

Introduction

Our Approach

In a nutshell:

This strategy is about how Newcastle Borough Council, working with the business community and local partners can improve the economic prospects of the area. It has been shaped with the following aspects in mind:

The strategy has four themes, arranged in the following sections

- *'Business'* – Strengthening the business base
- *'Place and Infrastructure'* – Physical transformation
- *'People'* – Transforming ambition
- *'Image and Marketing'* – Transforming perceptions

The strategy will set the context for long-term investment. Each section sets out a series of actions the Borough Council proposes to undertake (or work with others to undertake) to take forward the stated objectives.

Each section looks at the **strengths** which the Borough has to offer and the **opportunities** which may be capitalised on and develops **proposals** which take advantage of these.

A number of **challenges** are identified relating to the economy/skills mix/image etc. and interventions to address or mitigate them.

Despite the present economic circumstances and the impact this has on public finances, the Borough Council will continue to approach this strategy with **ambition**. That is, we will set ourselves challenging goals and set out a programme of action which will seek to improve the economic fortunes of the Borough.

This will be done by building a broad **consensus**, through consultation with our partners and with the local business community who will both help influence the work that the Borough Council should undertake and will also play their own parts in delivering elements of this strategy.

A key element of the approach will be **prioritisation**. The Council (and public budgets in general) cannot do everything. It is important therefore to focus on the things which are going to have the greatest impact and which the Borough Council is best placed to influence. Where possible, we will follow the principal that 'resources follow priorities'.

Some of our priorities are sub-regional (rather than specific to the Borough) and here we will work closely with partners from throughout North Staffordshire.

The strategy is accompanied with an annual **action plan**. This sets out in greater detail who will lead on each activity, what it will achieve, what it will cost, how this will be funded together with milestones.

We will learn from past interventions and use this **experience** to overcome barriers to change; we will be open to external challenge and use this to learn from others' experiences too.

Much of what is discussed is about **change** – doing what we have done before may not be enough. The Borough Council and its partners have shown that they have the capacity to

effect change and this is shown by the achievements listed in the section on 'Building Prosperity' (the Borough Council's previous economic development strategy).

Transforming North Staffordshire

'Transforming North Staffordshire' (North Staffordshire's Economic Development Strategy) was adopted by the North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership (comprising the Borough Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and Staffordshire County Council) in 2008 following detailed economic analysis, optioneering, consultation and participation between principle authors, The Work Foundation and local partners. It provides the **sub-regional framework** for pursuing the economic development of the area as a whole.

This wider strategy provides much of the analysis, evidence base and rationale for this Borough-specific strategy. 'Transforming North Staffordshire' has a number of detailed recommendations, arranged by;

- Business
- Place and Infrastructure
- People, and
- Image and marketing

This format is adopted as an appropriate framework for this strategy, demonstrating how the Borough Council and its partners propose to take forward its recommendations with the specific objective of improving the fortunes of the Borough.

The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

The Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was established in 2011 following the Government's decision to disband Regional Development Agencies. Although including representation from local government and the two universities, it is private sector led (with a business majority on the Board) and its role is to act as the primary body working to advance the economic performance of the whole county. The LEP conducts much of its work through sub-groups dealing with Inward Investment, Enterprise & Skills, Land & Housing, Funding, Broadband, Planning, and Low Carbon. Several references are made to the LEP in the body of this strategy.

Newcastle-under-Lyme: A Borough Profile in Figures (Data source NOMIS 2011, unless otherwise stated)

The Borough of Newcastle is based around the historic 800 year old **market town** of Newcastle-under-Lyme. Kidsgrove, six miles to the north, is the Borough's second town. The Borough is part urban (together with neighbouring Stoke-on-Trent forming the western part of the North Staffordshire conurbation) and part rural. The Borough is also home to the country's largest campus university, Keele University.

The town lies along the A34 and is well served by the M6, the A500 and the A50. Lying on the West Coast Main Line, four trains an hour connect Stoke-on-Trent Railway Station, 3 miles from Newcastle Town Centre, to London Euston (1 hr 27 minutes) and Manchester (37 minutes). Four airports, Manchester, East Midlands, Liverpool and Birmingham lie within 50 to 75 minutes drive.

The Borough's **population** has grown from 122,200 in 2000 to around 125,000 today and is projected to grow to 130,700 in 2025. There are currently 50,738 **households** in the borough and over the next five years it is planned that this will rise by 1591 to 52,329. Over the five year period 2005-10, 1485 new houses were completed, an average annual rate of house building of 297. The figure for Staffordshire as a whole over the same period was 13,580 (2716 p.a.)

Around 50,400 people **work** in the Borough, of which 6100 are self employed and 44,300 are employees. The 70:30 split between full-time and part-time employment closely reflects the national pattern. The level of self-employment (6.9%) is lower than the GB average of 9.1%.

Manufacturing accounts for 9.2% of **employment** (GB: 10.2%), retailing and hospitality 30.2% (GB: 23.4%), transport and communications 14% (GB: 5.8%), finance, IT and business services 12.4% (GB: 22.0%) and local government, education and health 25.5% (GB: 27.0%).

Amongst the Borough's more significant private sector **employers** are Phones 4U Ltd., Leoni Wiring, Ibstock Brick, Regina Plastics, Jacuzzi, science park companies such as Bio composites, Siemens Wind Power UK, Capita, GVA and Cobra Bio, engineering firms such as Converteam, KMF Engineering, Phoenix Dynamics and Simon-Hartley, in the logistics field, New Look, George, TK Maxx, Fedex and AAH, and a wide range of professional services firms including Knights, MHL, Hacking Ashton and The Aspire Group. Keele University and Newcastle College are significant employers in the Higher and Further Education sectors.

The local resident workforce is slightly more **qualified** than of the country at large, i.e. 32.5% are qualified to degree level (c.f. GB 31.3%, West Midlands region 26.0%), 53.5% have two or more A levels (GB 51.0%, West Midland region 45.4%), though the numbers with no qualifications (13.4%) is a little higher than GB (11.3%), but less than the West Midlands region (15.1%).

Earnings on the other hand fall behind the national average with the median annual pay for full-time workers in 2010 at £20,429, which is only 78.6% of the GB figure (and only 85.7% of the regional median).

Job seeker numbers in the Borough (2.6%) are below the average figure for GB (3.4%) but the numbers on Employment Support Allowance or Incapacity Benefits (7.3%) are higher (GB 6.6%). (All figures November 2010). At July 2011 there were 158 'NEETs' in the Borough (16 to 18 year old not in Employment, Education or Training), the wards with the highest numbers being Holditch (16), Chesterton (11) and Cross Heath (10). (In this case actual numbers rather than percentages are given to give a better feel for the scale).

Rates of **new business formation** (based on the number of new VAT registrations as a % of total stock) at 9.6% is a little lower than the national average of 10.2% but higher than the regional

average of 9.4%. 'De-registrations' (businesses folding) is 7.9% of the stock which is a little higher than the national (7.3%) and regional (7.2%) figures.

Shop vacancy rates in Newcastle Town Centre (11.1% in May/June 2011) are broadly the same as the average for town centres across the UK (11.2%).

