



# ECONOMIC STRATEGY

2022

## Chorley's Economic Strategy

**We are ambitious for the economy of Chorley, our businesses, and people. Our economy continues to grow and we must now drive forward our plans to respond proactively by optimising new opportunities. This Economic Strategy aims to set out a clear ambition and vision for Chorley, considering the local, regional and national context.**

### Background

The pandemic had a dramatic impact on the economic environment. It showed us that the economy is intrinsically connected to overall wellbeing and confirmed that people's economic circumstances including their income level, job quality, wealth and pay have a strong influence on their quality of life and potential.

We have taken time to review the position and to engage with local businesses and partners to understand what this means in terms of our future strategy and growth aspirations. The first Annual Partnership Summit hosted by the Chorley and South Ribble Partnership brought businesses and partners organisations together to:

- Understand the post Covid environment from an economic perspective and how this is likely to impact the residents of Chorley
- Establish a collective ambition to develop an inclusive economy, where there are opportunities for everybody, through partners working together as a system, supporting employers to invest in those furthest away from sustainable and prosperous employment based on the principles of inclusivity and social value
- Identify the regional and national opportunities and barriers, and provide an assessment of our local capability and capacity to achieve our ambition
- Consider key policy movements towards Levelling Up, building back better, opportunities linked to the green economy and climate change

Chorley has a track record of taking direct action to address local inequalities through investment and initiatives to strengthen the local economy, including reinvigoration of Chorley town centre and activity across the borough to encourage inward investment and local employment. However significant pockets of deprivation remain with outcomes consistently below national averages. We now need to set clear priorities and mobilise action, together with businesses and partners, to realise the benefits of economic growth for all stakeholders.

## Big Issues

### 1. Local centres

The borough appears to be recovering well post Covid, particularly Market Walk which has seen footfall increase from less than 100,000 per month in April 2020 to almost 220,000 in January 2022. Although vacancy rates are tracking around a similar level to average North West figures, there are some key outlets outside of market walk that remain vacant. A pre-Covid shift towards lifestyle and entertainment outlets has mitigated the worst of the retail decline with scope to now progress more conversion to residential use, incorporating a growing trend towards green/low carbon living. Economic centres outside of Chorley (e.g. Adlington and Eccleston) are seeing increased footfall, reflecting possible behaviour changes as residents shop 'hyper-local'.



**Opportunity:** Continue to build on the recovery by supporting local traders, creating an attractive proposition and defining a clear plan for the future of the town centre that supports our wider economic development and growth aspirations.

### 2. Productivity

Chorley has seen positive growth in enterprises from 4360 in 2019 to 4655 in 2022, particularly micro businesses with fewer than 4 employees. This is a 6.77% increase compared to 1.69% for the North West and 1.55% nationally. Council-led business support focused on entrepreneurialism (marketing, HR for small businesses, social media) has been very popular over the last 12 months and will encourage new businesses sustainability. Chorley has a mixture of small, medium and larger businesses which will require a tailored approach to respond to specific needs and requirements; process automation and digital capability is a strong cross cutting theme from business feedback. Climate change remains a high priority for the borough with all businesses needing to reduce emissions and improve their environmental credentials by making best use of natural resources.



**Opportunity:** Align Council action and assistance to meet the new and emerging needs of businesses, working collaboratively with the sector and partners to achieve our ambition with a focus on innovation and new technology. Support businesses to adapt to climate change and maximise investment and jobs linked to the green economy.

### 3. Communities

Chorley is a relatively affluent borough however pockets of deprivation remain. Although overall deprivation is lower than 2015, it has become more concentrated to certain areas, further widening inequalities. The employment rate in Chorley has been maintained at the same level as last year and the number of people claiming out of work benefits has reduced compared to last year, although still higher than 2020 and aligned to areas of deprivation. The ongoing cost of living crisis will further widen the gap within our communities.



**Opportunity:** Work with our partners to take a more targeted approach to identifying and supporting key groups using our local intelligence and insight.

### 4. Jobs and skills

Residents of Chorley, particularly young people, are well qualified however job density stats suggest a lower number of jobs per resident than at the regional level (0.63 compared to 0.82 for the North West) and that residents working outside the borough earn significantly more. This has the potential to be exacerbated by agile working and 'brain drain'. Chorley has the highest forecast labour market growth in Lancashire but employers tell us that skills don't match business need, particularly in advanced manufacturing/green/technical sectors.



