



Babergh & Mid Suffolk Economic Strategy





Cllr Deborah Saw
Leader of Babergh District Council

Our vision is to work to create a resilient, more sustainable future, with and for, all Babergh's residents and communities.

Babergh is regularly voted as one of the best places to live, work, and visit in the country, accolades we can all be proud of, but it is our duty to ensure that we help to create an economic future that all our residents can participate in and benefit from.

As a Council we want to foster economic prosperity while ensuring environmental sustainability and social well-being. We are committed to building an economy that not only thrives but also respects and preserves our environment for future generations whilst offering our residents a great quality of life.

Our economic strategy is built on the principles of sustainability, inclusivity, and innovation. We aim to create a resilient economy that supports local businesses, attracts new investment, ensures that our current and future workforce has the skills and attributes required by employers and provides quality jobs for our residents.

Key to our strategy is the collaboration with our partners in Mid Suffolk, community stakeholders, businesses, and educational institutions. Together, we will promote green technologies, support sustainable practices, and ensure that the growth of our economy aligns with our environmental goals. This integrated approach will help us build a vibrant, sustainable economy that benefits our businesses and residents alike.

Together, we will champion imagination and innovation and be ambitious to secure a bright and exciting future for our communities.



Cllr Andrew Mellen
Leader of Mid Suffolk District Council

Mid Suffolk has big ambitions to make our District the greenest and best place to live in the country – and this strategy is a vital part of that.

Our mission is to create a resilient, more sustainable future for all the residents and communities of Mid Suffolk.

We recognise the recent challenging times for businesses and residents in our district, and so, the ambition within this strategy is to deliver sustainable, inclusive growth focused on our three core principles; people, prosperity and place while ensuring we work within sustainable resources and maximise our positive impact on the planet.

By focusing on the green economy, we aim to create new opportunities for local businesses, attract eco-friendly investments, and generate quality jobs that support our residents. This strategy is designed to harness the power of innovation and green technologies, ensuring that our economic growth ambitions are both forward-thinking and environmentally responsible.

We are dedicated to delivering local priorities that directly benefit our communities. This includes supporting small businesses, enhancing public services, and investing in infrastructure that promotes sustainability.

By working closely with our partners in Babergh and community stakeholders, businesses, and educational institutions, we will build a robust economy that reflects our shared values and aspirations to deliver shared economic priorities in the way our residents and businesses expect of us.

Together, we can ensure that Mid Suffolk has a thriving, resilient and green economy for generations to come.

The strengths of our districts' economy lie in its diverse people, thriving businesses, and unique places. Strategically positioned and well-connected to national hubs like Cambridge and London, our districts are attractive places to work, live, and visit.

However, our economy faces several challenges, driven by historic local trends such as lower wages, limited workspace provision in rural areas, and higher house prices compared to national averages. We understand that things can change quickly and we have designed this strategy to be flexible so we can keep delivering no matter what changes nationally, whilst ensuring that we remain focused on delivering sustainable growth for our communities.

While the quality of our natural environment is a key economic driver, creating or expanding employment

hubs to address challenges around access to employment can make the drive to be more sustainable more challenging. By striking the right balance, we can reduce out-commuting and emissions, making the district more sustainable, whilst providing *"the right space for the right business in the right place"*.

With an informed Economic Strategy and a clear set of actions, we can more effectively tackle these challenges, further strengthening the diversity and resilience of our districts' economy. This is particularly crucial as we respond to the global challenge of transitioning to a Net Zero economy, seizing some of the greatest opportunities for positive change across our districts.

Our Economic Strategy is designed to complement and not duplicate existing strategies, such as the Culture, Heritage & Visitor Economy

Strategy, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), Carbon Reduction Management Plan, Wellbeing Strategy, Joint Local Plan, Corporate Plans and specific commitments including the Armed Forces Covenant.

We acknowledge the vital role we have as district councils and the importance of partnership working. Whether acting as an enabler, partner, influencer, lobbying or direct delivery we aim to deliver this strategy through strong collaboration with local businesses, partners, and organisations, ensuring we meet the expectations of our residents and businesses.

Together, we can build a vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive economy for the future.

" the right space for the right business in the right place "



Vision

Our overall vision is to help create a prosperous, resilient, more sustainable future, with and for, all the residents and communities of Babergh and Mid Suffolk

The development of our new Economic Strategy has been undertaken within the context of relevant local, sub-regional and national plans, policies and strategies. Ensuring our new Economic Strategy compliments and aligns with existing policy, plans and strategies will drive impact and 'buy-in' from local, sub-regional and national stakeholders.

Our aligned and coordinated approach provides the opportunity to leverage wider support and interventions. For example, it has the potential to unlock our growth and development goals, such as public sector investment opportunities to redevelop our town centres, while helping to secure more private sector investment in the districts through a clear and coordinated approach.

We will champion our districts as clean, resilient places, supporting green skills, decarbonisation of local businesses, innovation and business resilience, workforce development and will work with partners to tackle infrastructure challenges to ensure our districts are great places to live, work and visit and that we improve the quality of life of our residents and communities.



