



Winchester
City Council

From Progress to Impact:

Green Economic Development Priorities

2026 - 2029



Introduction

The **Winchester District Green Economic Development Strategy** was commissioned to set out a clear and ambitious framework for us to drive change in the context of the climate emergency we declared in 2019 and the economic uncertainties we were facing. Building on our unique strengths and assets we have the essential qualities to fully capitalise on green growth opportunities, making sure the district benefits from the new jobs, goods, and services and to position the Winchester district as a leading destination for enterprise and creative opportunity.

Over the last five years, we have remained committed to supporting emerging business needs and opportunities, helping key sectors to adapt, grow and thrive. This includes agriculture and other rural businesses, alongside the cultural, visitor, food and drink, creative, professional and education sectors that play a vital role in the district's economic vitality, prosperity and distinct sense of place.

We have:



Distributed nearly £3m in government funding to support business, residents and communities



Helped 60 business to become greener and more energy efficient, reducing emissions by 98 tonnes of CO²



Supported almost 1000 residents to develop their skills



Assisted 250 businesses through business development programmes including those tailored to creative, tourism and rural sectors



Over 70 events supported

As we move forward to a new landscape of delivery for local authorities it is vital that we are focused on what we want to achieve and how we can best ensure our economy, business and residents are strong and resilient.

For that reason we are setting the key areas in which we invest our resources over the next two to three years. This makes a clear statement about what is important and that can bring the greatest impact and benefits to our district in terms of securing a long-term sustainable economy in which all have the opportunity to participate.

We will continue to support business innovation, skills and competitiveness and the cultural, creative and visitor economy and we will focus on:



Powering rural growth and green economy

Supporting enterprises to innovate, digitise, and expand.



Securing Investment

To unlock investment in business growth, innovation, and skills.



Culture with impact

Ensuring culture in its widest sense continues to thrive.



Building our visitor identity

Strengthening our brand to position the district as Hampshire's tourism anchor.

Our approach, focus and achievements

It's been five years since the Winchester District Green Economic Development Strategy was commissioned. It provided us with a framework to work with stakeholders and to collectively influence the development of the district's economy over ten years to 2030.

Our focus over that period has been on supporting sustainable business growth, cultural and creative sector engagement and visitor economy and tourism marketing development.

There have been four major strands of work:



UK Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Funding Programme



Rural and agricultural land-based business support



Cultural and creative strategy and sector promotion



Tourism strategy and sector development



STREET

Cupboard
of Health
Stockists of
Mouskolas, Scher

© Harvey Mills Photography

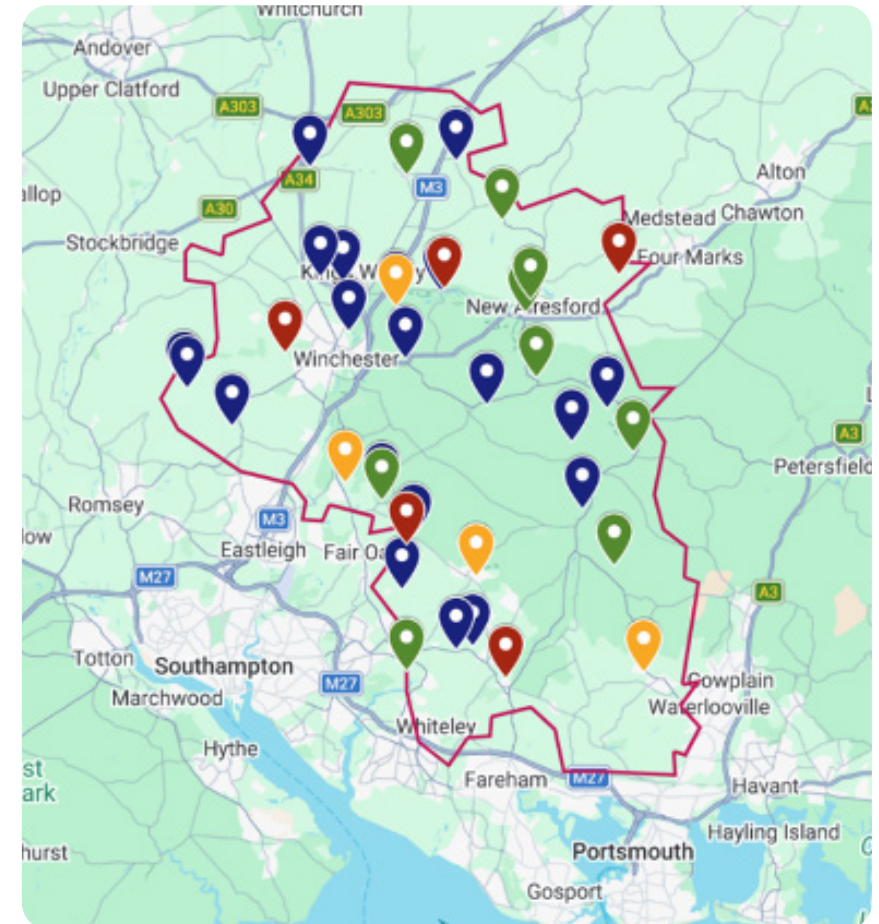
UK Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Funding Programme

Over the past four years we have delivered a highly successful and impactful UK Shared Prosperity and Rural England Prosperity Funding programme.

