

**DRAFT**

# **North Essex Local Growth Priorities**

**Contents**

About North Essex Councils – 3

About the North Essex Growth Priorities – 4

Harnessing our strengths - 5

Tackling our growth challenges – 9

Our mission – 14

Our investment priorities – 18

    Three new Garden Communities – 22

    Bathside Bay – 26

    Stansted Airport – 30

    Princess Alexandra Hospital – 33

    A12 widening Marks Tey-Chelmsford – 36

    A120 A12-Braintree – 39

    M11 J7/8 improvements – 42

    Trainline improvements from Clacton – 44

    North Essex Rapid Transit System – 47

    Delivering skills for growth - 50

Conclusion and next steps – 57

**About North Essex Councils**

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

We recognise that the Local Government landscape is changing, with Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) set to fundamentally reshape how we deliver services, 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, our 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
- 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

## About the North Essex Growth Priorities

Co-authored and endorsed by all nine NEC partner councils, the North Essex Growth Priorities are our pro-growth proposal for the next 30 years. They set out what we collectively believe to be the key priorities for action, which together will help achieve the full potential of our region. 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.

Our ambition is clear; however, real progress will require more than strong local leadership – it requires a shared, reciprocal commitment. Along with partners in Government, the private sector and the new Greater Essex MCCA, we must deliver upon our collective responsibility to invest boldly and consistently in the long-term future of North Essex. Through this shared endeavour, North Essex can go even further, building on our status as one of the UK's great economic success stories, to deliver growth and opportunity to benefit both the local and national economy.

These Priorities are a call for partnership and commitment to secure the targeted investment and coordinated action needed to turn our exciting vision into reality. This document is a rallying point for local and national partners, inviting the incoming Mayor of Greater Essex, Greater Essex Business Board (GEBB), anchor institutions, partners in Government and others to align behind our priorities and turn ambition into action. It is a deliverable blueprint for growth, which will unlock a step change in housing delivery, infrastructure and economic opportunity. By setting out a clear vision, these Priorities aim to influence the forthcoming statutory Mayoral documents (the Greater Essex Local Growth Plan, Spatial Development Strategy, Local Transport Plan and Skills Strategy), ensuring strategic alignment and maximising the impact of investment across the county.

The scale of what can be achieved is significant and the return on investment even more so. By securing the additional investment needed to secure benefits for all corners of our communities, the North Essex Growth Priorities can deliver more than 250,000 new homes, tens of thousands of jobs and billions in gross added value (GVA). North Essex partners recognise, however, that this growth cannot be achieved without a step-change in infrastructure investment and long-term resilience planning. This document sets out to address these challenges and to represent not just a local growth agenda, but a critical component of the UK's wider economic strategy. If delivered in full, these priorities will generate long-term rewards for productivity, infrastructure resilience and sustainable growth that can adapt at pace to future pressures.

## **Harnessing our strengths**

North Essex is a significant driver of regional and national prosperity, with our pro-growth approach and an economy worth over £25 billion. It's a place where entrepreneurial spirit, strategic location and natural assets combine to create real momentum for growth. This momentum forms the foundations of this document and highlights our readiness to respond to national priorities around housing, skills, clean growth and productivity.

NEC has already demonstrated what is possible through major schemes such as three Garden Communities, Freeport East and town centre regeneration. While we have the ambition and track record to deliver transformative growth, it is critical that North Essex now receives the sustained investment in key projects and infrastructure to ensure our growth can continue at the pace and scale required to fulfil our potential, delivering maximum benefits to our residents and businesses as well as the UK economy.

### **Housing growth**

Greater Essex is home to four emerging garden settlements – more than any other county in the UK. Of these, three are located in North Essex. Together, Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community, Harlow and Gilston Garden Town and Chelmsford Garden Community will provide over 30,000 new homes. They will create thousands of jobs and vital new infrastructure, demonstrating our ability to deliver growth at scale.

These settlements also represent a model for growth that is infrastructure-led and future-focussed, breaking the cycle of piecemeal development and ensuring that new communities are well-connected, healthy and resilient.

The North Essex Garden Communities are some of the most ambitious new settlements in the UK. They reflect our long-term commitment to growth and the credibility of our future ambitions. These settlements also underscore the critical importance of securing the upfront infrastructure investment needed to sustain delivery at scale and pace over the coming decades and beyond.

Following recent changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), North Essex is preparing to deliver more than 250,000 homes over the next 30 years – an ambitious target that reflects the region's pivotal role in meeting the national housing need. This long-term programme of delivery will further cement North Essex's position as a major net contributor to the UK economy, driving housing growth, unlocking resilient infrastructure, attracting private investment and powering productivity and job growth in key sectors. It is essential that North Essex receives the right backing to enable partners to continue to support the Government's wider growth objectives and deliver at unprecedented scale and pace.

### **A gateway to London, Europe and the world**

North Essex is strategically located between London, Cambridge and the coast and boasts strong connectivity to Europe via Stansted Airport and Harwich International Port. Our unrivalled geographic location not only supports local business growth and commuter accessibility, but also underpins our role in national supply chains and international trade.

Fast, direct rail routes link many parts of North Essex to London Liverpool Street in under an hour. The existing offer to commuters has been further enhanced by the opening of Beaulieu Park Station, the first new station on the Great Eastern Mainline in over 100 years.

The A12, A120 and M11 provide critical road access to London, the East of England and beyond. The M11 also sits at the heart of the UK Innovation Corridor (UKIC), driving significant investment, boosting innovation-led growth and delivering new, high-value jobs.

North Essex is also home to Stansted Airport, the UK's fourth-busiest airport and the East of England's largest single-site employer. The airport saw a record-breaking 29.8 million passengers in 2024, sitting only just behind Manchester Airport's 30.8 million. Stansted Airport has planning consents in place to expand significantly and has scope to increase passenger numbers to 43 million passengers per year. Stansted also handles 250,000 tonnes of cargo per annum, making it the third-largest cargo airport in the country.

At the eastern end of the A120 sits Harwich International Port, one of the UK's leading passenger and freight terminals. The port handles over one million passengers and over 4.2 million tonnes of cargo each year, playing a critical role in international tourism, trade and supply chain resilience.

Harwich International Port is one of the two main tax and custom zones of Freeport East, one of 12 Freeports in the UK. Freeport East has already attracted £250 million in private investment and created over 2,000 jobs, while Bathside Bay in Harwich represents an opportunity to transform the area into a green energy hub. As one of the largest land reclamation projects in the country, it will unlock over 120 hectares of high-quality employment land adjacent to the international port, creating the foundations for a nationally important green energy hub. Bathside Bay will generate over 3,500 new jobs on site while acting as a catalyst for unlocking other stalled sites across Harwich and Dovercourt, which have the potential to bring forward an additional 3,000 jobs and support inclusive growth at scale in one of North Essex's most deprived communities.

## **Powering progress**

North Essex sits at the heart of the largest overhaul of the electricity grid in generations. Infrastructure projects led by the National Grid to scale up capacity and update networks to carry clean energy from offshore wind installations will support over 55,000 new UK jobs and contribute £14.5 billion to the economy.

North Essex has further potential for solar and onshore wind generation. Both generate low-cost, low-carbon electricity with the potential to boost North Essex's renewable supply and energy resilience, support the grid and lower bills for consumers. Across the region, there is significant potential for large-scale solar farms. The forthcoming Longfield Solar Farm, for example, will provide a 500MW solar and battery storage facility near Chelmsford. It will also bring direct investment in skills and employment, with over £2 million already committed to training and supply chain development. Onshore wind potential, meanwhile, exists across the entirety of North Essex, with areas of Uttlesford, Maldon, Braintree and Colchester particularly well suited for energy generation from wind.

The region also has a strong network of community energy groups. Government has made a commitment to scale up local energy and create 8GW of municipally and community owned renewable generation across the UK as part of its Clean Power Plan. Working with North

Essex's already strong network to develop a pipeline of small and medium-sized renewable generation projects will position the region to secure investment, helping to power communities in a way that is equitable, affordable and sustainable for the long term.

### **A strong entrepreneurial spirit**

North Essex has a thriving SME sector and is home to over 47,000 micro and small businesses, as well as larger household names such as Teledyne e2v, The Hill Group, Galliard Homes, Crittall Windows, Maldon Sea Salt and Wilkin & Sons. Our business base has particular strengths in growing and thriving sectors, including clean energy, construction, advanced manufacturing and engineering, digitech, creative, financial services and life sciences.

Strong business survival rates (5% higher than the national five-year survival rate) and an entrepreneurial culture position the area well to continue to scale up activity, provided the right support – including workspace and finance – is in place.

<b>Survival rates of new enterprises since 2018</b>			
<b>Geography</b>	<b>3-year (%)</b>	<b>4-year (%)</b>	<b>5-year (%)</b>
<b>North Essex</b>	61.7%	52.2%	44.3%
<b>Essex County Council area</b>	61.1%	51.6%	43.7%
<b>England</b>	57.5%	47.2%	39.4%

### **Providing skills for the future**

Unemployment is low across the geography (3.2% compared to a national average of 4.4%), supported by impressive job availability in economic hubs such as Chelmsford, Colchester and Harlow. Furthermore, planned development around the Garden Communities and Freeport East is set to create thousands of new jobs in future-proof sectors.

Ensuring our residents have the skills they need to access these opportunities is the next key next step. Working under the umbrella of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), our employers and training providers are working to match local skills provision to business need. Targeted work will expand the range of in-demand training available across North Essex, including at the UK's only on-site aviation establishment, Stansted Airport College.

Our two universities – the University of Essex (UoE) and Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) – also play a key role in building North Essex's future talent pipeline. Ranked 29<sup>th</sup> in the UK in the Complete University Guide 2026, UoE excels in areas such as green growth, digital transformation and finance. UoE's Accounting and Finance degree sits in the UK Top 50, while its highly regarded Science and Engineering Schools position it well for digital growth. The university has also ranked in the UK Top 3 for the number of Innovate UK Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) secured over the past decade, helping to embed academic expertise into local businesses, accelerating innovation and creating commercial value in sectors such as health tech, cyber security and advanced manufacturing.

ARU, meanwhile, is climbing the ranks in a number of important and high-demand degrees, including Civil and Mechanical Engineering. It consistently ranks well for Nursing and Midwifery, while its recently acquired Writtle Campus positions the university strongly for veterinary medicine. ARU's Arise Innovation Hub – with locations in Harlow and Chelmsford

– are fostering a thriving ecosystem for local start-ups and entrepreneurs in key growth sectors. They provide the space, expertise and networks to boost innovation across MedTech and health tech, helping to translate research and ideas into real-world impact.



## Tackling growth challenges

Without urgent intervention and the right scale of investment North Essex's growth potential — as well as our ability to deliver inclusive, sustainable and resilient growth for generations to come — will be constrained. Our structural economic challenges, infrastructure deficit and climate risks must be addressed to fully harness our enormous ambition and translate opportunity into success.

Tackling these challenges will require sustained effort, long-term thinking and close partnership, to which NEC partners are already committed. Coordinated investment from Government and the private sector will also unlock major opportunities and ensure that North Essex continues to deliver against national growth priorities.

### Inclusive growth

Despite overall prosperity, there are significant pockets of deprivation across North Essex. Jaywick, Clacton, Harwich and St Osyth's rank in the 10% most deprived places in the country, while parts of Colchester (Greenstead and Hythe), Chelmsford (Melbourne), Harlow Town Centre and Epping Forest (parts of Loughton) rank in the 20% most deprived. These areas see poorer physical and mental health outcomes, reduced access to services and limited employment opportunities. The tables below from the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) exemplify these issues.

Tendring 018A Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) covering Jaywick and St Osyth:

Sub-domain	Rank (where 1 represents the most 10% deprived of all LSOAs in England)
Education, skills and training	1
Children and young people	1
Adult skills	1
Living environment	1
Barriers to housing and services	3

Colchester 008H LSOA covering Greenstead:

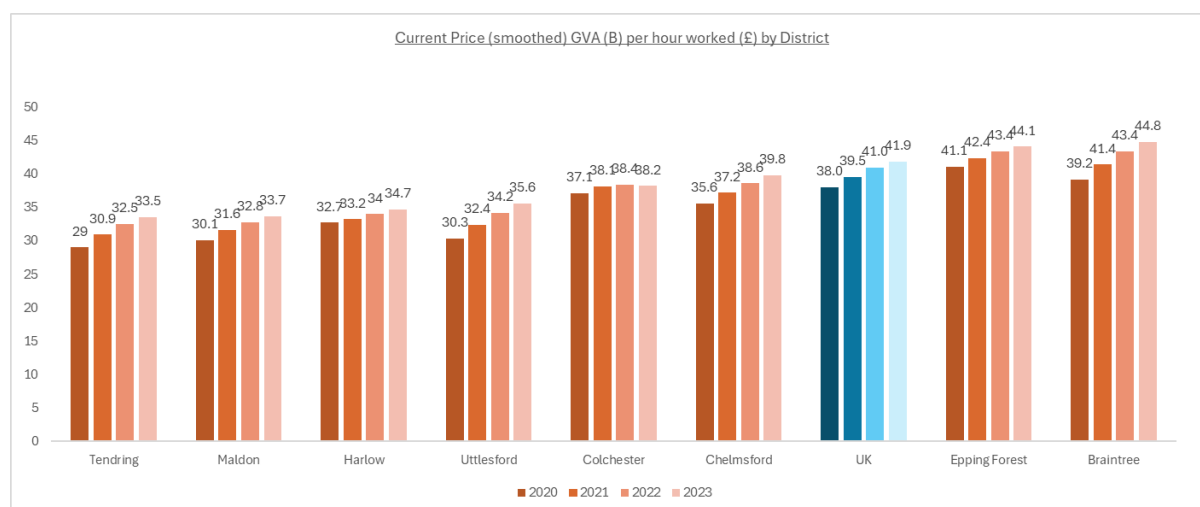
Sub-domain	Rank (where 1 represents the most 10% deprived of all LSOAs in England)
Education, skills and training	1
Children and young people	1
Adult skills	2
Living environment	1
Barriers to housing and services	2

The strategic initiatives outlined in this document – alongside local, place-based initiatives – are critical in ensuring all residents in North Essex benefit from growth. This, in turn, will help to significantly improve outcomes for the most deprived parts of the area.

### Productivity and business growth

Productivity continues to lag behind regional and national averages. In 2023, the average GVA per hour worked across North Essex was 38, compared to a national average of 41.9.

Although productivity is rising across most districts, it is not keeping pace with national increases.



A high ratio of microbusinesses (0-9 employees) to large businesses (250+ businesses) and lower-than-average R&D investment contribute to this stagnation. North Essex saw under £35 million in Innovation Grants between 2020/21 and 2024/25, ranking the area significantly behind regional competitors. Meanwhile, the region's micro business count sat at 42,975 in 2024, while its large business count sat at 140. The growth of large businesses in North Essex is also extremely slow, with the count rising by just ten between 2021 and 2024, evidencing that scale-up rates continue to remain modest, with access to finance, innovation space and commercial infrastructure often causing barriers to growth.

Although our thriving SME community forms the backbone of our local economy, this strength must be complemented with a greater presence of large businesses to achieve a substantial step change in productivity. The scale, investment capacity and innovation ecosystems that larger employers bring are critical to creating high-value jobs, attracting skilled talent and ensuring that North Essex continues to compete on a national stage.

To fully realise our potential, we must also unlock high-value sector growth, enhance digital infrastructure, improve the quality and quantity of local business accommodation and support innovation clusters (especially those linked to our universities, Stansted Airport and Freeport East). These efforts will drive productivity, stimulate business growth and make North Essex an even stronger regional and national competitor; however, this growth can only be sustained if North Essex builds firm foundations for energy, water and climate resilience, ensuring we can meet the resource demands of larger businesses while remaining a desirable place to live and work.

