



Building an economic vision for Shropshire

A report by IPPR North

For

Shropshire Council

February 2017

A Vision for Shropshire

By 2030 Shropshire can be a world-leading rural economy.

With its dynamic and diverse workforce, cutting-edge capabilities in agritech and digihealth, and as an area of outstanding natural beauty, well-connected to the Midlands Engine, there is no good reason for it not to flourish in post-brexite Britain.

With the right ambition, strategy and leadership, Shropshire will be a case study in England's modern industrial strategy.

Background

IPPR North was commissioned by Shropshire Council and the University of Chester to develop a new economic vision for Shropshire's economy in the future. Our study has involved some new economic analysis; it has considered some of the existing strategies of Shropshire Council and the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership; and we have held a series of roundtables with key stakeholders from around the county.

Our study has identified a series of key opportunities and challenges for economic growth including:

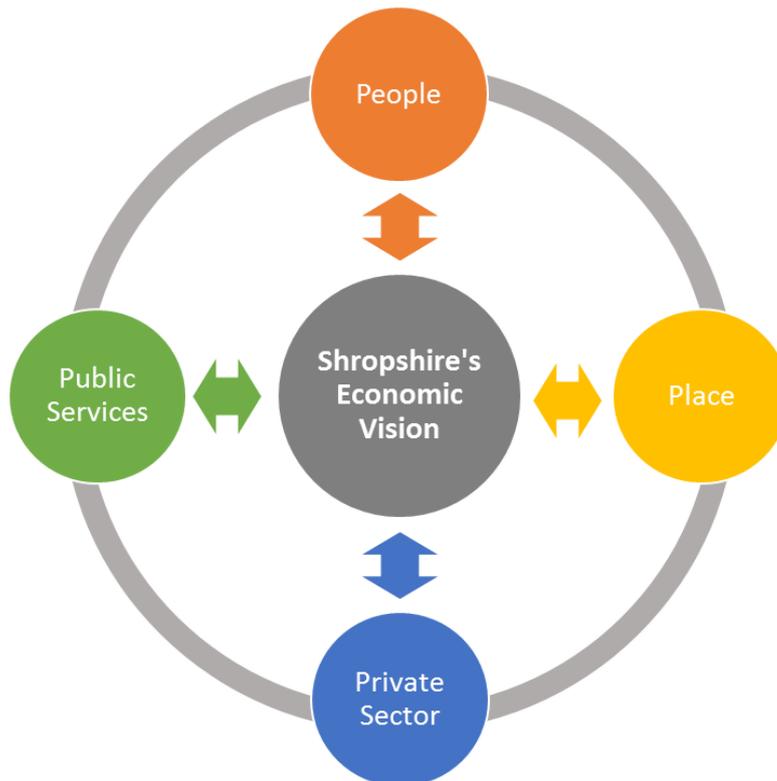
- Proportionately high rates of ageing in comparison with neighbouring areas and with England as a whole, with implications for health and social care costs but opportunities to unlock the potential of this relatively affluent and active population group through developments such as digi health;
- Relatively low productivity but with a higher employment rate and higher gross disposable household income compared with surrounding areas;
- Good economic linkages with neighbouring areas and a diverse business base but with significant dependency on agriculture, tourism and manufacturing which have lower productivity levels than many sectors;
- A relatively well-skilled labour force in comparison with neighbouring areas and the UK average with good school performance but challenges concerning graduate retention and skill shortages in specific service sectors.

Further details of our analysis are available in a separate report.

The four components for Shropshire's economic future

The vision for Shropshire's economic future centres on four areas: place, people, private businesses and public services. Shropshire has unique strengths in each of these areas, but the county also faces challenges looking towards the future. By building on its strengths and taking concrete steps to mitigate challenges, citizens, businesses and the public sector can work together to build a prosperous and sustainable economy that works for the people of Shropshire.

Figure 1: Components of Shropshire's vision



In the following sections of this report we will lay out the future vision for Shropshire in each of these 4 categories, including core priorities and a list of high-level actions moving forward.

Place

Vision

Shropshire is a highly attractive destination for national and international capital. Shropshire's residents are connected to one another, to public services and to employment through wide-ranging broadband connectivity and world-class infrastructure. And Shropshire is known for a high quality of life and excellent leisure offer for the West Midlands conurbation and beyond. Communities are resilient, with high levels of social capital and fully-utilised community assets.

