

Draft Economic Development Strategy

2024 – 2029

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Introduction

The strength of East Devon's economy lies in its diversity. Whether it is cutting-edge research and development at Exeter Science Park, nationally renowned restaurants on our coastline, or small enterprises tucked away in our rural hamlets, East Devon caters to businesses of all sectors and sizes.

This diversity creates resilience, cushioning our economy from the worst impacts of the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. A robust economy, well positioned in geographical terms, presents East Devon as an attractive place to live, work, invest and visit.

East Devon's economy has its challenges. Most of these are driven by historic local trends such as lower wages and higher house prices compared to national averages. The quality of our natural environment is a key economic driver, although this can constrain our ability to accommodate new development. Longer term, East Devon will start to feel the effects of wider social and global environmental challenges, such as our ageing population, climate change and a biodiversity crisis.

With an informed Economic Development Strategy and a clear set of actions, we can turn these challenges into opportunities, further strengthening our diversity and resilience.



What is Economic Development?

Economics is the study of scarcity, whether it is the scarcity of physical things like natural resources and products, or of intangible things like ideas or time. 'Economic development' prioritises these scarcities in a way to improve the wellbeing of citizens, providing them with a good quality of life.

Previously, this meant chasing growth at any cost, focusing on conventional economic outputs with the social and ecological consequences viewed as secondary, or even irrelevant. This outdated approach is neither desirable nor sustainable.

Our approach to economic development is different. We view our economy as being embedded within a unique and sensitive environmental and social system. Economic growth should only happen where there is a proven link to the improved and equitable economic wellbeing and prosperity of our residents. In addition, economic growth needs to be bound together with both ecological regrowth and greater social pride and cohesion.

Why do we need a strategy?

There are two answers to this question: timing and resource.

The national and global economic turmoil witnessed over recent years has prevented us from being able to measure the performance of our economy. This situation has improved to some degree and the results of the 2021 Census now provide a groundswell of evidence, enabling us to better identify and understand the district's various economic and demographic strengths and weaknesses.

We have witnessed an ongoing transfer of powers and funds to local authorities to aid economic development at a more localised level. Although these resources have been limited to date, they have nonetheless provided an effective tool for local authorities to set local priorities based on local need. This has helped us to act upon East Devon's core economic challenges and opportunities.

Having a clear and concise Economic Development Strategy for the district will strengthen our hand for future funding bids and opportunities arising from further devolution. The Strategy will also help to outline in more detail the economic priorities outlined in the emerging Council Plan and Local Plan.

