and skills providers (starting with Construction) to develop business led networks to encourage links with schools, colleges and universities, including developing and maintaining links with learners who enter the workforce, and exploring the opportunity to fund further learning jointly between the public sector and employers.
 - Work with the health and social care sector to explore the development of a Marches Digital Care curriculum, providing core skills and expertise in new care techniques and technologies.
 - Build on the work of the local authorities and Careers and Enterprise Company programmes to develop a “Future Leaders” scheme that offers schools the opportunity to engage with businesses locally to provide short term mentoring, workplace experiences and real world problem solving projects for 13/14 year olds, showcasing the opportunities available in the Marches, before making GCSE choices.
 - Further support the development of specific partnerships between HE, FE and businesses.

- Work with businesses and education providers to support lifelong learning and upskilling relative to the needs and opportunities of local businesses, particularly those in growth sectors.
- Expand employer led learning using existing models such as Hereford Group Training Association and the Marches Centre for Manufacturing and Technology.

Draft

9 Infrastructure

9.1 Infrastructure is fundamental to a modern, successful economy. Transport links drive economic growth, determine the location of housing and employment sites, and connect the area to surrounding economies. The Marches has four strategic transport corridors which provide economic connections to surrounding regions. These include:

- North – South Spine connecting the Marches to the North West, South West and South Wales
- East – West Central connecting the Marches with mid-Wales and the West Midlands
- North West Frontier connecting the Marches to the North West and North Wales
- Wales and Marches to Midlands connecting the Marches to the West Midlands, North West and South West

9.2 These corridors are expected to create XXX jobs and build XXX homes. [Figures on growth areas and expected housing delivery and jobs are being collated and will be added to this section].

9.3 The Marches road network is well used, with an estimated 2.6 billion miles of motor vehicle travel every year. This total has increased by 22% since 2000. Over 7.1m entries and exits were recorded at railway stations in the Marches in 2016/17, an increase of 3.4% over the previous year.

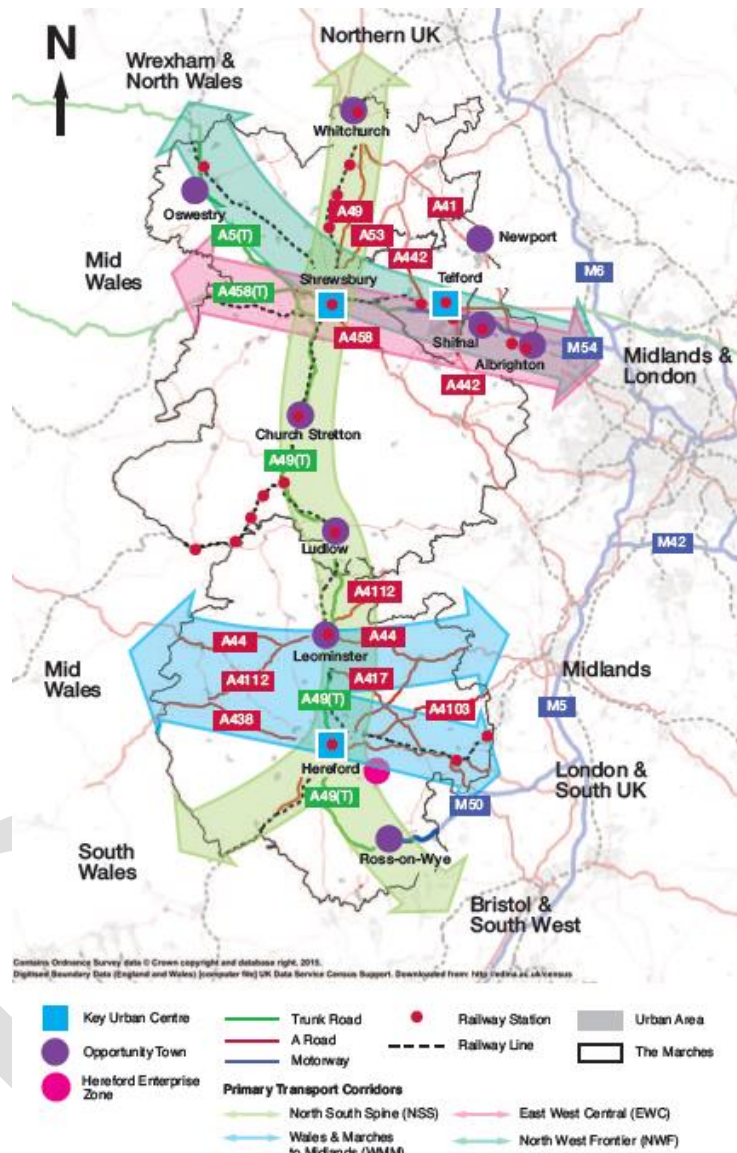
9.4 However, there are a number of challenges affecting the Marches road and rail networks. Many main arterial roads are single carriageway causing poor average speeds, long journey times and poor reliability. This is further exacerbated when there is slow moving farm traffic on these roads. When traffic incidents cause delays on major roads, there are a lack of alternative routes, causing further delays to journeys. West of the motorways, roads become single carriage roads, hindering efficiency and reliability. These issues limit the movement of people, goods and services, affecting both residents and businesses.