**Opportunity:** Proactively build clear links between job creation and future skills development in Chorley, working with our local education and training providers.

## 5. Land and assets

Inward investment activity in recent years has encouraged businesses to locate in Chorley. Businesses have told us that they want to remain and grow within Chorley so space to support existing businesses and further investment is now a critical issue. Large areas of Chorley are protected to maintain the borough as an attractive place to live. Looking ahead the emphasis will be on working with individual businesses to understand requirements and developing tailored solutions. At a regional level, the council will need to use policy levers, including the Local Plan, and county influence to maximise opportunities for business in Chorley.



**Opportunity:** Through the Local Plan, make the best use of existing land and assets to deliver high quality future-proof green spaces and places; be creative in developing new solutions and using our collective influence to create opportunities.

## 6. National economic conditions

Following the removal of Covid-19 restrictions, the UK experienced positive growth with high job vacancies and employment expansion. However recent forecasts suggest that a downturn may be imminent due to the cost of living crisis and high levels of inflation. Economic activity in Chorley is mainly related to service and professional industries although there has been substantial growth in transport, food and storage categories which may be more vulnerable to economic shocks. National and regional financial assistance may be subject to change in response to the wider context, therefore it's important that Chorley has a clear strategic direction that is flexible to changing conditions.

## 7. Levelling Up and Devolution

Although not identified in the Levelling Up White Paper, Lancashire continue to work on a single voice through the Greater Lancashire Plan which looks to link growth, infrastructure, communities and the environment. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund is one of a number of funds supporting the Levelling Up agenda. The fund focuses on 3 key themes: Communities and Place, Supporting Local Businesses, People and Skills. Funding of £4.2m over 3 years has been allocated to Chorley in line with an approved investment plan.



**Opportunity:** Be clear on our strategic priorities and regularly review our objectives and actions to address emerging issues.

## Economic Strategy Principles

Our strategy is set in a period of intense social and technological change. The strategy aims to define underlying principles and set a direction of travel, while enabling the council to react and respond to emerging trends.

Economic prosperity is a key enabler of life opportunities and determinant of overall wellbeing – this means that it is everyone’s business

We will take a more collaborative approach with businesses, partners and communities all contributing to local economic outcomes

Climate change and the commitment to net zero 2030 will be a cross-cutting theme, with all objectives and actions designed to advance the green agenda

The council will innovate, facilitate and drive action - using policy levers, influence, assets and resources where needed


Our plans will align to regional and national priorities where necessary to achieve the best outcome for Chorley

**Vision:** By 2030, Chorley will benefit from more and better paid jobs as a prime location for sustainable growth and investment, driven by innovation, new technologies and a commitment to net zero 2030

**Priorities**



**Space for business**  
Making the best and most sustainable use of land, assets and accommodation



**Jobs and skills**  
For the future, co-managed by employers and skills providers







**Employability**  
As a core public service connecting all residents to opportunities







**Business support**  
That is intelligence-led, proactive and versatile



Priority	Objectives
 <b>Space for business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fit for purpose accommodation for key sectors that is green and sustainable including office, light industrial and advanced technologies</li> <li>• Unlocking land and assets to enable business growth</li> <li>• Excellent local infrastructure right across the borough – physical (housing, transport, leisure) and digital</li> <li>• Sustainable use of resources to minimise environmental impact</li> <li>• A masterplan for our town centre that supports our wider economic growth priorities</li> </ul>
 <b>Jobs and skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using partnerships with key local education providers to connect the curriculum and skills (e.g. the Runshaw Employer Partnership Board)</li> <li>• Establishing incentives for jobs and skills that respond to future industry demands e.g. digital, sustainability and the green agenda, automation</li> <li>• Increasing employment opportunities in high growth, high value sectors</li> </ul>
 <b>Employability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted intervention and training in key geographical areas across the borough to support access to work</li> <li>• Working with public service partners to ensure that employability is built into all service pathways</li> <li>• Schemes with employers and private businesses to invest in those furthest away from employment</li> </ul>
 <b>Business Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic approach to managing business needs throughout the lifecycle based on intelligence captured by the business support team</li> <li>• Engagement and events to cultivate and maintain a vibrant business culture</li> <li>• Help for entrepreneurs to survive and grow within the borough</li> <li>• Bespoke business support offer and approach tailored to needs and priorities</li> <li>• Continued assistance for independent traders to build resilience and sustainability with a hyper local focus</li> <li>• Cross-sector learning to share expertise and experience e.g. green operations</li> <li>• Support for businesses to adapt to meet net zero 2030 commitments</li> </ul>



