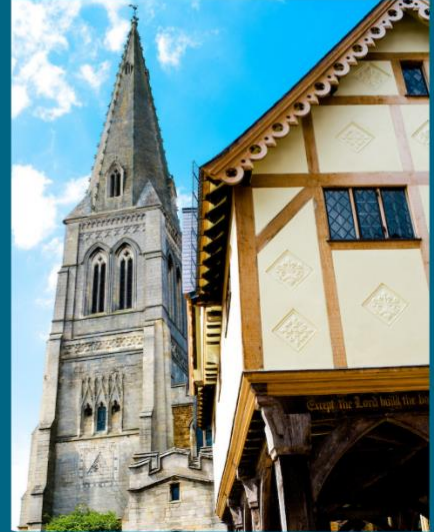




Harborough District Economic Development Strategy 2024-2031



Thriving people, places,
enterprise and environment



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1. Foreword

Harborough District has long enjoyed a robust and resilient local economy, characterised by a diverse range of industries, a highly qualified workforce, and an excellent natural environment. This strategy builds on these strengths to ensure that more residents and businesses can receive help from the opportunities our District offers.

As we move forward, we must navigate the challenges posed by the UK's exit from the European Union, which introduced complexities likely to influence both the national and local economy. Despite these challenges, Harborough District is well-positioned to adapt and thrive.

In this updated strategy, we will reassess our previous strategy to determine which actions remain relevant in the current climate. Some actions will continue to be appropriate given the long-term perspective with which they were developed. Others will need to be revised considering new circumstances, and additional initiatives will be created to help get our economy back on track.

Our focus is on looking to the future and leveraging our strengths to create new opportunities. This includes enhancing our infrastructure, supporting innovation, and fostering an environment where businesses can flourish. We are committed to ensuring that all residents can share in the District's prosperity, with particular attention to supporting young people, women, and ethnically diverse communities.

We plan to collaborate with our partners (including businesses and other stakeholders) to build on our successes, solidifying Harborough District's position as a beautiful place to live, work, and do business.

By working together and focusing on our strategic priorities, we can overcome challenges and ensure a prosperous future for Harborough District.



Cllr Jo Asher,
Portfolio Holder for Culture,
Leisure, Economy and Tourism



John Richardson,
Chief Executive

2. Introduction

Harborough District is a local authority area situated in the south-east of Leicestershire, with Market Harborough and Lutterworth being the two largest settlements. The District spans approximately 230 square miles and is home to over 92,000 people. Despite its large size, Harborough retains a mix of rural landscapes and vibrant communities, including the Grand Union Canal running through the town of Market Harborough. The District is also known for its historic sites and scenic countryside, which attract visitors and residents alike.