Ambition

Our Economic Strategy will deliver sustainable, inclusive growth focused on people, prosperity and place while ensuring we work within sustainable resources and maximise our positive impact on the planet

Where we fit

Shared goals

Our Strategy will align with wider strategic objectives at a regional, national, and global level to ensure that we are able to access funding and support the Governments wider economic growth agenda whilst ensuring that we are delivering a service that specifically benefits our residents and local businesses. 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.

SES sets out regional priorities to help achieve government's UK Industrial Strategy

BMSDC strategy will align with national and regional priorities whilst ensuring we are delivering a service that specifically benefits our residents and local businesses

UK Industrial Strategy

Suffolk Economic Strategy

UK Industrial Strategy outlines government's wider economic growth agenda for UK PLC

The role of national government is to set the framework for growth and identify national priority sectors and growth locations

SES focuses on powering the UK, feeding the UK, and connecting the UK taking a collaborative approach across the entirety of Suffolk, providing direction and priority interventions to create a more inclusive economy

Local government at a regional level establishes how the economy functions locally

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Economic Strategy

BMSDC Economic Strategy will link to external and internal strategies (e.g, Culture, Heritage & Visitor Economy Strategy, Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), Carbon Reduction Management Plan, Wellbeing Strategy, Joint Local Plan (JLP) & Corporate Plans) but will not replace or duplicate them

Local government at a district level supports the lived experience of the economy in a place for our residents and local businesses

Building on our commitment to creating a resilient and sustainable future, our approach to the development of this Economic Strategy has emphasised sustainable, inclusive growth that delivers benefits to our communities and doesn't damage our environment, rather than focusing on traditional metrics like GDP or GVA.

We will adopt the principles of wellbeing economics, ensuring that our policies and resources are directed at enhancing the wellbeing of our people, businesses and place whilst having a positive impact on the planet.

A scalable **Wellbeing Economy Framework** provides multiple benefits at all levels, including:

- Being driven by a community's social, environmental and economic priorities
- Shaped by those who live, work and run businesses and public services within those communities, with an interest in making a local economy function better for groups it doesn't serve well
- Shared responsibility for delivering those outcomes and agreed ways to measure progress.
- Addressing complex and interconnected issues through shared goals and diverse pathways to achieving them such as tackling local unemployment, improving energy efficiency or boosting local spend.

Economic opportunities are crucial for improving rural wellbeing. This includes education opportunities, financial security, and addressing the impacts of our rurality on jobs, services, and housing. Access to services, jobs, and support, as well as key enablers like transport and digital connectivity, are essential. Equality, or inclusiveness, is another key enabler, ensuring that everyone has equal access to the services and support that enhances their wellbeing.

Our goal is to create conditions where people can thrive and flourish, delivering these benefits fairly so everyone can enjoy them, and doing so sustainably to ensure the planet and future generations can also thrive.

Together, we can build a **vibrant, sustainable,** and **inclusive economy** that supports the wellbeing of all our residents and businesses, but that fits within our planets limited resources and net zero ambitions of our Councils.

The role of the Council

Some of the work outlined in this Strategy will be led by the Economic Development team directly, whereas some projects such as the regeneration of key sites and regulatory services including Licencing, Planning and Business Rates are managed by their own dedicated teams.

Economic development is promoted by the Council through a number of routes:

- **Direct actions:** such as managing the regeneration of our town centres, working with planning to ensure we optimise economic development opportunities, registration and licensing services, collecting business rates and provision of reliefs, and providing grant funding and business support.
- **Enabling support:** such as through sector-based networks, and by facilitating community and town centre events.
- **Partnership activities:** such as through work with education and skills training providers, and collaboration with the Suffolk Business Board and business organisations including Federation of Small Businesses, National Farmers Union and the Suffolk Chamber.



An extensive evidence baseline was prepared which has underpinned the development of the Economic Strategy. The comprehensive evidence base was wide ranging and structured around the three Pillars of People, Business & Economy (Prosperity) and Place. It has informed our understanding of what the key opportunities and challenges are within the Districts.

Evidence commissioned by the Council has also been used, including the Economic Land Needs Assessment (ELNA) and the State of the District report and a specialist Food & Drink sector analysis.

Consultation process



In-person sessions

held throughout the districts
(local businesses and organisations,
public sector and academia)