### Housing growth

LA	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	5-year average
Braintree	7.23	7.94	8.34	8.55	8.61	8.71	10.03	9.30	9.50	8.16	9.14
Chelmsford	8.49	9.43	10.39	11.20	10.90	10.14	10.34	10.90	10.80	9.70	10.38
Colchester	7.36	7.92	8.34	8.80	8.78	8.46	9.91	8.84	9.10	8.27	8.92
Epping Forest	10.85	11.34	12.25	12.73	12.01	13.00	13.68	13.41	11.29	10.72	12.42
Harlow	8.65	9.45	10.18	10.16	10.30	10.48	11.25	10.99	10.12	9.12	10.39
Maldon	7.49	7.98	9.75	10.03	9.13	8.74	10.21	10.41	11.55	9.82	10.15
Tendring	6.76	7.17	7.98	8.42	8.28	8.35	8.98	8.95	8.81	7.49	8.52
Uttlesford	10.25	10.10	10.63	11.89	11.60	11.38	12.33	12.14	11.29	9.35	11.30
England	7.53	7.72	7.91	8.04	7.88	7.87	9.06	8.56	8.41	7.71	8.32

North Essex faces sustained pressure on housing, with higher mandatory housing targets reflecting long-term demand and placing greater emphasis on ensuring homes are delivered at pace. If delivery fails to keep pace with demand, existing affordability challenges will likely intensify, putting further strain on our residents.

Meanwhile, poor quality housing stock in some localities affects our residents' quality of life. While areas with poorer housing conditions exist across many parts of the region, the proportion of households at risk tend to be more concentrated in our more rural districts. A number of households are also living in fuel poverty, increasing the risk of multiple health problems and exacerbating social isolation. The most at-risk wards are located in Tendring, Maldon and Braintree, where rates of fuel poverty remain stubbornly high.

Wards in North Essex with the highest rates of fuel poverty		
Ward	District	Fuel poverty (%)
National average	N/A	11%
West Clacton and Jaywick Sands	Tendring	62.9%
Pier	Tendring	62.4%
Tillingham	Maldon	53.4%
St James	Tendring	53.1%
St Osyth	Tendring	50.4%
Tollesbury	Maldon	50.2%
Harwich & Kingsway	Tendring	49.8%
Yeldham	Braintree	45.0%
Maldon North	Maldon	42.8%
Walton	Tendring	41.3%

The number of homes at risk of coastal, river and surface water flooding is rising. Over 75,000 North Essex homes are now at risk of surface water flooding alone, which is set to continue increasing with urbanisation bringing more 'grey surfaces'. Harlow, Epping Forest and Chelmsford are most vulnerable to surface water flooding, with 17,154, 13,591 and 11,271 homes at risk respectively. Coastal flooding is also an ever-present risk, especially in Tendring. Without further intervention, over 4,500 homes in the district will be at coastal flood risk in the long-term (by 2105), while over 2,400 will be at risk by 2055.

With three emerging Garden Communities, NEC partners are already seeking to tackle this challenge head on. We will continue to work as planning authorities and with neighbouring authorities to ensure a strong and steady supply of high-quality, affordable and healthy

homes. At the same time, North Essex will continue to drive the retrofit of its existing housing stock and invest in nature-based flood mitigation to reduce health and financial inequalities and ensure communities across the region benefit from future growth.

### **Infrastructure and connectivity**

Our key transport corridors – including the A12, A120, M11 and our rail lines – are under significant strain, with congestion and poor journey reliability hampering growth. Many local roads, junctions and connections to rail hubs also require upgrades to support planned housing and employment development. The infrastructure-first model being piloted across our garden settlement provides a blueprint for future progress, but significant investment is urgently needed now to tackle the current infrastructure delivery lag and enable us to continue to unlock major sites.

Whilst large parts of North Essex are served by strong rail links, capacity and reliability continue to constrain growth. Our lines face bottlenecks and peak-hour crowding, which is set to be exacerbated by new, large-scale developments. The new Beaulieu Park Station will be essential for addressing constraints at Chelmsford; however, investment in existing and new infrastructure will be key for enhancing wider sustainable connectivity around the region and between North Essex and its neighbouring areas.

Targeted support and investment in our branch lines are vital to ensure coastal and rural communities – often isolated despite their proximity to growth hubs – can access emerging opportunities across North Essex. Many coastal and rural communities currently face barriers to travelling by rail due to the high cost, infrequent service and long, slow journeys.

Our electricity grid faces issues with both capacity and resilience. As heat and transport electrify and industrial growth intensifies, this will place significant additional demands on electricity distribution networks. When a site electrifies, it may require upgrades or a new connection to the electricity distribution network, which, in some cases, can take up to ten years. Support to enable investment in the network and connections to come forward in a timely manner will be vital to ensuring North Essex can realise its potential.

Furthermore, all infrastructure — whether new or existing — is vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including overheating, extreme weather events, flooding and subsidence. Critical infrastructure outages can trigger cascading impacts, particularly when electricity supply is affected. This vulnerability is set to increase as housing and transport decarbonisation efforts accelerate. Consequently, North Essex is committed to designing, constructing and maintaining infrastructure in a way that maximises our resilience for our residents and businesses.

### **A skilled workforce**

Despite low unemployment across most of North Essex, economic inactivity is rising across several districts. 24.6% of working age residents are currently economically inactive, compared to a national average of 21.3%. Furthermore, skills levels vary widely, with 18.4% of adults not holding any qualifications. This places North Essex just above the national average of 18.2% and limits access to highly paid, future-proof roles. Our high growth sectors – including construction, engineering and clean energy – also report consistent recruitment challenges and skills gaps, significantly constraining their growth.

Leveraging the Greater Essex LSIP and subsequent new partnerships between local authorities, training providers and employers will be essential for developing a coherent skills pipeline and improving access to training and re-skilling opportunities.

**Protecting our natural advantage**

Our natural environment is one of our greatest assets, driving tourism and placing us at the heart of the Government's clean energy mission. Destinations such as the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Mersea Island and Tendring's Sunshine Coast attract thousands of visitors per year. Our extensive coastline also underpins North Essex's significant renewable energy potential, with Freeport East playing a central role in the construction and servicing of offshore wind.

Despite being drivers of growth, our natural assets also make us more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Our coastal and river areas, for example, are already facing increased risk of flooding as a result of rising sea levels, while hotter, dryer summers are impacting our agricultural sector. Water supply and wastewater capacity are cause for concern in areas with some of the highest growth potential, while limited grid capacity is already constraining new developments across the region. It is essential that energy security and climate resilience are embedded into major developments and investment decisions moving forward. This will ensure our economy is sustainable in the medium to long term while strengthening the preparedness of our businesses and communities as the climate continues to change and extreme weather events become more frequent.

**Our mission**

*“Creating a more productive, better-connected and more resilient North Essex where everyone can thrive.”*

Our mission reflects our ambition to deliver growth at an unprecedented scale, while ensuring this transformation delivers prosperity for all and enhances our unique character and assets. It is underpinned by four core outcomes, designed to accelerate long-term growth, innovation and collaboration. In achieving these outcomes, these priorities also contribute directly to the wider determinants of health for the region, recognising that better-quality housing, meaningful employment, affordable transport and a clean environment are among the most effective levers for reducing health inequalities.

### **Outcome 1: A more productive North Essex**

North Essex has the space, skills and potential to power growth for the wider East of England. With engines of innovation and commerce in areas such as Chelmsford, Harlow and Colchester, we are committed to unlocking further potential by delivering the homes, employment land and business support needed to deliver sustainable growth, without compromising the region’s climate resilience.

Delivering the homes our residents need is at the centre of our growth ambitions. We must ensure that healthy, future-proof new homes are delivered in tandem with high-quality jobs for local residents and the infrastructure needed to provide resilience and long-term growth. Ramping up our inward investment efforts will help to create more high-quality jobs, alongside modern infrastructure and new opportunities for local supply chains.

North Essex has many strengths in a range of high-value sectors. Through targeted interventions and partnerships, we will drive further growth in these sectors of the future, while enabling our SMEs to innovate, scale up and create new jobs.

A critical element of our productivity agenda is ensuring that businesses have the right accommodation to start, grow or relocate. Scaling up efforts to support a mix of flexible workspaces, industrial premises, innovation centres and more remains at the heart of our ambition, helping to attract high-growth businesses to the region, and ensuring that businesses that start here can grow and achieve their full potential here.

At the same time, we will work with employers and training providers, through new LSIP networks, to equip our residents with the skills required for the jobs of the future. This will ensure that local growth translates to opportunity for local residents, with a dual focus on those entering the workforce for the first time and lifelong learning opportunities for adults to adapt and progress throughout their careers. These opportunities will support better health outcomes, recognising that secure jobs are one of the most influential wider determinants of health and drivers of a better quality of life.

### **Outcome 2: A better-connected North Essex**

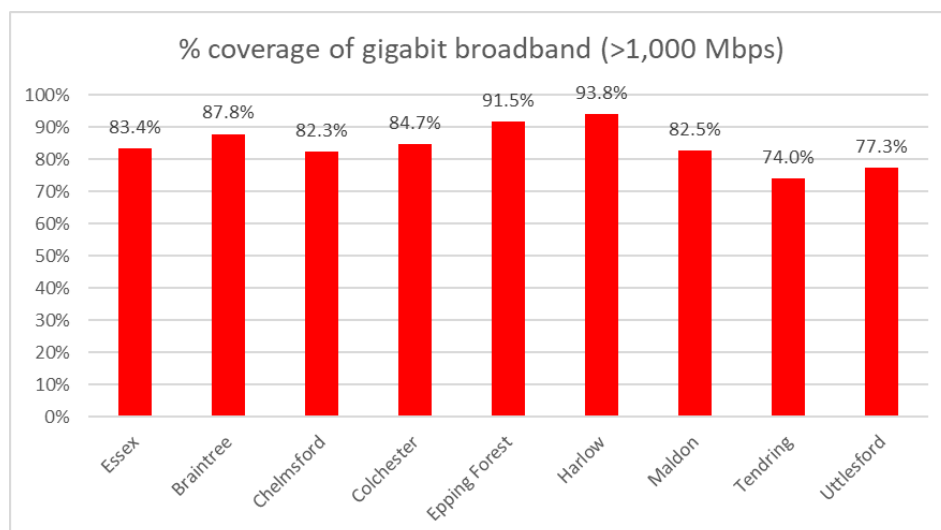
Connectivity – physical and digital – is the foundation of growth. Our roads, railways, ports, airports, digital infrastructure and electricity distribution network are the economic pillars of our region, making our economy more productive and leading to a better quality of life for those who live here. Better connectivity also widens access to employment, education,

healthcare and green spaces, all of which are essential wider determinants of health. Despite our strategic location at the heart of several nationally significant transport corridors, many of our communities remain underserved or face barriers around reliability, affordability, journey times and integration.

Our ambition is to secure long-term investment in infrastructure and transport networks that unlock new development, improve quality of life, facilitate smoother business and freight journeys, support modal shift and ultimately enhance the resilience of our economy. From progressing upgrades to our key networks to ensuring strategic growth is aligned with sustainable mobility, we will work with Government, operators and other national and regional partners to deliver transformative change to the movement of people and goods around North Essex.

To deliver inclusive growth for all of our communities, our residents need transport that is affordable, reliable and joined-up, with shorter journey times to reduce isolation. This is particularly important in our rural and coastal areas where travel options can be more limited. In addition to increasing the use of public transport, we also need to encourage active travel, with safe and accessible walking and cycling infrastructure acting as appealing alternatives to private vehicles.

Digital connectivity is equally as critical. Too many of our towns and villages — especially those in coastal and rural areas — lack access to superfast broadband, Gigabit and 5G. Tendring, Uttlesford, Chelmsford and Maldon, for example, all fall behind the Essex average of 83.4% Gigabit coverage, which lags substantially behind the UK average of 88%. This challenge significantly constrains growth and innovation while exacerbating isolation. By simultaneously tackling connectivity and digital exclusion we will ensure no part of North Essex is left behind on our growth journey, while also attracting new, innovative businesses to the region.



Increased demand for electricity is set to put rising pressure on the distribution network, which threatens to significantly constrain North Essex's growth potential. Working with partners in Government and the energy sector will be essential to strengthen the networks in order to meet increasing demand in the long term and enable critical investment in network capacity ahead of need.

### **Outcome 3: A more resilient North Essex**

To future-proof our growth, we must prioritise environmental, economic and social resilience. This means securing energy and water supplies, delivering healthy and energy efficient homes, investing in nature-based flood mitigation and building communities that can adapt and thrive in the face of future challenges. A resilient environment underpins resilient communities, with clean air and secure energy and water all contributing directly to population health.

Meeting this challenge will require a step-change in green skills delivery. Demand for skills in Essex's green industries — from clean energy and sustainable construction to retrofit and low-carbon infrastructure — is set to rise by more than 90% by 2030. With three Garden Communities, a Freeport, a growing airport, significant new transport infrastructure needs and multiple clean energy NSIPs, the scale of need in North Essex will only increase further with future generations. We must respond with targeted interventions, embedding green skills in our lifelong learning approach, aligning delivery with the needs of business and supporting reskilling in essential foundational sectors, such as construction and logistics. Without this pipeline, North Essex's resilience ambitions cannot be delivered at pace or scale.

We will work with partners and national bodies to secure affordable energy solutions that reduce our dependency on finite resources, while helping to insulate households and businesses from rising costs. Through local energy generation, smart networks and community-led initiatives, we will strengthen energy resilience at every level, while ensuring our residents benefit from clean growth. This is particularly critical for rural communities, where households may remain reliant on oil for hot water and heating. In Maldon, for example, 19.8% of homes have oil central heating. This figure is 16.3% in Uttlesford, significantly higher than the national average of 5%. Retrofitting existing homes will also be essential for delivering inclusive growth and ensuring North Essex communities benefit from new investment, while improving the health and resilience of the current housing stock. A retrofit programme for North Essex would also drive significant economic growth and create major employment opportunities for the region's construction professionals.

Water is a critical issue for our region, with North Essex already reliant on other parts of the country to supply almost half of its drinking water. Water scarcity is one of the most challenging barriers to future growth, with the majority of new requests for water supply for non-household use (such as new commercial and industrial developments) already being refused. Working with regional and national partners, we must secure long-term water resilience, improve water infrastructure and ensure that growth does not exacerbate existing pressures, recognising that North Essex is unable to achieve its growth ambitions without the water to support them.

This pressure further increases the need to make sure that our housing stock is fit for the future. With emerging Garden Communities, we are already championing healthy and energy efficient homes. NEC partners will ensure that future developments can withstand climate extremes while protecting and enhancing our impressive natural assets and landscapes, recognising their value for resilience, nature, tourism and public health. Importantly, building in resilience does not have to add prohibitive cost. North Essex planning authorities are already committed to embedding climate resilience into Local Plans in line with Essex Design Guide best practice. This approach ensures that energy and water



efficiency measures are not add-ons, but are considered from the outset, maintaining viability while delivering long-term benefits.

Resilience also provides significant opportunities. To enhance our economic resilience, we must support residents into secure, well-paid jobs in growing sectors. Through targeted programmes and interventions, we will build a workforce for North Essex that can adapt and succeed in a changing economy.

#### **Outcome 4: A more inclusive North Essex**

We do not believe in growth for growth's sake – it must benefit everyone across North Essex. Our mission will ensure everyone has access to opportunities and will address deep-rooted disparities across parts of the region. As inclusion and health are inseparable, we believe that reducing deprivation, improving access to opportunity and delivering healthy homes are among the most effective wider determinants of health for closing gaps between communities.