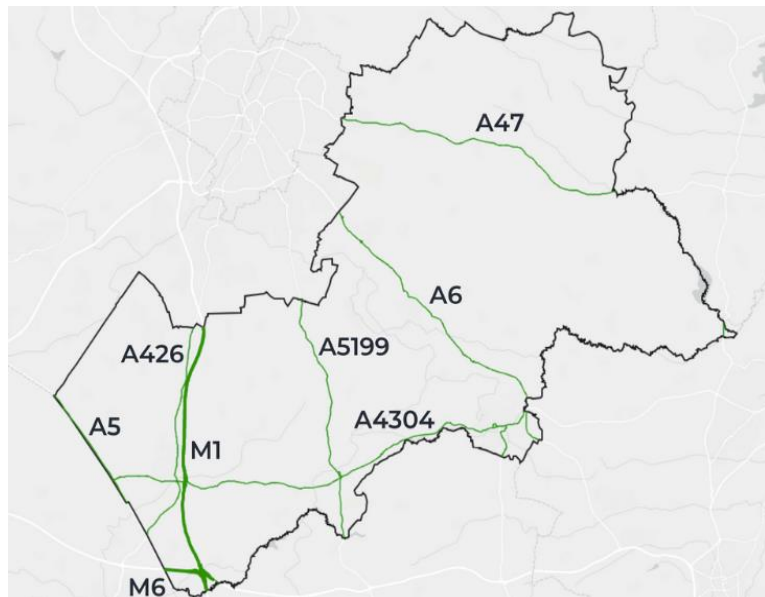


Map showing the location of Harborough District within Leicestershire

Regarding transport, the A6 runs through the District, connecting Leicester with Market Harborough. The town also has a train station on the Leicester to London St Pancras line (Midland Main Line), providing regular services to major cities – including Nottingham, Sheffield, and London. Additionally, the District is well-connected to the M1 motorway at junctions near Lutterworth, offering routes towards Birmingham and London, and the A47/A1 corridor towards Peterborough.



Harborough District is home to approximately 5,350 businesses, predominantly Micro to SMEs (where there are less than 250 employees). However, there are several larger employers within the District. The position of Harborough within Leicestershire, combined with its comprehensive transport links and available development space, means that it's a great place for businesses to grow. Recent developments, such as those at Airfield Business Park and Compass Point Business Park have provided new premises. Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground, Magna Park and Kibworth Business Park are key employment sites within the District.



Map showing the main transport routes

In terms of the economy, Harborough District features several Market Town & Village Centres, including Market Harborough, Lutterworth, and the larger village of Broughton Astley. These centres offer a range of facilities and services for local communities. Smaller retail areas are distributed across the District. There has been £3 Million of investment across the District through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund from the National



Government, aiming to enhance towns, villages, and rural communities in Harborough. The Council acknowledges the need to reassess town centre uses and will use the emerging Local Plan to address this. This effort aims to ensure that the District meets the evolving needs of communities and thrives in a positive and dynamic environment.

Map showing the main settlements & employment areas

Please note that references to Harborough in this document refer to the geography and communities covered by the whole Harborough District Council (HDC) area. Market Harborough is always referred to by its full civic name.

3. Harborough District in Numbers



83.0% of the 16-65 population **economically active**



468 Apprenticeships achieved in 22/23

Life expectancy



69.3% qualified to level 3 and above



4. What is Economic Development?

Economic studies often focus on how to manage both tangible resources (like natural assets and products) and intangible resources (like ideas and time) that are limited or scarce. The goal of economic development is to address these limitations in a way that enhances the well-being and quality of life for both individuals and businesses. In other words, it's about finding effective ways to use our limited resources to improve overall prosperity and living conditions.

In the past, economic development focussed on growing the economy no matter what, even if it was detrimental to the environment or did not help everyone. This unsustainable approach is no longer the focus of economic development, where it is believed the economy comes hand in hand with the environment and society. The economy should grow only if it makes life better for everyone and helps the environment.

This strategy highlights the importance of positive collaboration between local, regional, and national partners in supporting the economic development of Harborough. The Council aims to contribute its unique strengths as a District council, working together with our partners to avoid duplication and achieve greater success.

Economic Development Team	Wider team support
Broadband	Business rates
Business support	Community outreach
Economic analysis	Development management
External funding bids	Environmental health
Inward investment	Health and wellbeing
Placemaking and regeneration	Licencing
Skills & employment	Parking
Tourism, culture & heritage	Strategic planning
Town centre support	Waste management

Throughout the year, the Economic Development team promotes District wide events and campaigns using a variety of logos. You can find out more by visiting us [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [website](#) and the [business bulletin](#).



5. Why do we need a strategy?

The Economic Development Strategy is essential for guiding our community towards sustainable growth and prosperity. In a fast-changing global economy, we must shape our economic future proactively instead of just reacting to external changes.