Priorities

- Enhancing connectivity, through increased broadband access and improved transport infrastructure, for the whole of Shropshire
- Ensuring the provision of enough high-quality, affordable housing for all of Shropshire's residents with an efficient and strategic approach to planning with a focus on a small number of strategic development sites
- Promoting Shropshire's natural beauty while garnering a reputation for sustainable economic development
- A focus on asset-based community development targeted in key locations

Actions

- Develop a **comprehensive investment strategy** for Shropshire. This should leverage funding raised from a variety of sources to make Shropshire a highly attractive destination for national and international investment. This will include the following specific measures:
 - Making a stronger case for **connectivity investment** in better transport, superfast broadband and enhanced mobile phone coverage where appropriate using local resources to lever in wider public and private investment.
 - **Invest in future infrastructure** to support future growth including maintaining support for Connecting Shropshire and continuing to argue for greater investment in mobile coverage. Continue to support the development of transport infrastructure, including strategic freight corridors, by working with partners in the Marches LEP, the WMCA and the Midlands Engine.
 - **Show greater leadership** by challenging the widely held trope that Shropshire is a place where there is 'stagnation of ambition' by fighting for investment in Shropshire's economy including working with the Marches LEP to secure a settlement for European funding post Brexit, and working with UKTI to promote Shropshire's economic assets and services.
- Housing development
 - Use the Council's ability to allocate **land for development** to encourage and support the development of new housing where objectively assessed need exists¹ and to challenge housebuilders to build out consented sites. This housing should aim to provide a high quality of living for new residents and should ensure that adequate provision is made for starter and affordable accommodation, particularly to attract younger people and families into the area.

¹ The Council have just published their Objectively Assessed Local Housing Need Report <http://shropshire.gov.uk/media/2101729/Shropshire-Council-FOAHN-2016-.pdf>

- Identify **strategic sites for development** in the area and work with partners to realise the potential of these areas to create high quality residential and employment sites to support future growth, for example, Clive Barracks, Tern Hill².
- Other key development sites could include Mile End Oswestry, Ironbridge Power Station and the Riverside Centre, Shrewsbury.
- **Promoting Shropshire’s natural beauty** while garnering a reputation for sustainable economic development.
 - Develop a diverse partnership between public and private sectors to drive a more **coherent marketing strategy** for Shropshire including its AONB, food and drink offer, as well as linkages to neighbouring Wales. This should build on recent recognition in the media and focus on increasing private sector investment in the area.
 - Where possible, planning should promote **high standards of environmental quality** and efficiency in the development of new homes to help support the market for LCEGS in Shropshire, particularly on sites such as Clive Barracks which are in public ownership.
 - Re-frame the way in which Shropshire’s **environmental assets** are understood so that they are seen as resources, rather than constraints, assets rather than barriers to growth. This is an approach which has been used by other councils³ and links to university ambitions to become a centre of excellence for environmental sciences, technology and management. This can include the opportunity for Shropshire to deliver economic returns for future growth, for example, it is thought that there may be potential in **carbon offsetting** for areas like Shropshire whereby companies can relocate to offset environmental costs.
- Build on the **asset-based community development approach** being developed with health partners in a small number of neighbourhoods where there are high levels of deprivation that have a wider impact on economic development and public services .

² This is currently owned by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) but is being closed as part of the MOD’s rationalisation programme. This 69-acre site could potentially provide an opportunity for Shropshire Council to create a high quality (although not necessarily high cost) new community to complement the nearby village of Stoke-on-Tern and the work of the Stoke-on-Tern Neighbourhood Plan.

³ for example, Cambridge City Council in its Local Plan identifies the River Cam, the city’s green space and the green belt as ‘environmental assets’ which play a key economic role in supporting the high quality of life that the city enjoys and which in turn attracts investment, students and visitors to the area.

People

Vision

Shropshire's young people are supported to develop the right skills in order to find fulfilling employment in Shropshire and its neighbouring areas. The county provides world-class training and support services to help create a productive working-age population. Older people are supported to live fulfilling, independent lives, helping others and giving back to their communities.