Delivering transformative, place-based regeneration will tackle long-standing deprivation and improve our physical, social and economic environment. Our determined efforts to address long-term economic inactivity will ensure residents benefit from the opportunities generated through these regeneration programmes. Through partnerships with the DWP, local employers, health partners and the voluntary sector, we will provide tailored employability and skills support that helps individuals, businesses and communities to thrive. This includes targeted programmes for young people, initiatives that break down barriers to opportunity and support for adults looking to reskill.

Access to healthy homes that are affordable and energy efficient is a fundamental building block of inclusion. These Growth Priorities will ensure that housing delivery is aligned with local need as the region continues to grow. This document seeks out to ensure that the new homes that are delivered are supported by the accessible, reliable infrastructure upon which our communities depend.

Finally, our inclusivity outcome is inextricably linked with our mission to make North Essex more resilient. Vulnerable households often face the most significant challenges from fuel poverty, flooding, poor air quality, overheating and other climate risks. However, as we move towards local energy generation and a more resilient future for the region, there will be significant opportunities for our communities to benefit from the transition to a cleaner North Essex – not just in the immediate future, but for generations to come.

## Our growth priorities: An introduction

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 our core outcomes. They are expanded upon later in this document, forming the basis for strategic investment and policy focus in the years ahead. While not an exhaustive list of all the opportunities across North Essex, these projects represent our highest priorities for coordinated investment and the most significant opportunities to deliver transformational change.

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.

These priorities are future-facing in their ambition and are designed to remain relevant through LGR. 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.

Delivering these projects in full will unlock inclusive opportunity, help to future-proof North Essex's infrastructure and ensure that our communities become ever more productive, resilient and well-connected. These priorities represent a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape the region at scale, to deliver resilience in the face of future pressures and to secure economic outcomes of national significance.

**HOLD FOR TIMELINE VISUAL OF PRIORITIES, CAPTURING SHORT, MEDIUM AND LONG-TERM WINS**

### Growth priority 1: delivering three new Garden Communities

Our three emerging Garden Communities reflect our mission to build a more **resilient** and **inclusive** North Essex, creating healthy homes and neighbourhoods, while supporting long-term growth. These major new settlements — set to create over 45,000 new homes between them — will be supported by early infrastructure, ensuring communities are **well-connected** to opportunities across North Essex and beyond. Their innovative approach to delivering employment space will boost **productivity** across the region, while vibrant community amenities, active travel infrastructure, commitment to sustainable development and plentiful green spaces will improve quality of life for those who live in these new settlements.

### Growth priority 2: Bathside Bay

Bathside Bay represents a unique development opportunity and will unlock further potential at North Essex's Freeport. It will support new port capacity and accelerate **productivity** by

attracting inward investment (with over £250 million already pledged across Freeport East), generating 3,500 high-value jobs and facilitating world-leading innovation in clean energy development that is set to boost the UK's energy **resilience**. Bathside Bay's coastal location supports **inclusive** regeneration in Tendring, while its **connectivity** to Europe presents exciting opportunities for North Essex businesses.

### **Growth priority 3: maximising the benefits of Stansted Airport**

Stansted Airport is a cornerstone of a more **productive** and **better-connected** North Essex. The airport already sees 29.8 million passengers a year and has the ability to increase this to 43 million within existing planning consents. This would generate a further 5,000 new jobs in aviation, technology and logistics and support the growth of innovation clusters around the airport. As the airport continues to utilise more of its capacity, it will also support **inclusive** employment and skills provision through its cutting-edge onsite airport college, while its strategic location – offering strong regional benefits – will continue to attract investment and boost **resilience** through sectoral diversity.

### **Growth priority 4: delivering the new Princess Alexandra Hospital**

A next-generation health campus is planned for the West of the region, set to replace outdated infrastructure and serve growing populations with modern, integrated healthcare services. Investment in Princess Alexandra Hospital supports a more **resilient** and **inclusive** North Essex, directly addressing health outcome inequalities and population pressures. The development will also present new opportunities in health innovation, contributing to a more **productive** economy and creating high-value jobs for North Essex residents.

### **Growth priority 5: A12 widening (Chelmsford to Marks Tey)**

The A12 is one of the most important roads in the East of England, yet current limitations significantly constrain growth in the surrounding areas. Upgrading this key route along one of its busiest stretches underpins our mission to make North Essex more **resilient** and **productive**, facilitating more reliable journeys for businesses and residents. Improving **connectivity** along one of the country's most strategically important routes will also unlock substantial housing developments, whilst supporting significant job growth in Colchester, Chelmsford and beyond.

### **Growth priority 6: A120 dualling (Braintree to the A12)**

Despite being one of North Essex's most strategically important roads and underpinning several major housing and employment developments, the A120 is currently not fit for purpose. Most notably, it is constrained by a stretch of single carriageway between Braintree and the A12 which causes bottlenecks and undermines regional growth. Upgrading this key east-west route will support journeys to and from a range of key locations within North Essex, including but not limited to Harwich International Port, Stansted Airport and urban centres including Braintree and Colchester. It will support **productivity** and **connectivity**, unlocking new housing and economic zones while enhancing **resilience** in our transport network. Improving this key route will also facilitate **inclusive** growth in communities along and close to the A120 by enhancing access to opportunity.

### Growth priority 7: improving junctions 7 and 8 of the M11

Ensuring smoother, more reliable journeys on and off the M11 and easing pressure on this key route will support the **resilience** of our transport network, while improving **connectivity** to Harlow and Gilston Garden Town, Stansted Airport and nearby enterprise zones. Improvements to these strategic junctions have the potential to significantly boost the region's **productivity** by unlocking housing and employment growth, helping to realise Stansted Airport's full potential and supporting the ongoing success of the UKIC.

### Growth priority 8: improving train services from Clacton

Rail enhancements between Clacton and Colchester could double the frequency of trains departing from Clacton to London Liverpool Street (currently only one train per hour). This must be coupled with affordability and efficiency measures to make the train an attractive option for Clacton residents. This project – if coupled with the right investment and partner support – would significantly improve access to opportunity for residents of all ages in some of our most deprived places. In doing so, improved train services would not only better **connect** Clacton to the rest of Essex and London but also support **inclusive** growth and drive increased **productivity** in Tendring and beyond.

### Growth priority 9: Rapid Transit System (RTS) expansion

The RTS currently in development will initially serve Colchester and areas in the immediate vicinity. The first phases will connect major growth areas, including the city centre, University of Essex and Colchester Tendring Borders Garden Community. Providing faster, more regular public transit elsewhere in North Essex — potentially starting with the Tendring peninsula and rolling out to other areas — could provide fast, affordable, reliable **connectivity** to the region's major employment and skills opportunities, significantly increasing local **productivity**. Rapid, dependable and low-cost public transport linked into the RTS could accelerate **inclusive** growth in some of North Essex's most deprived coastal places, providing access to opportunity like never before. Facilitating low-carbon mobility and reducing car dependency, meanwhile, supports energy **resilience** for the long term.

### Growth priority 10: delivering skills for growth

Delivering North Essex's growth ambitions depends on equipping residents with the skills needed to power our future industries and drive a more **productive** economy. By aligning provision with employer demand, improving **connectivity** to training and education and expanding provision in line with national sectoral priorities, we have the opportunity to build a more **resilient** regional economy whereby skills provision meets the needs of current and future jobs. Strengthening our Further and Higher Education offers and ensuring everyone can access high-quality training wherever they live is also imperative for building a more **inclusive** region for the long term.

These flagship projects represent significant opportunities to address North Essex's challenges while building on our many strengths, including our international gateways, ambitious business community and major housing growth. This document will explore each growth priority in turn, demonstrating how targeted investment can unlock long-term, place-based growth across our geography.

## Growth priority 1: delivering three new Garden Communities

North Essex is home to one of the most ambitious programmes of planned growth in the UK. Our three Garden Communities offer a unique opportunity to shape high-quality, sustainable and inclusive places at scale. These long-term developments are not only central to our mission, but also critical for meeting national growth priorities. They are not just about homes, but are also major economic drivers, creating thousands of high-quality jobs across growing sectors. The settlements are also designed with resilience at their core. From water-saving technologies to net-zero development standards, these new developments are future proofed to protect communities against climate shocks and rising energy bills.

### An unparalleled growth opportunity

Our three Garden Communities are:

- **Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community (TCBGC):** a flagship development, providing up to 7,500 new homes, with delivery set to commence in 2027. Alongside major employment space and ambitions to deliver a Sustainable Skills centre, a new RTS is also planned for Colchester to support the community.
- **Harlow and Gilston Garden Town (HGGT):** a cross-boundary development, set to deliver over 21,000 homes in Harlow, Epping Forest and East Hertfordshire. The Garden Town will support the regeneration of Harlow town centre, attract investment and unlock critical east-west connectivity, anchored by the success of the UKIC. It will also be home to the new UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) campus.
- **North-East Chelmsford Garden Community:** the delivery of around 10,000 new homes to the North-East of Chelmsford will build upon the success of the award-winning Beaulieu and Channels neighbourhoods, significantly expanding the city.

### National and regional impact

More than just housing schemes, North Essex's Garden Communities are key drivers of the region's economic competitiveness, with the potential to deliver tens of thousands of jobs between them. They are backed by strong collaboration at local, regional and national levels and directly support Government ambitions across housing delivery, inclusive growth and climate resilience. When it comes to water resilience, for example, North Essex's Garden Communities are designed to prioritise water saving, supply and reuse, alongside integrated flood management and mitigation solutions, with standards for new homes that could reduce average water consumption from 152 litres per person per day to just 85.

#### *Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community*

In addition to 7,500 high-quality homes and 2,000 purpose-built student units, the development will provide 25 hectares of employment land and 7,500 jobs, including at a new business park and high-value knowledge-based employment sites. With its innovative approach to growth, TCBGC has a total scheme value of £6.5 billion, underpinned by £500 million in infrastructure investments, making it one of the most valuable and transformative development opportunities in the region.

Forward investment in key infrastructure means Phase 1 of the A133 Link Road is already underway, connecting the site to key movement corridors. Sections A, B and C of the

Colchester RTS are also near completion, providing affordable, reliable and efficient public transport and embedding sustainable travel choices from the outset. To complement and make best use of the RTS, a 650-space Park and Choose facility is proposed adjacent to the University of Essex. Unlike a conventional Park and Ride, the Park and Choose will provide a hub from which residents can take sustainable modes of transport to access Colchester's employment, skills, leisure and onward-travel opportunities. This includes connecting to the RTS, walking or cycling to access opportunities within the new development.

Impressive community infrastructure will include up to five new primary schools and one new secondary school. Delivering to Garden Community net zero standards and providing exceptional water efficiency measures will create a blueprint for climate resilience. Over 50% of the site is allocated to open space and multifunctional green and blue infrastructure, including a new country parks, waterways and other green spaces. Together with a minimum commitment to 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG), this will support active travel, access to nature and help to boost the physical and mental wellbeing of residents.

A highlight of the new development will be the Sustainable Skills Innovation Centre, currently proposed to come forward as Part 1 of TCBGC. This facility has the potential to equip local residents with the skills needed for the construction of the new Garden Community and for the wider economy. Based on the current designs, the facility will be capable of hosting 700 learners and 40 staff. Accommodation will comprise of 900 square meters of modern workshop spaces and an innovation hub, supporting a curriculum spanning apprenticeships, T Levels (vocational qualifications that are equivalent to three A Levels), higher-level courses and other flexible programmes.

There is also potential for TCBGC to anchor a new AI Growth Zone. Proposed to span part of the Garden Community and closely tied to the University of Essex and Freeport East, the North Essex AI Growth Zone could position the region at the forefront of the national digital and clean energy economy. Backed by Government policy to accelerate AI Infrastructure, the Zone offers over 100 acres of development-ready land, 3GW+ of clean energy capacity and over 150MW of AI-ready data centre infrastructure, alongside the UK's first 'AI-by-design' future living testbed. It has the potential to support 30,000 jobs and deliver £1.8bn in annual GVA while harnessing the University's 200+ strong AI research community. Crucially, partners are committed to prioritising sustainability in delivery, including transparency in water and energy reporting and exploring innovations such as waterless cooling systems. This approach will ensure that the proposed AI Growth Zone strengthens — rather than compromises — the long-term resilience of North Essex.

### *Harlow and Gilston Garden Town*

With over 21,000 homes planned from 2025 across four Garden Communities and the urban area of Harlow, HGGT presents an opportunity to deliver housing at vast scale. With £6 billion in economic impact expected from delivery, HGGT also promises to support the regeneration of one of North Essex's most strategically located towns.

25ha of new employment land, including allocations within the Harlow Enterprise Zone and the relocation of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) to the town, will support Harlow's evolution as a regional hub for innovation, health, MedTech and advanced manufacturing. These sites in Harlow, Epping Forest and Gilston (in East Hertfordshire) are set to deliver 12,000 jobs and strengthen the role of the growing UKIC.

HGGT's approach to infrastructure-led growth is underpinned by investment to deliver the new Junction 7a of the M11 (completed in 2022), as well as improving access to the town and surrounding growth corridors. A series of interconnected sustainable transport corridors is also being developed to connect new and existing communities to economic and social opportunities, prioritising modal shift from the outset. The timely delivery of these sustainable transport corridors, however, is critical. Current planning determinations are contingent on their progress and, without them, the full benefits of HGGT will not be realised.

The delivery of new primary and secondary schools, as well as healthcare facilities — including a new health campus (see Princess Alexandra Hospital chapter) — are integrated into plans, ensuring local services grow alongside housing delivery. Harlow will also be the focus of regeneration plans, with new leisure and civic infrastructure and cultural assets set to transform the town centre. Meanwhile, the integration of nature-based flood mitigation and green spaces will deliver improved health outcomes while enhancing the resilience of the Garden Town. Alongside highway and public realm improvements, this development is set to deliver over £1 billion in improved infrastructure for Harlow, Gilston and nearby communities.

### *North-East Chelmsford Garden Community*

The NE Chelmsford Garden Community will build on Chelmsford's strength as an extraordinarily fast-growing and economically dynamic city. Alongside over 10,000 new homes, 16.4 hectares of employment land will provide 10,000 new jobs, with a focus on high-value, knowledge-intensive sectors and green industries. Over 3,000 homes have already been built alongside a new secondary school, two primary schools, a neighbourhood centre, healthcare and community facilities, all set within an exemplar open space network.

With a total scheme value of £3.19 billion, the NE Chelmsford Garden Community is underpinned by £700 million worth of new infrastructure investment, including the first section of the Chelmsford North-East Bypass and a new rail station. Beaulieu Park Station, the first new station on the Great Eastern Mainline in over 100 years, will facilitate smooth, sustainable regional and London-bound connectivity, unlocking growth across Chelmsford and beyond. Further modal shift interventions include the expansion of the current Rapid Bus Transit for NE Chelmsford, which will connect new neighbourhoods to the existing Chelmer Valley Park and Ride and new Beaulieu Park Station.

Over 50% of the development will be dedicated to green space, while a focus on walkability and low-carbon travel will support healthier active lifestyles with new phases providing 20% biodiversity net gain. A further new secondary school and four new primary schools are planned, ensuring access to high-quality education within walking distance and supporting inclusive growth from day one.

### **Optimising our unrivalled growth**

Despite their scale and strategic positioning, each of the North Essex Garden Communities faces delivery barriers that risk delaying or diluting their benefits.

Primarily, key enabling infrastructure remains unfunded or delayed, impacting the pace of delivery. This includes important transport routes, education, digital networks and utilities. Without addressing these barriers, we risk compromising the scale, pace and environmental quality of housing delivery, constraining economic growth, reducing the number of new jobs

and missing a generational opportunity to transform North Essex and the wider East of England region.

Tackling these challenges can only be achieved through stronger, cross-system collaboration between councils, developers, infrastructure providers, Homes England and other Government departments. Greater Essex requires a clear strategic framework for bringing partners together to align planning, funding and delivery, which should also embed mechanisms for learning from past large-scale developments. Only through coordinated partnership working can we accelerate delivery, unlock investment and ensure that these Garden Communities deliver on their full potential for tens of thousands of new homes and jobs.