Summary highlights:

- **Over £2 million awarded, supporting 83 projects** across the district
- **Strong leverage of funding:** every £1 of prosperity funding has unlocked a further 92p in match funding, resulting in a total investment of £4.32m over the four-year period
- **25 villages or market towns** have benefited from grants
- **Funding has enhanced community facilities and supported local businesses** resulting in the outcomes highlighted overleaf

£966,034 Rural England Prosperity funding was allocated to 39 projects across the district in the following locations:



Examples of UK Shared Prosperity Fund outcomes and projects supported

Supporting local businesses



650m2

Commercial space improved



93

Businesses supported



100

Creative entrepreneurs engaged



50

Events supported



22

Digital projects supported

Supporting people and skills



21

Residents achieving qualification

Increasing residents' digital skills



307

Residents achieving qualification



25

Farms adopting new technologies

Increasing green / low carbon skills



852

Residents attending training workshops and sessions

Increasing employability skills

Net zero / climate mitigation



7

EV chargers installed



98

Tonnes equivalent from 21 projects



65,000

Tonnes equivalent from one SF6 project

CO2 emissions avoided

Community infrastructure and green spaces



10

Community buildings supported to remain viable



Energy efficiency measures introduced



1

Safe new play area created



Improvements to community facilities

Supporting local business and tourism development



21

Businesses supported

Enabling local businesses to grow



7

Jobs created

Increased business productivity requires labour



10

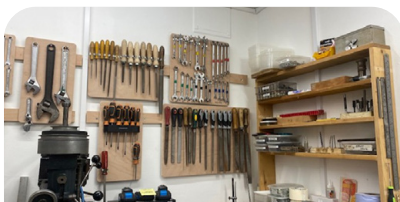
Visitor economy businesses supported

Improvements to the visitor experience

Our UKSP projects in action



Energy efficient ventilation for South Downs Social



Tools for Bishop's Waltham Men's Shed



Winchester Health walks



Sustainable Tourism



Archaeology event during the transformation on the Central Winchester Regeneration area



Bear Face Theatre's inclusive project studying perceptions



Hearing loop for Theatre



Light Festival



Tractor and flail for meadow management



Sandlizard and crayfish habitat for Marwell Zoo



Electric van for local gardeners



Pottery workshops at HMP Winchester



Dust extractor enabling local stonemason to teach his craft



Community bus for Bishop's Waltham



Solar panelling for Victoria Hall Sutton Scotney

Rural and agricultural land-based business support

In supporting our rural business and the agricultural, land-based businesses in our district we have:

- Provided support to 12 farm cluster meetings and around 20 individual farm visits (support provided in the form of green business support, access to funding, low carbon assessments and advice around solar PV)
- Funded a scoping study into the feasibility of a grazier scheme
- Summited a LEP funding application for an abattoir scheme
- Provided skills support to agriculture and land-based businesses including raising local skills needs with training providers such as Sparsholt College.
- UK Shared Prosperity Funding was awarded to a Sparsholt College project providing farmers, land-based workers and agricultural students with advanced digital skills, improving productivity through precision farming while helping reduce environmental impacts and tackle digital exclusion in rural areas.



Cultural and creative strategy and sector promotion

- The co-created **Winchester District Cultural Strategy** was published in March 2024, and two years on, partnerships have formed and grown, funding has been secured, opportunities have been seized and the sector has connected in powerful ways.
- We delivered the **Plot Lines project**, which gathered, listened to and shared stories and anecdotes from people living in and around Waterlooville, creating space for residents to share ideas and shape creative activity. Writer in residence Aoife Mannix captured personal experiences of moving to and living in the area, with three publications preserving everyday stories that reflect a broader sense of belonging and community.
- To support, encourage and grow our creative industries we delivered a **Creative Growth Programme** and peer group, which supported over 100 creatives with business skills.
- We engaged with young people to understand what culture means to them and the activity they want to see in the Winchester district. We secured funding and worked with university students to design and deliver an **Open Mic Night** in November 2025.
- We worked in partnership to deliver Winchester's first creative industries festival, **From Behind Closed Doors**, including an exhibition, student design challenge and open studios weekend. We worked with Rodd Design and partners including Winchester School of Art (WSA), Winchester Business Improvement District, the Royal Society for the Arts and Southern Creative Catalyst.
 - We showcased 12 Winchester-based studios in the exhibition which attracted 130 attendees to the private view and over 100 additional visitors across the weekend.
 - We engaged 10 WSA students in a design challenge and displayed their final concepts at the exhibition.
 - We facilitated 17 studios opening to the public and included four freelance creatives at a central hub.