As an indication of scale, Newcastle under Lyme Town Centre has a **commercial floorspace** of 105,343 m². This compares with Stoke-on-Trent City Centre (203,077 m²); Stafford Town Centre (110,282 m²); Macclesfield Town Centre (96,680 m²); Stoke Town Centre (75,391 m²); Longton Town Centre 66,965 m²; and Leek (46,580 m²).

Over the ten year period 2000-2010, 89.3 hectares of **employment land** was developed in the Borough, an average annual rate of development of 8.93 ha p.a. Across Staffordshire as a whole 583.7 hectares were developed (58.3 ha p.a.)

Further information about the Borough can be found at www.ons.gov.uk

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‘Building Prosperity’

‘Building Prosperity’ was the title of the Borough Council’s Economic Development Strategy 2005-10. This was built around six core priorities;

- Creating a strong and vibrant town centre
- Encouraging the growth of high value business clusters
- Encouraging entrepreneurialism and the development of the small firms sector
- Demanding high quality built design and investing in the quality of the public realm
- Promoting the Borough
- Linking the benefits of new investment and new jobs to the less well off sections of the community.

Notable successes during this time were;

- Developing Jubilee 2, the £10.5 million new Health & Wellbeing Centre in the town centre
- Maintaining a strong independent retail sector in the town and a busy street market
- Refurbishing Lancaster Building (now partly re-let for offices), and the Guildhall, (now a customer contact centre)
- Enabling the development of the magnificent new Further Education College a short distance to the west of the town centre
- Developing an informal partnership with the business community that has delivered a programme of town centre events
- Developing a Strategic Investment Framework (SIF) for the town centre
- Successfully lobbying against the expansion of Tesco at Trent Vale to protect the vibrancy of Newcastle Town Centre

- Completing the site preparation and infrastructure for the 70 acre expansion of Keele Science Park
- Developing high specification innovation centres at the Science Park to encourage high value businesses to invest here

- Introduction of the ‘Business Boost’ competition – rewarding high growth potential
- Promoting ‘Enterprise in Schools’ (developing the ‘world of work’ programme with Finest, the Carousel of Opportunity in primary schools, support for the career academy at Newcastle College)

- Launch of the Town Centre shop-front grants award project in the town centre conservation area
- Established an annual Design Awards scheme led by the Civic Society

- Working with both Instaffs and Make it Stoke-on-Trent to attract new businesses to the area
- The completion of the Lymedale Park (3600 jobs) and High Carr Business Park (650 jobs) development schemes together with the smaller Knutton and Silverdale industrial estates
- Produced the Town Centre (‘New Opportunities’) investment brochure
- The significant housing development begun at the former Silverdale Colliery and former Collins & Aikman (Cross Heath) sites having secured considerable sums of external funding and investment in partnership work
- Secured substantial investment that delivered the ‘BREEAM Outstanding’ ‘Blue Planet’ development in the Chatterley Valley
- Newcastle Business Panel continuing successfully

- The successful delivery of the Housing Market Renewal Programme in Newcastle centred on the Knutton, Cross Heath and Silverdale areas (providing an injection of new housing, skills training, building facelifts and investment in public realm)

- The establishment of the Jobs, Employment and Training Scheme (JETS) and the Family Employment Initiative (FEI) supporting people into training and work.

These successes are important not only in their own right but also as a means of reminding and inspiring the Borough Council and our partners that things can be achieved over the long-term as long as we;

- Are clear about our priorities
- Are prepared to collaborate between our different organisations (and not be precious about allocating or claiming credit)
- Are prepared to commit time and the necessary resources
- Stick with it.

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The Strategy at a Glance

Business – Objective: Strengthening the Business Base

1. Developing a long-term economic strategy built on ‘diverse specialisation’, aiming to increase both the proportion of knowledge intensive employment and the proportion of high quality jobs in retail, leisure, tourism and distribution
2. Developing a co-ordinated enterprise strategy
3. Supporting development of emergent knowledge intensive sectors, building on higher and further education expertise
4. Supporting development of the professional and business services sector
5. Making the most of the Borough’s successful logistics sector
6. Seeking to optimise the benefit to local companies from public sector procurement.

Place and Infrastructure – Objective: Physical Transformation

7. Drawing up a Masterplan to guide the future development of Newcastle Town Centre
8. Bringing forward proposals for retail and business accommodation in Newcastle Town Centre with priority placed on growing its professional services and a distinctive retail offer
9. Promoting the further development of Keele Science and Business Park
10. Enabling the development of higher quality housing for current and future residents, with an explicit aim to increase the attractiveness of North Staffordshire as a home to affluent residents
11. Bringing forward new sites for employment and housing through the Site Allocations Development Plan Document to enable the further growth of the Borough.

People – Objective: Transforming Ambition

12. Raising skills, reduce worklessness and raise aspirations as a core element of all transformational strategies
13. Working towards getting the right skills mix to increase productivity
14. Stimulating demand for higher skills and create opportunities for people to acquire skills for current and future industrial structure

‘Image and Marketing’ – Objective - Transforming Perceptions

15. Developing an external marketing strategy for the Borough
16. Improving the quality of life offer for current and future residents
17. Supporting the development of North Staffordshire’s ‘experience economy’
18. Using the Strategic Investment Framework as the basis for investment in the cultural and retail experience of Newcastle Town Centre.

Economy – transforming the business base

1. Developing a long-term economic strategy built on ‘diverse specialisation’, aiming to increase both the proportion of knowledge intensive employment and the proportion of high quality jobs in retail, leisure, tourism and distribution

The most successful places are those that build on their existing strength and develop diverse specialisms. This approach is adopted in this strategy as the Borough Council's approach to promoting the Borough, attracting new business and increasing employment opportunities. Whilst the Borough Council will continue to work with its partners in the LEP and North Staffordshire on sub-regional objectives, it will also promote Newcastle's distinctiveness, as reflected in:

- A differentiated town centre offer
- A strong professional and financial services sector
- Prospects for accommodating higher quality housing
- A thriving research based university and science park
- Borough-specific and town centre-specific marketing initiatives aimed at attracting inward investment.

2. Developing a co-ordinated enterprise strategy

North Staffordshire has a strong network of business support providers who encourage the growth and development of new and existing enterprises. It also benefits from a network of enterprise centres which offer a supportive environment to new enterprises and in some cases the capacity to grow on to larger units where required. However, our business formation rate is still below the national average and business survival remains a challenge with a business failure rate that is slightly above the national average.

In 2011, the delivery of government funded business support changed with the national Business Link model changing to a web based service. Each local area was encouraged by Government to determine its own needs and demand for locally responsive face to face enterprise support.

The LEP is taking a lead role in creating the Enterprise Action Plan for Staffordshire, building on the actions that local partners are already undertaking and also ensuring that entrepreneurs are signposted to the support they need.

The LEP is developing a range of measures designed to put business first and they have already hosted a range of ‘access to finance’ events to connect businesses with sources of finance to support growth.