Priorities

- Providing young people with the right education for them that gets them ready for work, with a particular focus on digital skills
- A strong skills offer to support all segments of the workforce
- A training offer to support people back into employment
- Stop seeing ageing in Shropshire as a problem, and start seeing it as an opportunity

Actions

- Work with the LEP to put together a **detailed Shropshire skills strategy**, which maps the current and future skills gap and indicates how these will be filled.
 - Work with schools and FE colleges to implement the findings of this strategy, so as to ensure that **young people leaving school and colleges are work ready**, and have skills that align with the needs of Shropshire's businesses.
 - Continue to work with schools and colleges to implement **evidence-based interventions to enhance employability** – for example, providing for young people to interact with business leaders and gain some experience of working life prior to entering the workforce is proven to enhance work readiness.
 - Leverage the **opportunities provided by the apprenticeships levy to develop an Apprenticeships Action Plan** to build on current strengths in this regard.
 - To work with Central Government and other partners on **devolution deals** which ensure that Shropshire gets extensive powers to determine its own skills policy, and resources for doing so.
- This strategy should include detailed recommendations **on tackling the skills gaps for caring, leisure, retail and customer services industries** input from health, the VCS sector and private companies.
 - This should involve leveraging centres of excellence to build a workforce of 21st century carers, as well as a schools/college-based programme to encourage more young people to enter the care sector.
 - However, older people should also be leveraged to fill this gap. Any skills strategy should involve reaching out to older people and encouraging them to take up part time employment in areas such as caring and retail, helping to combat social isolation alongside the skills gap.
- Encourage **young people to stay in Shropshire**.
 - Work with local business to develop an **information pack for graduates** from University Centre Shrewsbury, Harper Adams and the Shrewsbury College which

provides information about current opportunities with local employers as has been developed in other areas, for example, Warwick⁴.

- Consider developing a package of **targeted financial support for graduates** in partnership with local employers, for example, help with housing and transport costs.
- The previous recommendations should go some way to convincing young people in Shropshire that there are opportunities available to them within the county. This should be combined with a strong housebuilding offer (see below) and a sophisticated marketing strategy to keep more young people in the county.

⁴ Warwick District Council Graduate Retention Policy:
http://www.warwickdc.gov.uk/downloads/download/5/graduate_retentionhttp://www.warwickdc.gov.uk/downloads/download/5/graduate_retention

Private Sector

Vision

Small and medium-sized enterprises are supported to start-up, grow and take off in an entrepreneurial and business-friendly environment. Business leaders work with the public sector to drive economic growth and employment. Shropshire's core industries are supported to grow by the facilitating environment put in place by the council, which is known as being 'open-for-business'.

Priorities

- Supporting SMEs to start-up and grow by ensuring access to finance
- Closer working with the private sector by demonstrating that the council is 'open-for-business'
- Working with the Marches LEP, WMCA and other neighbouring authorities to deliver integrated development and devolution plans
- Provide a facilitative environment for Shropshire's core industries

Actions

- Agri-Tech
 - Support potential growth opportunities in **creating an agri-tech cluster** through making a shift into **agricultural engineering and precision farming**.
 - Working with neighbouring Harper Adams University to develop a **world-leading agri-tech cluster** with a particular focus on attracting and supporting cutting edge, spin-out businesses from the university with clear linkages with existing agri-business.
 - There are strong synergies between advanced manufacturing and the potential of agri-tech which could be further harnessed through joint **working with the Marches LEP, WMCA and neighbouring local authorities** such as Telford and Wrekin.
 - Work with the **UKTI** lead on Agri-tech to support the development of the sector in the future.
- Food, Drink and Tourism
 - Capitalise on Shropshire's food and drink sector to support higher value tourism. Shropshire has a buoyant food and drink industry which has the potential to complement the tourism market in the area. Participants suggested that Shropshire Council could adopt a **more active approach to promoting local food and drink providers** in the area, through scaling-out events such as the range of food and drink festivals held around the county.. This is an approach that has been developed successfully by other authorities in rural areas, for example, North Yorkshire Council and Rydale District Council have developed a Food Enterprise Zone which aims to attract investment and boost the local supply chain.
 - Support the LEP to build a **coherent marketing strategy** for Shropshire – many participants argued that Shropshire was still a relatively unknown destination for tourism, what some called 'England's best kept secret'. The council should work with the LEP to co-ordinate Shropshire's tourism economy and support initiatives to better market the area and its visitor attractions.
- Health, Social Care and Biotech
 - Use the provision of University Centre Shrewsbury to develop a **centre of excellence in the provision of health and social care sector** in Shropshire, specialising

particularly in delivery of health and social care services to rural areas not least through digital health innovation.

