



REPORT of CHIEF EXECUTIVE

to
COUNCIL
11 DECEMBER 2025

NORTH ESSEX LOCAL GROWTH PRIORITIES

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Member approval of the North Essex Councils, North Essex Local Growth Priorities document attached at **APPENDIX 1**.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the North Essex Local Growth Priorities (**APPENDIX 1**) be approved for the socio-economic benefit of the region and District.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The North Essex Councils (NEC) partnership was established to drive forward collaborative working in a range of strategic areas including housing growth, economic development and climate action. Members include:
- Braintree District Council
 - Chelmsford City Council
 - Colchester City Council
 - Epping Forest District Council
 - Essex County Council
 - Harlow District Council
 - Maldon District Council
 - Tendring District Council
 - Uttlesford District Council
- 3.2 The Local Government landscape is changing, with Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) set to fundamentally reshape how services are delivered, including economic development programmes. At the same time, North Essex faces enormous growth pressures and opportunities, with over 250,000 homes needing to be built over the next 30 years, major infrastructure requirements to support these homes and a range of pressing climate resilience challenges to be tackled head-on. As a result, the North Essex Local Growth Priorities seek to:
- take full advantage of the opportunities Devolution will offer to our residents and businesses as we continue towards the unitarisation of local Government in Essex.

- ensure that the priorities identified by North Essex Councils are understood and supported by the future Greater Essex Mayor.
 - enable the new unitary authorities to have a 'head start' and deliver early success by laying the foundations for these priorities to progress before new authorities are created.
- 3.3 In Summer 2024, senior officers of North Essex Councils from all nine authorities agreed to work on a North Essex Local Growth Priorities document. The co-authored document is an initial pro-growth proposal which can be given to any incoming new mayor. It sets out what we collectively believe to be the 'shovel ready' key priorities for action, which together will help achieve the full potential of our region. The North Essex Growth Priorities bring together a current shared vision for sustainable, inclusive growth that reflects the distinct strengths and ambitions of our cities, towns, coastal areas and rural communities, whilst ensuring residents across North Essex benefit from this growth.
- 3.4 Work has progressed via monthly officer workshops and thematic workstreams to identify the priorities. The objective of these growth priorities is:
- a shared, long-term vision for North Essex and a reflection of the collaboration between all nine authorities
 - a strategic framework for guiding future collaboration across the public and private sectors and for aligning local ambition with national priorities
 - a tool for influencing the early focus of the Mayoralty, for offering early, visible wins and for ensuring North Essex's priorities are reflected in the Mayoral Combined County Authority's (MCCA) statutory documents
 - the Growth Priorities are not; a statutory document, a replacement for Local Plans, a detailed blueprint for every site or project, or a vehicle for direct engagement with government
- 3.5 Agreeing these shared priorities puts North Essex in a strong position when the call takes place for an investable project pipeline longlist.
- 3.6 With Mayoral elections due to take place in Essex on 7 May 2026, the document serves as a vital early pitch for the needs and opportunities of North Essex to grow sustainably. The mayor will have strategic responsibility for:
- Strategic Planning: creating a long-term vision and developing a statutory Local Growth Plan for the region.
 - Transport: developing a regional transport strategy, managing a Key Route Network (KRN), and potentially franchising bus services.
 - Economic Development: champion the region nationally and internationally to attract investment, boost business growth, and create jobs.
 - Housing and Regeneration: powers related to housing supply, brownfield development, and regeneration, including working with Homes England and potentially establishing Mayoral Development Corporations.
 - Skills and Education: devolved adult education and skills functions to align training with local job market needs.
 - Public Safety: functions of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Fire and Rescue Authority, working to align these services for better community resilience.

- Environment and Energy: local climate action plans, the Warm Homes Plan, local nature recovery strategies, and promoting green energy and decarbonisation activities.
- Financial Oversight: long-term investment fund provided by the government and manages the MCCA budget.

3.7 The shared vision is 'creating a more productive, better-connected and more resilient North Essex where everyone can thrive'. This is underpinned by the outcomes of:

Outcome	Mechanism
A more productive North Essex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing growth • Employment land and business accommodation • Sector development • Innovation and Research & Development • Business support • Skills
A more inclusive North Essex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing deprivation • Place regeneration • Employability support • Healthy and efficient homes
A better-connected North Essex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roads, railways, ports and airports • Digital infrastructure • Electricity distribution network • Active travel
A more resilient North Essex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy security • Water security • Job security • Healthy and efficient homes

3.8 Since the development of the objectives, NEC partners have identified a set of priority projects that (if met with significant private and public investment) will create a step-change in delivering long-term, sustainable growth across North Essex. These projects have been selected as the initiatives with the strongest potential to advance all four of the core outcomes. While not an exhaustive list of all the opportunities across North Essex, these projects represent the current highest priorities for coordinated investment and the most significant immediate opportunities to deliver transformational change.