The LEP has stated that it will continue to develop a range of measures designed to put business first including:

- Promotion of the area as a premier investment location at a national and international level using the ‘Make it’ brand
- Introduction of a single point of contact for business
- Introduction of the Staffordshire Planning Charter
- Development of a business mentoring service
- Support to deliver broadband access and superfast broadband across the area
- Creation of a LEP growth fund to provide start up finance for business investment

Whilst the delivery of business advice, coaching or mentoring sits outside of the normal activity of the Borough Council we will support the services of our partners by signposting and promoting them to local businesses. Where we are able to add value, for example through co-ordination or hosting activity this will also be on offer. Although the opportunity to attract external funding is now much reduced, the Borough Council will support co-ordinated bids, where the opportunity arises, to attract funding for enterprise activity. To this end we will work with the local business community to develop through the Regional Growth Fund.

Developing entrepreneurs starts at an early age, and in addition to the actions that our partners already take to support enterprise in schools the Borough Council will continue to work with the District Employer Engagement Partnership (DEEP) to develop innovative ways to engage young people in enterprise and to seek ways to fund its continuance.

Further actions include:

- Working with Business Enterprise Support (BES) to help in the delivery of its enterprise support schemes, including the New Enterprise Allowance Scheme, setting up a network of volunteer mentors and ERDF funded business coaching in the Borough
- Continuing to promote enterprise in schools, predominantly through DEEP which brings together schools, colleges, training providers and local employers to influence educational delivery to meet the needs of the 21st century
- Supporting continuation of the annual Newcastle Business Boost competition. This brings together public, private and education sectors in support of local businesses and, since its inception in 2008, has provided in excess of £40,000 direct investment in their growth and development
- Continuing to signpost businesses to appropriate sources of assistance, including those offered by the Borough Council such as rates advice, licensing, waste disposal, planning and environmental health. We will ensure that advice on the council's website is kept up-to-date and includes links to appropriate partner sites
- Advocating for the delivery of Superfast Broadband in the key areas of Keele University & Science Park, Newcastle town centre and across North Staffordshire.

3. Supporting the development of emergent knowledge intensive sectors, building on higher & further education expertise

North Staffordshire benefits from being home to both Keele and Staffordshire Universities who offer a range of science, creative, technology, business and humanities opportunities for research and study. These are the drivers of the area's knowledge intensive jobs both through enterprise support to graduates and through the accommodation and services offered to business. The Borough is also home to Newcastle under Lyme College, which is consistently in the national top 25% of further education colleges nationally for success rates in AS/A level and advanced vocational courses and has excellent progression rates to Higher Education. Additionally, the Staffordshire Business Innovation Centre (the BIC) provides support to innovators, entrepreneurs and small & medium sized businesses on new product and new business ideas.

Our challenge is to use this expertise to retain and grow employment in the Borough and drive a more prosperous economy.

Specialist Business Accommodation

Keele University & Science Park is the Borough's flagship accommodation offer to knowledge intensive industries. Tenant businesses provide a variety of jobs spanning ICT, Medical Healthcare, low carbon and technology. The high specification of the Innovation Centre buildings and the strong links to the University naturally attracts businesses specialising in research and development and higher level skills.

Keele University Science Park continues to innovate its support for knowledge intensive businesses. The Nova Centre, which opened in April 2012 is designed to offer a follow-on support package for early stage companies who will benefit from a 2-year business growth programme and office accommodation. For those who are not ready to take business accommodation there is also a 'Virtual Office' offer. The Nova Centre targets businesses that can demonstrate plans for significant growth, employment opportunities, provision of new products and services, introduction of new skills to the area, or are highly innovative.

Knowledge Transfer

The recently established Business and Innovation Group (BIG), a partnership between Keele University Science Park, Keele University, Staffordshire University and the North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce will be the prime driving force to provide businesses with specialist and strategic advice. Targeted sectors will include professional services, creative, medical, manufacturing technology and environmental technologies and the group will work closely with the LEP to deliver the service.

Low Carbon & Environmental Sustainability

Keele University and Science Park is the primary driver for growth in the environmental sustainability field, although it should also be noted that the Borough is also home to Converteam who provide valued jobs in this sector designing and manufacturing components for the wind turbine industry. In addition to the Science Park accommodation and business offer, the University is committed to developing an environmentally aware and outward facing campus with an extensive commitment to carbon reduction including plans to introduce renewable energy on campus and BREEAM 'very good' status to all new and refurbished buildings. The sustainability hub is also a living example of a sustainable building in action.

Superfast Broadband

The LEP has recently celebrated a government award of £7.5 million to support broadband provision in Staffordshire. This will be matched by a £7.5 million investment from Staffordshire County Council which is designed to support the roll out of broadband to those areas that don't currently have it, upgrading of broadband speeds and also superfast broadband in the urban area.

Manufacturing

Newcastle has a strong manufacturing base which employs a significant number of people. Support for this sector is principally delivered through skills development such as the Staffordshire STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) centre and through seeking inward investment of manufacturing companies and making suitable employment land available for development.

Creative Industries

Our partners have identified that digital creative firms are a potential growth area for the Borough. Attracting this type of firm relies on the availability of superfast and reliable broadband, the right style of business premises and the opportunity to cluster with other digital technology firms. This support infrastructure is substantially provided by our partners as set out above and in other sections of this strategy.

Further actions include:

- Working with the LEP and its partners in the higher and further education sectors aiming to encourage the growth of creative industries, promote technology transfer and provide specialist business accommodation
- The Borough Council will support the re-use of existing property in the town for businesses such as graphic design, film and media, publishing, animation, music and computer/console games software development including, where suitable, its own premises
- The Borough Council will continue to work with Keele University and Science Park to encourage development of Keele Science Park Phase 3 and attract knowledge intensive businesses to Keele Science Park through marketing support, lobbying for infrastructure investment and planning advice
- The Borough Council is working with Keele University to explore means by which its business support model might be rolled out to suitable businesses in Newcastle Town Centre.

4. Supporting the development of the professional and business services sector

Professional and business services are an important knowledge intensive sector that offers the potential for further growth in Newcastle. Our approach is based around three main activity areas:

- Ensuring the availability of appropriate accommodation (both commercial and residential), which is necessary to attract and retain highly skilled workers in these sectors. Proposals for new business accommodation in Newcastle Town Centre and new executive housing are contained in the Place and Infrastructure section
- Working with Finest, the North Staffordshire professional services network and host to future Finest, which aims to develop and create opportunities for future leaders of North Staffordshire. As Finest members, the Borough Council will continue to work with them in promoting networking, good practice, increasing business opportunities and by hosting events
- Supportive procurement practises – this is dealt with in more detail in section six.

5. Making the most of the Borough's successful logistics sector

Logistics has been a major growth area in the North Staffordshire economy which is due largely to the good connectivity that the area enjoys and our position close to the centre of the country.

It is mistakenly believed that logistics employs fewer people per square metre of floor space than manufacturing, pays poorer wages and requires a lower range of skills. Recent research from Instaffs UK however has demonstrated the benefits of logistics

employment. For instance, three of the large distribution firms based at Lymedale Park, (New Look, TK Maxx and George) are national or regional headquarters and employ a considerable number of people in skilled technical and managerial roles as well as drivers and warehouse staff. These three firms employ around 2100 people between them and with the exception of high technology manufacturers; most manufacturing firms occupying similar sized buildings would not necessarily employ more people, offer better pay or require a greater range of skills than these.