- We achieved strong engagement, with studios welcoming up to 60 visitors each, 850 views on Visit Winchester, and over 4,000 views of the open studios map.
- We have created a new [Cultural and Creative Industries Resource Hub](#) and a creative directory of the organisations, locations and individuals delivering cultural and creative activity across Winchester district.
- We coordinate the **Winchester Cultural Network** (a group of cultural and creative organisations and practitioners working across the district who meet regularly to connect and learn) and the **Winchester District Cultural Strategy Collective** (a strategic partnership that brings together the stakeholders with an ability to influence and drive the successful delivery of the Winchester District Cultural Strategy).
- We've also created **new and improved creative and cultural content**, from [Why you should bring your festival to Winchester](#), to [Winchester's Marvellous Museums](#) and [An arty overnight itinerary](#).

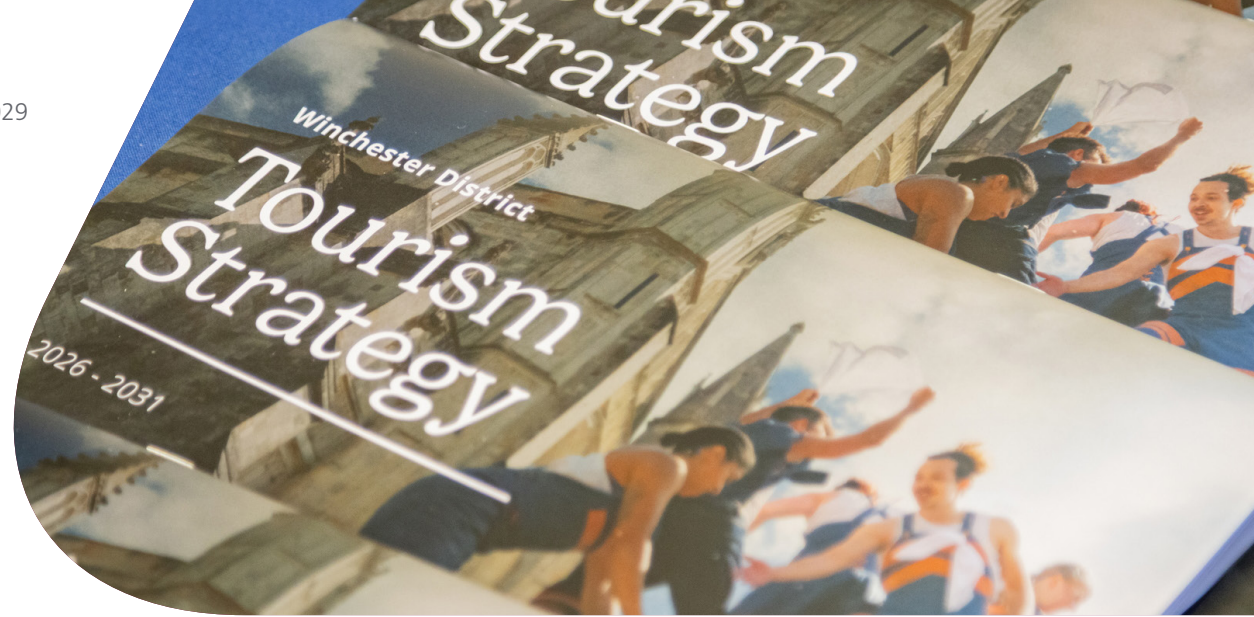


Tourism strategy and sector development

Winchester District Tourism Strategy 2026 – 2031

was developed from a thorough analysis of visitor data, market trends, and stakeholder consultations and approved by Cabinet and launched in March 2026. The purpose of the strategy is to guide the Winchester district visitor economy toward a new vision: to evolve from a day-trip destination into a vibrant, high-value, short break and overnight destination.

We have already enhanced content and campaign material focused on the identified visitor market 'curious families'.



Supporting our visitor economy businesses and partners

Visit Winchester marketing and partnership activities

Supporting our businesses through the Visit Winchester Marketing and Partnership Programme, in 2025 we achieved the following:



A major campaign in 2025 was Jane Austen 250

We led partners across Hampshire to collaborate on marking the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth through a rich programme of events, projects and campaigns.