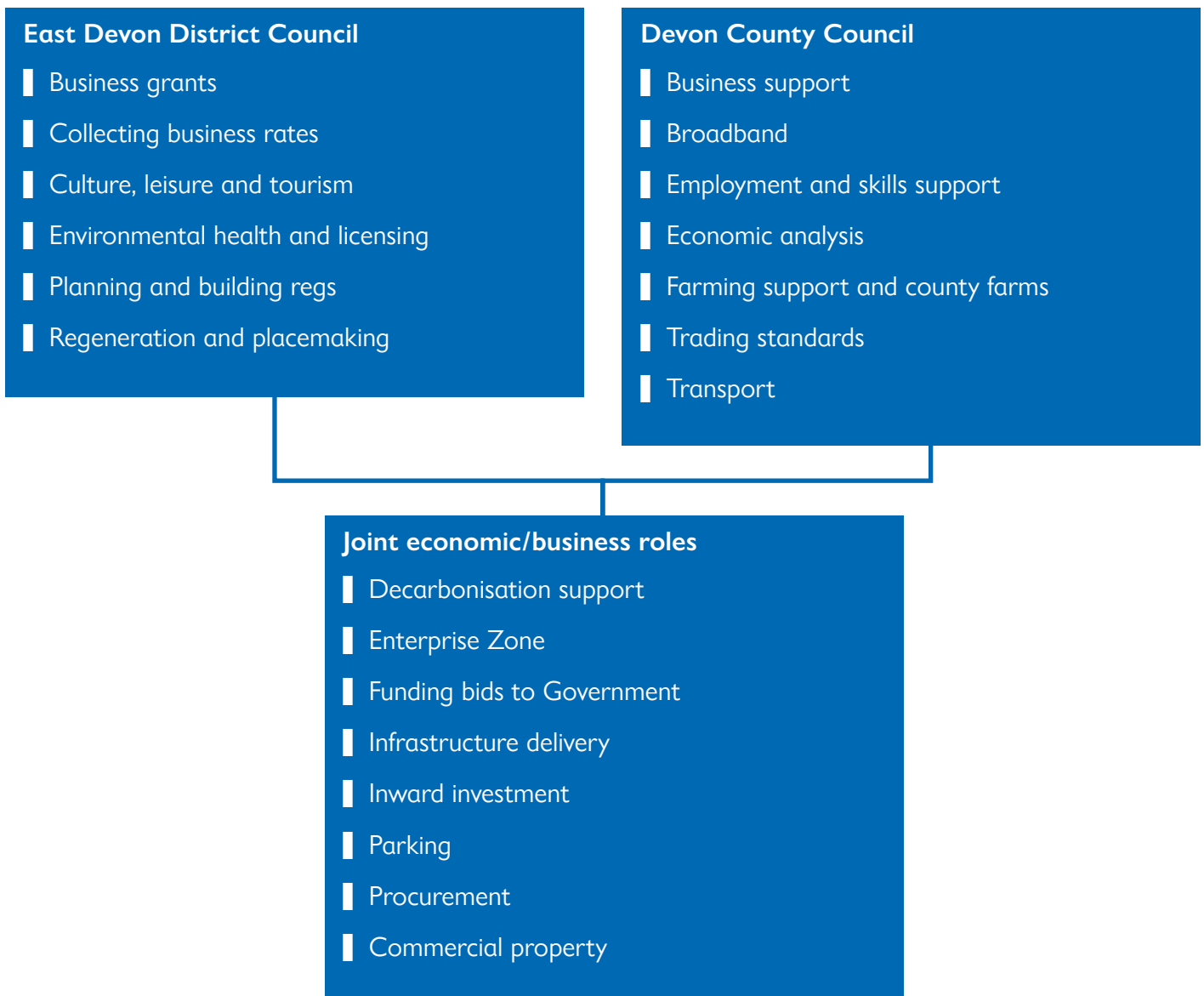
Our aim is for the Strategy to provide the clarity and confidence needed for residents, strategic partners and inward investors.

Roles

This Strategy acknowledges the various roles played by local, regional and national partners in supporting the economic development of East Devon. The Council's role is to provide additionality to what is already being delivered, to avoid duplicating what our partners are doing and playing to our strengths and specialisms as a district council.

The diagram below shows which economic activities and business services have traditionally been delivered by East Devon District Council and Devon County Council.

Economic/business roles



In addition to these responsibilities, one of the most important roles of a local authority is to be an enabler. By collaborating with local partners, we can help to facilitate those shared aspirations, as we can achieve more when we work together than we can apart.

Shared goals

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

To ensure there is alignment with longer term global priorities, each action presented within this Economic Development Strategy will be linked to one or more of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals. We have taken this approach to demonstrate to our residents how action at a local level can feed into critical global priorities.



The Sustainable Development Goals

www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment

Evidence

This Economic Development Strategy for East Devon has been developed using a wide evidence base. This includes data from the 2021 Census and other Office for National Statistics (ONS) datasets. Evidence commissioned by the Council has also been used, including the Economic Development Needs Assessment (EDNA) produced to help inform the emerging Local Plan. This data was brought together to form a Local Economic Review endorsed by EDDC Cabinet and published in October 2023.

Links to other information

Local Economic Review

Ranked 4th

in proportion of retirees out of England's 332 local authority areas

By 2040

Our net zero goal, carbon emissions are not falling fast enough

58,000+

Economically inactive residents, 46% of East Devon District Council residents

+14%

increase in population from 2011 and 2021

Average wage

£29k < £31k

East Devon and the South West

UK average

Jobs in East Devon for every working age resident

0.74 jobs

Average productivity of the national average

£35 per hour

of value added since 2011

Average wage

has outpaced inflation since 2011

6,730 businesses

registered in East Devon

30% of residents mainly work from home

3% Exmouth Town Ward unemployment rate

508,000sqm

Demand for industrial and logistics workspace significantly which outstrips supply 17,000sqm

1.7% unemployment rate

South West 2.1%
England's average 2.9%

To sense-check this data and fill in the gaps, a series of in-person and online consultation exercises were organised with local businesses and stakeholders. The graphic below illustrates some of the main points of feedback.