Online business survey



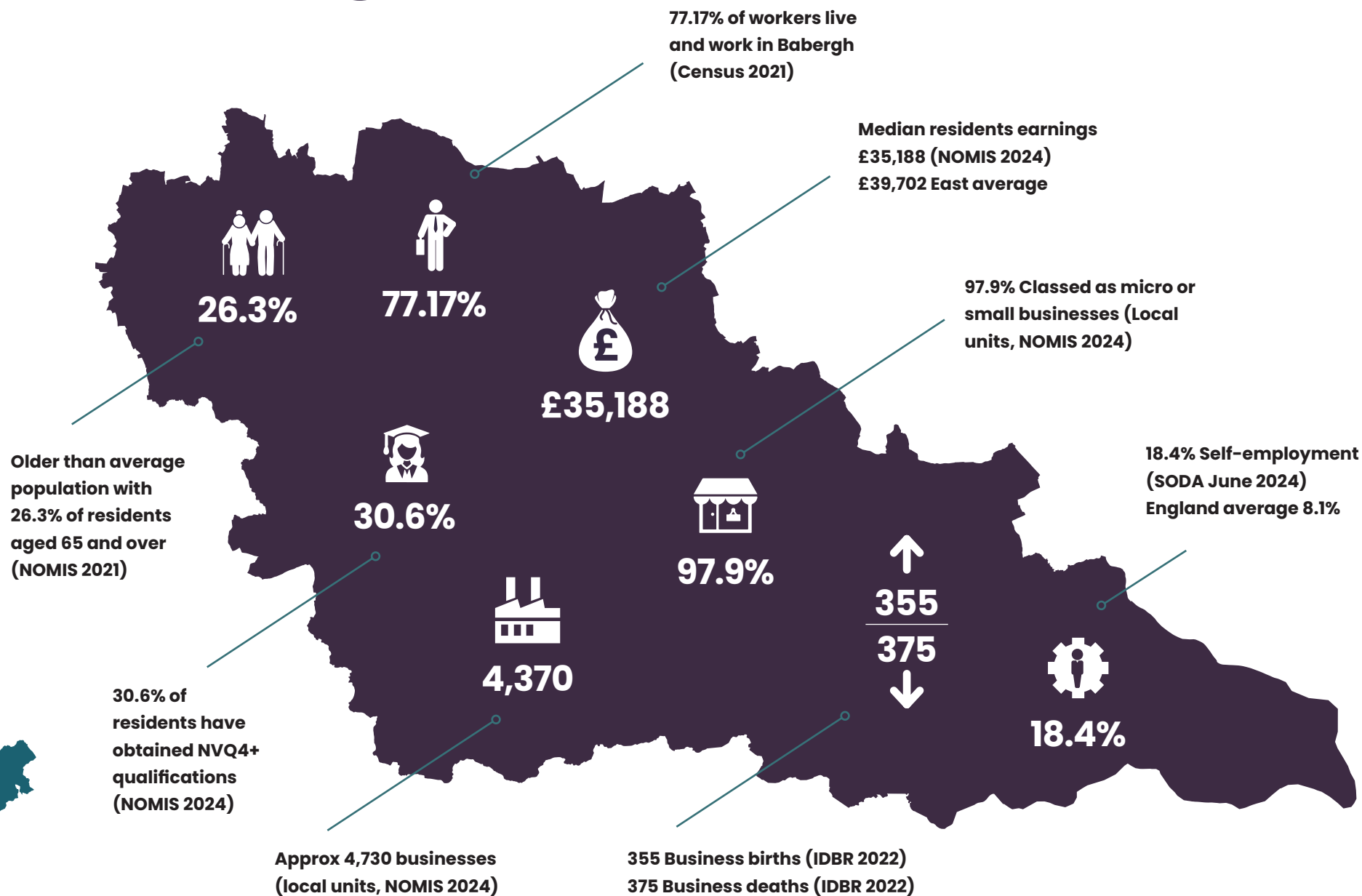
Collaboration with County Council on wider workshops