- Over one hundred themed events took place over the year, with footfall notably increasing at The Cathedral and Winchester College compared to the previous summer. No.8 college street opened for the first time and welcomed 7k visitors over a limited opening.
- We also worked with partners across the Winchester district to deliver a marketing and PR campaign which resulted in over 100 pieces of press coverage, reaching an anticipated audience of over 1.4 billion and 601 brand mentions.
- We were named as the number one place to visit in 2025 by The New York Times and we welcomed national and international press including The Toronto Star and The Boston Globe. The Jane Austen Winchester Trail was downloaded 8k times and 2k printed copies were distributed through the Visitor Information Centre. The campaign page had over 23.5k page views.
- We spearheaded an Instagram takeover with Visit England in which reach benchmarks were surpassed by 232% at over 209,547.



Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and Winchester Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP)

As members of the Executive Delivery group, alongside Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council, we are shaping the development of the Hampshire Destination Management Plan. We are the local LVEP representative on the Visit England and Visit Britain AI impact programme for LVEPs.

Support for our market towns



Engaged with Bishop's Waltham and Wickham over signing up to a bespoke partnership and marketing programme package.



Working with Wickham Chamber of Trade and Bishop's Waltham Parish Council on promoting their events and updating content on Visit Winchester website.



Featured in our marketing campaigns (eg. blogs, itineraries, social media).



Focus on market towns in our monthly enews.



Creative work including creative blog itineraries, networking events and Plot Lines project in Newlands.



Summary of work we have delivered as part of the 2024-2027 Action Plan.

Action	Achievements 2024- 2026
Culture and visitor economy	
Implement the district-wide Cultural Strategy 2024-2030.	The Cultural Strategy is available to download here . Currently being delivered to empower cultural and creative activity across the district.
Co-ordinate the establishment and operation of the Cultural Network Group.	15 Cultural Network events delivered, with over 350 attendees from the arts and cultural sector.
Deliver the West of Waterlooville Public Art Programme.	The Plot Lines project has produced three publications inspired by stories and anecdotes from residents. Download Volume 1 and 2 here .
Deliver the Tourism Strategy.	The Winchester District Tourism Strategy is available to download here. Currently being delivered to develop Winchester district into a vibrant, high-value destination.
Create a new sustainable operating policy for City Street Markets.	65 traders have been approved through new application process, as of April 2026.
Skills and competitiveness	
Deliver a Digital Growth Factory which includes a digital productivity programme for SMEs through UKSPF.	96 businesses supported through The Business Growth Factory (funded by UKSPF).
Secure employment and skills plans for major developments that encourage developers to develop green skills.	Employment and skills plan delivering green skills training secured for four major developments.
Deliver Digital Skills programme for residents through UKSPF.	230 Winchester district residents' digital skills supported through a digital skills programme (funded by UKSPF).
Deliver Winchester District Jobs and Opportunities Fair.	Four Jobs and Opportunities Fairs have been held, attracting over 600 resident attendees.

Action	Achievements 2024- 2026
Deliver a retrofit skills improvement programme in partnership with Hampshire County Council and the Retrofit Academy through UKSPF.	148 learners completed retrofit courses, and 50 residents attended retrofit skills conference (funded by UKSPF).
Support installation of low carbon technology training bays through UKSPF.	Three low carbon technology training bays delivered by Sparsholt College (funded by UKSPF).
Business innovation and green growth	
Produce digital sector inward investment prospectus.	The prospectus is available to download here .
Deliver a programme of low carbon assessments / business audits to identify measures that will reduce carbon emissions.	58 low carbon assessments delivered for businesses across the Winchester district.
Deliver a green business grants fund to reduce energy consumption and transport emissions and increase renewable energy regeneration	10 green business grants delivered for businesses across the Winchester district. Green Business Growth film: https://youtu.be/FXhqJladiY
Produce a technical advice note to encourage the repurposing retail space.	The technical advice note is available to download here .
Deliver a mentoring scheme, with a focus on a green business practices.	Sustainability Peer Mentoring Group launched in January 2026. 15 businesses have been supported.
Maintain a register of vacant properties and pop-up spaces promoted to cultural and creative sectors.	The vacant property register is available to download here .
Facilitate the Greener Futures Partnership to support deliverables.	Three Greener Future's Partnership meetings held.

Our Vision for 2026 - 2029

Council Plan 2025-2030

OUR VISION

“ We will make a real difference to the lives of our residents, the strength of our business and the quality of our environment.

We remain committed to supporting emerging business needs and opportunities, including agriculture and other rural businesses, alongside the cultural, visitor, food and drink, creative, professional and education sectors that make a significant contribution to the district's economic vitality, prosperity and identity.

The outcomes we aim to achieve are to:



Support new businesses and create new jobs



Increase solar PV installation on large commercial and industrial buildings



Work with further and higher education, alongside local businesses, to support skills and enable research and knowledge transfer



Work with partners to promote and develop our unique cultural, heritage and natural environment assets across the district



Revitalise our street markets and support local festivals

Our priorities and GEDS themes

Our priorities for 2026-2029

Powering Rural Growth and Green Economy

Support local enterprises to innovate, digitise and expand, while strengthening Winchester's rural economy and ensuring that no community is left behind.