Priority Project	Significance to Maldon District and Region
Delivering three new Garden Communities (Chelmsford, Harlow, Colchester / Tendring)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction job/contract opportunities, in particular Chelmsford Garden Community • Development of schemes in North Essex will, to an extent, help relieve housing pressure on the system regionally
Bathside Bay (Harwich)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regionally significant project with thousands of new jobs being created both on-site and in the broader supply chain in the construction phase with ongoing jobs once operational
Maximising the benefits of Stansted Airport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant training and employment opportunities for residents of Essex and regionally • Improved infrastructure benefitting the region for local connectivity and access to international destinations

Priority Project	Significance to Maldon District and Region
Delivering the new Princess Alexandra Hospital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circa £1.5bn - £2bn construction, generating significant jobs • In conjunction with UK Health Security Agency creating 100s of new jobs on a permanent basis <p>Growth Priorities have also identified the potential for new community-based health provision which can complement new large-scale hospitals and highlights the potential for new provision in Maldon, as an example</p>
A12 widening (Chelmsford to Marks Tey)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faster, safer journeys for all North Essex residents and businesses, including those from Maldon District, many of whom use the A12 • Future proofs the road network which will come under increasing pressure as the population increases • Reduces surrounding roads being used as 'rat-runs', minimising congestion on the rest of the network
A120 dualling (Braintree to A12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to high growth technology and employment opportunities on the A120 corridor and UK Innovation Corridor • Improved East to West journey reliability and pace for Maldon District residents and businesses (most likely route joins the A120 to the A12 Witham) • Will help reduce pressure on other regional road routes such as the A12, M11, A14 • Improves investment attractiveness of North Essex with a more resilient, higher capacity and faster road network
Improving junctions 7 and 8 of the M11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Junction 8 is the other end of the A120 – this, coupled with the dualling of the A120, will improve the pace of journeys on the A120 for all road users including Maldon residents and businesses, as well as encourage investment along the route • These junction improvements will help improve access to the UK Innovation Corridor • Junction 8 improvements will also future proof the A120 as Stansted Airport continues to grow and houses are built in the area
Improving train services to Clacton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will reduce pressure on the broader road network and help alleviate congestion <p>We are hopeful this initiative demonstrates the benefit of more regular services on branch lines, with scope to increase frequency on the Flitch (Braintree) and Crouch Valley (Dengie) lines in future</p>
Rapid Transit System (RTS) expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapid Transit Networks in Harlow and Colchester promise to significantly improve public transport speed, reliability and frequency

Priority Project	Significance to Maldon District and Region
	<p>However, public transport outside of major towns and away from rail lines in North Essex can be very slow, infrequent and unreliable with bus journeys from towns such as Maldon being very slow meaning they are simply not a viable option for many residents. This leads to many being cut off from jobs, skills and being more isolated if they do not have access to a car. Proposal for the new mayor to introduce new services that are frequent, faster and more direct that can complement the existing bus services and knit into the RTS system so they can be scaled up if demand increases.</p> <p>For example, this might mean rapid and more frequent bus services from Maldon Town Centre to Chelmsford and Colchester City Centres</p>
Delivering skills for growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated training pathways for Maldon District's residents to provide routes into high-value sectors • A call for scaled skills provision where Further Education facilities are lacking (including Maldon District) • Better access to skilled labour for Maldon District's businesses • Reduces out-migration for work and training by offering clear career routes within the region • Enhances Maldon District's competitiveness, attracting investment into an area with a highly skilled workforce

3.9 These priorities demonstrate North Essex's readiness to contribute to shared Greater Essex ambitions. They provide a clear basis for collaboration through forthcoming Mayoral strategies, including the Local Growth Plan, Strategic Development Strategy, Skills Plan and Local Transport Plan. They also include several initiatives capable of early delivery and quick, tangible impact.

3.10 **APPENDIX 1** of the report sets out the future-facing ambition of these priorities and how they are designed to remain relevant through LGR.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 By identifying shared priorities for the region now, NEC members are laying the groundwork for coherent, joined-up economic planning that can support stronger, more strategic local leadership in the years ahead which will be helpful for any new Mayor taking up office in May 2026.

5. IMPACT ON PRIORITIES AS SET OUT IN THE CORPORATE PLAN 2025 - 2028

5.1 Supporting our communities

5.1.1 The North Essex Local Growth Priorities shared vision is 'creating a more productive, better-connected and more resilient North Essex where everyone can thrive'. This is

underpinned by the outcome of 'A more inclusive North Essex' which supports this priority.

5.2 Investing in our District

- 5.2.1 The North Essex Local Growth Priorities shared vision is 'creating a more productive, better-connected and more resilient North Essex where everyone can thrive'. This is underpinned by the outcome of 'A better-connected North Essex' which supports this priority.

5.3 Growing our economy

- 5.3.1 The North Essex Local Growth Priorities shared vision is 'creating a more productive, better-connected and more resilient North Essex where everyone can thrive'. This is underpinned by the outcome of 'A more productive North Essex' which supports this priority.

5.4 Protecting our environment

- 5.4.1 The North Essex Local Growth Priorities shared vision is 'creating a more productive, better-connected and more resilient North Essex where everyone can thrive'. This is underpinned by the outcome of 'A more resilient North Essex' which supports this priority.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – The North Essex Growth Priorities bring together a shared vision for sustainable, inclusive growth that reflects the distinct strengths and ambitions of our cities, towns, coastal areas and rural communities, whilst ensuring residents across North Essex benefit from this growth.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – The North Essex Growth Priorities will ensure everyone has access to opportunities and will address deep-rooted disparities across parts of the region. As inclusion and health are inseparable, reducing deprivation, improving access to opportunity and delivering healthy homes are among the most effective wider determinants of health for closing gaps between communities.
- (iii) **Impact on Risk (including Fraud implications)** – None.
- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – None.
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – None.
- (vi) **Impact on Devolution / Local Government Reorganisation** – The North Essex Growth Priorities seek to take full advantage of the opportunities Devolution will offer to our residents and businesses as we continue towards the unitarisation of local Government in Essex, ensure that the priorities identified by North Essex Councils are understood and supported by the future Greater Essex Mayor and enable the new unitary authorities to have a 'head start' and deliver early success by laying the foundations for these priorities to progress before new authorities are created.

Background Papers:

APPENDIX 1 - North Essex Local Growth Priorities

APPENDIX 2 – Presentation to the Council

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