Internal staff working group

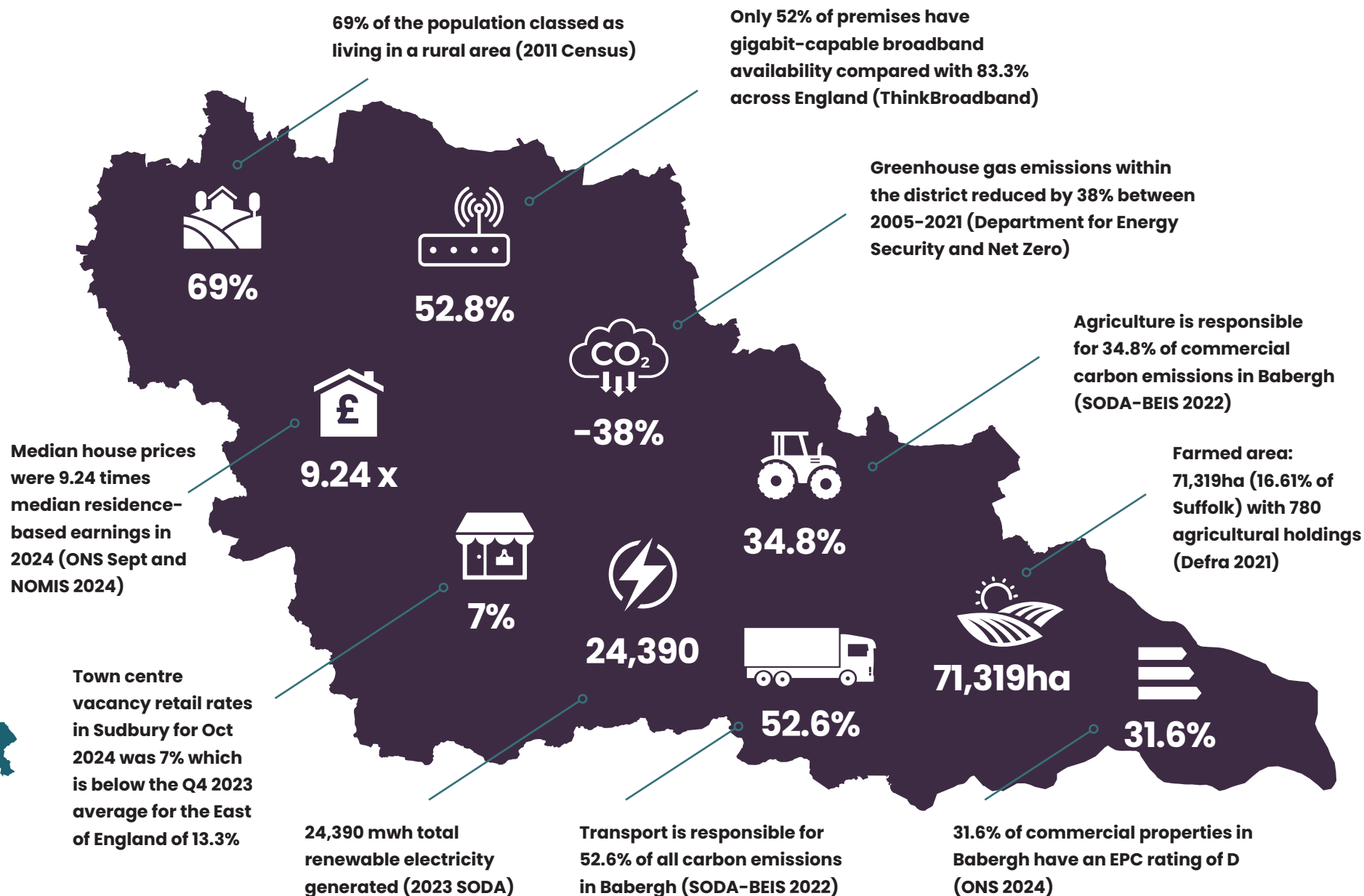
Babergh

People & Prosperity



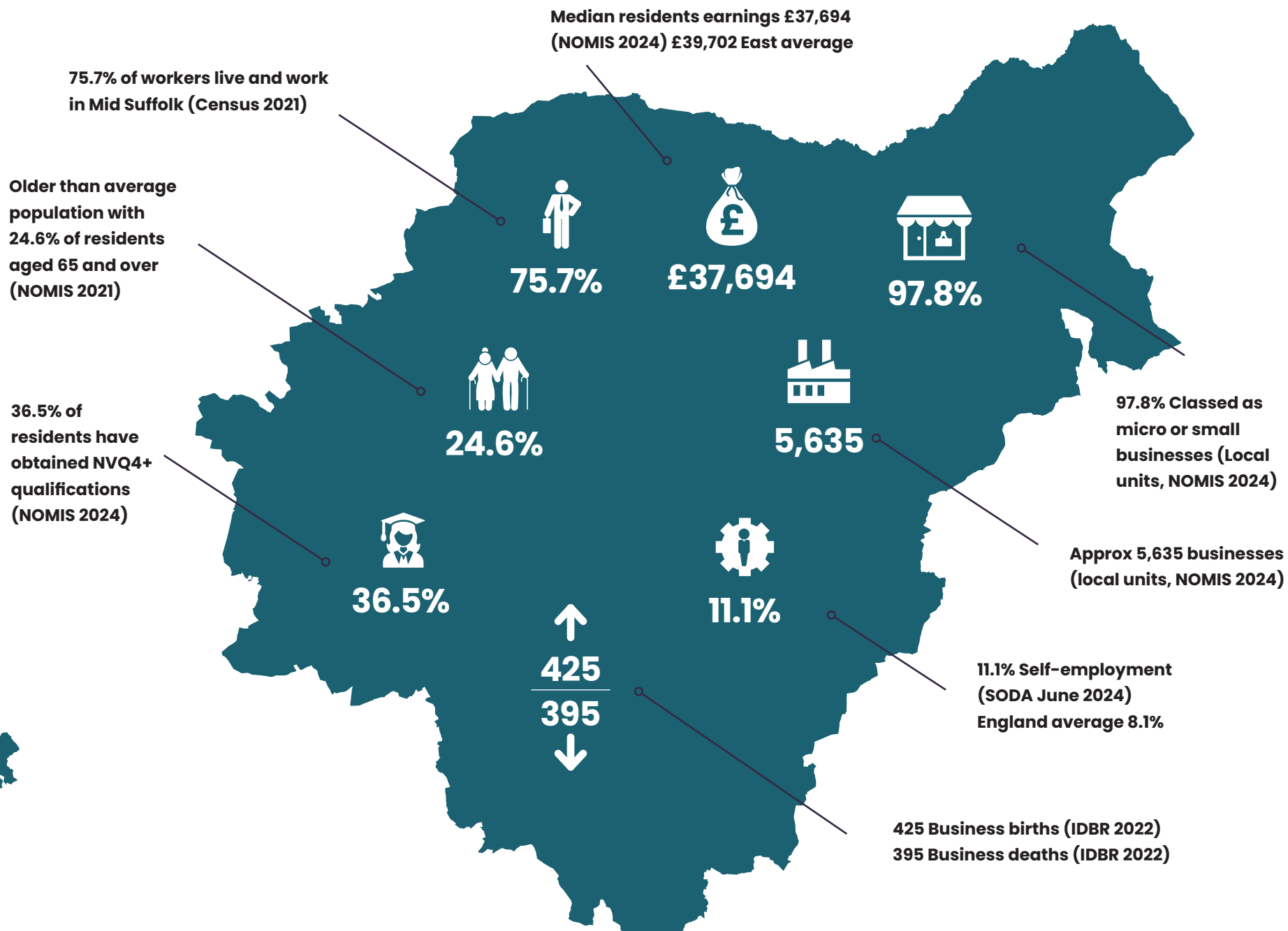
Babergh

Place & Planet



Mid Suffolk

People & Prosperity