- **A1331 Link Road, Phase 2:** this is the single most critical transport intervention for TCBGC. Timely investment will accelerate the delivery of this route, essential for providing efficient connectivity for TCBGC residents. It also presents an opportunity to increase the pace of housing delivery.
- **Sustainable Skills Innovation Centre at TCBGC:** the timely securing and aligning of capital funding with S106 contributions will be essential if the college facility is to be delivered as part of Phase 1 of TCBGC. Support from the incoming Mayor of Greater Essex could help ensure all necessary funding is secured in the first TCBGC development phase, make certain that the site is ready for construction and help to attract private sector investment to further underpin TCBGC's skills and employability ambitions.
- **Park and Choose facility:** repayable grant support for the £6 million Park and Choose facility for the TCBGC would unlock delivery, ease developer cashflow and reduce viability pressures across the wider scheme. Mayoral intervention could bring this infrastructure forward sooner, supporting sustainable transport provision from the outset of the community's development.
- **North Essex AI Growth Zone:** swift Government approvals for the zone and Mayoral leadership of its delivery will ensure North Essex sees active benefits for local businesses and communities, not just passive capacity.
- **Further investment into the HGGT Rolling Infrastructure Fund:** this fund underpins the delivery of critical transport interventions across the HGGT area, with a particular focus on sustainable transport. Additional support would enable the timely construction of a much-needed vehicle crossing over the River Stort. It would also facilitate the creation of strategic north-south and east-west sustainable transport corridors that would deliver a new bus system and network of high-quality cycleways and footpaths, enabling a step change in modal shift. While developer contributions are already helping to fund critical infrastructure, further grant funding is essential to ensure transport infrastructure keeps pace with housing growth and maximises the benefits of planned development. Without investment in transport interventions that secure modal shift, the highway network in and around HGGT will not have the capacity to accommodate growth at the planned scale.
- **A12 Junction 19 Boreham Interchange:** critical investment to provide strategic capacity improvements would support the development of a proposed second 4,500-home garden community to the East of Chelmsford. Full improvements would also increase housing capacity at the NE Chelmsford Garden Community by a further 2,500 new homes.



North Essex's Garden Communities represent an opportunity to deliver nationally significant housing, infrastructure and economic growth in tandem and at scale. With the right partnership arrangements and targeted investment in enabling infrastructure, we have the potential to accelerate delivery, unlock billions in economic value and create new blueprints for resilient and inclusive placemaking across the East of England and beyond.

North Essex partners urge the incoming Mayor to support the successful delivery of the three Garden Communities through prioritised packages in their Local Growth Plan and Spatial Development Strategy. The Mayoral Investment Fund could also be invaluable in bridging early viability gaps and accelerating critical transport interventions.

## **Growth priority 2: Bathside Bay**

Bathside Bay offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to position North Essex as a driving force in the UK's clean energy economy. Located within the Freeport East Industrial Zone and backed by national tax incentives, Bathside Bay is uniquely placed to unlock scalable green growth, supporting thousands of high-quality jobs, driving inclusive growth in coastal communities and facilitating energy resilience through offshore wind supply chain leadership.

As clean energy, logistics and technology become ever more interlinked, Bathside Bay also presents opportunities to create synergies with wider North Essex ambitions, particularly in AI and digital innovation thanks to the strong digital clusters anchored around the University of Essex in Colchester. The development offers a direct bridge to the Government's clean energy mission and port infrastructure ambitions under the Modern Industrial Strategy and the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, helping to deliver against national objectives for energy security and low-carbon maritime growth.

### **A global gateway for clean growth**

Bathside Bay is a 122-hectare development site at Harwich. It sits within the Freeport East Industrial Zone, which covers over one thousand square kilometres across Essex and Suffolk. This includes the Port of Felixstowe, Harwich International Port and Gateway 14 (Stowmarket). Freeport East's vision — in line with the Government's Modern Industrial Strategy — is to become a hub for growth in key sectors, including Clean Energy Industries, Advanced Manufacturing, Digital Technologies and Ports and Logistics. These are underpinned by an emphasis on innovation that will attract new investment and high-quality jobs.

Its Skills and Employment Plan commits Freeport East to maximising labour market opportunities for local residents (especially those furthest from the labour market). Its Green Freight Corridor partnership, meanwhile, pledges to decarbonise the transport networks that stretch from the Freeport to its local, regional and international destinations.

Bathside Bay is primed to become a green energy hub that also supports a longer-term use case for its container handling terminal. Harwich International Port already supports and attracts a wide range of offshore wind activities and, in recent years, has also attracted new investors in green hydrogen and sustainable aviation fuels. The new development is led by one of the world's leading port investors, Hutchinson Ports, and supported by Freeport East and other local partners.

Bathside Bay will create a new deep-water, heavy-duty quay to support offshore wind and clean energy projects with associated marshalling and capability to stimulate innovation and manufacturing clusters for clean energy. There are few comparable facilities elsewhere in the UK and Bathside Bay is one of only a handful of new developments with full planning consents in place. As such, Freeport East is uniquely positioned as a logistics and innovations hub, poised to support the UK's offshore wind delivery ambitions alongside a wider range of clean energy projects and activities, encompassing clean fuels and nuclear.

### **Delivering infrastructure, jobs and innovation**

Bathside Bay forms part of the broader Freeport-wide programme expected to generate £5.5 billion in GVA over the next decade, with Bathside Bay contributing significantly through the

provision of 122 hectares of employment land. This includes over 100,000 square metres of new industrial and office space, alongside a new dedicated Innovation Hub to support the growth of clean energy SMEs.

Bathside Bay offers scalable capacity for both fixed and floating offshore wind construction and manufacturing, as well as new capacity to support other projects in the nuclear, grid and clean fuels sectors. With sheltered and direct sea access, the site is well-positioned to support national offshore wind deployment targets, driving innovation, lowering costs and strengthening the domestic supply chain. In doing so, Bathside Bay will unlock essential infrastructure, enhancing energy resilience and security across the East of England and the UK.

Alongside its economic value, Bathside Bay will also see significant improvements to the local environment. The development includes the creation of a 117-hectare wildlife sanctuary, making it one of the largest green infrastructure schemes in the Freeport East programme. Bathside Bay also unlocks important active travel benefits, with new pedestrian and cycle infrastructure planned to connect the site to Harwich town centre and nearby rail stations, reducing car reliance and opening access to existing and future employment opportunities at Freeport East.

Freeport tax incentives enhance the site's investment offer, including 0% National Insurance for new hires, 100% business rate relief for the first five years of business occupation and stamp duty exemptions. These incentives are available until September 2031 (with relief continuing to 2036). The site also operates under a bespoke customs model, which removes import and export duties for value-added assembly and manufacturing. This reduces friction and increases efficiency for international trade, helping bolster the region's ability to export to foreign markets.

The development is shaped by a clear commitment to innovation, with the newly opened Harwich Innovation Hub, a flexible workspace for businesses in growth sectors that align with the Freeport's ambitions, such as clean energy, maritime and digital technologies. Located in the heart of the port and industry area of Harwich, the hub provides space for businesses to collaborate, grow and access training opportunities. Freeport East is also exploring the development of smaller-scale manufacturing spaces in Harwich, which are in strong demand from offshore wind supply chains and across other sectors.

These developments form a key part of the emerging Harwich Innovation District – a broader strategy to drive economic development and innovation across the wider Tendring area. Working with partners such as the University of Essex and Harwich Haven Authority, Freeport East has identified a number of local clusters across key sectors to attract new inward investment to the area. The success of attracting Australia-based hydrogen storage experts, Rux Energy, to set up in Harwich and commitment from Firefly Green Fuels to produce Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) at the Haltermann Carless Refinery are examples of what this work can achieve. It also demonstrates the opportunity to capture more of the global value chain in growing sectors that align with the Modern Industrial Strategy's priority sectors (the IS-8).

Job creation is a core element of the site's impact. Bathside Bay will support up to 3,500 high-quality jobs and act as a catalyst for unlocking adjacent sites that have the potential to deliver a further 3,000 roles. Over half of these jobs are anticipated to be in the clean energy sector, representing a significant step-change toward delivering a skilled, future-facing

workforce and inclusive growth in one of England's 10% most deprived communities. Freeport East already has a proven track record in supporting economically inactive individuals into full-time employment. Its partnership with Road to Logistics in Felixstowe, for example, provided holistic support to help benefit claimants and ex-offenders into sustainable employment in the logistics sector.

The potential to tackle long-standing inequalities and boost household incomes is stark, especially if coupled with the right employability support and pathways for local residents to benefit. This will require coordinated collaboration with colleges, schools, FE and HE providers and skills hubs to not only deliver a strong talent pipeline for the Freeport, but also to ensure residents can access and thrive in emerging sectors.

### **Realising Bathside Bay's potential**

Whilst the site's strategic case is robust, significant public investment is required to fully unlock Bathside Bay's economic, environmental and social potential. This is principally due to the challenge for offshore wind developers to make long-term commitments to support port investments. This, in turn, makes long-term capital investment in the port challenging for private investors. In practice, only Government has the strategic policy oversight and market levers to provide the certainty required, alongside the support of local stakeholders.

Although Bathside Bay is consented and investor interest is strong, there remains the need for a longer-term, Government-led support mechanism that would enable the private sector to invest with confidence. Local authorities in the area, together with private partners, have already committed tens of millions of pounds to land assembly, early infrastructure and innovation assets, demonstrating strong local leadership and private sector backing. The catalytic power of Government investment, however, is needed to accelerate the development, provide certainty and thus crowd in further private capital.

Significant investment is required in a package of complementary interventions that go beyond core infrastructure to ensure Bathside Bay contributes to inclusive growth and local resilience. Investment in improved active travel and bus services, alongside integration with the North Essex RTS, would better link Clacton, Jaywick and the wider North Essex geography with high-quality jobs at Bathside Bay and beyond, linking some of England's most deprived coastal communities to new and existing employment opportunities. NEC member councils have a strong track record of planning and delivering sustainable transport corridors to support new growth and are committed to applying this expertise to Bathside Bay. Crucially, the A120 dualling between Braintree and the A12 will underpin these transport interventions and will be essential for unlocking Bathside Bay's full potential. Current limitations constrain the wider port, but improvements could provide a stronger freight and workforce corridor to maximise productivity, boost supply chain resilience and ensure residents can access new employment and skills opportunities.

The skills plan for Bathside Bay is already well developed, with partners investing in training provision, employer engagement and SME support to ensure a strong talent pipeline. The Harwich Energy Skills Centre — established through collaboration between NEC local authorities and FE providers — is already operational. It has proven to be a strong foundation for scaling up critical green skills delivery and is well-positioned to cater for the anticipated increase in clean energy jobs at Bathside Bay and wider East of England region. Capital investment to expand the centre, however, would provide additional opportunities for local upskilling, creating a larger, more resilient local talent pipeline for the site. The centre

has the potential to become a regional anchor for green skills delivery, supporting both the regeneration of Harwich and the surrounding areas as well as the wider ambition of Freeport East to transform the UK's clean energy sector.

To attract and retain skilled workers, there is also a need for investment in high-quality housing and public realm improvements in Harwich and Dovercourt. Greater public sector intervention in land assembly and bringing forward stalled sites, in collaboration with Freeport East, will be a key mechanism for accelerating local regeneration. This will help rebrand the area as a dynamic and liveable coastal economy and an attractive destination for talent, families and innovators. It will also harness the locality's significant tourism potential as an area already steeped in rich history and boasting already-popular coastal attractions. These include the Mayflower Heritage Centre, the Napoleonic Redoubt Ford and a number of classic pleasure piers, such as the Victorian Ha'penny Pier.

Finally, a dedicated permanent innovation centre, focussed on clean energy and maritime technologies, is needed to anchor Freeport East's R&D potential. A purpose-built home for scaling up innovation activity would not only support business growth but also embed Bathside Bay as a national hub for clean, resilient growth. The existing hub has been made possible with significant investment from Freeport East and Tendring District Council, alongside support from the voluntary and community sector. Building on these strong foundations would anchor Bathside Bay as a national hub for clean energy that is able to deliver for national productivity, innovation and energy ambitions.

Strategic investment in Bathside Bay offers a unique opportunity to drive inclusive growth and job opportunities in one of England's most deprived coastal communities whilst simultaneously delivering against national ambitions around innovation, decarbonisation, global trade and productivity. Given its national strategic value, North Essex partners ask the Mayor to prioritise Bathside Bay in the Local Growth Plan. Mayoral borrowing powers could also help to provide catalytic capital to de-risk private investment and accelerate the delivery of this transformational infrastructure. Equally as important will be the Mayor's convening power and their ability to bring together local authorities, Government agencies and the private sector across Essex and Suffolk to align planning, infrastructure and investment decisions. This leadership will be essential to overcome fragmented governance and ensure Bathside Bay realises its potential of becoming a regional growth engine.

### **Growth priority 3: Maximising the benefits of Stansted Airport**

Stansted Airport is a strategic national asset – the UK's fourth-busiest airport, a vital trade and freight hub and the largest single-site employer in the East of England. With the capacity to serve up to 43 million passengers per year and major investment already flowing, Stansted is one of the clearest and most immediate large scale growth opportunities in North Essex. Manchester Airport Group (MAG) has already invested £1.1 billion to extend the existing terminal by a third (16,500m<sup>2</sup>), deliver a 14.3 megawatt on-site solar farm and improve the wider airport estate, including an airfield taxiway upgrade.

#### **Powering national prosperity and international connectivity**

Stansted already plays a critical role in the UK's aviation and economic infrastructure. In 2024, the airport served 29.8 million passengers and handled over 307,600 tonnes of cargo. These figures secured Stansted its status as the fourth-busiest passenger airport and third-busiest cargo airport in the UK.

Offering direct access to around 200 destinations across Europe and beyond, the airport is a vital travel hub and has seen significant growth since being acquired by MAG in 2013. This includes an annual passenger volume increase of more than 60%, an £80 million terminal redevelopment completed in 2020, substantial sustainability investments to achieve Level 3+ carbon neutrality and improved connectivity with upgrades to the Stansted Express rail service.

As the largest single-site employer in the East of England, the airport is also a key employment anchor for the region, providing jobs for over 12,000 on-site employees. Adjacent to the airport, the 150-acre Stansted Airport Business Park is expected to create a further 2,000 long-term career opportunities, deepening the employment and skills base in the surrounding area.

Helping to provide the future talent pipeline for these emerging opportunities is Stansted Airport College, the UK's only on-site aviation college and a proven model of employer-led learning. Part of the Harlow College Group, the college offers tailored training and career pathways in aviation, engineering and airport operations. 85% of its students progress directly into jobs at the airport, while demand for places at the college consistently exceeds capacity, resulting in the temporary lease of additional space to boost capacity. This success and demand cements Stansted's position, not only as a global gateway, but also as a growth engine for local talent and a cornerstone of West Essex's strong skills offer, complementing impressive sustainable and logistics skills provision at the college's Harlow campus.

#### **Growing Stansted's global potential**

Expanding Stansted's passenger capacity is one of the most deliverable and high-value growth opportunities in the East of England. The airport saw a record 29.8 million passengers in 2024 and, within existing consents, has the ability to increase this further to 43 million.

As well as reducing pressure on other over-capacity airports in and around London, consented Stansted expansion will strengthen the UK's international connectivity and unlock £2.25 billion in GVA by 2034. The construction phase alone is expected to create 150 jobs

over a 10-month build period, while long-term operations will support 5,000 additional new roles across the airport.