Priority	Actions
 <b>Space for business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the sites available within the Local Plan and develop clear strategies for each in line with local priorities and ambitions.</li> <li>Develop local investment propositions and consider new commercial investment partnerships</li> <li>Cooperate across Chorley and South Ribble to make the most of limited accommodation and assets, retaining businesses in the local area.</li> <li>Support green upgrades to commercial premises (including electric car charging points) to increase attractiveness</li> <li>Review and refresh the town centre masterplan in line with UKSPF</li> </ul>
 <b>Jobs and skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively support employer-partnership forums linking industry and education</li> <li>Develop career pathways for key skills and sectors working with local partners</li> <li>Develop targeted career days with specialist partners e.g. digital, health innovation, green/environment</li> </ul>
 <b>Employability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider an incentive scheme to support employers to develop entry level schemes for key skills and sectors</li> <li>Enhance the employability service with additional capacity to target specific areas and geographies with a bespoke offer</li> <li>Develop schemes with employers and businesses to invest in key cohorts</li> </ul>
 <b>Business Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and deliver a programme of business events with specialist partners. Review and evaluate to understand business preferences. Include climate change adaptations and green solutions to meet the net zero aspiration</li> <li>Increase place branding and identity through visibility and attendance at high profile regional and national awards</li> <li>Establish consistent business dialogue through roundtables, Council 'open-door' sessions</li> <li>Trial B2B knowledge sharing partnerships, starting with green operations</li> <li>Develop a business support package for new start-ups and entrepreneurs including advice and assistance</li> </ul>

## Delivery

The Council will drive the delivery of the strategy through a collaborative approach with partners that pulls everyone in the same direction and makes the most of shared resources. An action plan will accompany the strategy with a number of specific schemes that will be led, directed or facilitated by the Council to enhance delivery.

- **Innovation hubs** – council-directed thematic, intelligence-led forums where organisational leaders will come together around a specific agenda (e.g. skills and training) to commit to actions to be delivered collaboratively, with allocated funding/resource if needed.
- **Knowledge transfer partnerships** – council-facilitated business to business collaboration to share sector learning or best practice e.g. sustainable operations and the green agenda. Could be two large businesses working together or groups of businesses with a similar challenge.
- **Business events and awards** – in addition to networking and engagement forums and following a long period of limited activity due to Covid, there may be a desire to review and reinvigorate a focused programme of events that has clear objectives in line with the aspirations of the strategy. Given the impact of Covid on the business sector, consideration may be given to an awards or celebration type event.
- **Employability services** – council-led employability services that are integrated into public service pathways and targeted to support key areas of the borough. Supporting those furthest from the workplace and providing clear pathways to skills and employment through a range of council and partner services including advice, training and apprenticeships.
- **Business advice and engagement** – council-led structured business engagement and intelligence gathering to understand needs and inform tailored solutions. This could be direct support and advice to individual businesses, or sector wide interventions. Current grant schemes will be reviewed to fit with strategic objectives.
- **Investment** – UKSPF themes are common to those identified locally. The investment plan would complement priorities and delivery plans with an emphasis on working in partnership to achieve improved outcomes for the borough.

Given the changing nature of the economic climate and emerging challenges, this will be a 3 year strategy reviewed in 2025.

## Success Measures

- Increase in the overall employment rate for the borough
- Reduction in the number of young people (16-17) who are not in education, employment or training
- More young people have recognised qualifications at a higher level
- Fewer vacant properties in the town centre
- More jobs created within the borough, particularly in key growth sectors
- Increased earnings for Chorley residents
- Increase in visitor numbers
- Increase in business growth rate for Chorley
- Increased business accommodation across the borough with supporting infrastructure
- Greater support for individual business needs including advice and support