Mid Suffolk

Place & Planet

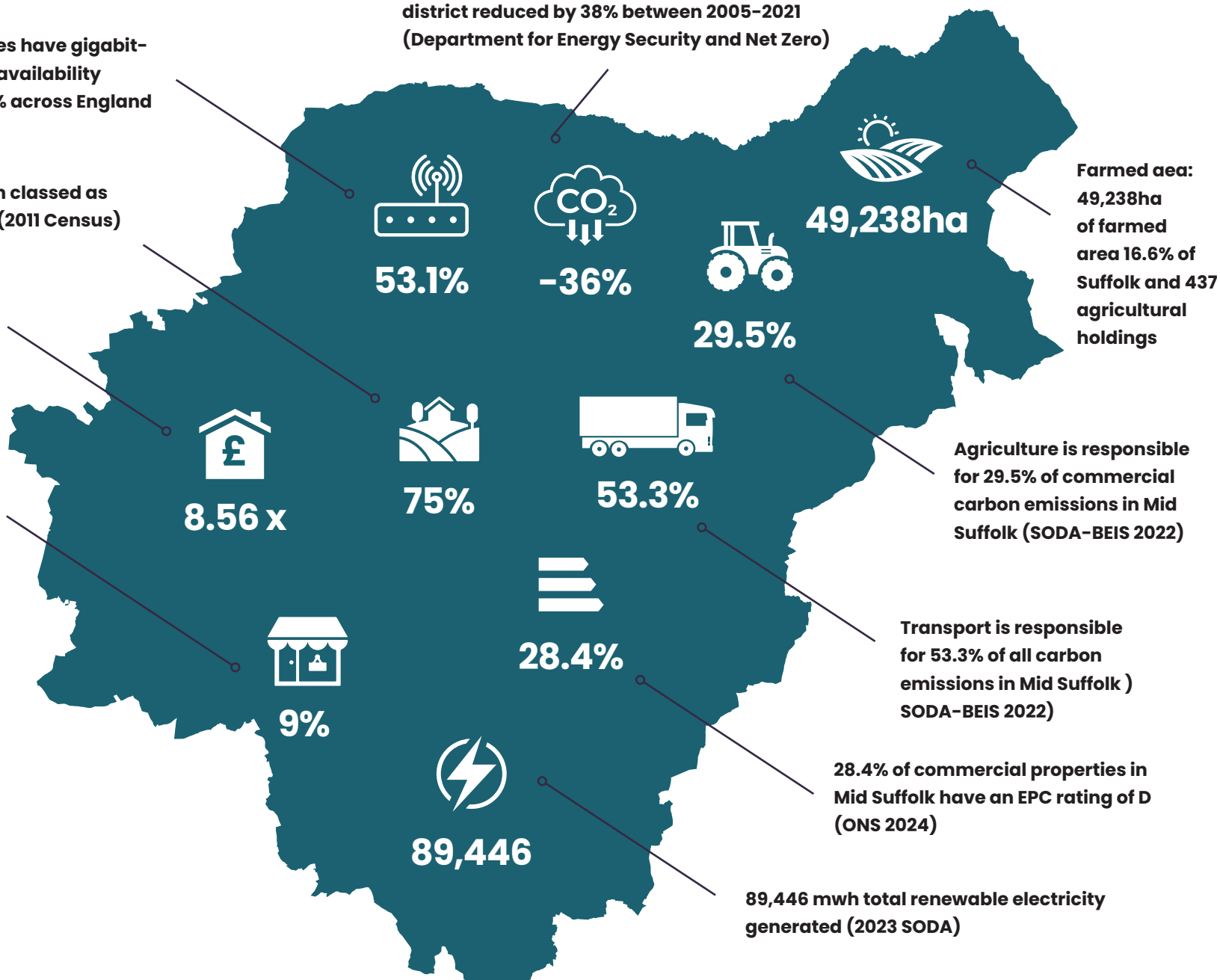
Only 53.1% of premises have gigabit-capable broadband availability compared with 83.3% across England (ThinkBroadband)