“The low carbon sector is a huge opportunity

to attract talent and create high value jobs.”

“Green jobs present our biggest high-skilled employment opportunities.”

“Housing is a key constraint.

Can we ringfence homes for young people?”

“We need to focus on creating careers rather than jobs;

people need to see that staying here will provide them opportunities to move up.”

“Shift in what young people value creates a great **opportunity for East Devon to market itself on a lifestyle basis and attract young people.”**

“The real struggle is the lack of small commercial units.”

“We’re so busy trying to find workspace for our growing business, it is hard to focus on other business needs”

“There is no space available and **businesses will just leave rather than wait for workspace to come forward”**

Vision

A strategic vision gives purpose to the actions we can take. The vision of this strategy is linked to our definition of 'economic development', the evidence, our role and also aligning with other relevant visions and strategies, primarily the Council Plan and Local Plan.

Our vision is for East Devon to have a sustainable and equitable economy geared towards the improved wellbeing of our residents and prosperity of our businesses. This vision is based on five key aspirations:

- To transition towards a Net Zero economy, displaying tangible progress towards decarbonisation and nature recovery.
- Our aspirational and traditional sectors to have the workspace and investment they need to thrive.
- Well-paid and productive careers that residents of all ages can be proud of.
- A more attractive offer for young adults to want to live and work in the district.
- To provide agile, responsive and quality public services that local businesses can rely on.



Policy Programme

To fulfil our vision, we have developed five policies to focus our actions within five years. These policies have been developed to address core challenges from the Local Economic Review and stakeholder evidence base whilst also acknowledging the specific specialisms of East Devon District Council.



Industrial Policy

Our industrial policy will target public resources towards specific sectors and industries with the support they need to grow and prosper. A focussed industrial strategy can promote 'clustering', where businesses within a specific sector establish a local ecosystem of competition, collaboration and innovation.

The Council can action its Industrial Policy using grant funding programmes provided by Government and regional bodies. Our aim is to directly stimulate growth in both aspirational sectors with a high growth potential and businesses in traditional sectors seeking to modernise. In turn, this financial investment will unlock high-value job creation, higher productivity and new innovative products coming to market.

To align with the wider Strategy, our Industrial Policy will focus on 'clean growth' outcomes such as tackling climate change and minimising waste. Policy outcomes should also be inclusive and aspirational, for example by helping to create jobs which foster occupational pride and financial stability. Areas of higher rural deprivation will also be prioritised where possible.

An industrial policy can also be used as a strategic signal to central government and other sources of funding to unlock larger streams of investment for our target sectors. This will help to catalyse confidence in the private sector to invest in East Devon, demonstrating how the Council and business can work in partnership.

Actions

This policy outlines how we will support our aspirational and traditional sectors, including through future grant funding schemes and other mechanisms of support. The core outcomes of the policy are:

- To increase the number of well-paid and secure jobs.
- To increase the number of businesses experiencing productivity gains.
- To increase the development of new clean technologies, services and production processes.

The Policy will align with existing sectoral strategies, such as the Tourism Strategy and the West End Clean Growth Vision.

Links to other information

- [Tourism Strategy](#)
- [West End Clean Growth Vision](#)

Action	Funding/Resource	Sustainable Development Goal
Invest and support projects linked to 'clean growth' including clean energy, green finance, sustainable transport and innovations in the circular economy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Devolved funding. ■ Enterprise Zone investment. 	<p>09. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.</p> <p>12. Responsible Consumption and Production.</p>
Invest and support projects linked to new digital and data innovations, such as artificial intelligence, robotics and drone technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Devolved funding. 	<p>08. Decent Work and Economic Growth.</p> <p>09. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.</p>
Support the development of a sustainable aviation cluster focused on Exeter Airport.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Officer time. ■ Devolved funding. 	<p>08. Decent Work and Economic Growth.</p> <p>09. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.</p>
Invest and support projects to promote East Devon's renowned food and drink sector, including events and exploring specialist workplace provision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Officer time. ■ Devolved funding. 	<p>08. Decent Work and Economic Growth.</p> <p>09. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.</p>
Invest and support projects linked to East Devon's Tourism Strategy to promote improved quality, collaboration, sustainability and accessibility across the sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Officer time. ■ Devolved funding. 	<p>08. Decent Work and Economic Growth.</p> <p>09. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.</p>
Invest and support projects linked to our most rural businesses, including farm businesses seeking to diversify.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Devolved funding. 	<p>08. Decent Work and Economic Growth.</p> <p>09. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.</p>