Securing Investment

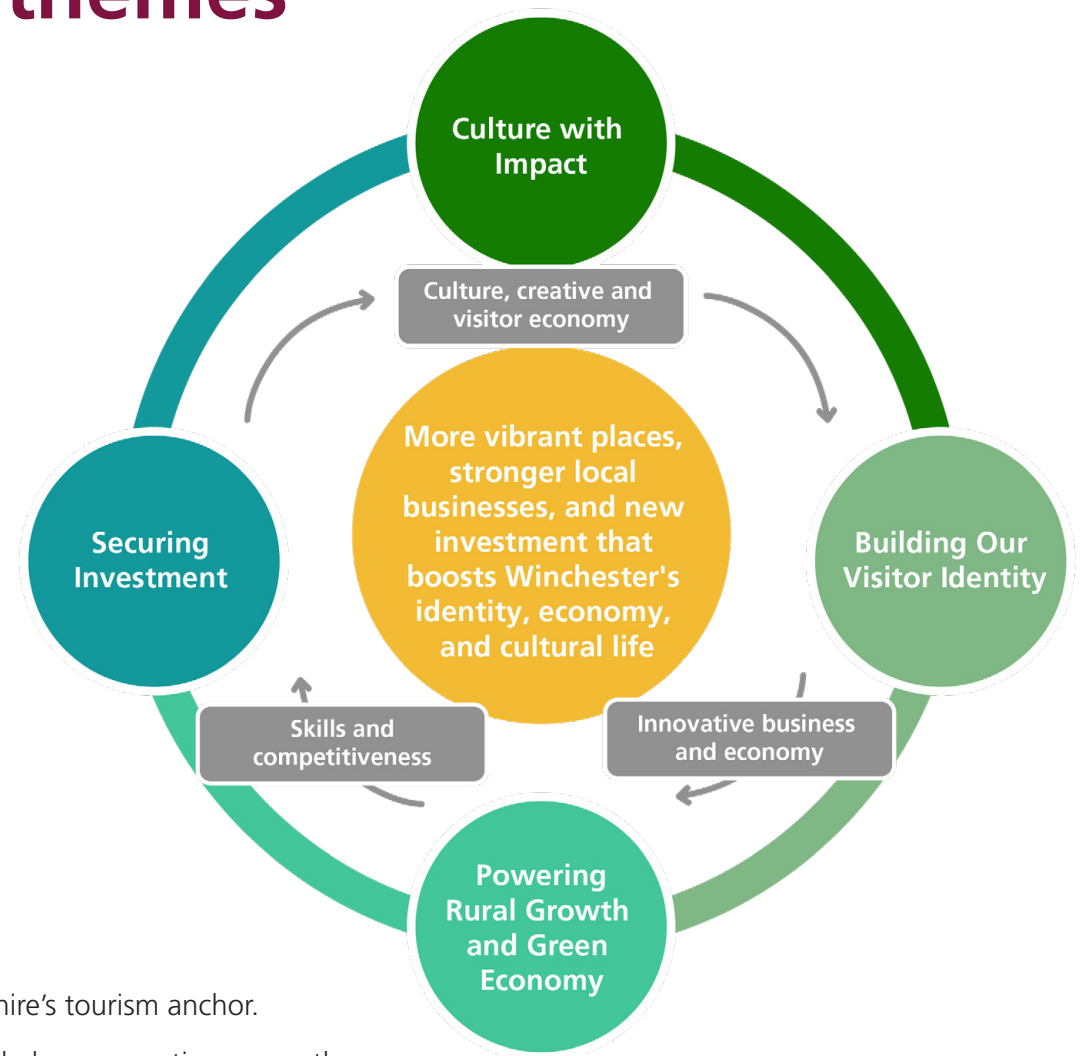
Unlock investment in business growth, innovation, and skills, helping position Winchester district as a leading destination for enterprise and creative opportunity.

Culture with Impact

Embed legacy and sustainability across our Cultural Partnerships to ensure culture in its widest sense continues to thrive.

Work with partners to secure recognition as a model of best practice by Arts Council England and beyond.

- Building Our Visitor Identity
- Strengthen the Visit Winchester brand to position the district as Hampshire's tourism anchor.
- Establish bold, evidence-based foundations for growth, partnership, and place promotion across the South.
- Continue leadership role in the Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) for Hampshire
- Ensure our district's distinct offer drives regional collaboration and national recognition.



