

Agenda Item 3 Norfolk Local Growth Plan: Action Plan

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Summary

This paper outlines a proposed process for the development of a detailed Action Plan, building on the Norfolk Local Growth Plan.

Following endorsement of the draft Norfolk Local Growth Plan by the Norfolk Business Board in September 2024, officers will now progress an 'Action Plan' to support implementation of the strategy.

The paper proposes to engage stakeholders, to develop further detail on the actions outlined in the Norfolk Local Growth Plan. Engagement will include a review of funding horizons, to support implementation, and also consider how both public, academic and private sector can work together to deliver outcomes.

The paper also highlights how the Norfolk Business Board can add value and support the development of the Action Plan. This includes influencing the plan and acting as a conduit for initiatives that could be delivered to address key priority areas within the strategy, plus also the identification and support of any not currently listed as actions within the strategy. In addition, Business Board members could support the mapping of interventions and potentially delivery of pilot schemes.

Background

The purpose of the Norfolk Economic Strategy, is to provide an up-to-date economic growth strategy for Norfolk, for the next 5 years, building on the Norfolk & Suffolk Economic Strategy. The strategy will be an overarching document for Norfolk, to encompass thematic, place based and sector strategies to help grow our local economy and support the people who live and work here.

The Norfolk Economic Strategy, known as the Norfolk Local Growth Plan, provides an overview of Norfolk's economy and key priority areas of focus to address economic growth. Strengths, opportunities and challenges for growth are listed against the main pillars of the strategy; key priorities are then highlighted with actions listed under each priority and measures of impact.

The strategy sets a framework for priority interventions – and this is demonstrated through a twin track approach, firstly capitalising on high growth assets in our key sectors, such as offshore energy, agri-food/ agri-tech, advanced manufacturing and engineering, digital/ ICT and also our strong financial services sector - in order to grow the economy, improve levels of productivity and support creation of higher wage jobs.

But as well as high growth and emerging sectors, the strategy highlights it is equally important that we also support the foundational economy in Norfolk, for example agriculture, health and social care, the visitor economy.

There were four phases to developing the strategy: building the evidence base and developing the logic model, extensive stakeholder engagement, including a series of workshops with over 500 organisations, developing the narrative and drafting the strategy.

The strategy has also been developed to align with the Government's five missions and also feed into the new Government's Modern Industrial Strategy by providing clear evidence of the areas in which Norfolk will play a key role in driving UK's growth and prosperity.

Locally the Economic Strategy will act as the overarching document for a number of related documents such as, the Strategic Skills Plan, the Norfolk Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Plan (NSIDP), and other strategies covering growth at a county and district level.

The draft strategy has been reviewed by Public Sector Leaders Board, district councils, Infrastructure and Development Committee and the new Norfolk Business Board during the summer and Autumn. Amendments were incorporated into the document ahead of consideration by Cabinet, who endorsed the Norfolk Local Growth Plan on 4th November 2024.

In addition to endorsement from NCC Cabinet, the Norfolk Economic Strategy - also known as Norfolk's Local Growth Plan, has been endorsed North Norfolk District Council. It has also been endorsed by Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk Cabinet on 17th October 2024, Great Yarmouth Borough Council on 5th November 2024, Breckland Council Cabinet on 11th November 2024, and is due to go to Norwich City Council Cabinet 11th December 2024, and South Norfolk and Broadland Cabinets for endorsement in January 2025.

Norfolk's Local Growth Plan was also welcomed by Norfolk's MPs, at a briefing in Westminster this month, demonstrating the cross-party commitment to supporting economic growth, through the priority areas highlighted within the strategy.

The economic strategy will act as a policy for the council, but also serve as a framework for a wide range of partners including districts, education institutes and the private sector. The strategy has been refined to align with the Government's five missions and will act as **a Local Growth Plan for the Government**, who will expect bids for funding to reference the strategy. Norfolk County Council is working closely with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to ensure this alignment.

The strategy was developed over the course of this year – with a shifting landscape of funding horizons for economic growth. However, we are committed to delivering the priorities set out in Norfolk's Local Growth Plan, which will be supported by a detailed action plan to follow in 2025

Action Plan

Purpose:

An Action Plan is needed for a number of reasons, including:

- To help implement the Norfolk Economic Strategy
- To support the Norfolk Business Board to plan future activity and investment, with input into the design.
- To Identify gaps, where solutions are required, and interventions need to be developed
- To understand interim/ immediate actions, and also actions that are med-longer term.

To consider resources to support implementation of actions, including funding and stakeholder coordination for delivery.

Process:

The following process is proposed for the development of the Action Plan in 2025:

Step 1: Internal review and mapping

The first step will be to capture all of the higher-level actions contained within the strategy and organise these into actions that could be delivered in the near future, or are in train, actions that could be delivered within a five year timeframe, and actions that will fall within 5-10 years, or long term.