- It provides a clear roadmap for **sustainable and balanced growth**, ensuring resources are used effectively to boost the local economy.
- A well-defined strategy can **attract businesses and investors** by showcasing the area's potential and commitment to economic development.
- It helps identify opportunities to **create jobs, reduce unemployment**, and improve the overall standard of living for residents.
- It prioritises and plans for necessary infrastructure enhancements to support economic activities and **improve the quality of life**.
- It enables the District to compete more effectively with other regions by leveraging its **unique strengths and opportunities**.
- By focusing on inclusive growth, it ensures that economic benefits are shared across the community, **reducing inequalities** and fostering social cohesion.
- It aligns local actions with long-term global priorities, such as the **United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals**, promoting sustainability and resilience.
- It fosters collaboration among key stakeholders, including businesses, educational institutions, and community organisations, to **achieve common goals**.

By aligning our resources and efforts, we can capitalise on emerging trends, attract investment, and support local businesses, thereby securing a thriving economic landscape for future generations



6. What has been successful?

Reviewing and reflecting on our previous Economic Development Strategy ‘Harnessing Harborough’, we have achieved significant milestones and learned valuable lessons. These achievements are set out below.



2107 followers on Visit Harborough Instagram

Free Wi-Fi in both Market Towns



£3.6 Million COVID grants



68 Shop front grants

Regular business events delivered



18 Commercial HGV License Grants to residents



Over 100 business bulletins sent



5 Secondary Schools supported with a Skills and Careers Grant



47 FSB Memberships given out

Funded 20 business memberships for

zellar



1,500 residents attending job fairs



102 attendees at Heritage Open Days events



Welcome pack sent to every new business since 2019

7. Evidence

This Economic Development Strategy for Harborough has been developed using a wide evidence base. This includes an [Evidence and review paper](#), stakeholder workshops, online consultations and a resident focus group.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritisation of flexibility over rigid growth models. • Emphasis on sustainable practices and inclusive growth. • Commitment to well-being and quality job creation. • Rich natural resources and open spaces that can attract tourism and investment. • Market towns, large villages, and rural areas provide diverse economic opportunities. • Proximity to major urban centres in the Midlands. • Strategic location near Leicester and Midlands hubs, with good connections to London and regional airports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited financial and human resources to implement and sustain large-scale initiatives. • Dependence on external funding and partnerships for major projects. • Need for upgrades and expansion in transport, digital connectivity, and public services. • Difficulty in achieving economic growth uniformly across rural and urban areas. • Potential for disparities in development and service provision between different areas. • Risk of over-reliance on certain sectors, making the economy vulnerable to sector-specific downturns.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitalising on new economic patterns emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. • Increased interest in rural living and remote working can boost local economy. • Strategic developments aimed at attracting and retaining skilled professionals. • Enhancement of local amenities and lifestyle offerings to make the area more attractive. • Opportunities to lead in sustainable practices and green technologies. • Potential to attract investments in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and eco-tourism. • Leveraging these developments to attract further investment and tourism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to global economic uncertainties and market fluctuations. • Potential impacts of Brexit and other geopolitical factors on trade and investment. • Environmental threats that could impact agriculture, tourism, and overall quality of life. • Need for robust strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change effects. • Competition from neighbouring regions and other parts of the Midlands for investment and talent. • Risk of falling behind if unable to match the pace of development and innovation elsewhere. • Changes in national or regional policies that could impact funding, regulation, and economic priorities.

The SWOT analysis highlights the District's excellent quality of life, environmental vitality, and positive economic metrics such as skills, occupational employment, jobs, and enterprise density. However, it also faces ageing challenges, housing market pressures, a lack of major business clusters, and no Higher Education or Further Education (HE or FE) provision of any scale.

The District is well-located, however, due to this, the economic strengths are overly dependent on out-commuting and Magna Park. Gross value added, productivity, and workplace wages produced locally are low. Harborough District appears less vulnerable to potential shocks than many places but needs to be well-positioned to command policy attention and prioritisation from the government pan-regional and regional bodies compared to City and County (L&L) flagships and priorities.

The District is well-placed to take advantage of post-COVID demand for space and quality of life. However, low levels of resourcing limit local freedoms, flexibilities, and delivery capacity.