Workspace Policy

There is clear market failure in the delivery of employment land which will steadily degrade our economic wellbeing unless intervention is taken. Including a Workspace Policy in this Strategy is a direct response to this challenge. The Council can action this policy by pooling resources including planning expertise, council-owned assets and engagement with landowners.

There are concerns that a number of East Devon's employment allocations have viability constraints which are holding back delivery. There is a risk that more of these allocations could be lost to housing or to employment uses which only create a small number of low-aspiration jobs.

Supporting the development of these sites for high value commercial uses can help to strengthen pride of place and improve the economic resilience of our communities.

Additional employment land is required across the district, to promote settlement self-containment and reduce the need for car-based commuting. We will encourage the redevelopment and intensification of existing low-performing commercial sites to minimise the need to develop new sites in environmentally sensitive areas. We will also support the development of non-allocated employment land where proposals comply with the Local Plan.

To align with the wider Strategy, we need to ensure that new workspace can accommodate aspirational careers which are well paid and secure. Our aim is to support the delivery of key allocations, including council-owned assets, by seeking funding from Government and investing our own funds where this can generate a reasonable return.

Actions

This policy outlines how we will support our aspirational and traditional sectors, including through future grant funding schemes and other mechanisms of support. The core outcomes of the policy are:

- To increase the number of well-paid and secure jobs.
- To increase the number of businesses experiencing productivity gains.
- To increase the development of new clean technologies, services and production processes.

This Policy will align itself with the relevant strategies and policies of the emerging Local Plan, any updated iterations of the National Planning Policy Framework and the findings of current officer examinations of both our own stalled employment sites and future supply of strategic employment sites on a sub-regional basis.

The Policy will align with the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Nature Recovery Declaration.

Action	Funding/Resource	Sustainable Development Goal
Lead the delivery of the Enterprise Zone programme by investing in the delivery and effective marketing of new commercial space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Officer time. ■ Enterprise Zone budget. 	<p>09. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.</p> <p>11. Sustainable Cities and Communities.</p>
Explore the viability of developing small start-up units on vacant Council-owned land.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Officer time. ■ EDDC Investment. 	<p>08. Decent Work and Economic Growth.</p> <p>09. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.</p>
Support the viability of employment allocations by simplifying planning requirements and working with partners to ensure their development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Officer time. 	<p>09. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.</p> <p>11. Sustainable Cities and Communities.</p>
Ensure employment and skills plans are produced for larger residential and commercial developments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Officer time. 	<p>08. Decent Work and Economic Growth.</p> <p>09. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.</p>
Establish an online platform to help new and existing employers find available workspace to grow into.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Officer time. 	<p>08. Decent Work and Economic Growth.</p>

Environmental Policy

Although environmental and ecological outcomes feature throughout the Strategy, there are a number of specific targeted actions the Council can use to ensure our Vision is realised. The urgency of the climate crisis and wider ecological degradation demand a more targeted approach.

Climate change represents the largest market failure in our history. There is a clear gap in provision when it comes to supporting residents and businesses to reach net zero by 2040. Filling this gap requires attitudinal and behavioural change, enabled through accessible support and guidance. The Council will also seek to utilise a limited amount of grant funding to help those local organisations who lack the funds to deliver decarbonisation projects.

Decarbonisation relies not just on equipment, but also on the skills required to retrofit buildings and deliver infrastructure. Infrastructure delivery will also need be linked to environmental goals. For example, the delivery of active travel options can help to reduce the need for car-based commuting, leading to health and wellbeing benefits and reducing transport costs.