- There are two large distribution buildings, Alto 415 at Lymedale and Blue Planet at Chatterley Valley (415,000 sq. ft and 385,000 sq. ft. respectively) which remain un-let. Both were commissioned in advance of the current economic downturn and the Borough Council will continue to work with their developers and agents to find suitable occupiers for these buildings (either logistics or manufacturing). Each of these, when occupied, could bring several hundreds of new jobs to the area
- The Borough Council plans to continue the development of Chatterley Valley on land to the west of the Blue Planet building, (described as Chatterley Sidings and Peacock Hay). In the absence of further financial support from Advantage West Midlands, the high cost of site preparation and off site highway improvements may now make this difficult to realise. We will work with the landowners and their agents to explore alternative means of bringing forward Peacock Hay for light industrial development without the need for such extensive ground modelling and highway investment as was previously envisaged.

6. Seeking to optimise the benefit to local companies from public sector procurement

The Borough Council spends around £20 million each year on procuring goods and services. A number of actions have already been undertaken to make doing business with the Borough Council as easy as possible for local businesses. This includes a dedicated procurement section of the website, work undertaken with Finest to develop a 'Highway Code' for collaboration, and regular contact with local business organisations.

Sensitive procurement can have a positive effect on the local economy and the environment. Larger contracts frequently include a requirement for bidders to demonstrate how they would maximise economic benefit to the local area and minimize environmental impact. Information is also required on the sustainability of a provider's supply chain and sourcing arrangements. For example, the tender specification for the Jubilee 2 café required the identification of average food miles linked to the provision of the service and the use of local trainee placements and apprenticeships.

- The Borough Council will continue to support local people and businesses through its procurement policies. This will include;
 - Further improvements to the website and wider dissemination of relevant information through websites such as Build-up North Staffordshire (BUNS) and Think Local 4 Business (TL4B)
 - Supporting local people into jobs through use of the 'Public Procurement Framework for Jobs and Skills' which has several approaches to secure contractor support for training and recruitment initiatives with the aim of securing greater access to jobs and skills for local people.

- Subject to a successful ERDF bid, the Borough Council will support the development and launch of Platform as a North Staffordshire contracts portal covering all sectors, which will enable more local firms to access contract opportunities.

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Place and Infrastructure – Physical Transformation

7. Drawing up a Masterplan to guide the future development of Newcastle Town Centre

The Borough Council and its partners have developed a 'Strategic Investment Framework' (SIF) as a vision for the future development of the town centre and to frame a series of actions to raise the attractiveness and appeal of the town (see further 'Image and Marketing').

Taking its lead from the SIF the Borough Council commissioned a series of commercial and development options appraisals of sites in Newcastle Town Centre and this made a number of recommendations about the planning and development of the three key sites in the town, Ryecroft, Nelson Place and Blackfriars.

A key recommendation was that new retail led regeneration is the catalyst for further regeneration of the town centre and that;

- The Ryecroft site (based on the site of the former Sainsburys supermarket and land adjoining, including potentially that of the present Civic Offices) is identified as a priority develop site
- Nelson Place (including the former Jubilee Baths is identified as suitable for the creation of a new Civic Quarter and;
- Blackfriars (between Blackfriars Road and Pool Dam). A range of uses complementary to the town centre, including bulky goods retail; residential or civic uses are proposed. Retail development here would be considered to be in competition with, rather than complementary to the town centre.

The development options appraisal was based on optioneering and viability assessment against objectives for the town centre. The delivery strategy sets out the option of a development agreement approach (between the Council and a selected developer) to achieve the preferred form of development for Ryecroft and Nelson Place. Finally each site is subject to design briefs which set out the design principles which should be followed when developing proposals.

8. Bringing forward proposals for retail and business accommodation in Newcastle Town Centre with priority placed on growing its professional services and a distinctive retail offer

Plans for Newcastle Town centre's retail and business accommodation are contained in the masterplanning work discussed in section seven.

New Retail Development

The Ryecroft site that includes the former Sainsbury's supermarket and the present Civic Office site is identified as the key retail opportunity in the town as this lies inside the town centre ring road and would therefore work with existing pedestrian shopping flows around the High Street, Castle Walk and Ironmarket.

The Ryecroft development strategy for the Ryecroft site envisages a development of around 150-180,000 sq. ft. of new retail space including a 60,000 sq. ft. department store to anchor the scheme and a 750 space car park. Only with this scale and level of ambition can the town achieve the necessary 'step-change' in its shopping fortunes and address the long-term loss of trade to out-of-town retail parks.

The Ryecroft scheme will accommodate retailers which have not yet been able to locate in the town due to the limitations of current property offer (typically historic, narrow, deep and multi-level). The

first step was made with the acquisition of the former Sainsburys site in July 2011 in partnership with Staffordshire County Council. The two councils are now working alongside a retail development consultant (Cushman Wakefield) to secure a development partner for the scheme.

Consideration will also be given to managing the change in the retail focus of the town centre which is likely to result from the Ryecroft scheme and the impact this may have on the more peripheral shopping areas of the town. For instance, a complementary string to the Borough Council's development strategy is to play to the town's strength in independent shops, many of which are clustered in areas like Bridge Street, Merrial Street, King Street and Lower High Street. It is anticipated that custom in these areas of town will be increased if and when the Ryecroft scheme is completed as a result of increased numbers of visitors to the town but in addition to this, these clusters of independent shops will be more actively promoted (see further 'Image and Marketing') as one of the town's distinctive attractions along with 'town centre events', 'where to eat', 'town centre trails' and 'the food market'. It is intended that making provision for some family friendly places to eat will also form part of the new Ryecroft development, again with the explicit intention of attracting more people to the town and providing reasons for shoppers and visitors to stay longer..

New Business Accommodation

Town centres are the most sustainable locations for new office development as day time workers help to support nearby business in shop, leisure and food and drink businesses without the need to make additional journeys. The new National Planning Policy Framework (2012) requires a presumption in favour of locating new office development in town centres and this will be actively pursued in favour of unsustainably located out of town business parks.

The possible town centre based co-location of the Borough Council, Newcastle Police Station, the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and County Council staff is being explored. Depending on the outcome of the Ryecroft redevelopment, this could take the form of new consolidated offices providing substantial financial savings to all parties. Two town centre sites, already in public ownership, have been identified as prospective options for re-siting the Civic Offices in the event that a move is required. The County Council will also use this as an opportunity to bring a substantial number of staff currently dispersed around the borough into the town centre – so providing a greater presence in the town centre and with it, significantly greater footfall and spending.

In private-sector terms, there are a number of suitable development opportunities in the town, including land adjoining the new Travelodge, the former Maxims Nightclub site (together with land adjoining), the former Blackfriars Bakery site, land adjoining the new Sainsburys store and the site of the former Zanzibar nightclub in George Street. Achieving that investment will, of course, depend on the strength of market interest and the appeal of the sites available. The Borough Council will work closely with the 'Make It' Inward Investment Service to encourage office development to take place in the town centre.