Expansion within the current consented plans will also accelerate growth in the airport's cargo capacity, with Stansted strategically positioned to support the UK's growing logistics and export economy and facilitate faster, more affordable access to global markets for businesses in London and the East of England. Already a gateway for high-value air cargo, Stansted has a unique opportunity to secure its position as an essential link for internationally focussed businesses in innovation clusters across the East of England. This includes highly innovative businesses across the nearby Harlow Innovation Park, Chesterford Research Park and wider UKIC. This will allow Stansted to build on its strong export track record, already centring around nationally significant industries.

Top Stansted Airport exports (July 2025)	
Product	Value
Gas turbines	£208m
Aircraft parts for spacecraft, UAVs and ground equipment	£73m
Vaccines, blood, antisera, toxins and cultures	£49.3m
Orthopedic appliances	£28.9m
Telephones	£25.4m

### Maximising impact through coordinated effort

Stansted already plays a critical role in supporting the national economy by connecting UK businesses to global markets, easing pressure on other, more constrained airports in and around London and creating tens of thousands of jobs across the East of England. The airport already aligns with national infrastructure priorities and the Industrial Strategy's goals to modernise transport, unlock regional productivity and decarbonise aviation hubs.

To realise the airport's full potential, targeted and coordinated public and private support are essential. Stansted is difficult to reach via public transport for much of Essex, which limits access to employment, training and travel opportunities. There is an urgent need for Network Rail to update its West Anglia Main Line (WAML) study to better understand the long-term challenges and opportunities for the line and how it can better support Stansted (and wider West Essex) growth. It is also critical that the Greater Essex MCCA reflects access to the airport in its Local Transport Plan, ensuring that local residents benefit from improved job opportunities and infrastructure. As well as train line enhancements, the Plan must feature improvements to M11 Junction 8, where bottlenecks are limiting airport productivity and resulting in unreliable journey times to the airport for employees, passengers, freight and Stansted Airport College students.

Meanwhile, Phase 2 expansion plans for Stansted Airport College would raise capacity from 600 learners to over 900. This expansion would help to bolster the airport's response to the growing gap in aircraft maintenance technician capacity in the UK's aviation sector, which results in many airlines outsourcing aircraft maintenance to companies based abroad. Further information about, and requirements for, Phase 2 expansion can be found in the 'Delivering Skills for Growth' chapter.

Support is also needed to grow the innovation ecosystem around the airport, including R&D in cleaner aviation, skills partnerships with nearby FE and HE institutions and links to the wider Freeport East growth cluster. These interventions will generate high-value employment, attract unparalleled inward investment, reinforce Stansted's role in climate

mitigation and embed the airport more firmly within the UK's emerging network of regional innovation clusters.

Stansted is already delivering for the UK, powering growth, productivity and international connectivity from the heart of the East of England. With the right enabling investment in infrastructure, skills and innovation, the airport can continue to grow within consented plans, delivering even more for the national economy and strengthening the UK's competitive edge.

To secure the airport's skills pipeline and maximise Stansted's economic potential, we ask the Mayor of Greater Essex to recognise the airport's needs in its Local Transport Plan, Spatial Development Strategy and Local Growth Plan. Allocating funding could significantly improve the delivery of access improvements (such as Junction 8 of the M11) and support wider airport infrastructure. As well as reflecting Stansted Airport College's expansion in their skills strategy, the Mayor should also seek additional capacity support and clarity from the DfE on loan funding frameworks for colleges in order to unlock the expansion plans for Phase 2. This will help the college to meet oversubscribed demand and continue to develop the skills offer in West Essex.



## **Growth priority 4: Delivering the new Princess Alexandra Hospital**

The delivery of the new Princess Alexandra Hospital (PAH) in the West of the region represents a unique opportunity to strengthen the health, wellbeing and economic resilience of North Essex. As part of the Government's New Hospital Programme, construction of the new facility is scheduled to begin between 2032 and 2034. It will replace outdated infrastructure with a world-class health campus, delivering care at scale, in the right place and at the right time for a growing and diverse population. Alongside the recently confirmed UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) relocation to Harlow, the new hospital also promises to stimulate growth in the life sciences and healthcare sectors whilst enhancing the resilience of key nodes (including Harlow and Epping Forest) with excellent links to London, Cambridge and the rest of the UK.

This opportunity, however, is not necessarily guaranteed. There remains risk of delay that could undermine improved health outcomes and economic growth. It is therefore critical that the Mayor champions this project and works with Government to remove barriers to ensure that PAH is not only delivered, but delivered quickly to realise its benefits as soon as possible.

### **Replacing ageing infrastructure**

PAH is currently one of the most constrained major hospitals in the country. It provides acute and specialist services to a catchment area of approximately 460,000 people across the West Essex and East Hertfordshire catchment and demand for its services continues to rise.

The estate is no longer fit for purpose: over half of the infrastructure has been rated as being in an unacceptable condition, with persistent issues relating to capacity, maintenance and layout. Clinical teams are operating in ageing buildings that no longer reflect modern models of care and patients face fragmented services delivered across a site that was not designed for the complexity of today's needs.

The current hospital's limitations are particularly acute given its strategic location. Sitting between London, Cambridge, Chelmsford and Stansted, PAH serves some of the fastest-growing communities in the UK, as well as a number of areas of high deprivation with significant health inequalities. Harlow, for example, sees an under-75 preventable mortality rate of 190 per 100,000, compared to an East of England average of 135. Around 95 people per 100,000 aged under 75 die from cardiovascular diseases that are considered preventable, compared to a national average of 77. In this context, a modern, integrated hospital is not only essential to meet rising clinical demand but also to underpin a healthier, more resilient North Essex.

### **A catalyst for health innovation and inclusive economic growth**

The intended PAH design is not just a replacement hospital complex: it is a driver of transformation. It will combine the most modern clinical facilities with smart technology, flexible and adaptable spaces and a fully electric, carbon-neutral operation, making it one of the most sustainable hospitals in the UK.

The new facility will enable enhanced models of care, shorter patient stays, improved outcomes and a better working environment to support the attraction and retention of high-quality clinical staff, directly aligning with Government's 10 Year Health Plan for England.

New transport and ambulance hubs will improve emergency response times and connectivity for staff and patients alike. This critical new infrastructure will support significant housing and population growth across the wider M11 corridor, especially for the new HGGT.

Building on its healthcare function, the new hospital development will provide the foundation for a next-generation Health Campus, already allocated in Epping Forest District Council's Local Plan. The hospital will also be integrated into Harlow's future sustainable transport corridor network, ensuring efficient connectivity, while attracting investment, supporting innovation and creating high-value jobs. Overall, the scheme will represent over £750 million of investment into local healthcare facilities and health sciences innovation, underlining its scale and long-term significance to the region and its role in delivering the life sciences ambitions of the Modern National Industrial Strategy.

Anchored by the UKIC, West Essex is already emerging as a national hub for health innovation thanks to the Harlow Science Park, its proximity to research centres in Cambridge and London and the recent confirmation of the UKHSA relocation to a £1 billion campus in Harlow, which is set to create around 3,000 permanent jobs. These assets combined will support growth in nationally significant sectors where North Essex already has a strong comparative advantage, helping to increase productivity and broaden the employment base.

At the same time as planning for the new hospital, PAH is working with Harlow District Council as the local authority develops its Pride in Place agenda. Building on commitments in the 10 Year Health Plan for England, PAH will work with Harlow and Epping Forest District Councils and its Essex health and care partners to reshape services for patients. The focus on place, communities and neighbourhoods will support the new hospital transformation agenda, making sure the newly built facility focusses on the critical, specialist and acute care that needs to be delivered symbiotically. As Neighbourhood Health plans develop, coupled with the hospital's focus on proactive care, this will reduce the demand for acute services from the growing population across the West Essex and East Hertfordshire catchment.

### **Delivering better health outcomes requires a new approach**

PAH has been confirmed as part of the Government's New Hospital Programme, but unlocking its full potential will require more than capital investment alone. It is essential to ensure timely delivery, full design flexibility and the ability to integrate wider innovation, training and community uses into the hospital campus, ensuring the hospital continues to have a robust talent pipeline for years to come.

There is also significant digital potential associated with the new hospital and wider health campus. Several initiatives are already underway that could be further targeted and enhanced to support the development. Digital skills programmes and improved connectivity infrastructure could enable remote diagnostics and telehealth while ensuring that nearby communities are not only digitally included, but actively benefit from the opportunities created by the PAH and wider UKIC area.

Securing a clear delivery timeline and funding certainty is essential to ensure that design, planning and construction can progress at pace and avoid escalating costs. A joined-up approach across health, infrastructure and planning departments will also be critical to realise the opportunity for integrated transport, digital connectivity and workforce provision. Partnerships with the private sector — particularly in health innovation and sustainability —

will also be key to deliver a facility that combines best practice in design and clinical excellence.

North Essex partners also recognise that PAH is not the only health facility in the region that requires urgent support. There are also acute health infrastructure pressures in places like Maldon, where the 150-year-old St Peter's Hospital faces defects such as damp, leaks and structural decay. As a result, the community stroke unit and specialist rehabilitation services have been closed and the birthing unit has been moved to Braintree. As well as ensuring the delivery of the transformative PAH facility, North Essex partners urge the incoming Mayor of Greater Essex to consider wider community health challenges in their Public Health approach. Mayoral intervention could not only safeguard wellbeing but also underpin economic and inclusive growth by attracting health-related innovation and enabling a healthier workforce to support regional productivity.

The successful delivery of the new PAH is critical, both as a health asset and as a cornerstone of long-term growth and resilience. Continued Government support, in partnership with PAH, local communities and businesses is essential to ensure this major development delivers maximum benefits for North Essex and the wider economy. As the incoming Mayor assumes new responsibilities for tackling health inequalities, there is a clear opportunity to champion PAH whilst addressing wider community needs to ensure that health investment drives inclusive growth and productivity across the region. We urge the incoming Mayor to make the rapid progression of this scheme a top priority, using their influence to remove barriers, accelerate decision-making and secure the necessary backing to expedite the scheme.

## **Growth priority 5: A12 widening scheme from Chelmsford (Junction 19) to Marks Tey (Junction 25)**

The A12 is the spine of North Essex. Its upgrade is not merely a connectivity intervention but also critical for boosting productivity, unlocking new homes, creating jobs, strengthening national freight resilience and facilitating sustainable growth across the East of England.

Despite the recent cancellation of the A12 widening scheme and the difficult fiscal climate, all NEC partners strongly believe that this scheme must be brought forward, not just for North Essex's growth, but for the sake of Greater Essex and UK economic prosperity as a whole.

### **A key route under pressure**

The A12 is the most heavily used A road in Essex and one of the busiest in the country, carrying up to 90,000 vehicles per day between Chelmsford and Colchester. This is comparable to many stretches of UK motorway but the A12 faces higher level of congestion, more unreliable journey times and more serious safety concerns than many of the country's motorway networks.

This overburdened stretch of road is now a major constraint and is restricting the economic and housing growth potential of North Essex, which is one of the UK's major growth success stories. Given the cancellation decision, Local Planning Authorities across the county will need to update Local Plans, revisit technical assessments and delay timetables, jeopardising many years of preparatory work.

In the short term, the feasibility of a number of strategic development sites will be called into question, hampering the region's productivity and potential. This includes 4,500 homes in Colchester aligned to the A12 corridor and a further 4,500 homes in a garden community planned for Chelmsford. It will also have implications for Braintree (especially for planned growth along the Witham-Kelvedon-Hatfield Peverel corridor), Maldon (where significant growth is predicated upon the new Junction 21 proposed as part of the widening scheme) and Tendring (where strong connectivity between the A12 and A120 will play an important role in maximising the success of Freeport East).

In the longer term, tens of thousands of new homes will be stalled or come forward in a piecemeal way without the necessary infrastructure investment and/or affordable housing. This could risk the delivery of inclusive outcomes upon which North Essex's growth ambitions hinge.

Daily traffic on the A12 comprises over 10% heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) — double the national figure — reflecting the A12's importance for the logistics sector. Businesses that are reliant on the A12 incur higher costs due to significant congestion and the recent scheme cancellation will have adverse effects on productivity and limit the potential of Freeport East. Congestion continues to increase journey times on a stretch of road that already causes delays of 1.5 hours per working week. North Essex is already seeing the impact of this congestion, as reduced journey reliability pushes long-distance traffic onto minor roads and through residential communities. The result is a highly inefficient and increasingly unsafe road network, where daily delays act as a drag on economic productivity, a major investment deterrent and a source of frustration for tens of thousands of commuters.

The East of England, with over 1.7 million jobs and a long-standing contributor to UK GDP, is being held back by an A12 which does not meet the needs of our modern, dynamic economy. The region suffers from average vehicle delay rates that are nearly 20% higher than the national average, underlining the scale of historic underinvestment and reflective of the omission from national infrastructure investment. These factors have led Transport East to identify the A12 as the corridor where improving reliability and journey times would have the most significant impact on raising productivity levels across the region.

Intervention is critical to prevent these gaps from growing, particularly as pressure mounts from planned housing and employment growth across North Essex. Without improvements to the A12, we risk stalling future developments, economic growth and job creation, despite significant local efforts to drive growth and overcome the region's infrastructure challenges. To achieve the ambitions of Government and local partners, the issues on this major route must be addressed as a matter of critical urgency.

### **A route to prosperity**

While the A12 widening between Chelmsford and Marks Tey is not currently progressing, the proposal is fully developed and had been scheduled and planned for. It was not just a road-building scheme; it was a vital enabler of national and regional policy aims, aligning fully with the Government's 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy's ambitions to drive economic growth through transport infrastructure, boost transport resilience and support regional housing growth. While the scale of investment required is significant, the transformative economic and social benefits demand that the case for upgrading this key corridor is urgently revisited.

Having already secured a Development Consent Order (DCO) — following extensive public consultation, route design and feasibility work — the scheme is oven-ready, free of legal challenge and has widespread cross-party support from across the region. It also has private sector backing, including from the GEBB. Having been a committed scheme since 2020, the A12 widening presents an immediate opportunity to accelerate housing growth, create jobs and deliver a rapid return on investment.

The A12 upgrade would significantly reduce congestion, improve journey time reliability and reduce collisions, making the network safer, more resilient and more productive. It would also allow the road to absorb increasing volumes of freight from Felixstowe (the UK's busiest container port), Harwich and the wider Freeport East area.

The scheme is absolutely integral to North Essex's housing growth agenda and the emerging Spatial Development Strategy for Greater Essex. Thousands of new homes — including those within the Chelmsford Garden Community — have been planned on the knowledge of the scheme proceeding. Their viability and sustainability are now at risk and, without clarity over the route's future, there will be significant delays for a number of large, strategic housing sites across the region.

The A12 widening scheme had further connectivity benefits, including providing the much-needed capacity to enable an upgrade of the A120 between Braintree and the A12 in the longer term. While this is a separate scheme, there is a clear interdependency between the two, with unparalleled opportunity for unlocking further growth along both strategic routes.

## **A call to reconsider**

NEC recognises the difficult fiscal choices facing central Government and the imperative to prioritise projects that deliver maximum value for money. In this context, the A12 widening scheme stands out. It is already at an advanced stage of development, with a DCO in place. Allowing this DCO to lapse would waste millions of pounds already invested and set the project (and the economic and housing growth contingent on this scheme) back by years. The project already has strong local support and clear alignment with Government priorities, including housing delivery, freight and logistics resilience and infrastructure-led growth. Years of partnership work mean that public consultation, route design and feasibility work is already complete and this scheme is ready to progress to the next stages.

The reactivation of this existing commitment remains essential to delivering national objectives and North Essex is seeking certainty that nationally managed infrastructure such as the A12 will not become our primary constraint. The A12 forms the backbone of the regional economy and its modernisation is critical to making the East of England investment-ready and globally competitive.