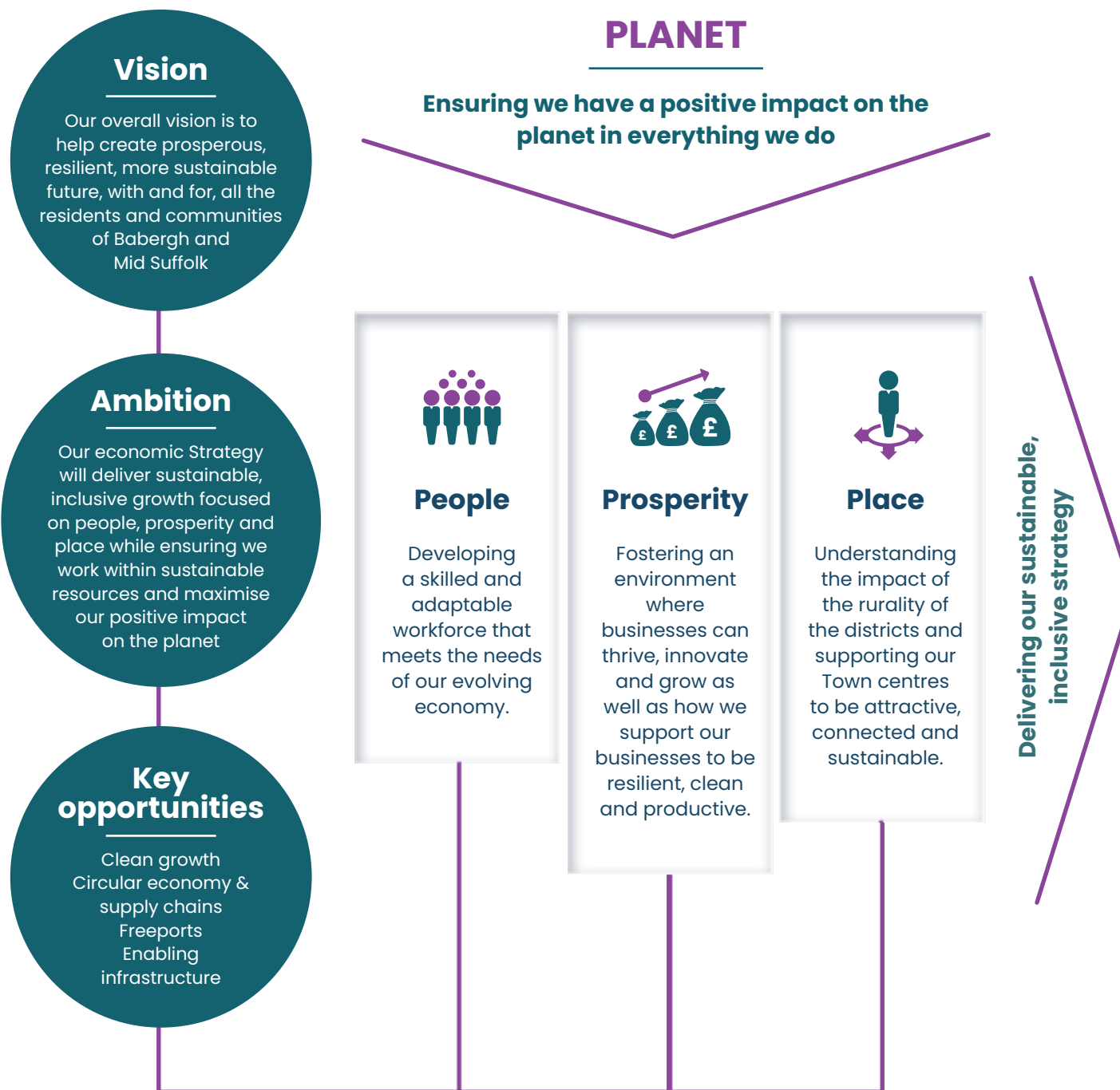
75% of the population classed as living in a rural area (2011 Census)

Median house prices were 8.56 times median residence-based earnings in 2024 (ONS Sept and NOMIS 2024)

Town centre vacancy retail rates in Stowmarket for Oct 2024 was 9% which is below the Q4 2023 average for the East of England of 13.3%

Greenhouse gas emissions within the district reduced by 38% between 2005–2021 (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero)





INFLUENCE

Enabler

Someone who makes it possible for a particular thing to happen or be done

Direct Delivery

A method of delivering a service directly from a provider to a user, without any stops in between

Partner

An entity that works with local government to address issues or achieve goals

Influencer

A person or group that can influence the opinions or behaviour of others

Lobbying

An attempt by individuals or groups to influence decisions

Following consultation and analysis of the evidence base, 5 key opportunities were identified that reflect the need for overarching areas for focus to underpin the wider strategy.

These are:



Clean Growth



**Enabling
Infrastructure**



Food & Drink Sector



**Circular Economy
& Supply Chains**



Freeports



Clean growth

Clean growth is an overarching ambition in relation to the economy at a national and local level. Suffolk is a national leader in Clean Energy which will play a crucial role in the UK's energy transition.

There is a clear opportunity for us to help address climate change through fostering sustainable growth. Advancing clean growth in our districts involves all sectors of the economy reducing their carbon emissions, improving the efficiency of the buildings in which businesses operate; and the manner in which those who work in businesses travel around.