Currently much of that interest is focussed not to Newcastle Town Centre or Stoke-on-Trent City Centre (the key development priorities for the two local authorities) but to out-of-town locations. With this in mind, sketch schemes have been prepared to demonstrate how office developments of between 8000 and 50,000 sq. ft. might be accommodated on four sites in Newcastle Town Centre, each capable of accommodating modern open-plan style buildings, generally of three storeys in height, each with plentiful car parking. These are illustrated below:

IMPORT ARCHITECT'S DRAWINGS HERE

Complementary Interventions

Complementary factors in making Newcastle Town Centre a more desirable location for new retail or office investment are also;

- Investment in the quality of the public realm (see section 18)
- A better food and drink 'offer' (see section 18)
- Increased town centre living: a number of edge-of-town sites suitable for housing development exist (the former Titleys Fruit and Vegetable Warehouse in George Street, the First Bus Depot on Liverpool Road and the former Bristol Street Motors site off London Road). Developers will be encouraged to bring forward residential led schemes on these sites
- Management of town centre car parks (this could include a review of the pricing structure, pay-on-exit arrangements and payment by card)
- Creating a clearer 'sense of arrival' in the town centre through VMS (variable message signs) drawing attention to where to park.

Some of these actions are discussed in more detail in section 18.

9. Promoting the further development of Keele University Science and Business Park

The Borough Council will continue to work closely with Keele University to realise its plans for the further development of its Science and Business Park, including the development for the next phase of the park, the development of a Conference and Training Centre, further Innovation Centres, and increased promotion and marketing for inward investment.

The science park to date comprises a Postgraduate Medical School and four Innovation Centres with a combined floorspace of 110,000 sq. ft. of high tech business space accommodating 50 technology-based companies employing around 700 people. Bio-composites, Erigal, Siemens Wind Power UK, Capita, GVA, Cobra Bio, Dermal Technology, Internet Central, Navman Wireless and Synetrix are amongst the firms based here. These represent high value, high growth, high tech businesses with first class pay, career prospects and skills requirements – opportunities for local people to aspire to (both as prospective employees and to establish like enterprises themselves) and as a magnet for attracting new people into the area.

Keele University Science and Business Park has established itself as UK Headquarters for a number of international environmental technology companies in recent years. Siemens Wind Power UK R&D has doubled the number of graduate recruits at the Keele site in the past two years and McCamley, suppliers of vertical axis wind turbines, have recently opened an office on the Science Park.

The next phase of Keele Science Park comprises 70 acres (28 ha) of prime development land adjoining Keele University and this is made up of 13 development plots which could potentially accommodate around 600,000 sq. ft. of new business space and around 2500 new jobs. Allied to increased marketing effect this site presents one of North Staffordshire's best opportunities of attracting new inward investment (as opposed to housing existing local firms seeking to upgrade their accommodation). The pace of development on the park will be increased through greater proactive marketing of the site using the host of blue chip companies located on the park as a key selling factor.

The key sectors which are likely to form part of the Science Park's' growth strategy includes:

- Medical and Healthcare
- Low Carbon and Environmental Sustainability
- Information Technology

- Media
- Design and Technology
- Engineering

The site's frontage plot is planned to be developed in 2012 as a Training and four star Conference Hotel and the existing Home Farm building, to be known as the Nova Centre and which opened in April 2012 for business occupation and graduate enterprise opportunities. With the support of Staffordshire County Council, the construction of a fifth Innovation Centre, 30,000 sq. ft. in size, is due to be started by the end of 2012 with a view to accommodating the needs of growing technology firms currently housed in smaller premises on the science park, as well as space for new businesses. Plans for a sixth and seventh Innovation centre are also being drawn up, though the timetable for their construction will depend on market demand.

The establishment of the hotel will help showcase the area, the Science Park and the businesses based here as well as hosting their international visitors. This would be a significant economic boost for the area (many business visitors currently often stay outside the area altogether e.g. near to Manchester Airport) as well as providing an important marketing tool for the area in its own right.

10. Enabling the development of higher quality housing for current and future residents, with an explicit aim to increase the attractiveness of North Staffordshire as a home for affluent residents

There would be considerable economic (and other) benefit to North Staffordshire if a larger proportion of the higher income people who work in the area chose to live in or close to the urban area. The impact would be felt in terms of the range of the local retail, food and drink and cultural offer of the area as well as the harder economic consequences of higher rate income and consumer spending. Importantly (in the context of an economic development strategy) housing high earners locally could also help to retain local entrepreneurs (and would-be entrepreneurs) and business leaders close to the area in which they work.

Currently around 13,000 professional people and senior managers commute to work in Newcastle or Stoke-on-Trent from the surrounding Districts of Stafford, Staffordshire Moorlands and (the former local authority districts of) Congleton, Crewe and Nantwich. There are many reasons why people chose to live a distance from their place of work including schooling, lifestyle, the environment, a certain retail offer and availability of the right type of property. These reasons provide the starting point for establishing what can be done to reverse or, reduce this.

In the 1930s Newcastle Borough Council established a residential area to the south west of the town centre (The Westlands) with the explicit objective of housing higher income groups. So it can be done. Recent research from consultants Arc4 suggests that the market for executive housing (of a value of £500,000 or more) across the whole of North Staffordshire may not be large and could be satisfied by the provision of 10 to 20 new build properties per year.

Housing high earners locally is a North Staffordshire-wide objective, not limited to the Borough alone and the Borough Council will work with our planning colleagues across the area to identify suitable locations for executive housing.

The Borough Council will shortly to prepare a Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) to identify suitable sites for new development in the Borough and one of its objectives will be to make some provision for higher value housing (see section 11). A clear pointer to geographical preference is illustrated by the fact that nearly half of all E to H banded residential properties in the Borough lie in just three wards, (Keele, Loggerheads and Whitmore, and Westlands).

One option the DPD may explore could be to permit the small-scale growth of established villages which have schools, shops and community facilities so allowing for a more sustainable form of development. Opportunities may also lie in the provision of development plots suitable for self-build housing.

11. Bringing forward new sites for employment and housing through the Site Allocations Development Plan Document to enable the further growth of the Borough

The private-sector is the principal engine for growth; but that growth can be frustrated by a lack of suitable and viable development opportunities which are attractive to the market. This includes the availability of sites, modern infrastructure and a supportive and easy to use planning regime.

In the short-term there is sufficient land for new housing development and new employment development. The Site Allocations Development Plan Document (see section 10) will make provision for new land allocations up to the year 2026.

From feedback from the development industry it is clear that developers and their industrial clients (whether factories and logistics companies) are looking for sites which are relatively close to the principal road network (which in Newcastle terms means the A34 and A500) and in recent years the success of Lymedale Park, Parkhouse East and West and High Carr Business Park provides clear evidence of this.

Much of Newcastle's success in attracting new industrial employment in recent years can be attributed to a central location and good accessibility to the nation's motorway network via the M6 and A50. Connectivity via rail is also a key asset for the area's businesses with frequent direct rail services to London Euston. Long-term, the area may be served by the high-speed route, HS2, which will operate a 200 - 240 mph service between London and the north and midlands. There could be stations serving this route to the east of Birmingham and at Manchester Airport but it is not known whether this will make provision for a stop in North Staffordshire. If this cannot be secured, future Government lobbying will focus on retaining the quality and frequency of service to and from Euston that the area currently enjoys.

To complement the focus on Newcastle Town centre and Keele Science and Business Park (see earlier), the Borough Council in its role as Local Planning Authority aims to bring forward future land of this type to meet its future 'industrial' development needs.