- Identify and support a small number of niche clusters for example through **biotech and biochemistry spin-outs** from University Centre Shrewsbury.
- Devolution
 - Working more closely with the Marches LEP, the West Midlands Combined Authority and other neighbouring authorities to develop **joined-up economic development and devolution plans** that support cross-boundary benefits without fear of disadvantage or political recrimination.

Public Services

Vision

Shropshire's people are supported to start well, live well and age well by public services that put people first, whilst supporting Shropshire's economic objectives of growth, productivity and employment.

Priorities

- Provide high-quality education and skills services, from early years through to secondary education, to ensure more young people leave school excited and enabled for the world of work.
- Work with health, universities and the private and voluntary sector to deliver an innovative, integrated offer for adult social care.
- Develop a training offer as part of the Work and Health programme that helps the county to meet many of its skills shortages.

Actions

- Channel investment into Early Years, where the evidence suggests that there is the greatest return in investment in terms of future development.
 - Build upon the strong **links between Children's Centres and primary schools**, to ensure an excellent transition as children start in reception. This will also ensure that schools are able to plan ahead in terms of devoting resources to providing in-depth support for those that enter primary school with complex needs.
 - Make use of the extensive research that has been conducted in this area to implement the most efficient evidence-based ways of working. Promoting good social and emotional development amongst children is critical for improving attainment across the life course – evidence-based interventions based on attachment theory, such as Signs of Safety should be a key part of the toolkit in this area.
- Set out a vision, in consultation with health colleagues and in line with STP negotiations, to improve integration between health and social care, to increase older people's independence, reduce the strain on adult's social care and the health sector and allow older people to get more involved in their communities.
 - Using the University Centre Shrewsbury to develop a centre of excellence for health and social care provision in rural areas, pioneering the latest techniques and working with older people themselves to **push the boundaries of co-production in adult social care**.
 - A **technology and digital strategy** should be a key part of this programme of change, as this will allow services to operate more efficiently whilst ensuring a high standard of care is provided. Hampshire County Council, which faced many similar issues to Shropshire in this area, has pioneered the use of new technologies in social care.
- Develop a pioneering approach to the new Work and Health Programme with multi-agency teams and specialist advisors developing a clear 'case for investment' for individuals and cohorts leading to a 'whatever works' approach to support provision.
 - The council should develop a **multi-agency task-and-finish group** to explore best practice in employment support and refresh the current approach in the county.

Summary

These 13 important steps form the basis for much stronger economic growth and productivity in Shropshire. They are ambitious and bold but they are not unrealistic as they build upon the assets that already exist. They require confidence and co-ordination but they leave scope for key players to work with the grain of existing potential and develop local ideas and solutions within a broad framework for future planning.

<p>Place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A comprehensive investment strategy • The provision of high-quality, affordable housing • Promotion of Shropshire’s natural beauty and sustainable development • Tackling pockets of neighbourhood deprivation 	<p>People</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Shropshire skills strategy • A focus on tackling skills shortages in caring, leisure, retail and customer services • Targeted support for graduates and young people
<p>Private Sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for SME start-ups • Support for key sector strengths including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An agritech cluster ○ Food, drink and tourism ○ Health, social care and biotech • A cross-boundary approach to devolution 	<p>Public Sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A focus on early years and primary education • Developing an age friendly Shropshire with a focus on digihealth • A pioneering approach to the Work & Health programme

Further details of the economic analysis underpinning these recommendations is available in a separate research report.

Appendix 1:

List of consultation events undertaken

- Roundtable discussion with Senior Officers, Shropshire Council (including representatives from planning, health, housing, transport and economic development)
- Roundtable discussion with members of the Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee
- Roundtable discussion with Shropshire Business Board
- Roundtable discussion with Shropshire Council Cabinet
- Roundtable discussion with External Partners (including representatives from business, health and education)
- Series of face-to-face and telephone discussions with other consultees including:
 - University Centre, Shrewsbury
 - Harper Adams University
 - Shrewsbury Business Improvement District
 - Local businesses