9.5 High-spec broadband and mobile coverage is also essential for high productivity growth. It enables businesses to function and is important for the many people in the Marches working remotely or from home. In 2015, the Marches secured £7.7m of Growth Deal funding to roll out superfast broadband. Many areas now have superfast broadband (30-300Mbit/s), particularly Shrewsbury and Telford and a high percentage of premises have access to ultrafast broadband (300Mbit/s+) in Telford, Newport and south Herefordshire.

9.6 However, there remain large areas of the Marches with slow broadband, especially in rural south Shropshire between Ludlow, Bishop's Castle and Bridgnorth. Many

businesses in urban areas report inadequate broadband. Given the shift towards remote working and an internet-based economy, provision of ultrafast broadband across the area is vital to support home-based businesses and home-workers, as well as larger companies based in rural areas.

Figure 4. Strategic Transport Corridors



9.7 To support economic development in the Marches it is important to invest in priority schemes and corridors, enhance broadband and mobile coverage, and potentially upgrade water and energy to support housing and employment sites. It is important for us to encourage companies to locate to the Marches by providing high quality employment sites which are accessible, close to housing for staff, and have ready supply of energy and other utilities. These sites need to be 'shovel-ready', as companies are often unwilling or unable to wait long periods for remediation works or planning permission to begin development. In recent years, our Enterprise Zone at Skylon Park has started to provide this type of space.

9.8 We will:

- Invest in priority schemes: [list to be agreed by LEP Board and partners]
- Get a small number of strategic sites across the Marches 'shovel ready' for development with physical and digital infrastructure, and utilities in place.
- Ensure that technical studies for infrastructure projects are completed in advance to make effective funding bids and secure more capital investment.
- Improve high speed broadband in south Shropshire, parts of north Shropshire and west Herefordshire, and ensure that the three key urban centres have ultrafast broadband.
- Work with bus operators and anchor tenants to facilitate conversations to improve public transport links to address accessibility issues to key training and employment sites.
- Work with local authorities to explore land value capture mechanisms that can be used to invest in transport infrastructure.

10 Business environment

- 10.1 The Marches has a supportive business environment. We have a high business survival rate of 80.2% after two years, compared to the national average of 75.6%, and a low business death rate of 9.1%, compared to the UK average of 11.6%. A supportive business environment includes access to finance and business support services for small businesses, including those wishing to grow. Our Growth Hub, which is in the top quartile of all Growth Hubs, has supported nearly 9,000 businesses to date using a decentralised model which suits the needs of our area. Now we need to help more firms start and grow.
- 10.2 It is also important that there is adequate space available for firms of different sizes from start-ups, companies wishing to grow, and established, large companies, as their needs tend to vary. Our relatively low business birth rate of 10.1%, compared to the national average of 14.6% suggests that we need to provide more support for new and fast growing companies. The LEP and partners have plans to develop more start-up space at the Flaxmill in Shrewsbury, Shell Store in Hereford and Newport Innovation Park in Telford. Developing this space, and helping to develop a strong ecosystem will be important to nurturing innovative companies in the area.
- 10.3 Business networks also have a key role to play in developing local supply chains and developing economic growth. We have a strong tradition of collaboration and networks between our companies, such as through our three Business Boards. Often these networks connect to wider geographies through their supply chains, such as Agri-Tech West and the Cyber Resilience Alliance. We should enhance these networks to grow our supply chains and share knowledge.
- 10.4 We will:
- Work with the Growth Hub and other local business groups to develop SME support packages, assisting them with developing leadership and management skills, and understanding their skills and technological needs.
 - Develop an Access to Finance Group, working with the business and professional services sector and the Growth Hub, to highlight finance opportunities for growth orientated companies.
 - Establish funding streams for SMEs in high productivity growth sectors: environmental technology, cyber security and resilience, agri-tech and innovative healthcare.
 - Develop a Marches approach to encourage local networks, promoting different parts of the Marches with different strengths and supporting companies in manufacturing supply chains linked to the West Midlands.

- Establish a public sector procurement charter to support local SMEs and supply chains.