Our Environmental Policy will embrace opportunities to lower waste and inefficient spend on energy and promote skills development in green sectors which are key to meeting carbon and biodiversity goals. Our actions will show that economic growth and ecological regrowth can work hand in hand.

Actions

This policy will outline how we will support the decarbonisation of our economy and promote biodiversity net gain. The core outcomes of the policy are:

- To increase the number of businesses reaching net zero by 2040.
- To increase the take-up of clean energy equipment to lower bills and tackle poverty.
- To increase the number of residents upskilling into green jobs.
- To increase the quantity and quality of sustainable travel options.

The Policy will align with the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Nature Recovery Declaration.

Links to other information

- [Climate Change Strategy](#)
- [Nature Recovery Declaration](#)

Action	Funding/Resource	Sustainable Development Goal
Provide training and specialist one to one support for organisations seeking to decarbonise, reduce waste and become more resource efficient.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ EDDC business support budget. 	12. Responsible Consumption and Production. 13. Climate Action.
Provide decarbonisation grant funding to those organisations in most need.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Devolved funding. 	07. Affordable and Clean Energy. 13. Climate Action.
Support the reskilling and upskilling of residents into retrofitting and other careers linked to clean growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Devolved funding. 	04. Quality Education. 13. Climate Action.
Ensure that large scale employment development is coupled with sustainable travel options.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Devolved funding. 	11. Sustainable Cities and Communities.
Provide retrofitting grants to households in poverty who cannot access support from other schemes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Officer time. ■ Enterprise Zone funding. 	01. No Poverty. 07. Affordable and Clean Energy.

Social Policy

Our Social Policy will ensure that specific actions are taken to ensure that economic development is inclusive, equitable and strengthens residents' pride of place. Although these outcomes already feature throughout the Strategy, there are a number of specific targeted actions the Council can deploy to ensure our Vision can be realised.

East Devon faces particularly unique demographic challenges, with one of the highest proportions of retirees in the county. Residents living longer and healthier lives is a key measure of success. However, a severe imbalance in age groups within the district and between differing communities can lead to negative social outcomes, such as a reduced sense of belonging for those in under-represented age groups. Ageing populations have also been linked to lower productivity, higher demands on public services, a growing reliance on low-value jobs and reduced housing availability for those of working age. This in turn creates a feedback loop, where more younger residents feel compelled to leave the district to find a quality career, affordable housing and a better lifestyle.

An effective social policy can help to reshape this dynamic. The Council will explore ways to ensure that those at or near retirement can continue to play an active role in boosting the life prospects of younger residents, through mentoring and volunteering for example. The Council will also seek to bring forward a suite of innovative and pioneering projects to increase the attractiveness of East Devon as somewhere for younger people to live and work, utilising drivers such as an improved culture and leisure offer alongside town centre regeneration.

Rebalancing these long term imbalances in our demographic profile will take a long time, but with the right actions in place, we can begin to mitigate these challenges and promote social and economic opportunities.

Actions

This policy will outline how we will help to improve pride of place and the social fabric of the district. The core outcomes of the policy are:

- To increase the number of residents with an improved sense of pride in their community.
- To reduce the number of households facing poverty and protect disposable incomes.
- To increase the number of younger working age adults living and working in the district.
- To increase the number of residents who are economically and socially active.

The Policy will align with the Council's Cultural Strategy and Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Links to other information

- [Cultural Strategy](#)
- [Poverty Reduction Strategy](#)

Action	Funding/Resource	Sustainable Development Goal
Develop bids to support high streets and regenerate town centres, focussing on sustainable retail and an attractive social offer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ EDDC Investment. ■ Devolved funding. 	11. Sustainable Cities and Communities.
Lead on the delivery of town centres for our new communities to improve pride of place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ EDDC Investment. 	11. Sustainable Cities and Communities.
Fund cultural and leisure projects targeted to improve the lifestyle offer for young adults and to promote the wider offer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Officer time. ■ Devolved funding. 	03. Good health and Wellbeing. 10. Reduced Inequalities.
Explore the viability of innovative projects to provide housing for young professionals in our coastal and market towns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Officer time. 	10. Reduced Inequalities. 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities.
Help coordinate employment support for economically inactive residents of all ages, including a focus on those with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Devolved funding. 	08. Decent Work and Economic Growth. 10. Reduced Inequalities.
Facilitate and promote voluntary and mentoring opportunities for those at or near retirement age.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Officer time. 	10. Reduced Inequalities.