NEC member authorities strongly urge Government to reconsider and revisit the project, keeping the existing DCO in place as the foundation for delivery. We invite Government to work with us, alongside National Highways, to explore collaborative approaches to bringing this vital infrastructure investment into fruition.

If the UK is to build the homes it needs, create better-paid jobs outside London and improve freight mobility, it must invest in the infrastructure that makes this possible. The A12 is a mission-critical quick win and, although currently paused, remains highly deliverable and within reach.

NEC urges the Government to collaborate, co-invest and co-deliver to support unprecedented regional growth, maintain network resilience and strengthen productivity across North Essex and beyond. The incoming Greater Essex Mayor should treat the A12 widening as a key priority within their Local Transport Plan, Spatial Development Strategy and Local Growth Plan, while using their lobbying power to influence Government to revisit the scheme and retain the current DCO. The Mayor should also work with neighbouring authorities in Suffolk and Norfolk to present a single, united regional voice on the A12. This collective approach could add significant weight to the case for reinstatement, demonstrating that the benefits of the scheme extend far beyond the Essex borders.

## **Growth priority 6: A120 dualling (Braintree to the A12)**

The A120 forms the only east-west freight and passenger corridor connecting the M11 with Harwich International Port and the A12. This route is central to regional productivity and the UK's international trade and housing delivery ambitions yet remains constrained by a short, outdated stretch of single carriageway between Braintree and the A12.

This length of single carriageway stretches just under nine miles but creates a disproportionately large bottleneck on one of the East of England's most important routes that underpins major development opportunities, including Freeport East and the emerging TCBGC. A relatively modest investment could unlock significant economic and connectivity benefits for the East of England, with the opportunity to consider this scheme as part of a wider regional growth package, alongside the A12 widening, to strengthen this essential economic spine.

### **Underserving a high-growth region**

The section of the A120 stretching from the M11 at Stansted to the A12 at Marks Tey is one of the most strategically important stretches of roads in the East of England. It carries both high volumes of commuter traffic and substantial freight movement, serving the UK's largest container port cluster and one of its busiest airports. The section between Braintree and the A12, however, significantly constrains an otherwise vital route, pushing traffic onto the already over-capacity A12 or A14. With its short length, relatively small improvements have the potential to release a major bottleneck, relieve pressure and enhance resilience across the network.

This outdated infrastructure causes regular congestion, particularly at peak hours, when A120 traffic volumes reach up to 3,000 vehicles per hour. Up to 15% of daily traffic consists of HGVs, which is well above the national average. This places additional strain on a network not designed for such demand and has significant productivity impacts for businesses relying on the network. Furthermore, almost a quarter of the road is frequently congested, and average vehicle speeds during the evening peak are reduced by up to 22mph compared to free-flowing conditions.

The single carriageway section also sees more than 230 accidents and 350 casualties per year, not only resulting in a tragic loss of life and life-changing injuries but also costing the economy more than £2 million per year. This unreliability and lack of safety is a deterrent to investment, limiting commercial viability and impacting the daily lives of residents and businesses across the region.

The implications are far-reaching, restricting access to Freeport East, Stansted and Cambridge, pushing traffic onto already-busy roads serving London, Chelmsford, Ipswich and others, weakening the UK's logistics resilience and damaging its competitiveness in international trade. It impedes the delivery of major housing sites, including along the high-potential Colchester-Braintree-Marks Tey growth corridor. It also undermines wider productivity, with congestion and delays acting as a consistent drag on the regional economy.

## The road to growth for North Essex

Upgrading the A120 between Braintree and the A12 is a clear opportunity to unlock housing and improve safety and reliability. It would also form a continuous high-capacity corridor between the M11 and A12, providing much-needed relief for other east-west routes.

Modelling indicates that the scheme could generate an additional £2.2 billion in economic output, while significantly improving journey times and boosting productivity. Critically, it would strengthen the logistics offer of Freeport East and is a key enabler for unlocking Bathside Bay's potential. As well as improving road access to Harwich and Felixstowe for the region's port industries, it would also facilitate more efficient movement of goods and people to Stansted Airport. In doing so, dualling the A120 supports the Modern Industrial Strategy's ambitions around trade corridors and clean logistics and is directly aligned with the 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy's aims to better support ports and surrounding growth corridors.

The scheme would also unlock thousands of new homes and jobs. Without it, there is a risk of under-delivery against national targets, with knock-on effects for affordability, investor confidence and long-term growth. A number of major planned developments — including TCBGC — are underpinned by improved connectivity and reliability on a dualled A120. Benefits extend beyond housing, with A120 improvements also helping to unlock regeneration in key areas such as Colchester and Harwich, enabling the former to capitalise on the benefits of Bathside Bay and supporting the city of Colchester to strengthen its role as a regional economic centre.

A120 dualling is also essential for unlocking growth in Braintree, a fast-growing economic node in North Essex. With major employment zones such as the flagship Horizon 120 site — which is already home to British Offsite, CareCo, Essex X-Ray and others — the town boasts strengths in advanced manufacturing, logistics, clean energy and digital sectors. Its potential is severely constrained, however, by limited east-west connectivity. Dualling the A120 between Braintree and the A12 has the potential to provide greater access to labour markets, supply chains and international gateways, reinforcing Braintree's economic status and supporting Government ambitions for productivity and better-connected places.

Improved east-west connectivity could also unlock access to education and training opportunities. This includes Colchester Institute's Braintree campus, which specialises in construction, business and STEM disciplines. The campus creates clear pathways for young people and adults into skilled, high-value employment, supporting inclusive growth and building a resilient talent pipeline for local businesses in high-growth sectors.

The A120 dualling could also strengthen growth in the UKIC by improving east-west connectivity between key Cambridge clusters, emerging hubs in North Essex and major global gateways. Meanwhile, it would enhance access to Bathside Bay, enabling the site to draw on world-class supply chains, talent and investment from the wider East of England geography.

This scheme has wider connectivity benefits from the region. Not only would it reduce rat-running through the large number of rural communities in the surrounding areas, but it also has a clear interdependency with the A12 widening scheme. Together, these projects would create a fully integrated connectivity corridor for the region, unlocking transformative opportunities for growth. The A120 dualling could also provide essential relief for the A12, helping to improve network resilience. Delivering these schemes as part of a coordinated



transport package — rather than in isolation — would maximise return on investment and ensure the region has the capacity to support long-term housing, employment and trade growth.

### **An invitation for collaboration**

Many NEC partner organisations have long championed the case for A120 dualling, supported by robust analysis and strong local cross-party political support. In return, we are seeking renewed commitment from Government to move this long-overdue project forward.

The A120 dualling business case is well established and strategic alignment with national objectives is clear. It also has strong regional backing, with Transport East also advocating for the dualling. Only through progressing this scheme will North Essex be able to truly boost inclusive growth by improving access to jobs, education and services for communities along the corridor, connecting people in towns such as Braintree, Coggeshall and Marks Tey to thriving economic hubs at Stansted Airport and Freeport East. This enhanced connectivity promises to attract new business, support existing employer expansion and enable greater participation in economic opportunities in the Government's priority sectors.

The pledge we are seeking from Government is long-planned and evidence-based. Bringing the scheme back into the Roads Investment Strategy (RIS) pipeline is the first step. NEC also supports exploring opportunities for blended funding, including developer contributions and stronger private sector collaboration.

This scheme connects nationally important infrastructure, supports international trade and directly enables the delivery of thousands of homes and jobs. With renewed Government backing, it promises to support a more resilient, better-connected, inclusive and productive economy, not just for North Essex, but for the entire East of England region. By including the A120 dualling in their Local Transport Plan and by convening Government, National Highways and other key partners, the incoming Mayor of Greater Essex has the potential to support the timely design and delivery of this essential infrastructure.

## **Growth priority 7: Improving junctions 7 and 8 of the M11**

The M11 is a critical component of the UK's strategic road network, linking London to Cambridge, powering the UKIC and providing a key freight route between the Midlands/North and the Channel Ports. Junctions 7 and 8 are pivotal access points for key national assets, including Stansted Airport, the Harlow Enterprise Zone, the Government's newly announced National Health Security Agency (UKHSA) centre and HGGT. Junction 8 is also strategically important for East Hertfordshire, especially for connectivity around Bishop's Stortford, which lies immediately adjacent. Despite their importance, these junctions are currently acting as pinch points, causing severe congestion which undermines the region's productivity and growth potential.

Targeted investment to enhance these junctions promises to unlock tens of thousands of new homes and jobs. To realise this opportunity, however, it is vital that the Government works with partners in North Essex and Hertfordshire to deliver infrastructure that is fit for a high-growth, high-productivity future.

### **Necessary upgrades to a national growth corridor**

Junction 8 of the M11 serves as the principal gateway to Stansted Airport, the UK's fourth-busiest passenger airport and East of England's largest single site employer. At peak times, however, congestion undermines this critical connectivity, creating delays for commuters, passengers and freight.

Junction 7, meanwhile, provides access to the town of Harlow — rapidly emerging as an important economic and productivity hub for the East of England — as well as substantial housing sites to the south and east of the town. Harlow's growing strengths in life sciences, advanced manufacturing and digital technology are anchored by the Harlow Enterprise Zone and the recently announced relocation of the UKHSA to the town.

Although the opening of Junction 7a in 2022 has helped alleviate some of the pressure on this essential junction, the network remains under strain. Junction 7 plays a central role in unlocking HGGT, an impressive development set to deliver over 21,000 homes. Without further intervention, however, the current road network risks constraining the delivery of this ambition, undermining wider economic growth efforts in Harlow and beyond.

### **Unlocking international competitiveness and connectivity**

Upgrading Junctions 7 and 8 is central to unlocking long-term growth across North Essex and the wider East of England. These enhancements underpin the development of HGGT, supporting 21,000 homes at HGGT and a further 1,000 at North Weald, plus potential new developments in urban areas of Harlow and future development opportunities. This growth will play a key role in regenerating Harlow and driving inclusive growth in the town, improving local infrastructure and creating vibrant, sustainable communities. The upgrades will also open new opportunities for the residents of Harlow, which has a higher-than-average proportion of people who are economically inactive (22% compared to a county average of 19%) and claiming benefits (5.4% compared to 3.3% Essex-wide).

As well as providing access to 12,000 jobs at HGGT, Junction 7 is also critical for strengthening connectivity to the Harlow Enterprise Zone, supporting growth in sectors that are well-aligned with national industrial policy (for example, life sciences and advanced

manufacturing). With modern business space and a strategic location at the heart of the UKIC, it is already attracting innovative companies and creating skilled jobs that match with national productivity ambitions.

Improvements at Junction 8 will reduce congestion and ensure better access to Stansted Airport, which is expected to generate a further 5,000 new jobs in the near future. The airport already acts as a major hub for employment, innovation and sectoral growth; however, its future success depends on seamless transport connections, which will underpin its £2.25 billion economic contribution by 2034.

### **A shared commitment to regional impact**

Local authorities across both Essex and Hertfordshire are already investing in strategic infrastructure, as demonstrated by the successful delivery of Junction 7a, which was funded by Essex County Council and National Highways. The full benefits of this investment, however, cannot be realised without additional Government backing.

The delivery of improvements to Junctions 7 and 8 requires coordinated national action. NEC asks that the schemes are prioritised in the Road Investment Strategy and that Government explores co-funding opportunities with local partners and infrastructure providers.

The return on this investment will be substantial. Enhanced M11 junctions will unlock nationally significant housing growth (over 21,000 at HGGT alone) and boost productivity through better access to innovation clusters in Cambridge, London, the Harlow Enterprise Zone and wider UKIC region. They will also help to secure the long-term resilience and competitiveness of one of the UK's key airports. In doing so, North Essex will continue to deliver against national priorities: boosting high-growth sectors, supporting international trade and enabling inclusive growth by better connecting economically inactive residents to exciting opportunities in innovative sectors.

Targeted investment in Junctions 7 and 8 of the M11 promises to deliver major national economic benefits, strengthen international connectivity and accelerate delivery against national growth, trade and productivity ambitions. Inclusion of these improvements as strategic investment priorities in the Mayor's Local Transport Plan will be essential. The incoming Mayor's financial support has the potential to accelerate the delivery of key junction upgrades that unlock housing, enterprise growth and innovation across the UKIC, delivering benefits for the wider East of England region.

## Growth priority 8: Improving train services from Clacton

Enhancing rail services between Clacton and Colchester represents one of the most immediate, affordable and impactful opportunities to drive inclusive economic growth and social resilience in North Essex. Increasing train frequency along this corridor has the potential to open up access to jobs, training, education and leisure opportunities for communities in some of England's most deprived places. This includes access to Colchester Institute and the University of Essex. Simultaneously, the upgrade would support modal shift and decarbonisation, reduce congestion, enhance the resilience of otherwise-used road networks and boost productivity across the region.

More frequent trains alone, however, are not enough to drive out deprivation and stimulate substantial economic growth. NEC proposes that additional interventions are considered, including fewer stops on-route to London (making train travel faster and more appealing) and significantly cheaper ticket options.

### A critical but underserved rail link

Clacton is home to around 55,000 people and serves as the economic and civic heart of Tendring, a district with some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country. In the 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), Tendring ranked particularly low in the domains of education, skills and training, income and employment (see figure 1 where 317 is the highest ranking and 1 is the lowest). The district has a significant lack of opportunity in the job market with a job vacancy ratio of 0.32 (the lowest in North Essex Essex), which is reflected in work-based pay. This averages £622 per week, which is over £100 a week lower than the national average. Furthermore, 17% of Tendring households are classified as fuel poor (4% higher than the UK average) which, coupled with low incomes, is likely to remain an issue without significant intervention. Economic opportunity is further constrained by poorer health outcomes in the district, which sees an under 75 mortality rate of 388 per 100,000, representing the highest rate in North Essex.

	Income	Employment	Education, Skills & Training	Health & Disability	Crime	Living Environment	Barriers to Housing & Services	IDACI (deprivation affecting Children)	IDAOP1 (deprivation affecting older people)
<b>2015 Rank</b>	40	24	14	61	100	163	261	38	86
<b>2019 Rank</b>	36	22	12	34	96	153	211	30	75

Figure 1 - Tendring IMD rankings

The Clacton–Colchester corridor is served by a single hourly train, despite linking North Essex's largest coastal town to one of its fastest-growing urban centres. This also restricts access to Chelmsford, with its high-value roles in advanced manufacturing and engineering (Teledyne e2v, for example) and professional and financial services, with companies such as AON and M&G Investments. Journeys to opportunities in London are also hindered, preventing Tendring residents from accessing highly paid roles in professional, financial and technical services. Meanwhile, evidence from Transport East's Connectivity Study shows that this corridor sees a disproportionately high share of passengers travelling for business and retail. This is a clear marker of its economic potential, which is held back by current services.

The rail service does not match local need or unlock opportunity for the 70,000 people living within 1km of a station on this corridor. With services limited to one per hour and peak fares remaining unaffordable for many (an annual season ticket from Clacton-on-Sea to London Liverpool Street exceeds £7,000), the current offer deters rail use and constrains inclusive growth. These barriers push residents towards car dependency — worsening congestion and air quality while compromising road network resilience — or limit residents to bus travel which, although affordable, is usually very slow.

<b>One-way journey durations and costs from Clacton-on-Sea to Colchester</b>		
<b>Vehicle type</b>	<b>Journey time</b>	<b>Journey cost</b>
Train	From 28 minutes	£10.10 (anytime single)
Bus	From 58 minutes	£3
Private car	From 35 minutes	Approx. £4

### **A step change to deliver inclusive growth and regional resilience**

Doubling the frequency of services between Clacton and Colchester would represent a step change in modal shift in North Essex, reducing reliance on private vehicles and supporting long-term decarbonisation. This upgrade would increase the number of trains from one to two per hour, significantly improving journey flexibility.