Alongside this we will also need to map the known funding landscape, that could support implementation of actions. For example, the Autumn Statement, and announcements that followed, contained a number of funding streams that could be used to support implementation – such as continuation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, support for continuation of Growth Hubs through funding from the Department for Business and Trade, Long Term Towns Funding for areas such as Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn and Breckland. Funding to roll out programmes such as Made Smarter Adoption across the UK, which will support digitalisation and improvements in productivity for the Manufacturing and Engineering sector. There were also funding commitments to support increase in social housing and commitment to delivering clean energy, as well as support for the NHS – which will have implications for Norfolk's Health and Social Care sector.

Meetings to engage economic development teams within Norfolk County Council and district authorities, will take place first, in order to assess actions against the 4 main pillars (People and Skills, Business, Infrastructure and Placemaking); in addition to mapping known public sector funding that could support implementation in the short term and med term.

Step 2: External Stakeholder engagement

A series of workshop sessions and one to one discussions will take place with stakeholders, including those initially engaged in the development of the strategy. The sessions will help us to understand what activity could be delivered against actions highlighted in the strategy and which stakeholders would be involved in delivery – helping us to provide more detail around delivery areas.

The external stakeholder engagement exercise will also help us to identify where there are gaps, and where projects and programmes need to be developed against actions identified within the strategy.

The engagement process will also include working with members of the Norfolk Business Board, to help identify actions which are not currently defined or listed within the Local Growth Plan, but could support the priority areas identified within the Local Growth Plan. The business board can also help as a conduit, to bring stakeholders together for discussion. It is important the action plan is not prescriptive list, but uses the strategy as a base to build upon, working with stakeholders to identify potential solutions and actions.

Suggested stakeholders include organisations who will have a role in delivering the economic, social and environmental outcomes identified within the strategy, including: VCSE organisations, business support providers, private sector businesses (SME and large), industry council Chairs and sector leads, public sector (local government and government depts.), skills providers, colleges and universities, Infrastructure leads (incl action groups such as Transport East, Norfolk Climate Change Partnership, Water Resources East; in addition to UKPN, Environment Agency etc).

Step 3: Analysis

Once the internal and external stakeholder sessions are complete, analysis of findings, proposed projects and programmes will take place to identify and detail stakeholder delivery and outcomes anticipated.

The analysis phase will also help us to understand where there is no planned action against required actions highlighted within the strategy, for example, due to funding, resource or need for further feasibility to progress. This will help us to understand areas for development and further stakeholder engagement to explore potential interventions to deliver actions.

Step 4: Draft Action Plan

It is proposed that the Action Plan is drafted in March 2025, once the initial stakeholder engagement and analysis workstreams are complete.

Step 5: Governance Review

The Norfolk Business Board will have oversight of the Norfolk Local Growth Plan and associated Action Plan. It is proposed that the draft is reviewed by the Norfolk Business Board during March 2025 for endorsement, with time for amendments, ahead of submitting to Norfolk County Council (and district council) cabinets for review.

The Action Plan will also be of interest to stakeholders, including the Industry Council and Sector Boards who will be feeding in their actions and delivery, linked to the Norfolk Local Growth Plan. It is recommended a copy of the draft Action Plan is circulated to key stakeholder groups involved in supporting the different strands of the strategy.

Step 6: Monitoring and Updates

The Action Plan will be iterative and updated on a quarterly basis. It is important that the Action Plan remains flexible, as new funding streams emerge that may enable us to implement actions sooner, or to develop projects and programmes that support priority areas of the strategy.

It is recommended that there is a process of continued engagement with stakeholders as required, following the initial engagement in Jan/ Feb 2025 while developing the Action Plan. This will enable the team to further develop and explore actions where immediate interventions and delivery plans are not in place.

Measurement of impact will be important. The action plan will link to metrics outlined in the Norfolk Local Growth Plan and Evidence Base, in order to measure outputs and outcomes over a short and medium term. It is also proposed that evaluation is built into this process, to measure delivery and impact. Evaluation will be considered from the start of the process of developing the Action Plan, and it is anticipated that interim evaluations take place in 2026-2028, and a full evaluation in 2029.

Following sign off of the draft Action Plan by the Norfolk Business Board in March 2025, it is proposed that annual review and progress reports are provided to the Norfolk Business Board and Norfolk County Council Cabinet.

Timescales

Item	When by
Internal review	December 2025
Stakeholder input	January / February 2025
Analysis and drafting	February / March 2025
Progress update and Draft Action Plan to be reviewed by Norfolk Business board	March 2025
Finalise Draft Action Plan	April 2025
Report to Norfolk County Council Cabinet	May 2025

Resources

It is proposed that a task and finish group, utilising existing team resources from the NCC Economic Development Team is used to coordinate the stakeholder engagement sessions, analysis and drafting of the Action Plan.