Within 'clean growth', there are many 'moving parts' and the inter-relationships between these are important. The emphasis is on innovation, technology and sustainable resource management and requires community and businesses engagement in sustainable practices.

The goal is to drive EPIC (Environmentally Positive, Innovative, and Circular) growth, embedding sustainability into all aspects of our economy.

Our commitment to clean growth includes, but isn't limited to the following areas:

- Expansion of low-carbon industries (renewable energy, electric vehicles, sustainable agriculture).
- Creation of green jobs and resilient economic infrastructure.
- Sustainable transport (electric vehicles, public transport).
- Efficient use of resources and minimizing waste.
- Circular economy initiatives (reuse, repair, recycle).
- Sustainable supply chains.
- Public-private partnerships for innovation and green infrastructure.

By focusing on these initiatives and putting clean growth at the centre of our strategy, the district can achieve sustainable economic growth that is economically viable, socially inclusive, and environmentally sustainable, positioning itself as a leader in the transition to a low-carbon economy.



Circular economy & Supply chains



The traditional linear economy model of 'take, make, dispose' is no longer sustainable. To address the challenges of resource depletion, waste management, and climate change, we must transition to a circular economy. This approach, combined with robust local supply chains, will help us to create a more resilient and sustainable local economy.

The Councils' can help drive the transition to a circular economy through the following activities:

- **Procurement policies (though our Social Value asks – local sourcing and supporting sustainable procurement practices)**
- **Planning conditions**
- **Supporting local producers**
- **Promoting recycling & reuse**
- **Education & training programmes**
- **Showcasing success of leaders in the field**
- **Local partnerships to share resources and best practice**

Alongside this, support for business-to-business engagement to develop and expand local supply chains and enabling and encouraging our businesses to deliver social value in our communities will help to ensure that our communities benefit more explicitly from the economic activity happening here.

Supporting the growth of circular economies offers numerous benefits, including enhancing environmental sustainability and community well-being alongside showcasing the innovation and leadership of our Councils in this space.

By focusing on these activities, our Councils can play a crucial role in building a sustainable and resilient local economy that benefits our businesses, our communities and the environment.



Enabling infrastructure

With 69% of Babergh residents and 75% of Mid Suffolk residents living within rural areas, and the transport sector contributing to 39.9% of greenhouse gas emissions within the districts, we are committed to tackling infrastructure challenges to ensure our districts are great places to live, work and visit as this will help us deliver sustainable and inclusive growth and create a resilient, more sustainable future for our residents and businesses.

Whether the challenge is the rurality of the districts, transport, access to utilities including water and broadband availability or access to commercial space for our existing businesses or new businesses looking to invest in our districts, we understand the importance of working with our neighbours and partners to plan, coordinate and facilitate enhanced infrastructure whilst being mindful of our commitments to sustainable growth, considering the

balance of development and natural capital preservation.

By responsibly enhancing our local infrastructure and focusing on the key challenges and constraints, we will be able to help realise the ambition for other areas of our strategy including support for the food & drink sector, workforce availability and access to work, pride in place, sustainable growth as well business resilience and productivity helping the districts become thriving, prosperous places.





Food & drink sector

The Food and Drink Sector within Babergh and Mid Suffolk is key. 24.1% of our workforce are employed within the food supply chain and 12.9% of workforce are within food production, processing and distribution. The sector equates to 17% of total GVA for the districts.

With over 1200 agricultural holdings farming over 120,500ha of land between our Districts, the success of this sector is of particular importance to our economic prosperity.

At a county level and national level, the sector has been identified as a high growth sector, holding a competitive advantage to the rest of the country.

Suffolk is the food larder for the UK, excelling in horticulture, cereal, sugar beet, pig and poultry farming. It is also a key hub for food processing and the drinks industry particularly brewing.

Our districts are home to a number of major UK and international companies such as Cranswick, GCB Cocoa UK Ltd and Muntions and many of our

businesses pioneer innovative Agri-tech and sustainable practices, a significant specialism driving climate adaptation.

We have the opportunity to further increase local food processing, however this requires unlocking water and power infrastructure.

To cement our commitment to the Food and Drink sector, we will focus on the following areas:
enabling infrastructure; promoting access to local food; improved local supply chain; working with local businesses to support investment and expansion in existing food production; attracting inward investment of new food producers alongside supporting our existing businesses to capitalise on opportunities that will improve productivity, sustainability and move them up the value chain.





Our Districts' play a crucial role in global logistics and trade, anchored by key ports that drive economic activity and by key transport corridors that allow for these goods to be transported across the country.

Freeport East, which includes tax sites at Felixstowe port, Gateway 14 in Stowmarket, and Bathside Bay in Harwich, stands as one of the largest Freeports in the UK and is set to attract significant investment to the region, potentially bringing in £300 million and creating 13,500 new jobs, contributing an estimated £5.5 billion to the UK economy over the next decade. Mid Suffolk is poised to

benefit from a substantial portion of this growth through the development already underway at Gateway 14.

This is set to be further expanded by the £18 million development of the Innovation & Skills Centre at Gateway 14 which will act as a hub location for the wider Freeport and an anchor for Gateway 14.