As new homes come forward in Colchester and the city continues to grow as a knowledge economy anchored by the University of Essex and Knowledge Gateway, improved rail connectivity will be vital to link residents with emerging economic opportunities. Enhanced train services will also enable both young people and adults to access further and higher education, apprenticeships and lifelong learning opportunities (at Colchester Institute, for example), which will be essential for tackling deprivation and supporting progression into high-value sectors.

Crucially, the proposal is deliverable in the short term. No new infrastructure is required and service enhancements could be made through more efficient use of the existing network. The scheme also promises to unlock modal shift from car to rail, reducing carbon emissions and improving local air quality. It would also increase rail revenue through new demand, while supporting local regeneration efforts in Clacton, enhancing its viability as a place to live, work and invest. Importantly, an improved service would give residents that need it most more efficient access to the high-growth clusters of Colchester and Chelmsford, alongside high-value employment opportunities in London.

### **A call to Government and the rail industry**

This scheme is already supported by Transport East and, together with regional partners, we are ready to work with the Department for Transport, the rail industry and private sector partners to assess the cost and feasibility of delivering improved service levels on the Clacton-Colchester line. Doing so aligns fully with the Modern Industrial Strategy's aims to decarbonise transport, expand access and connect underserved communities.

We welcome innovative solutions, recognising that a flexible and collaborative approach will be key to this proposal. An all-day frequency uplift, offering two trains per hour between Clacton and Colchester, would provide a consistent, easy-to-understand service pattern. If, after exploration with the train operator, this is not immediately deliverable, introducing

additional services during morning and evening peaks could offer a valuable and cost-effective interim solution.

Increasing the pace of services from Clacton during peak times should also be considered, as slow journey times of up to 90 minutes to London Liverpool Street currently constrain commuter flows. A faster, peak-time connection — such as a direct service from Clacton to Colchester — would significantly improve access to major economic hubs, supporting both connectivity and inclusive growth in North Essex.

Whether a new all-day timetable is introduced, peak time frequency is increased or the pace of services is reviewed, changes must be met with affordability interventions. The cost of train travel between Clacton and London is unaffordable for many, especially given local levels of deprivation. Introducing targeted fare subsidies or discount schemes would help to address barriers, improve access to opportunity and increase train use by the local population.

We invite the incoming Mayor of Greater Essex to co-design affordability options with the train operator and local authorities. This should include exploring tried and tested models, such as the West Midlands' Swift Card or East Midlands' Capped Fare Pilot. The former introduced a smart card system, functioning like London's Oyster Card, offering pay-as-you-go travel, stored-value tickets, and daily and weekly fare limits, which made frequent travel cheaper than pay-as-you go fares. The East Midlands Pilot, meanwhile, introduced fare capping, simplified day pricing and smart card-based offers, such as £1 'mega low' train fares. Making rail travel more affordable for Tendring residents is essential, not only for commuters but also for those not currently in work. Affordability measures will ensure these individuals are able (and more likely) to access opportunities at institutions like the University of Essex, Colchester Institute and the future Sustainable Skills Innovation Centre at TCBGC.

This intervention is deliverable within a single Mayoral term, with no new infrastructure required and a clear case for demand. The Mayor's Investment Fund and/or devolved transport budgets have the potential to underwrite early operating support where needed. Meanwhile, the Mayor's convening powers will help to bring together rail operators, Government and Network Rail to fast-track timetable and service improvements alongside fare interventions. In doing so, this is a quick-win solution that delivers long-term benefits while supporting national ambitions around breaking barriers to opportunity, increasing productivity and decarbonising transport. This project also offers a model that could shape connectivity improvements in other areas of the UK that are facing similar challenges.

## **Growth priority 9: Rapid Transit System (RTS) expansion**

The expansion of the RTS represents a transformative opportunity to deliver faster and cleaner connectivity across one of the East of England's most dynamic regions. Expanding the RTS to the Tendring peninsula is a logical first step to expanding beyond the Colchester city area and will help to deliver inclusive outcomes. However, the North Essex ambition is to extend a higher-frequency, low-cost public transport network to all of the region's priority settlements, critically enabling access to jobs and training in high-value, growing sectors.

The existing RTS scheme — already in development with £30 million Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) support — is designed to unlock major growth within Colchester and TCBGC. The network's reach, however, will initially be limited to the city's boundaries which has the required population density to support an RTS. NEC partners recognise that areas outside of the largest settlements in North Essex are unlikely to have the population density required to support a very frequent rapid transit network. Partners nonetheless consider there to be scope for a more regular and reliable service from and between key towns that could be integrated within the broader RTS system. Such an approach would improve the RTS as a whole, help to reduce inequalities and boost economic growth by increasing connectivity between urban areas in North Essex.

### **A strong foundation with potential to grow**

Colchester is a strong regional economic hub and one of the newest and fastest-growing cities in the East of England. It is home to over 130,000 people, a thriving university and a growing base of high-value employment in health, construction and creative sectors, delivering against Government ambitions for innovation-led growth. The city is also brimming with culture and history, from Colchester Castle and the longest-surviving Roman city wall in Britain to the magnificent Tudor Layer Marney Tower and contemporary art at Firstsite.

The first phase of the new RTS — set to be operational by Spring 2026 — will enhance east-west movement between the A133 near the University of Essex and the A120. It promises to cut journey times by up to 35% and will offer high-frequency, low-carbon services. The new rapid transit corridor will also improve walking and cycling facilities to support modal shift and healthy lifestyle choices while enhancing road network resilience.

Further phases of the RTS will be guided by the North Essex Garden Community Master Plan, ensuring infrastructure keeps pace with housing growth. It will focus on extending the RTS into the new Garden Community, connecting it with key areas of Colchester, such as the hospital and university.

The current scope of the RTS, however, falls short of connecting with the adjacent Tendring district, where there is significant need for economic opportunity, mobility and inclusive growth. Home to some of the most deprived communities in England, many residents face barriers to employment, education and health, with high levels of economic inactivity, lower-than-average car ownership and poor access to services. Without new, direct, reliable and affordable transport links to Colchester and its training and employment facilities, many residents will remain disconnected from one of North Essex's primary hubs of opportunity.

The North Essex ambition is to use the Tendring peninsula extension as a blueprint for other urban but disconnected nodes of North Essex that are currently underserved by public transport. Delivering further rapid transit routes that use the Colchester system as a

foundation but meet the distinct needs of their localities will ensure that communities across the region benefit from future growth expected for North Essex.

### **Connecting growth and opportunity through RTS extension**

Extending the RTS beyond Colchester into Tendring has the potential generate significant regional growth. It would enhance access to employment and education by linking deprived coastal communities with major establishments such as the University of Essex, Colchester Institute, Colchester Hospital and the Knowledge Gateway. This would not just support young people and those entering the workforce but would also present opportunities for lifelong learning and upskilling for career progression.

The RTS extension would also help unlock the long-term regeneration of Harwich and Clacton by strengthening their role as places to live and invest, with stronger public transport connections to the heart of North Essex's growing economy. The scheme could also directly serve future growth at Bathside Bay, ensuring local residents benefit from new jobs and training opportunities, and that businesses can access wider labour markets and boost their productivity without adding pressure to road networks.

Crucially, the initial RTS extension into Tendring would act as a blueprint for delivering much-needed rapid transit interventions in other parts of North Essex that are currently underserved by regular, fast public transport to neighbouring towns. This includes Maldon, Harlow, Saffron Walden, Tiptree and Waltham Abbey.

This scalable approach would ensure that the benefits of reliable and inclusive connectivity are felt across the region. A hub and spoke model could provide a network which radiates out of high-density areas, attracting further investment to our high-growth towns and cities. We acknowledge that many areas served by an extended North Essex RTS would not have the population density to support a highly frequent service (i.e. every few minutes), however, provision of regular, reliable, fast, affordable and attractive bus transport will be essential for unlocking the potential of these growing towns.

Critical to the North Essex RTS is that it provides access to key training and employment hubs, especially those in the North-East and West of the region, which are underserved by public transport and difficult to reach from more deprived communities. In the West of the region, this includes Stansted Airport College, which has plans to grow its capacity and curriculum in line with airport growth, and Harlow College, which is a key sustainable skills provider in the region. The North-East, meanwhile, boasts Colchester Institute and its Net Zero and Renewables Centre.

By delivering a clean, reliable alternative to car travel, the extension would also help to drive modal shift. Given that nearly 40% of carbon emissions in North Essex come from transport — the majority from road travel — investment in deliverable low-carbon transit options that enhance network and climate resilience must underpin our strategy for regional development.

### **Laying the tracks for delivery**

To realise this opportunity, the incoming Mayor of Greater Essex should work with North Essex partners to forward fund the connection of key towns in Tendring to the RTS as a first step. This should be done with a view to exploring scalable models for a wider North Essex



network which can increase frequency and route options as housing continues to be developed in the region. Building on the success of the HIF investment that enabled the first RTS phase, there is scope to test new and blended funding approaches for future phases. This might include developer contributions, targeted transport funds and private sector co-investment, particularly from major employers set to benefit from the network.

Whether through phased implementation, demand-responsive services or public-private partnerships that share risk and reward, North Essex partners welcome innovation in delivery. A collaborative, evidence-led approach will ensure the expanded RTS delivers long-term value for North Essex and supports partners' inclusive growth ambitions. We also invite the Mayor to consider the wider North Essex RTS within their Local Transport Plan as a strategic mechanism for improving regional connectivity while decarbonising travel for the county.

Expanding North Essex's Internet of Things (IoT) network and integrating these technologies into an extended RTS represents a significant opportunity to enhance patronage and improve overall user experience. Smart interventions such as real-time passenger information systems, integrated ticketing platforms and IoT-enabled traffic management tools can improve reliability, accessibility and customer responsiveness. Not only do these innovations support modal shift, but they also generate valuable data to inform future transport planning and investment. Leveraging public sector-owned assets for network deployment — including buildings and highways — will be essential for optimising asset utilisation and creating a blueprint for a digitally connected transport ecosystem that can be replicated across Greater Essex.

Investment into an extended RTS promises to support national ambitions on multiple fronts. Not only will it lift barriers to opportunity for disadvantaged communities, but it will also facilitate high-density, low-carbon housing delivery in line with sustainable and efficient transport. The scheme will also drive innovation-led productivity, by linking residents to opportunities in high-growth sectors.

A well-planned RTS extension — starting with the Tendring peninsula with the view to expanding to the wider North Essex region — would not only relieve pressure on local roads, but would also support national decarbonisation, regeneration and inclusive growth objectives. We invite the new Greater Essex Mayor to support the Tendring extension as an immediate strategic priority and to champion the wider North Essex network as a long-term ambition in their Local Transport Plan. With strong mayoral leadership and collaboration with Government, transport operators and local authorities, North Essex has the potential to deliver a genuinely joined-up network that supports people, places and the economy.

## **Growth priority 10: Delivering skills for growth**

North Essex already benefits from a strong Higher Education (HE) and Further Education (FE) base, with colleges and universities delivering skills to power the regional and national economy. However, as the scale and ambition of growth across North Essex accelerates, our ability to deliver on this potential will depend on whether we have the skilled workforce to match it.

To sustain growth and create opportunity, investment in a skills system that is agile, inclusive and responsive to current and future business needs is critical. This means ensuring parity of access across the region and equipping all residents with the lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling opportunities that enable them to respond to the evolving needs of the economy and thrive both today and in the future. This presents both an immediate and long-term mission that can deliver tangible wins within the first term of the newly elected Mayor of Greater Essex, while laying the foundations for a resilient, future-ready workforce that underpins North Essex's wider ambitions. By investing in skills at scale, we can simultaneously improve outcomes for residents, including those in our most deprived areas, while unlocking growth across multiple high-value sectors. This includes engineering, life sciences and green technologies, cementing North Essex as a national centre of excellence in line with the Modern Industrial Strategy.

### **Established anchors for growth**

North Essex boasts a growing skills ecosystem with two universities and a number of specialist FE centres. These establishments are already delivering the technical and professional skills that are in demand across many of our priority sectors, including construction and life sciences. They are also adapting to future economic needs, with many FE institutions opening green skills facilities in recent years, focussing on specialisms such as electric vehicle (EV) maintenance, air source heatpump installation and servicing as well as other retrofit qualifications.

At the heart of our skills ecosystems are North Essex's two universities. With two campuses in Chelmsford, Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) offers a portfolio of courses in growing sectors, with particular strengths in health, life sciences and engineering. The University of Essex, meanwhile, is recognised for its strengths in data sciences and finance. Its Innovation Centre Knowledge Gateway provides direct support to high-growth businesses and start-ups, linking academic expertise with industry innovation.

The region is also home to a number of progressive FE institutions. Harlow College, for example, is a national leader in technical training. Its specialist facilities reflect the industries of the future, attracting learners from across North Essex and beyond. Its EV Training Centre is one of a kind in the region, responding to the accelerating shift towards greener transport and the growing demand for skilled EV technicians. The college's Sustainable Energy Centre, supported by Mitsubishi Electric, is delivering pioneering training in resilient energy systems, preparing students for emerging roles in new energy technologies. Harlow College is also the only provider in the East of England offering Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) maintenance training, with the nearest comparable facility over 100 miles away in Bournemouth. The college has also achieved 'Apple Distinguished School' status, recognising its leadership in digital learning and innovation.

Also part of the Harlow College Group, Stansted Airport College in Uttlesford is the UK's only on-site aviation college, situated within the grounds of Stansted Airport. The college is a

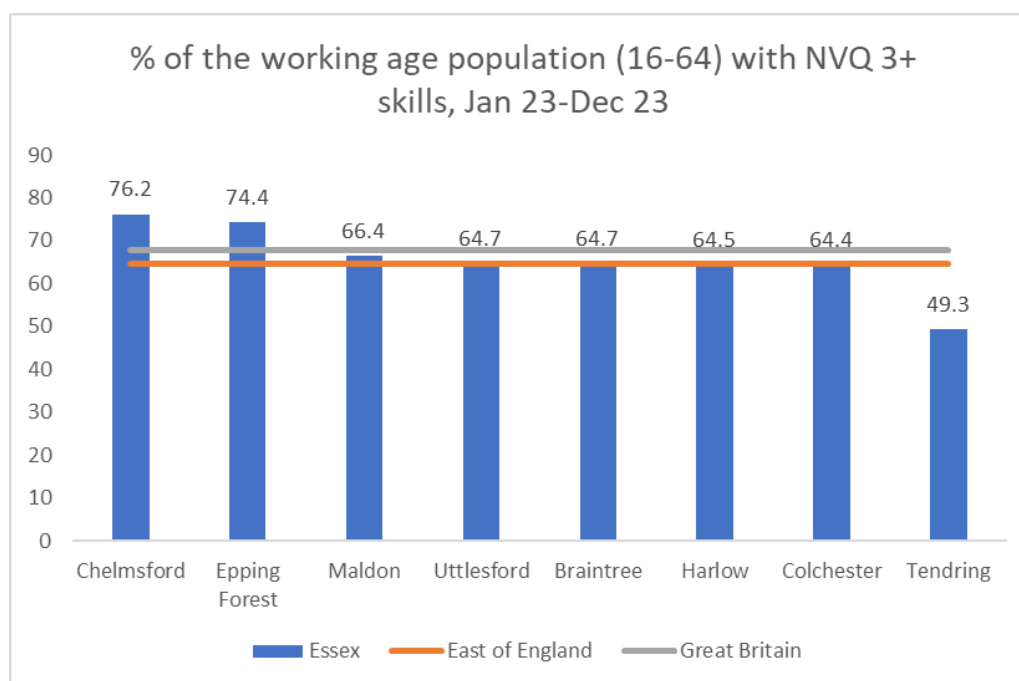
national exemplar of employer-led education, providing training across aircraft maintenance, airside operations, engineering and logistics. Its model of aligning training to business need is clearly delivering results, as 85% of its graduates progress directly into employment at the airport, with a further 12% progressing onto further education. This success demonstrates the impact of business demand-led skills provision, a model which, if replicated at scale across North Essex, would drive stronger outcomes and widespread benefits for individuals, businesses and the regional economy. The college is already operating above capacity and has consequently leased additional space to temporarily boost the number of students it is able to accommodate. Its track record of graduate progression into work and the demand from students underline the potential for expansion to continue to meet the needs of the growing airport and wider UK and European aviation industry.