Draft

11 Place and Housing

- 11.1 The Marches is a beautiful place, with a high quality of life. People choose to live and visit here because of the many outdoor experiences that our countryside offers; the quality of our historic towns, large and small, and the opportunities of our larger urban centres. These include fast growing business locations with rapid connections into the West Midlands. Our communities are supportive and inclusive, blending strong local traditions and history with a welcoming of the new and diverse and a renowned local arts and cultural offer.
- 11.2 At the same time, housing affordability and provision varies significantly across the Marches. Whilst house prices and rents are relatively affordable in some areas, particularly in Telford, in other parts of the Marches median house prices are as high as ten times median annual salaries. Moreover, at the lower end of the housing price spectrum the picture is worse. Lower quartile house prices are as much as twelve times lower quartile annual salaries in parts of the Marches, particularly in rural parts of Herefordshire. Available evidence suggests that in part this reflects a lower proportion of one and two bedroom houses in the Marches, which would increase average prices.
- 11.3 Our approach to place reflects our two main types of economic centre:
- Our three main urban centres of Hereford, Shrewsbury, and Telford
 - Market towns across the Marches, which are important economic and employment centres, with different specialisms and opportunities.
- 11.4 How we implement the actions and the priorities in this strategy will reflect the unique and varied economy and requirements of our places. From employment land, housing choice, technology adoption and showing young people the careers available locally – many of the priorities in this strategy will require distinctive local delivery and design.

Hereford

11.5 [This section to be developed further in partnership with Herefordshire Council and the local business board]

- 11.6 Hereford is a historic cathedral city, a centre of commercial and cultural importance and also a gateway to surrounding countryside and leisure opportunities. Hereford and its surrounding area is home to major food and drink brands, specialist engineering firms and a growing nationally significant cluster of cyber and business security and resilience firms. [FIRM NAMES]
- 11.7 Hereford has a strong education offer which is expanding further with the creation of a new University focused on meeting the national demand for engineering skills and employment ready graduates. NMiTE will be a new anchor institution, and key to

further developing the town's attractiveness to new professional businesses and people.

- 11.8 Hereford has the potential to significantly expand employment land, integrated with the provision of new incubator and grown on facilities at Skylon Park and Enterprise Zone.
- 11.9 Hereford is well connected to the road and rail network, both east west and north south, with a major priority being to deliver the bypass which will significantly improve existing congestion bottlenecks and open up further growth opportunities.
- 11.10 Housing affordability and securing the right type of housing offer for young families and professionals is a further priority.

Shrewsbury

11.11 [This section to be developed further in partnership with Shropshire Council and the local business board]

- 11.12 Shrewsbury is a renowned historic market town, with excellent heritage assets and surrounded by beautiful countryside. It has a high-quality education offer, with high-performing schools, the largest FE college in the country, and now home to a new University Centre, with strong links to local businesses and career opportunities.
- 11.13 Historic roots as a market town manifest today in a thriving food sector, and a strong engineering and manufacturing sector, particularly at the Battlefield Enterprise Park. Key local manufacturing companies include: EAE Automotive Equipment, Sentinel Manufacturing, and ABP Food Group.
- 11.14 Shrewsbury is well connected, under an hour from the centre of Birmingham by rail with two trains an hour and with a direct rail service to Manchester (under 90 mins). HS2 will bring travel times to London via Crewe down to under 2 hours. Shrewsbury is well connected to the motorway network via the M54 and is where the A5 and A49 corridors intersect.
- 11.15 Shrewsbury has long been a gateway town for leisure and business connections to north and mid wales and south Shropshire, with a high quality cultural and sporting offer. Shropshire Council has strong plans for Shrewsbury's development, having published the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan which will further enhance the town's accessibility and offer, including building on the existing independent retail offer, developing and strengthening the existing public realm, and developing the Flaxmill and a new creative hub as vibrant, independent workspaces.

Telford

11.16 [This section to be developed further in partnership with T&W Council and the local business board]

- 11.17 The birthplace of the industrial revolution is now a fast growing, diverse modern business location at the forefront of opportunities and challenges around automation, meeting need for more technical skills, whilst also seeking to improve progression in both wages and skills. In Harper Adams University, Telford & Wrekin has one of the leading institutions at the forefront of agri-tech, and the University of Wolverhampton provides a range of important vocational training.
- 11.18 Telford is strategically placed, with good motorway and rail links - contributing to and benefiting from the wider West Midlands economy, with important supply chain firms in automotive and other advanced manufacturing and engineering. For example, the JLR engine plant at i54 is only 10 minutes drive away. It is also a gateway location between engineering / tech and growing food production firms, and an important logistics hub.
- 11.19 As such, Telford has a strong recent track record of FDI and attracting UK growth businesses. The borough is now home to more than 150 foreign companies, with large numbers of American, German, Japanese and Taiwanese investors, including household names such as Ricoh, Epson, Xerox, Denso Europe and Maxell. As well as this, the Ministry of Defence is developing its new Defence Fulfilment Centre in Donnington.
- 11.20 Relatively low land values and turn key approach to employment land means Telford can respond quickly and flexibly to business demand. As a legacy of its status as a New Town, the borough owns a number of major sites.
- 11.21 Telford is primed for growth. Through a strategic land deal partnership with Homes England, £44.5m from land sales will be used to support site preparation and infrastructure to bring forward available housing and employment sites. Through the Local Plan, the borough is committed to delivering 17,280 homes by 2031.
- 11.22 Telford has a diverse population, that is younger relative to other parts of the Marches. It also has some areas that are amongst the most deprived in the country. Supporting all residents to access new economic opportunities is an essential part of our approach.