In order to maximise the potential for our residents and businesses to benefit from this designation, we will focus on the following specific areas:

Specialised Training Programmes

Developing employment & training programmes for the local workforce

will ensure our residents can access the new jobs being created.

Inward Investment

Work with partners to actively promote the Districts and specific sites to international and other inward investors and provide aftercare support to help ensure that their decision to locate in our District is supported.

By leveraging the value attributed to the Freeport designation, we can drive inclusive and sustainable economic growth, ensuring that our district remains a dynamic and attractive place for businesses and residents alike.



The wider strategy will then be focused on the following three fundamental pillars for developing a Thriving Economy.

These are:



People

People are key to creating a resilient, more sustainable and accessible future for all in our districts. Pivotal to this strategy is ensuring we have a skilled and adaptable workforce that meets the needs of our evolving economy through building the capabilities of people to find, sustain and progress in education & employment and achieve economic security.



Prosperity

Fostering an environment where businesses can thrive, innovate and grow and accelerating the transition for our businesses to be resilient, clean and productive whilst helping to drive the circular economy and encouraging our businesses to deliver greater social value.



Place

Creating an inclusive, sustainable and prosperous place for all, where people choose to live, work and visit and where businesses can locate and grow, whilst addressing the challenges linked to our rurality and utility restrictions.



Priorities

1. Work with employers and education providers to encourage life-long learning (whole life learning including primary/secondary/further education/in employment/unemployed/older people) with particular emphasis on ensuring support meets the needs of our residents who are disabled or neurodivergent
2. Support continuing professional development and innovation amongst business leaders
3. Support businesses to invest in workforce development, grow our working age population and attract and retain talent
4. Provide volunteering, training and self-employment opportunities for our residents via our local partners to reduce inactivity and unemployment and improve wellbeing outcomes, with particular focus on delivering specific employment & skills programmes aligned with the Armed Forces Covenant
5. Promote the importance of creating opportunities, work experience placements and connections that benefit our residents amongst our new and existing businesses
6. Help drive the transition to a green economy through supporting and championing green skills development





Priorities

1. Provide continuing support for existing clusters of businesses and focus on enabling growth of new clusters that take advantage of changing markets and new commercial opportunities.
2. Work with partners to focus on helping businesses become more resilient – future proofing the business to help them succeed and reduce chances of failure.
3. Attract new businesses, enable and encourage growth & retention of existing businesses, and support their integration within our community, celebrate successes and support new entrepreneurs to start their businesses in our Districts.
4. Work with industry specialists and partners to shape targeted support for growth sectors to capitalise on opportunities that will improve productivity, sustainability and move them up the value chain, in particular the Food and Drink Sector.
5. Work with partners to offer all businesses the opportunity to access tailored support, funding and premises needed to start, grow and thrive in a clean, productive and inclusive way. (particularly to help them decarbonise, reduce their carbon footprint and achieve net zero).
6. Champion our commitment to carbon reduction; support businesses across our districts to be resilient, clean and productive.





Priorities

1. Supporting our town centres and rural hubs to be successful, attractive and vibrant, with diverse uses, including supporting the growth and development of our wider leisure, culture, tourism and evening and night-time economy offer
2. Work alongside partners to create the right conditions for investment and improvements to the physical environment of the Districts town centres to enhance their vibrancy and vitality - making them accessible for all
3. Supporting sustainable growth and development across our rural areas by working with businesses and local partners to minimise challenges and maximise the opportunities of our rural settings
4. Working with partners and neighbours to influence and improve the Districts physical and digital infrastructure necessary to support sustainable growth (including transport, broadband, mobile connectivity, grid connections and water availability)
5. Unlocking sustainable economic growth through enabling businesses to have access to sites that provide the right mix of commercial space and utilities, in the right place, to meet business demand and facilitate access to market and labour supply.
6. Promote Babergh & Mid Suffolk as attractive, connected and sustainable and places to live, learn, work, visit and invest.



Delivering our Strategy: Our commitment

This Strategy outlines our strategic priorities and ambitions for the sustainable growth of our Districts.

In developing this Strategy, we have remained mindful that economic development must balance the drive for prosperity with the need for sustainability, a responsible approach to the environment and the need to connect with and include all our communities whilst remaining flexible to any future changes and challenges at all levels.

This joint strategy for Babergh and Mid Suffolk will enable the Councils to promote prosperity in a sustainable way which improves the quality of life of our residents, businesses and communities.

The accompanying Action Plan will provide further detail on the priority actions, timescales, delivery owners, as well as identifying measurable outcomes to inform our progress in future years. The Action Plan will be where differences in the Districts will be highlighted, some specific actions may be delivered differently within the Districts.

Regular reporting will be shared through partnership and organisational performance reporting. The action plan will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Measuring Success

Each action will be measured against a target number of outputs and outcomes.

All actions need to:

- 1 Add value to existing provision**
- 2 Avoid duplication**
- 3 Offer good value for money**
- 4 Be impactful**
- 5 Align with the Vision and Policies within this and other Strategies**



Location map