The task and finish group will liaise with the Norfolk Business Board members during the development of the Action Plan, and the draft will be brought back to the next Norfolk Business Board meeting in March 2025.

Considerations

There are a few considerations, when reviewing the proposed process for the development of the Action Plan, which will support the implementation of the Norfolk Local Growth Plan. These include the following:

- **Timescales:** do the timescales suggested enable enough time for stakeholder consultation or should this be reviewed?
- **External support:** does the Action Plan require external input from consultants or do the Business Board feel existing resource can be utilised initially and monitor need for external input as required?
- **Alignment with other action plans:** it will be important to ensure alignment with other economic action plans being developed – for example, economic action plans linked to the Norwich Economic Vision and West Norfolk Economic Vision & Strategy, in addition to Long Term Towns Fund plans in Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn and Breckland. This will also be relevant to actions planned with key stakeholders, that align with the Norfolk Local Growth Plan priority areas.
- **Cross county/ regional actions and engagement:** it will also be important to ensure cross county and regional alignment, where actions and delivery will involve regional partners (e.g. in Suffolk, wider EofE). This could include interventions to grow key sectors (e.g. Offshore Wind, Agrifood) or specific programmes to support interventions, delivered on a regional scale (e.g. GENERATE, or Made Smarter Adoption Programme).
- **Devolution:** consideration should also be given for the next phase of Norfolk's devolution journey, and what opportunities this may bring to introduce levers for implementing strategy, including what proposed forms that may take.

Next Steps

The next steps will be to complete the internal review of actions for the plan and a mapping of potential funding for implementation.

The Norfolk Business Board members will be invited to participate in stakeholder workshops or one to one discussions in early 2025; diary invites will be sent accordingly.

Input from the Norfolk Business Board

In addition to the Governance process outlined, for the Norfolk Business Board to oversee the Action Plan, and the involvement in stakeholder engagement in the development of the Action Plan, the Norfolk Business Board will also be able to contribute to delivery in a number of ways, to support leverage of private sector investment.

This could involve assessing where there is a commercial viability gap in the proposed actions and if private funds could support to address barriers to delivery. An example of this could be where an intervention has commercial viability gap that prevents market investment coming forward to invest. It may be that private sector stakeholders could coordinate a fund to address the issue, whether that be a challenge for example, for skills, infrastructure or to support decarbonisation.

The Business Board will also input from their areas of expertise, perhaps inputting solutions from their organisations, in addition to coordination with further stakeholder engagement, or acting as a conduit to develop initiatives and actions not already listed in the strategy – supporting a bottom up approach when designing solutions.

It will also be important to link the development of the Action Plan to the new Norfolk Ambassadors network. This will enable us to have a wider pool of businesses and stakeholders to engage with, in addition to voicing business needs, coordinating interventions and activity and building upon the strategy as to how we can collectively help grow Norfolk's economy and raise the profile of the county.

Early Outcomes

In addition to designing the Action Plan, it is important to highlight early outcomes in implementing the Norfolk Local Growth Plan. A few examples of this include:

- Our investment in the **Norwich Research Park**, supporting a viability gap through £2.2m retained Enterprise Zone business rates, to deliver much needed lab and office space and leveraging £25m private investment, thereby supporting NRP's long-term growth and expansion plans.
- Bidding for and securing £1.2m to deliver the East of **England Made Smarter Adoption Programme** – supporting the region's manufacturing and engineering firms to improve productivity and implement digital technologies
- Our commitment to clean energy, delivering the **GY Operations and Maintenance Campus** – a £24.8m infrastructure project, creating over 650 higher wage, green jobs
- Achieving an extension funding for our highly successful **Working Well Norfolk** programme – supporting 1,700 economically inactive residents back into the workplace and removing barriers to employment.
- Aligning with the Norfolk Economic Strategy's priority for SME support and the need to adopt new digital technologies, we are committed to continuing our flagship **Go Digital** programme, which has supported over 1,500 Norfolk SMEs.
- This is in addition to our commitment to continue delivery, following the LEP integration, of key support services - such as the **Growth Hub and Careers Hub**, supporting Norfolk's businesses to grow and raising aspirations, to help young people access career pathways.

Recommendation/Request

1. For the Norfolk Business Board consider the proposed Process for development of the Action Plan in 2025, to support implementation of the Norfolk Local Growth Plan, and make any further recommendations.
2. For the Norfolk Business Board members to feed into the action plan, through the stakeholder engagement process, and help convene stakeholders to also develop bottom up solutions. To feed into interventions