The Borough Council has jointly commissioned (with Stoke-on-Trent City Council) an independent review of its employment land portfolio against the projected employment land needs for the next 15 years and the recommendations from this study will be used to inform decisions on future site proposals.

People – transforming ambition

12. Raising skills, reduce worklessness and raise aspirations as a core element of all transformational strategies

Skills Gaps

Skills gaps continue to be addressed in Newcastle through partners such as the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Family Employment Initiative (FEI), Newcastle under Lyme College (NULC), PM Training the Social Enterprise arm of the Aspire Group, Newcastle Community and Voluntary Support (NCVS), Job Centre Plus and through The Work Programme. However, there are still many issues to address regarding the supply of readily employable people.

Since the launch of the project in February 2009 FEI working with JETs (Jobs Enterprise Training Services) have engaged with over 600 people, provided training for over 200 and supported almost 200 people back into work. Evaluation carried out by Ekosgen in July 2011 shows that FEI delivers good value for money with an average cost of £1,813 per client supported back into work. This compares very favourably with similar programmes and equates to a social return on investment of up to £22.28 for every £1 invested. Partners will continue to work together through the LEP in order to address these issues and to ensure that national initiatives add value to existing local programmes.

Long-Term Worklessness

There is a particular challenge in providing appropriate and accessible training for people who have been unemployed for a long period of time, especially those who have never worked. In February 2012, 2664 people (3.3% of the Newcastle population age 16 – 64) were claiming Job Seekers Allowance. However, in addition to this at August 2011, 5780 people were claiming Employment Support Allowance. These are the people who are furthest from the jobs market and who require more intensive support to get back into training and work

During 2004 – 2010 the then NSRP provided further opportunities for agencies to work together on a joined up approach to reducing long-term worklessness. The NSRP Employment and Skills Business Plan, which all partners signed up to, provided a clear direction and a range of mechanisms to address this issue.

A key initiative prioritised within the plan was the establishment of JETs which integrated worklessness support measures for those people furthest away from the workplace. In Newcastle, in addition to the JETs service, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, Borough Council and Aspire worked together to establish the Family Employment Initiative (FEI), which has been based in Knutton since 2009.

Apprenticeships

It is widely recognised that apprenticeships provide people with the chance to learn and to gain nationally recognised qualifications whilst receiving a weekly wage. The Staffordshire Providers Association (SPA) provides a network of Staffordshire training providers many of which are based in Newcastle. Two of the main local providers are PM Training and Newcastle under Lyme College (NULC).

PM Training is the social enterprise arm of the Aspire Group based in Newcastle and is one of the largest social enterprises in the country. It aims to tackle worklessness among young people by offering those with limited or no formal qualifications an alternative route into employment. PM Training has recently established a new training centre in Chesterton. The centre will provide more opportunities for local young people to access training and apprenticeship opportunities. The centre

will help young people to develop essential skills in the construction and housing sectors. It is anticipated that the centre will create training for 150 young people every year and 100 of these are expected to take up apprenticeships.

NULC has a 30 year successful track record in delivering apprenticeships and has recently invested in establishing an Employment Training Centre opposite the main college site where all activity can take place. The college has a strategy to increase the number of apprenticeships being supported in local business and to support young people 16+ and adults 19+ to undertake apprenticeships with potential progression to other programmes including degrees.

The LEP Enterprise and Skills Implementation Group and the Newcastle Employment and Skills Group (NESG) provides the opportunity for all partners to share information on apprenticeships and further develop this area of work.

Schools

Schools need to know what businesses are looking for and employers need input from schools to better understand how businesses can make effective contributions to the curriculum. In Newcastle schools the DEEP is a delivery mechanism for the Staffordshire Partnership, which has a county-wide responsibility for employer engagement with respect to work experience, work-related learning, the new Diplomas and professional development for teachers. The DEEP has developed an innovative approach to introducing the world of work to young people through the 'Carousel of Opportunity', which brings business and young people together to introduce the world of work, raise aspiration and explore options.

Volunteering

As part of the route back into training and work it is widely recognised that volunteering can provide unemployed people with skills, experience and increased confidence. The Job Centre Plus 'Work Together' programme is a national initiative that aims to encourage unemployed people to consider volunteering as a way of improving their employment prospects while they are looking for work.

For people not eligible for the 'Work Together' programme, Staffordshire Moorlands CVS delivers a volunteering programme, funded through European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) on behalf of the three North Staffordshire authorities. This covers a wide range of people and can be directly influenced by the local authorities to ensure that priorities are met.

The Borough Council will;

- Continue to support the work of the DEEP group to raise ambitions of the young people in schools
- Continue to work in partnership to support the Skills Funding Agency's (SFA) aim to ensure that people and businesses can access the training they need to succeed, informed by the needs of businesses, communities, sector and industry bodies. This is through the LEP Enterprise and Skills Implementation Group
- Continue to work closely with the Staffordshire training providers to encourage apprenticeships and address worklessness
- Continue to work with the LEP Employment and Skills Implementation Group to address priorities identified in the E&SIG work plan
- Co-ordinate the local employment and skills network in order to ensure effective communication between service deliverers
- Work with partners to ensure join-up between existing initiatives and the Government's Work Programme
- Work with the FEI, PM Training, NULC, JCP, other partners and Staffordshire training providers, to address the worklessness agenda and in particular the promotion of apprenticeships

in line with the Memorandum of Understanding between the Borough Council and PM Training the Council will seek, whenever possible, to provide opportunities for work either directly or via the Borough Councils list of suppliers of services, sector firms and other third parties and, on their part, PM Training will seek to secure maximum local benefit from projects through the provision of training and supply of apprentices.

13. Working towards getting the right skill mix to increase productivity

Skills are integral to accelerating economic prosperity; creating competitive business advantage and empowering individuals to change their lives for the better. Higher and further education plays a critical role in ensuring that we have the right skills mix to help build a stronger, evenly balanced and more vibrant economy.

The Borough Council will continue to work with the LEP who have identified three priorities;

- Developing a more enterprising culture both at school and beyond
- Ensuring that young people and adults are equipped with basic employability skills required by local businesses
- Ensuring we are delivering the education and skills needed to fill jobs now and in the future

These priorities will be progressed by the LEP Enterprise and Skills Implementation Group (E&SIG) through its annually updated work plan.

The local Universities of Keele and Staffordshire play a key role in addressing the LEP priorities through a range of professional development courses and training for industry, public-sector and a range of other organisations in a variety of study options. Many of the courses are accredited by professional bodies and count towards continuing professional development portfolios.

As well as having the right skills, employers require people with employability qualities and competencies, which include a positive attitude, professional approach and commitment to the work. This is echoed in the Staffordshire Employers Skills Survey 2010 (phase 1), which states that in some cases, depending on the level of the job, employability skills were considered to be of more importance than vocational and formal qualifications.

Locally, NULC Employer Engagement Team continues to work closely with employers to better understand their demands for skills and to ensure that the college delivers the correct training to meet their needs.

This work is supported by the Skills Funding Agency's (SFA), who invest £4billion annually into colleges, (including NULC) providers and other training organisations to provide the education and training needed by employers, employees and future employees to progress and improve what they do - increasing the chances of success for all.