Magna Park and its existing planning consents offer an opportunity for a step-change in the campus and District's economic profile and performance. Other high-profile niche businesses, like Deichman and Cox Automotive in Market Harborough and Bruntingthorpe, have the potential to anchor broader developments.

The Emerging Local Plan sets a strategy for at least 15 years to shape what can be built and where it should go across Harborough District. Policies will outline the provision of employment land and development that is needed to help the local economy thrive, supporting job creation and business growth with the right infrastructure. Engagement in the development of new Local Plan by businesses is essential so that local needs are considered Market Harborough can position itself as a new exemplary post-pandemic 'middle-England' market town. Lutterworth, Broughton Astley, attractive rural settlements and their hinterlands enhance the District's overall offer.

Looking ahead, our community is presented with numerous opportunities and challenges that will shape the effectiveness of this strategy. Opportunities include the rise of digital economies, green technologies, and potential partnerships with educational institutions to foster innovation and introduce a higher education presence into the District. Conversely, we must address challenges such as global economic volatility, climate change impacts, and the need for workforce upskilling.

8. Vision & Ambition

“By 2031, Harborough District will be recognised and admired as a distinctive economic jewel of Leicestershire and the Midlands, offering residents, communities, and businesses opportunities to improve their prosperity and well-being in a dynamic and increasingly sustainable environment.”

This new economic vision builds on Harborough District's existing strengths and distinctive assets, capitalising on our competitive advantages. We aim to leverage these assets to enhance prosperity for our residents and businesses. By maximising our economic credentials, we seek to lead in a competitive environment, secure necessary infrastructure investments, and significantly improve economic performance and prosperity, ensuring inclusivity so that no one is left behind. The vision also addresses identified weaknesses and growth challenges, such as low local workforce productivity and the need for improved digital infrastructure, as well as the importance of fostering skills development to meet future industry demands.

This vision is supported by **four ambitions**, each area is accompanied by a rationale and a series of enabling factors where the Council can exert the most influence to overcome key challenges and achieve our vision for Harborough District by 2030. To deliver these, we have developed an action plan which sets out priorities for us and our partners to ensure the vision is met.

Thriving People: Ensure the economy increases health and well-being opportunities for all District residents – from having the education & skills they need to access good jobs and employment to support for activity that assures health and well-being as they grow older.

Thriving Places: Strengthen the economic vitality of and opportunities in and across Harborough District’s towns, large villages, and rural areas by enhancing their strengths, creating jobs, and improving transportation and digital connections.

Thriving Enterprises: Boost local productivity, attract investment, and establish Harborough District as a business destination by promoting eco-friendly logistics, supporting key sectors, and adapting to post-LEP changes.

Thriving Environment: Encourage sustainable development and good practice in all areas of economic activity, promoting green growth opportunities and a thriving low-carbon business base.

Our strategy aims to make Harborough District the leading business destination in the region, leveraging its strong entrepreneurial spirit and mix of urban and rural opportunities. Aligned with the council's broader vision of a 'District that works for everyone,' the strategy focuses on creating a supportive business environment, enhancing infrastructure, and promoting sustainability. Collaboration with businesses, educational institutions, and community organisations will be key.

9. Wider Factors

UN Goals: Our Economic Development Strategy also needs to align with wider strategic objectives at a regional, national, and global level. Where new strategies are developed at a regional level, resulting from devolution for example, we will ensure that shared objectives are identified and can be acted upon at a local level.

To ensure there is alignment with longer-term global priorities, each action within this Economic Development Strategy will be linked to one or more of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This approach shows residents how local actions contribute to global objectives. Recognising the need for collaboration with businesses, communities, and organisations, Goal 17: Partnership for the Goals, is integrated throughout the strategy.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Future Changes: Developing and implementing a strategy during uncertain times, carries some risk. Nonetheless, it is a practical approach to manage and adapt to significant global, national, and local changes. This Strategy demonstrates our approach to addressing the situation wisely and flexibly over the next seven years. It also details how the Strategy can adapt and evolve to remain effective during ongoing political and governmental transformations.