Opportunity Towns

- 11.23 Our market towns are places of opportunity. They all have distinct strengths and specialisms as a result. For example, Bridgnorth has strong automotive supply chain links and is growing this expertise through the MCMT, Oswestry has strengths in food processing, packaging and logistics with a number of companies based on or near the Maesbury Road Business Park, and Ledbury is home to a major Heineken facility.
- 11.24 To ensure we support our opportunity /market towns we will develop a Marches Opportunity Town programme. Working with local business and community partners this will consist of a series of phases, beginning in Autumn 2018:
- Evidence – the challenges and opportunities, building on any existing studies

- Priority development, with local businesses and leaders, covering:
- Connections
- Business / employment land
- Skills
- Incubation / Support
- Networks.

Housing

11.25 [This section will be completed following the return of information on growth corridors, and discussion with local authorities on broader housing delivery mechanisms – e.g. revolving funds, dedicated delivery vehicles, use of land value capture etc. It will also be consistent with extant Local Plans]

Improving our place offer

11.26 The attractiveness of the Marches is one of our key strengths, but this is not always widely understood outside of our area. We will:

- Develop a campaign to attract families and young people to locate, using connectivity, housing choice and affordability, education and employment alongside quality of life as drivers. / Or ‘Start your business in the Marches’ campaign
- Establish a visitor economy commission / study to develop detailed recommendations about improving levels of spend, quality of accommodation offer and lengthening the season.

12 Relationships and partners

12.1 The Marches is a connecting place with transport and supply chain links to neighbouring economies. We have strong relationships with our neighbours in the North West, West Midlands, South West and Wales. Joining forces with our neighbours ensures that we capitalise on our central location. Building these strategic economic links and developing our relationships is key to delivering this strategy, boosting productivity and generating economic growth.

Figure 5. **Strategic Economic Links**

INSERT MAP

North West

12.2 We connect to the North West via two of our transport corridors: the North – South Spine including the A49 and Marches Rail Line, and the North West Frontier, comprising the A5, A583, and Shrewsbury to Wrexham Rail Line. The new HS2 station at Crewe offers a huge opportunity for the Marches with further connections to Liverpool and other major urban centres in the North West. We are partners with Cheshire and Warrington LEP in Agri-Tech West UK, an organisation based on the acknowledgment that supply chains in rural economies cross LEP and county boundaries and to develop an inter-LEP approach to growing the agri-tech sector.

West Midlands

12.3 We have strong links to the West Midlands. We are linked to the area via two key strategic transport corridors: the East – West Central corridor includes the M54 and Shrewsbury to Birmingham Rail Line, whilst the Wales and Marches to Midlands Corridor links Hereford to Birmingham. There are a range of strategic growth opportunities along the M54, including [to be added once all information received from LA partners].

12.4 Our economies are linked via manufacturing supply chains in the east of the Marches, specifically in the automotive sub-sector. Our cyber-security sector also links to the University of Wolverhampton as they are a key partner in the development of the Centre for Cyber Security at Skylon Park. We are also a non-constituent member of the West Midlands Combined Authority. More broadly we are a member of the Midlands Engine, a regional grouping which aims to boost regional GVA by £54bn to 2030.

South West

12.5 Our North – South Spine and Wales and Marches to Midlands corridors provide transport links into the South West. We are part of the Cyber Resilience Alliance along with our partners Worcestershire LEP, GFirst LEP and Swindon and Wiltshire LEP. Worcestershire LEP are also a partner in Agri-Tech West UK.

Wales

12.6 We share our western border with Wales. Three of our strategic transport corridors provide connections to Wales. We are connected to South Wales via the North – South Spine, mid-Wales via the East – West Central and North Wales via the North West Frontier. Our supply chains cross the Welsh border and we provide a strategic logistics gateway for businesses through to the Welsh market. We have recently launched a joint freight strategy for the Marches and Mid Wales, partnering with The Growing Mid Wales Partnership, Welsh Government, Midlands Connect and local authorities. This could release £149m of financial benefits for the region.

13 Making this happen

13.1 [This section to be agreed following conversation with the LEP Board and partners. It will set out how the LEP will implement the strategy, next steps on LIS, etc.]

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