Colchester Institute adds further strength to the region's FE offer. As one of the largest construction skills providers in the East of England, it plays a critical role in supporting the region's housebuilding, infrastructure and retrofit ambitions. Its Net Zero and Renewables Centre showcases the college's leadership in green skills, training local learners to work in sustainable construction and low-carbon energy industries. The Institute's Centre for Health and Social Care adds to its offer by providing state-of-the-art clinical simulation spaces and interactive technologies to equip learners with the practical skills and confidence to enter a sector facing acute workforce shortages.

In the centre of the region, Chelmsford College plays a key role in supporting technical progression and higher-level skills. Home to the South East Institute of Technology, the college delivers advanced qualifications in construction and engineering disciplines, ensuring learners can gain innovative, industry-recognised skills without leaving the region. Its Centre for Built Environment and Sustainable Technologies (BEST) provides purpose-built facilities to meet the rising demand for low-carbon construction and retrofit expertise, directly addressing skills gaps that have historically constrained housing and infrastructure delivery.

Taken together, these establishments form a robust skills system. They are already working collaboratively through the Greater Essex Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) to align provision with employer demand, tackle persistent skills gaps and strengthen pathways from education to employment.

Despite these strengths, however, disparities remain. While Chelmsford and Epping Forest exceed the national average for residents qualified to NVQ Level 3+, the remaining districts all lag behind. The challenge lies in achieving parity of access to skills infrastructure, ensuring that high-quality provision that meets the needs of businesses and has strong pathways into employment is easily reached by residents from all parts of North Essex. This provision needs to be supported by adequate transport and digital connectivity to make learning accessible, affordable and appealing to all North Essex residents, regardless of where they live. Building on our strong foundations, there is a clear opportunity to work with business to identify and address gaps in education, training and skills provision, whether through growing existing institutions, supporting the development of new facilities or collaborating across borders with neighbouring areas to maximise the regional opportunity. In doing so, North Essex can be at the heart of a truly integrated skills ecosystem that delivers for regional productivity, operates in unison with business, removes barriers to participation and helps residents realise their potential.



### Challenges in coverage and capacity

Despite North Essex's impressive skills ecosystem, persistent challenges remain in ensuring fair access and adequate capacity across the geography. The region's success in creating centres of excellence has not yet translated into equal opportunity for all communities, with rural and coastal communities at a particular disadvantage.

In Maldon, for example, there is no FE provision beyond a single Adult Community Learning (ACL) centre, leaving residents with limited access to technical or vocational pathways. In Uttlesford, post-16 options are restricted to the dedicated aviation college at Stansted Airport, meaning those whose interests lie outside of the sector must travel considerable distances (often leaving Essex's boundaries) to study.

In many parts of North Essex — including, but not limited to, Tendring, Maldon and Uttlesford — longer and more expensive public transport journeys make it difficult to access the high-quality training on offer in areas such as Harlow, Chelmsford, Braintree and Colchester. Without improved connectivity, opportunities remain out of reach for many, limiting social mobility, constraining talent pipelines for businesses and reducing the return on investment in new skills provision. Alignment between skills investment, the needs of business and North Essex's transport priorities are therefore critical to ensure new facilities and programmes can truly deliver improved outcomes for employers and residents alike.

Capacity pressures are also becoming acute. Some of the region's most successful FE establishments are already operating beyond the intended capacity of their current facilities. Stansted Airport College, for example, has had to lease additional space to accommodate 600 learners, despite being designed for 500, yet remains unable to keep pace with the demand, such is the level of interest in studying at the college. Similar strains are emerging elsewhere as the demand for technical and green skills grow in line with economic changes and business need.

Without additional capacity, these institutions risk turning away prospective learners, which is a missed opportunity for residents and the wider economy. By addressing these challenges locally, North Essex has the potential to set a national benchmark, strengthen the UK's skills base and position ourselves as a regional centre of excellence for high-growth sectors. Doing so would not only help to meet business needs but also contribute to national productivity and competitiveness.

At the same time, the pace of economic change means that the skills system as a whole must become more agile. While North Essex's 9,500+ construction businesses are reasonably well catered for, its base of more than 2,100 digital businesses do not benefit from such a robust talent pipeline. Whilst North Essex's institutions are adapting to the evolving needs of the green economy, the demand for green skills is set to rise by more than 90% by 2030. In order to remain competitive and build a workforce capable of meeting North Essex's growing housing and infrastructure needs, the region must expand its skills provision and infrastructure. This means increasing capacity and coverage, while improving access to ensure future demand can be met.

A key theme emerging from the LSIP is the need for employer-led change rather than learner-led provision. Employers consistently highlight that the current system is too slow to adapt to industry needs. Businesses also emphasise that technical competence must be matched with strong soft skills, including leadership and communication. Addressing these priorities will require the coordination, investment and momentum that Mayoral leadership can bring. The incoming Mayor has an opportunity and the capability to tackle the need for greater parity of provision and access as well as responsiveness to business need in the North Essex skills system. This must include targeted investment in areas of little or no provision, strengthening transport links to key opportunities and ensuring North Essex's skills system is as dynamic and resilient as the community that it serves.

### **Investing for the future**

To deliver a comprehensive skills package for North Essex — one that ensures parity in access and opportunity while aligning with future growth sectors — North Essex Councils invites the incoming Mayor of Greater Essex to champion a set of strategic interventions. These will strengthen the region's skills infrastructure, support employer-led delivery and ensure residents everywhere benefit from economic opportunity. Key to the productivity of our biggest growth sector is the delivery of equitable construction and green skills hubs across North Essex. Where demand exists, the development of new facilities in addition to the expansion of existing campuses should be considered to meet existing and future business needs. As well as broadening opportunity, new centres could also provide specialist learning environments in line with some of the region's growing opportunities.

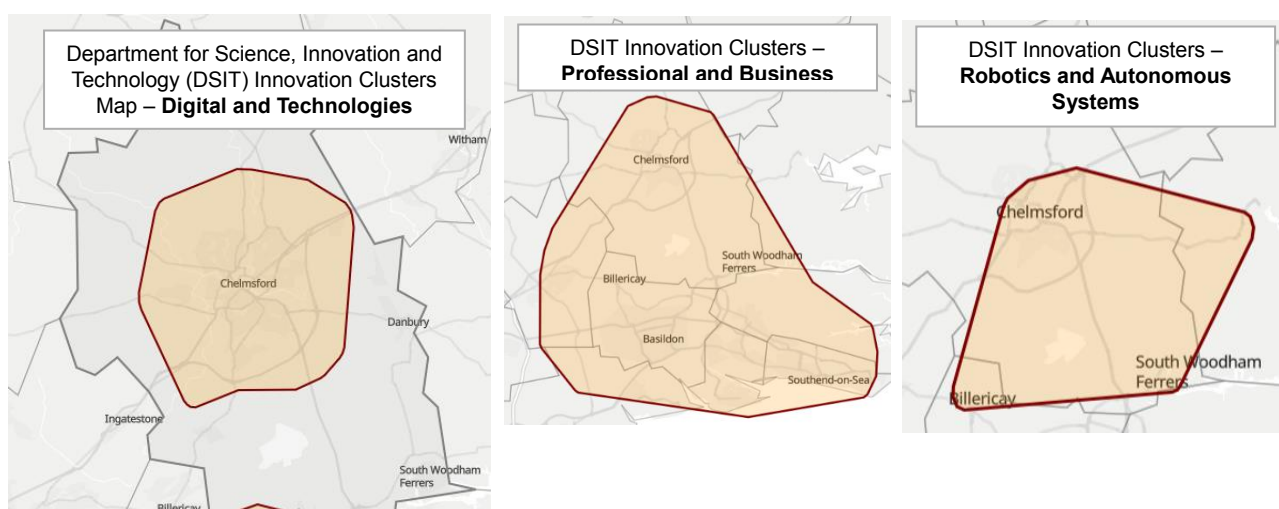
In the West of the region, for example, there is significant opportunity to expand skills provision around the servicing of EV vehicles alongside other sustainable growth areas such as air source and ground source heat pumps. The West of the region is also strategically positioned within the UKIC which provides further opportunities to expand life sciences training and related technical skills. Anchored by Cambridge in the North and London in the South, the UKIC means that people in the West of the region with relevant vocational qualifications and skills are well-positioned to help meet the needs of expanding businesses in growing sectors that align with the Modern Industrial Strategy. This presents an opportunity to build a talent pipeline that not only serves local and regional businesses but

also supports the UK's ambition to become a global leader life sciences, HealthTech and related industries.

Stansted Airport College is currently over-capacity. As an immediate opportunity, we urge the Mayor to support Phase 2 expansion, which is set to raise student capacity to 900. New facilities will include a new hangar for engineering apprentices, specialist facilities for aviation operations and logistics and expanded offerings in other areas. Phase 2 is already backed by over £9 million in public and private investment. Further capital support alongside clarity from the Department for Education on loan funding frameworks are now essential. Allocating devolved Adult Skills Funding in the Greater Essex Skills Strategy will ensure the college can fulfil its role in delivering a workforce pipeline, not only for Stansted but for the UK's entire aviation sector.

In mid-Essex, expanding Chelmsford College's already-extensive provision offers a significant opportunity to meet the rising demand for construction skills, especially given the city's garden community ambitions. The South East Institute of Technology, based at the college, already delivers advanced qualifications in construction and engineering, while the purpose-built BEST Centre provides cutting-edge workshops for trade and technical construction. The college is also part of the employer-led 'Building a Lasting Legacy' programme, inspiring students to pursue careers in construction. Ensuring this offer keeps pace with industry need, and that regional connectivity enables access for learners from areas with limited training provision, will be critical to achieving a balanced and future-ready skills ecosystem across North Essex that is ready to respond to its growth trajectory.

Chelmsford also sits at the heart of Government-recognised clusters in digital technologies, robotics and professional and business services. This creates a compelling case for dedicated skills facilities that can accelerate growth in these nationally aligned sectors, supporting innovation, attracting investment and ensuring the local workforce is equipped to meet the evolving needs of these high-value industries.



In the East, the Sustainable Skills Innovation Centre is proposed under Phase 1 of the TCBGC. It will equip local learners with skills in sustainable design, green construction and supporting trades to help deliver future phases of the garden community and other housing developments in the region. An equivalent facility in the West of the region is essential to

ensure parity. Building on Harlow College's existing strengths and expansion plans, this could be realised through the growth of current facilities or through new services to ensure the same high-quality offer is available across the region.

In Harwich, Bathside Bay is set to support over 6,000 new jobs, many of them in clean energy. Ensuring local residents can fill these roles requires targeted investment in green skills, which can be achieved through the expansion of the Harwich Energy Skills Centre. Capital investment to scale up training at this facility will be key to providing a talent pipeline for the wider Freeport East area and the East of England's clean energy economy. Alongside improvements to the centre, Mayoral support for holistic skills interventions in deprived areas around Bathside Bay could be transformational in addressing social inequalities, tackling long-term economic inactivity and driving meaningful change for coastal communities.

Improved skills infrastructure must be coupled with a business support landscape that enables employers to access talent pipelines, upskill their staff and grow within North Essex. The Mayor's responsibility for the Growth Hub Service offers a quick win: to create an all-encompassing business support service that works with the skills system to help businesses to navigate apprenticeship funding, professional development opportunities and collaboration with HE and FE institutions. This would complement work already undertaken by the Ambitious Essex Growth Agency to create a single front door for business support and create an employer-led skills system for the county.

The above interventions cannot succeed in isolation. Transport will be a key enabler to ensure that those in rural and coastal communities are able to access learning and training. The Mayor will need to ensure that the Skills Strategy aligns with the Local Transport Plan and Spatial Development Strategy to reflect these relationships and that future devolved funding is allocated in ways that prioritise connection to opportunity as set out in previous chapters.

By investing now in a more balanced, connected and future-ready skills system, North Essex has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver a skills system that not only meets local demand but powers national competitiveness. Its workforce has the potential to drive innovation, accelerate clean growth and position the region at the forefront of the UK's new industrial era.

We ask that the incoming Mayor embeds these priorities firmly within their Skills Strategy and considers the use of their Investment Fund and future devolved Adult Skills Funding to support deliverable projects, such as Stansted Airport College Phase 2. We also invite the Mayor to consider quick wins by aligning business support with skills delivery to ensure the region's employers have access to the talent pipeline they need to grow. This, in turn, helps to reduce inequalities, especially in our more deprived communities. The Mayor's convening powers will also be critical in bringing together business, skills providers and local authorities to ensure FE and HE provision aligns with national growth industries, particularly where demand for skilled workers is highest.

In addition, we ask the Mayor to take a bold, outward-looking approach to skills planning. This includes using demand from neighbouring areas to strengthen the case for expanding provision in North Essex, ensuring that investment decisions reflect the wider regional opportunity and that we make the most of our proximity to both Cambridge and London with their world leading education institutions. The Mayor should also work proactively with surrounding areas to avoid unnecessary duplication of facilities while maintaining access to

opportunity for North Essex residents. Finally, we see a major opportunity to collaborate on developing regional specialisms that will benefit our residents and businesses, while positioning North Essex as a key player in the UK's priority sectors. These might be hosted in North Essex and made accessible for regional neighbours or in nearby areas with complementary cluster strengths, such as Cambridge or London.

By taking these steps, the Mayor can help to deliver a skills system that is integrated, future-ready and capable of driving growth across multiple high-value sectors, ensuring North Essex plays a leading role in the UK's new industrial era.



## **Realising the North Essex opportunity**

North Essex councils have already demonstrated that they can deliver at scale. From major housing growth and infrastructure provision to pioneering regeneration schemes, we have a strong track record of translating ambition into delivery. This determination and strong local and national partnerships will continue to drive the next chapter of our growth story as we build on what has been achieved and scale up delivery across our geography.

Across our growth corridors and coastal communities, our member organisations are aligned behind a shared mission: creating a more productive, better-connected and more resilient North Essex where everyone can thrive. These Growth Priorities are a pitch for support to take this commitment to the next level, enabling us to deliver at pace and at scale, in collaboration with public and private sector partners.

This document sets out a pipeline of investable, deliverable projects that will shape the future of our region. From unlocking the nationally significant potential of Bathside Bay and Stansted Airport, to delivering three new Garden Communities and investing in rapid transit, road and rail, our priorities are both ambitious and achievable, provided we have the right backing.

These are not abstract ideas or long-term aspirations. In some cases, planning and enabling work is already underway. In others, new funding and delivery powers will be the key to unlocking pace and scale. Across the board, these priorities represent a clear return on investment: new jobs, new homes, greater resilience and improved connectivity to national and international markets.

As Greater Essex moves towards Devolution and the creation of a new MCCA, North Essex Councils stand ready to work in full partnership with the incoming Mayor. Our priorities align directly with the new MCCA's core responsibilities around driving economic growth, improving infrastructure, supporting skills and tackling the wider determinants of health. We welcome regional collaboration on the forthcoming Local Growth Plan, Spatial Development Strategy, Skills Strategy and Local Transport Plan, ensuring that the opportunities and investment identified in this document are fully embedded in Greater Essex's strategic programmes. With strong local leadership and the right policy and delivery tools, North Essex can continue to deliver regional growth in a way that delivers long-term benefits.

North Essex has the vision, scale, experience and commitment. Now we are inviting the incoming Mayor, Government and investors to partner with us and deliver regional growth with national impact.