The Borough Council will continue to work with partners through the LEP Enterprise and Skills Implementation Group to ensure that we are delivering the education and skills needed to fill jobs now and in the future as outlined in the annual work plan, and will continue to work in partnership to support Keele University, Staffordshire University, Finest and NULC to address skills gaps.

14. Stimulating demand for higher skills and create opportunities for people to acquire relevant skills for current and future industrial structure

To stimulate demand and create opportunities for people to acquire higher skills, the Borough Council will continue to work with the LEP and to support the work of the lead organisations; Keele

University, Staffordshire University, the North Staffordshire Chamber of Commerce, Newcastle under Lyme College and Stoke-on-Trent College.

In line with the view of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) that employers are looking for more than just technical skills and knowledge, Keele University is committed to ensuring that in addition to subject knowledge, all students will acquire generic employability skills and have the opportunity to develop these further through the completion of a personal development portfolio, Keele Certificate of Employability and through work placements and internships.

This work is complemented by Finest, the professional services network. The Finest mission is to be a catalyst for the growth and development of member businesses and the professional services sector in North Staffordshire, its key objectives are the recruitment and retention of skills in North Staffordshire along with supporting and raising aspirations in all tiers of education

Gaps in training have been highlighted as an issue by the LEP and specifically, Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) as a career path has been highlighted as an important area for improvement. A key action of the LEP Enterprise and Skills Implementation Group Workplan is to ensure that training providers have the capacity to ensure that employer demands are met.

Evidence suggests that we don't have enough young people choosing science related subjects; consequently we cannot meet the demands of the sector. The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) has raised this as a serious issue for the UK and suggests that we need to double the number of new science graduates over seven years or see skilled jobs disappear.

The Borough Council will work with Keele University and Staffordshire University to identify opportunities for graduate placements, will continue to work with Finest focusing on support for the business and professional sectors and will continue to work with the LEP to provide more focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) to address current and predicted future skills gaps.

Image and Marketing – transforming perceptions

15. Developing an external marketing strategy for the Borough

Much of this strategy focuses on making visible transformations. However, people need to be made aware of the changes taking place and the assets currently on offer, for this transformation to take effect. The Borough and the role it plays in the wider sub-region, needs marketing both as an inward investment location and a tourism destination with a clear focus on Newcastle town centre and Keele Science and Business Park.

Marketing Newcastle's assets as an inward investment location

Within North Staffordshire, enquiry handling and promotion of the area as an inward investment location is primarily carried out by the Make It Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire team. The Make It team has a county-wide remit but ERDF funding is allocated for North Staffordshire specific marketing activities. As far as the Borough is concerned the principal objectives of our marketing strategy are:

- To raise the profile and investor-awareness of Newcastle Town Centre, its qualities and development opportunities; this will include office development, leisure and retail, food and drink and residential development, all of which we will seek to bring in greater numbers to the town centre
- To promote Keele Science and Business Park for high tech inward investment including new Innovation Centres and a new Training and Conference Hotel
- To attract manufacturing and other employment investment to sites and premises around the Borough including land at Chatterley Valley, Chesterton, Lymedale Park, Cross Heath and Silverdale.

The Borough Council will work with our colleagues at Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council, and with agents, land-owners and intermediaries to identify prospective investors, present investment opportunities to them and help them to overcome obstacles which may stand in the way of their development intentions.

We will use digital media, including the Borough Council's own website and that of the 'Make it Newcastle' brand, as well as the printed media, including the preparation of a North Staffordshire focussed Employment Land Compendium. Regular dialogue with local and regional agents, architects and commercial advisors will also play a part in promoting the Borough and its investment opportunities.

The Strategic Investment Framework (SIF) provides a clear and strong framework around which to base town centre marketing Initiatives (see section 18). The emerging Town Centre Partnership will bring together partners, such as landlords and estate agents, to develop a coherent plan for marketing the town for inward investment.

The Borough will work closely with the LEP in marketing the area and will ensure that its voice is heard in the development of strategies and subsequent action plans.

16. Improving the quality of life offer for current and future residents

North Staffordshire needs to improve its quality of life offer based around different identified selling points for different groups. Newcastle has a key role to play in the differentiation of the sub-region and so it is vital to work with partners on the development of our offer. This will be achieved by;

Developing offers for key target markets of high skill workers

Typically these might include young professionals seeking affordable housing and an easy commute or more experienced professionals looking for 'executive homes' and access to schools. However, before developing offers it is essential to define Newcastle's target markets. Therefore we will undertake a review of our existing 'customer' profile, identify any gaps and use this analysis to define appropriate target markets.

Use the SIF to deliver 'quality of life' improvements in Newcastle Town Centre

The town centre is at the heart of the Borough community, and a key economic driver. Improvements here will demonstrate a shift in organisational and partnership culture towards a more creative, proactive and co-ordinated approach to delivering local quality of life. As well as the SIF, the emerging Town Centre Partnership we will be using recommendations in the December 2011 Portas review of The Future of the High Street. This aims to develop the distinctiveness of the place and create a balance of appropriate town centre uses that supports this distinctiveness. The main focus will be the cultural and retail offer but we will also seek to enable the development of new offices, leisure and housing.

We will aim to maintain and develop a complementary and distinctive offer to that of Stoke-on-Trent City Centre, consistent with the North Staffordshire brand.

We will specifically develop the town's role as a 'character centre', focussing particularly on revitalising the soul of the town centre, notably its street markets (The Stones) and marketplace.

We will promote Newcastle as an urban market town – a key part of the quality of life offer that in turn supports our longer-term aim of becoming more recognised as a 'University Town'.

We will promote, modernise and upgrade the quality of the street markets, keeping them relevant to our local community and develop a higher quality, sustainable market culture that is distinctive and, over time, attracts a wider range of visitors.

The Borough Council, working with the Town Centre Partnership, will also look at those areas cited by businesses as particular barriers to business growth in the town centre, such as the cost of parking, rents and rates.

17. Supporting the development of North Staffordshire's existing 'experience economy'

The annual tourism economic impact assessment undertaken by the Enjoy Staffordshire Partnership shows that in 2010 1.7m trips were taken to Newcastle, with an estimated total spend by visitors of £92m. Furthermore, almost 2,500 jobs are supported by the tourism sector in the Borough. The assessment uses a model developed by Geoff Broom Associates in partnership with the Regional Tourist Boards and has been compiled and written by The Research Solution, an independent market research agency.

Gradually increasing affluence has led to the growth of the 'experience economy', whereby consumers are seeking added value from retail, leisure and tourism sectors. The economic downturn has further encouraged people to stay closer to home. There are many gems in the North Staffordshire experience economy, including theme parks, gardens, ceramics, canals, etc, all of which are easily accessible from Newcastle.

Tourism is an area where all local authorities in the sub-region benefit from working together to increase the proportion of visitors staying overnight and spending more money in the area. The LEP has identified a growing rural economy supported by tourism, with food and drink sectors being a

key attribute of the county. Furthermore, the LEP Board acknowledges its need to work with existing partnerships and specialist sector interest groups, one of which is the Destination Management Partnership (DMP). The DMP, known as the Enjoy Staffordshire Partnership, has made a significant contribution to tourism within the area but more needs to be done to create a clearer tourism offer.