Our Delivery Focus and Activity 2026-2029

GEDS Theme	Outcomes
Innovative business and economy Skills and competitiveness	• Strong, sustainable business growth • Increasing solar PV installation on large commercial and industrial buildings • Work with further and higher education, alongside local businesses, to support skills and enable research and knowledge transfer
Priority	Delivery Focus and Activity
Powering Rural Growth and Green Economy Support local enterprises to innovate, digitise, and expand and strengthen Winchester's rural economy and ensuring no community is left behind.	Green Business • Solar for business • Low carbon business audits and grants • Peer to Peer Sustainable Business Mentoring scheme Rural economy & land-based business • Work with farm clusters to develop the rural economy • Collaborate to establish a centre for skills in rural farming and green technologies
Securing Investment Unlock investment in business growth, innovation, and skills, helping position Winchester district as a leading destination for enterprise and creative opportunity.	Business innovation • Deliver a package of digital support (including AI) for businesses Attracting investment • Produce sector specific inward investment proposition for the rural economy • Develop an up-to-date pipeline of rural projects that are investment ready • Ensure that grant funding is used to unlock and leverage further business investment beyond the value of the grant itself
Culture, creative and visitor economy	• Work with partners to promote and develop our unique cultural, heritage and natural environment assets across the district • Strong footfall in all our centres with lower than regional vacancy rates • Revitalise our street markets and support local festivals

GEDS Theme	Outcomes
Priority	Delivery Focus and Activity
Culture with Impact Embed legacy and sustainability across our Cultural Partnerships to ensure culture in its widest sense continues to thrive. Work with partners to secure recognition as a model of best practice by Arts Council England and beyond.	Cultural Strategy Deliver key outcomes from the action plan including: • Develop and explore From Behind Closed Doors for 2027 onwards • Continue and grow Winchester Youth Nights • Develop a Cultural Education Network • Promote, support and enhance events and festivals programming West of Waterlooville Public Art Programme • Finalise outputs from phase one (Plot Lines) programme - third publication and physical artwork and evaluate 'Plot Lines' programme • Review and revise public art plan, reflecting on programme delivered and proposed next steps and explore interim recommendations
Building Our Visitor Identity Strengthen the Visit Winchester brand to position the district as Hampshire's tourism anchor. Establish bold, evidence-based foundations for growth, partnership, and place promotion across the South. Continue leadership role in the Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) for Hampshire Ensure our district's distinct offer drives regional collaboration and national recognition.	Winchester Tourism Strategy Visitor Market Focus • Draft a practical and tightly focused marketing plan for each of the identified visitor markets: Curious Families, Cultural Foodie Explorers, Country Loving Traditionalists, Global Experience Seekers. Destination marketing • Develop a refreshed, clear and compelling narrative underpinned by a clear brand vision statement. • Produce a light touch toolkit for tourism business and partners to amplify destination narrative across key markets. Roll out via online webinars and live events. • Deliver refocused campaigns to new target markets. • Continue with baseline promotion, evaluating performance to inform future activity. Destination development • Develop and promote experiences and joined up 'heritage plus' itineraries • Accommodation audit to map supply, need and demand. • Actively promote rural transport services, travel planning tools and active travel networks.

GEDS Theme	Outcomes
Priority	Delivery Focus and Activity
	Destination management • Improve visitor welcome through high quality gateways which offer enhanced experience and wayfinding information. • Create trade data and business advice hub on visitwinchester.co.uk • Explore destination certification and support businesses to undertake their own certification through offering signposting, advice and support. • Improve accessibility and inclusion information for visitors. Implementation of Access Index surveys (a new platform empowering businesses to understand and improve accessibility standards). • Develop an Accessibility campaign area on visitwinchester.co.uk making it easier to showcase accessibility offer and best practice • Signpost and provide training, networking and collaboration opportunities for the sector. Hampshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership • Position held on Executive Delivery Group for LVEP (alongside Hampshire County Council, Southampton City Council and Portsmouth City Council) • Contribute to creation of the Hampshire Destination Management Plan • Increase partnership, collaboration and opportunities with Visit England and Visit Britain with regards to destination growth and business support

We emphasise that none of our four priorities will be delivered in isolation; rather, they are mutually reinforcing and designed to work together to maximise impact. For example, farm diversification not only strengthens the rural economy but also supports rural tourism and helps mitigate climate risk. A practical demonstration of this integrated approach can be seen in last year's delivery programme, where Rural Prosperity Funding was allocated to Holden Farm. This investment supported diversification initiatives, including the installation of a wooden visitor shelter serving the farm café and campsite within the South Downs National Park.

The project also includes the development of sustainable electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure for both cars and electric bikes. Building on the farm's existing solar photovoltaic (PV) system, the addition of battery storage will ensure that these charging facilities are powered by renewable energy. This approach exemplifies how economic development, sustainable tourism, and climate action can be delivered in tandem.