Resource Policy

All strategic documents must acknowledge the scarcity of time, money and officer resource available to deliver key objectives. This Strategy is no different. Our resource policy will outline our approach to 'business as usual' and statutory duties, but also reiterate the need to be agile and adaptive to major disruptions. The most recent disruption was the COVID-19 pandemic, where the Council had to radically alter the services it provides.

Our Resource Policy sets out our priorities on how to manage these competing demands. This means being prepared for future challenges and opportunities whilst maintaining the same quality services our residents and businesses expect. We also need to prepare a pipeline of 'shovel-ready' projects relevant to all of the policies sitting under this Strategy. This will enable us to submit high-quality funding bids at short notice to future Government and regional funding opportunities.

Where a major disruption or opportunity relevant to this Strategy presents itself, we may need to prioritise this over other actions presented within this Strategy. These decisions will be based on which actions will have the most positive impact, offer the best value for money and have the clearest alignment with both the Strategy and our Council Plan.

The Strategy itself also needs to be adaptable, acknowledging that the economic and governance landscape can change very quickly, even within a five-year period. The Strategy may need to change to match these new realities, requiring a pragmatic, entrepreneurial and solutions-first mindset. Where this is the case, the core principles underlying this Strategy will remain constant, even if our priorities need to change.

Actions

This policy will outline how we will deal with short-term and immediate economic opportunities and challenges. The core outcomes of the policy are:

- To increase and maintain the quality of statutory services provided to businesses.
- To successfully act upon new inward investment and funding opportunities.
- To be flexible and adaptive in our response to immediate challenges and risks which threaten the stability of our local economy.

The policy will build on the lessons learnt from our COVID-19 experience, major redundancy responses, recent funding bid submissions and the importance of maintaining local agency in the identification and prioritisation of centrally funded economic development interventions.

Action	Funding/Resource	Sustainable Development Goal
Produce a Business Charter committing the Council to providing quality public services to local businesses which offer good value for money.	■ Officer time.	16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.
To ensure a responsive and efficient planning service for businesses and commercial developers.	■ Officer time.	09. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. 11. Sustainable Cities and Communities.
Continue to provide an agile and approachable inward investment service to land high-value, aspirational employers.	■ Officer time.	08. Decent Work and Economic Growth. 09. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.
Create a networking group of local businesses to share best practice, connect and collaborate.	■ Officer time.	08. Decent Work and Economic Growth. 17. Partnerships for the Goals.
Ensure a responsive and engaging redundancy response offer for large employers, coordinating support from relevant agencies.	■ Officer time.	08. Decent Work and Economic Growth.
Work constructively with local authorities, businesses and other partners to maximise the benefits of devolution.	■ Officer time.	17. Partnerships for the Goals.

Next Steps



How will we measure success?

Success will be measured against the delivery of the actions outlined in this Strategy whilst allowing for the flexibility provided in our Resource Policy. The actions listed within this Strategy will be integrated within the Council 'golden thread' of service-level and officer-level actions to be carried out each year.

An annual report will be published providing a RAG (red, amber or green) rating for each action along with a brief update on how each action is progressing. All actions need to:

1. Provide additionality.
2. Avoid duplication.
3. Offer good value for money.
4. Be impactful.
5. Align with the Vision and Policies within this Strategy.

Where a particular action cannot meet these criteria, it will be amended, removed or replaced with an alternative action where the criteria can be met. This will prevent the Strategy from becoming out of date.

We will continue to monitor the longer term economic, social and environmental trends of East Devon, both through future datasets and the feedback we receive from businesses, partners and stakeholders. Our local actions will not be able to turn the tide of national and global pressures.

However, by aligning our actions to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, we will work to maximise the positive impact of our actions and 'play our part' to address the global challenges impacting local residents.

A final monitoring report will be published in 2030 providing a detailed analysis of the Strategy, its actions, outputs and overall impact. This work will help to inform future strategies and actions aimed towards the economic development of East Devon.

Strategic structural chart

Local Plan



Council Plan



Economic Development Strategy



Service Plans



Officer objectives