Despite the evolving political landscape, Harborough District's action plan is designed to be adaptable and resilient, regardless of the uncertainty of future funding. We are prepared to respond to any future provisions, ensuring that our strategy remains effective and relevant. This readiness allows us to navigate and manage changes proactively, maintaining our commitment to progress and community well-being irrespective of external variables.

The landscape of career services and skills development in England is undergoing significant changes, with developments involving the National Careers Service (NCS) and the establishment of Skills England. It has been announced that the NCS will be merged into Jobcentre Plus, this strategic move aims to streamline career services, providing a more integrated approach to employment support and skills training. By consolidating resources, Jobcentre Plus is expected to enhance its ability to assist individuals in finding employment and developing the necessary skills to succeed in the job market.

Simultaneously, a new body called Skills England is being established to focus specifically on the development of skills across the nation. Skills England will play a central role in identifying current and future skills needs, promoting vocational training, and ensuring that education and training systems align with the demands of the economy. This initiative is part of a broader strategy to bolster the UK's competitiveness and productivity by investing in a highly skilled workforce.

These changes reflect a proactive approach to addressing the evolving needs of the labour market and ensuring that career services remain effective and relevant. By merging NCS with Jobcentre Plus and creating Skills England, the government aims to provide more comprehensive and cohesive support for individuals seeking to improve their employment prospects and adapt to new job opportunities. These changes will be reflected in our approach to this strategy and may alter how we approach actions within the people theme as changes are implemented.

10. How will we measure success?

Additionally, we will establish clear metrics for success and regularly review our progress to ensure we are on track. Harborough District's performance will also be benchmarked against other Leicestershire Districts, East Midlands, and UK averages, along with access to Leicester-Shire & Rutland Statistics and Research (www.lsr-online.org).

We will gather and analyse data on employment, industry, infrastructure, and skills to inform strategic decisions and identify growth opportunities. Engaging stakeholders, including businesses, community organisations, educational institutions, and residents, through consultations, workshops, and forums will be a priority.

Our focus will be on prioritising infrastructure projects, business facilities, affordable housing, and growth sectors, while facilitating access to community and charity funding. We will support local businesses with funding, training, and innovation hubs like the Harborough Innovation Centre.

Collaborating with educational institutions to address skills gaps and promote lifelong learning opportunities will be crucial. We will enhance the District's attractiveness by investing in public spaces, cultural amenities, heritage preservation, and economic vitality. Harborough District will be promoted as an investment and visitor destination through marketing campaigns and events. We will monitor and review progress with agreed performance indicators, adjusting as needed to positively impact key groups and communities across the District.



Appendix A: Action Plan

Ambition	Action	Delivery	Sustainable Development Goals	Timescale		
				Short	Med	Long
People	Provide opportunities for apprenticeships at HDC and support local businesses to do the same.	HDC Local businesses Secondary schools	4, 8	✓		
	Link businesses and schools across the District. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work experience • Mock interviews • Career events 	HDC Enterprise Advisors Schools Local businesses Town and Parish Councils	4, 8, 9	✓		
	Collaborate on the delivery of the Local Skills Improvement Plan.	HDC Leicester College Other HE/FE Providers East Midlands Chamber	4, 8, 10		✓	
	Promote corporate social responsibility and volunteering opportunities within the District.	HDC Local Businesses Canal and River Trust Community organisations Voluntary Action LeicesterShire Town and Parish Councils	3, 8, 13, 14, 15	✓		
	Support training academies in Magna Park and District wide.	HDC GLP CLEAR Campus (NWSL College) Wincanton Tomorrow College	4, 8, 9	✓		