Engagement and Partnerships 2026 to 2029

GEDS Theme	Partnership	Delivery Focus and Activity
Innovative business and economy Skills and competitiveness	Greener Futures Partnership	Themed programme of two events per annum focus on Carbon Neutrality Action Plan interventions
	Sustainable Peer Mentoring Group:	Themed programme of four events per annum to support SMEs on their sustainability journey.
	South Downs National Park	Working in partnership to deliver rural growth and green economy initiatives
Culture, creative and visitor economy	Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and Winchester Local Visitor Economy Partnership	- Hampshire Destination Management Plan - Increased partnership, collaboration and opportunities with Visit England and Visit Britain with regards to destination growth, business support, data and insights, national and international marketing opportunities.
	Visit Winchester Partnership and Marketing Programme	- Quarterly meetings with partners - Destination Marketing and PR campaigns - Business support, training, advice and networking
	Winchester District Tourism Strategy Advisory Group	To influence and drive the successful delivery of the Winchester District Tourism Strategy
	Winchester District Cultural Strategy Collective	To influence and drive the successful delivery of the Winchester District Cultural Strategy



Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

The overarching aim is to ensure that the Winchester area economy is well-positioned to benefit from enhanced joint working and collaboration with neighbouring areas, including New Forest, Test Valley, and East Hampshire.

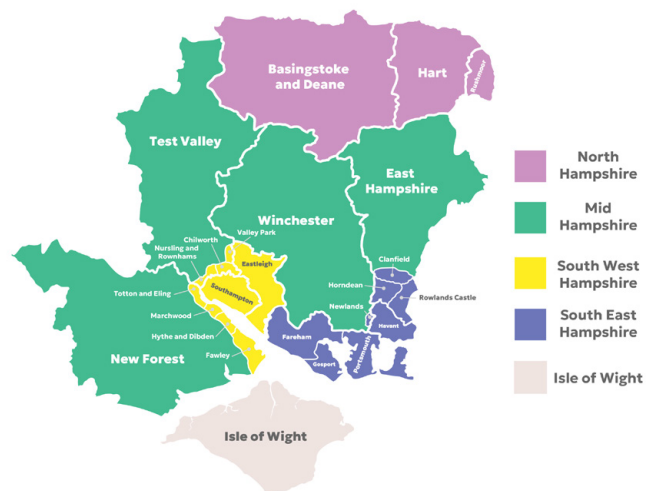
By setting our priorities, key themes and opportunities we can advocate these to help shape priorities during the unitary authority's formative years.



Devolution and Mayoral Combined Authority (MCA)

The four unitary authorities are working closely together on plans to form a new Strategic Authority across the wider region, known as the Hampshire and the Solent Combined County Authority (HSCCA).

This new Mayoral authority will be responsible for setting the strategic direction for local growth, regeneration and skills. In contrast, the new Mid Hampshire Unitary Authority will have a local delivery role, taking responsibility for economic development and regeneration, business support, skills delivery, and the wider place-making functions that are critical to drive growth.



This shift introduces a clearer distinction between strategy and delivery, creating:



Greater alignment of investment and priorities through a single strategic authority



Increased emphasis on partnership working, with local authorities responsible for delivering Mayoral priorities at pace



Opportunities for more consistent and coordinated economic planning across a wider geography



A need for the unitary authority to demonstrate strong delivery capability and local insight to influence funding decisions



Enhanced accountability for delivering tangible outcomes in communities and businesses

This presents **opportunities** for supporting rural and visitor economy growth, skills and work force alignment and access to strategic funding.

Performance measures and indicators

Skills & competitiveness

Outcome / Performance Indicator

Higher Skills and Productivity

Qualifications

NOMIS

Source: ONS annual population survey

Current data

Qualifications (January 2025 to December 2025)

Level	Winchester	Winchester (%)	South East (%)	Great Britain (%)
RQF4 and above	45,900	61.7	49.5	48.6
RQF3 and above	56,800	76.2	71.0	69.0
RQF2 and above	69,300	93.1	88.6	87.0
RQF1 and above	70,400	94.5	91.2	89.3