As the recession continues and more people choose to holiday in the UK, the scope for attracting UK visitors to the Borough grows. The opening of the town centre Travelodge, plus plans for the Keele conference hotel has increased the number and range of bed spaces available to visitors.

Business tourism is another area for development and Keele campus is a consistently popular and award-winning destination for conferences and training.

- The Borough Council will;
 - Identify joint projects as a sub-region to develop local tourism
 - Support LEP marketing and tourism related initiatives to attract visitors, business tourism, inward investors and students
 - Continue to support the Enjoy Staffordshire Partnership and seek ways to play a more active role
 - Work with partners to bring the former St Giles & St George's school back into use for the benefit of the town centre and for the wider benefit of the local business community
 - Work with Keele University to promote the development of the Keele Sustainability Hub, based on the Home Farm site (see section 9)
 - Explore the wider use of the new Jubilee 2 leisure facility, the upper floor of which offers the opportunity to host large-scale town centre events and bookings.

- The emerging Town Centre Partnership will;
 - Work with Keele University to improve the student experience and links with the town centre
 - Investigate options for improving the quality of hotels, conference and eating/drinking facilities in the town
 - Develop a town centre website to highlight the features and benefits of the town
 - Improve the visitor experience within the town centre focussing particularly on the market, food and drink and events and festivals.

18. Using the Strategic Investment Framework as the basis for investment in the cultural and retail experience of Newcastle Town Centre

Newcastle town centre plays a vital role in the economic future of the Borough. In response to this a Strategic Investment Framework (SIF) for the town centre has been developed with considerable input from partner organisations. The SIF provides a context for actions to improve the economic well-being of the town centre. Although the SIF represents a long-term commitment, the action plan is revised annually.

The main aim of the SIF is to develop the distinctiveness and character of Newcastle town centre. Pillar 1 of the SIF, 'Retail Remade', proposes actions to improve the core business of the town, significantly improving the retail offer, environment and experience by building on existing strengths and character. Pillar 2, 'town and culture' is about creating reasons to dwell in the town centre, specifically growing the leisure and cultural offer as well as housing.

Retail should continue to play a strategic part, particularly because it can contribute to the quality of life for visitors and for current and potential residents. Over the last two years, during the worst part of the recession, the vacancy rate within the town centre has consistently been lower than the national average. Whilst a number of high street chains may have disappeared, the independent sector has remained fairly robust, suggesting resilience amongst local businesses. However, the town currently lacks floor space of sufficient size to draw key multiples. Attracting large-scale developer investment into the town centre is covered in sections 7 and 8.

- Retail networking and communication

The development of the retail offer needs to be a partnership between all town centre stakeholders. Based on SIF recommendations, steps have been taken to set up a town centre partnership (TCP), to bring a wide range of partners to develop Newcastle as a destination, focussing on some of the recommendations of the December 2011 Portas review of The Future of the High Street. The TCP will oversee the setting up of a town centre website, listing shops, restaurants, etc. alongside other relevant visitor and investor information.

- Investing in the quality of public realm

The SIF recognised that there was a need to improve the environment within Newcastle Town Centre to improve its attractiveness to shoppers. The identity and performance of the street market is critical to this. Research conducted for the Borough Council has shown that the market suffers from a poor layout in the town and that the market stalls are urgently in need of replacement. The Borough Council, in partnership with Staffordshire County Council, has prepared proposals to close Hassell Street to through traffic in the daytime and re-align the street market whilst providing new modern market stalls and re-paving the Hassell Street/High Street junction to reinforce its status as a pedestrian area. Associated works will also take place to introduce a bus lane on Barracks Road and create a new taxi rank at the entrance to the Ironmarket. Following public consultation and Cabinet approval, the works on the scheme are due to begin in 2012.

- Shops for Art

A scheme will be developed in conjunction with relevant partners to make vacant shop units look more attractive. A trial has already taken place and it is planned to build on the work already undertaken. Typically this might include artwork displays and possibly other cultural uses such as 'shop front theatre'.

Pillar 2 of the SIF, 'Town and Culture', is about creating reasons to dwell in the town centre by developing the cultural and leisure offer. One of its key recommendations is consolidating and promoting the local food and drink offer within the town centre. In this respect, the Borough Council will;

- Work with partners, in particular 'Taste of Staffordshire' to develop the 'local food' offer for the town centre. This will include both short term and longer term actions encouraging market traders and other outlets to promote the origin of their produce and possibly organising a food festival
- Explore, in conjunction with partners such as the DMP, the possibility of setting up a local tourism group, to maximise the impact of the Borough's tourism offer.
- Develop the cultural offer. Tourism-related projects such as festivals and events were prominent amongst the innovative actions set out in the North Staffordshire Tourism Strategy 2004-2014. Events programming in Newcastle under Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent is a significant area of development for the city region - encompassing sports, cultural, business and other events - and will be a key area of our image-building work.

The Jazz & Blues festival which started in Newcastle town centre in 2006 provides an excellent example of how partnership working can develop and sustain a successful event. Furthermore, in 2010, a small amount of funding from Staffordshire County Council provided the opportunity for a number of successful town centre events aimed at raising the profile and increasing footfall. Some of the most successful have been repeated, such as the Oatcake Festival and the Breast Cancer Campaign 'Paint the Town Pink', with new events being added to the calendar.

- An events group was formed in 2011 as a sub-group of the town centre partnership and this group will develop an annual programme of events which will contribute towards the aims of the TCP. As well as building on the successful Jazz & Blues festival, other key events will be developed.
- The Borough Council, in conjunction with the Town Centre Partnership will market the town centre to supplement tourism and inward investment objectives.

DRAFT

Implementation, Monitoring and Review

A supplementary document to this strategy, an annual Action Plan, accompanies this strategy. While the strategy itself is intended to endure for the full five year period, hopefully demonstrating the effectiveness of the priorities which the Borough Council and its partners have chosen to put their weight behind, the annual action plans will be prepared afresh each January / February for the following year (April to March).

The annual Action Plans will set out in more detail how the aims and objectives agreed will be carried out. Like the strategy itself, these will also be based around the four themes of

- Economy
- Place and Infrastructure
- People, and
- Image & Marketing

The Action Plans will identify lead bodies, timescales for implementation, costs (where appropriate) and how these will be funded.

At the end of each year the Borough Council will publish an annual progress report, reviewing the year in terms of how well (or not) it has achieved the targets set as well as agreeing the action plan for the following year. The annual report will give decision makers in the Borough Council and their partners the opportunity to assess success to date, remind ourselves why initiatives are being pursued and the join-up between them. The review may also take the opportunity to consider fresh Government initiatives or changes in the economic or financial landscape and capitalize on them. It may also suggest changes in emphasis or priority (and perhaps what might no longer be pursued so that new things might be tried).

A fundamental question (as with all strategies) is what will success look like? This is answered in part through text (success in achieving the actions we have set ourselves) and in part through the publication of a number of performance indicators appropriate to the four themes (business, skills etc).

At the end of the five year period covered by this strategy (2017), the Borough Council will publish an evaluation report of the effectiveness of the strategy and assess the successes achieved and what might have been done better (or differently). This more detailed review will be undertaken after the period of the Strategy by which time changes in the economic and financial circumstances of the country (and the area) will be clearer and it may then be more appropriate to consider more fundamental changes in direction, including new initiatives.