Ambition	Action	Delivery	Sustainable Development Goals	Timescale		
				Short	Med	Long
	Facilitate regular job fairs and recruitment events across the District.	HDC Jobcentre Plus (DWP) Local businesses Local workforce Town and Parish Councils	4, 8	✓		
	Promote Healthy Workplaces and Mental Health Friendly Workplaces.	HDC Leicestershire County Council Local Businesses	3, 8	✓		
Places	Deliver and support projects from the Market Harborough town centre masterplan. Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Quarter • The Square 	HDC Leicestershire County Council MH Neighbourhood Forums Creative Harborough Harbs Collective	8, 11		✓	
	Deliver and support projects from the Lutterworth town centre masterplan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market Square revitalisation 	HDC Leicestershire County Council Lutterworth Town Estates Lutterworth Town Council Lutterworth Town Team	8, 11		✓	
	Continue the rollout of place branding and marketing building on successful campaigns. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small Business Saturday • Shop local • Heritage Open Days • English Tourism Week 	HDC Local Businesses Town and Parish Councils	8, 11	✓		

Ambition	Action	Delivery	Sustainable Development Goals	Timescale		
				Short	Med	Long
	Encourage further rollout of broadband improvements (gigabit and gigahubs)	HDC Digital Leicestershire (Leicestershire County Council)	8, 9, 11		✓	
	Support equal economic growth in the district across towns and villages. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up and support business forums in the larger villages Support rural tourism development with a focus on visitor attractions and accommodation providers 	HDC Town and Parish Councils	8, 9		✓	
	Deliver from the Leicester and Leicestershire Tourism Growth Plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fitcation Uncover your story Taste the place Sustainable tourism campaign 	HDC Visit Leicester Neighbouring Authorities Town and Parish Councils Harborough District Tourism Partnership	8, 11	✓		
	Develop and improve the promotion of visitor attractions in the District.	HDC Harborough District Tourism Partnership Town and Parish Councils	8, 11	✓		
Enterprise	Continue engagement with businesses through events, newsletters, networks, social media, websites and 1-2-1 meetings	HDC Local Businesses Federation of Small Business East Midlands Chamber Market Harborough Chamber of Trade and Commerce	8, 9	✓		

Ambition	Action	Delivery	Sustainable Development Goals	Timescale		
				Short	Med	Long
	Work with business communities across the District to encourage collaboration and sharing of best practices.	HDC Market Harborough Chamber of Trade and Commerce Federation of Small Business East Midlands Chamber of Commerce	8, 9	✓		
	Support further commercialisation of the two business centres in Market Harborough	HDC Harborough Innovation Centre Harborough Enterprise Centre	8, 9, 11	✓		
	Support the delivery of a business hub in Magna Park and other locations within the District.	HDC GLP Magna Park Developers	8, 9		✓	
	Promote the usage of local businesses and workforce in the extension of HMP Gartree to maximise its benefits.	HDC HMP Gartree Local workforce Local businesses	8, 9, 11, 12		✓	
Environment	Support businesses to reach net zero emissions in line with HDCs Climate Emergency Action Plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminars/webinars • Best practice sharing • Business support and advice 	HDC Local Businesses	8, 9, 11, 13			✓
	Ensure Magna Park is showcased as the largest net-zero logistics hub in Europe.	HDC GLP Magna Park	8, 9, 11, 13	✓		

Ambition	Action	Delivery	Sustainable Development Goals	Timescale		
				Short	Med	Long
	Facilitate and support active travel projects in the District, improving health and wellbeing.	HDC LCC Town and Parish Councils	9, 11, 13	✓		
	Deliver an annual green agenda event alongside promoting other activity in Big Green Week.	HDC Local Businesses Town and Parish Councils	8, 9, 11, 13	✓		
	Support the growth of electric vehicle infrastructure across the District.	HDC Town and Parish Councils	11, 13	✓		
	Administer the Environmental Grant Scheme from 2023-2026 to support community capital environmental projects.	HDC Community Organisations Town and Parish Councils	3, 11, 13		✓	