Innovative Business & Economy

Outcome / Performance Indicator

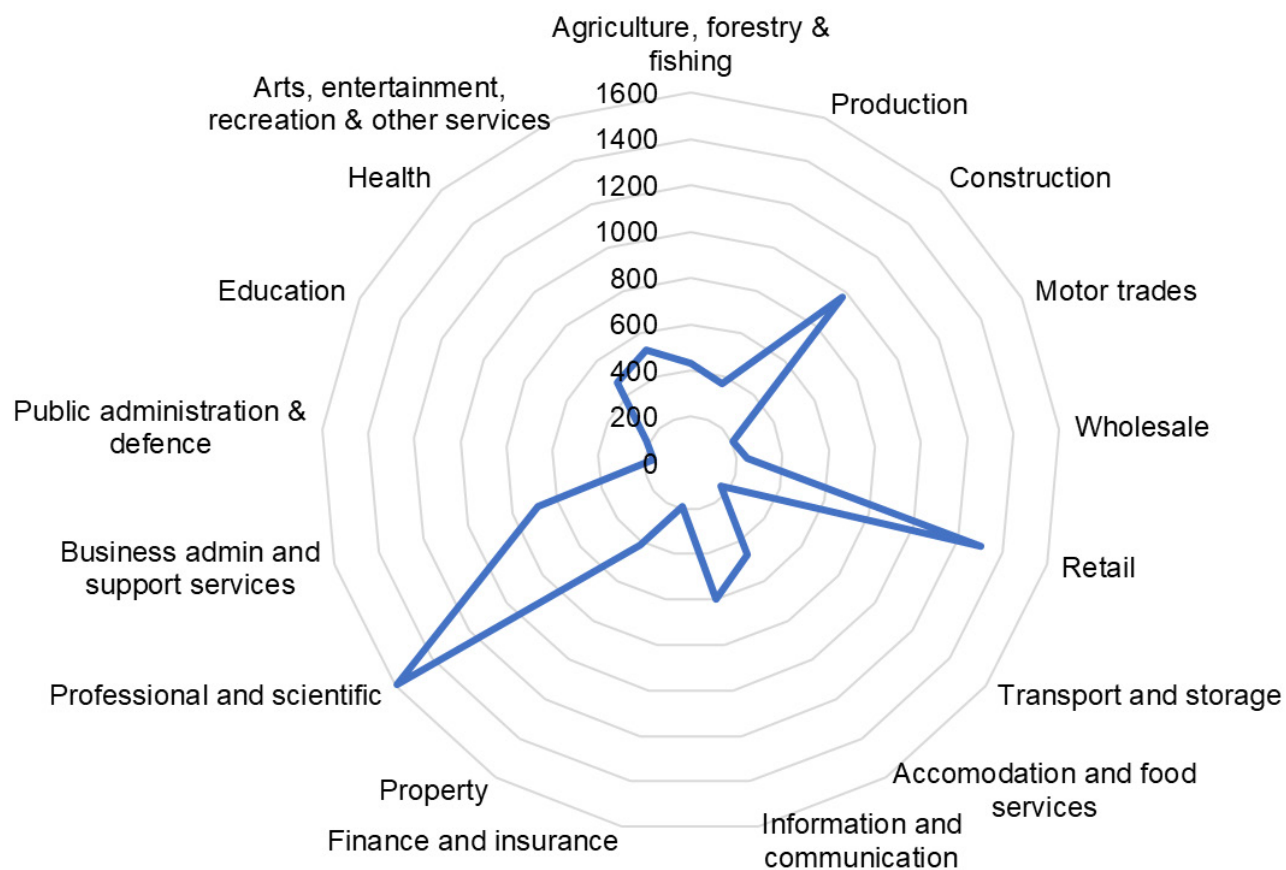
Increased business density & diversity

Number of district enterprises by sector.

Source: ONS - UK business, activity, size and location; 2025

Current data

Number of VAT and/or PAYE in Winchester district - 2025



Innovative Business & Economy

Outcome / Performance Indicator

Job Density

The ratio of total jobs to population aged 16-64.

(Source. NOMIS 2024)

1.34

(Year 2024)

Year	Winchester	Winchester (density)	South East (density)	Great Britain (density)
2020	94,000	1.23	0.85	0.84
2021	99,000	1.26	0.85	0.85
2022	102,000	1.28	0.86	0.86
2023	105,000	1.30	0.85	0.86
2024	111,000	1.34	0.85	0.85

Job density increased continuing the trend from 2020

Innovative Business & Economy

Outcome / Performance Indicator

Business density

Number of businesses per 10,000 people.

(Source LG Inform from ONS NOMIS2020 to 2024 data)

District	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Winchester	705	697	684	679	659
Basingstoke & Deane	505	495	460	434	423
East Hampshire	580	567	566	549	545
Eastleigh	568	511	463	440	438
Fareham	468	464	460	447	443
Havant	410	419	409	401	401
Test Valley	596	551	521	510	500

Business density has decreased, continuing the trend from 2020.

Innovative Business & Economy**Outcome / Performance Indicator****Reduced socio-economic and spatial inequality.**

Resident Earnings vs Workplace earnings

Gender pay gap and full time and part time

Gross Weekly Pay 2023	Residents	Workforce	Gap
Full-Time Workers	£789.4	£682.6	-£106.8
Male Full-Time Workers	£854.3	£757.3	-£97
Female Full-Time Workers	£652	£609.6	-£42.4
Gender earnings gap	£202.3	£147.7	

Gross Weekly Pay 2025	Residents	Workforce	Gap
Full-Time Workers	£855.5	£795.3	-£60.3
Male Full-Time Workers	£925.7	£861.7	-£64
Female Full-Time Workers	£763.2	£714	-£49.2
Gender earnings gap	£162.5	£147.7	

- Gender gap in earning for workforce has remained the same, however it has decreased for residents.
- The pay gap between workers and residents has decreased for men but not for women where it has increased.



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