



# **Draft Economic Development Strategy**

## **2015-2025**





## FOREWORD

These are exciting times for West Lancashire. We have the ability and the ambition to capitalise on the new developments and opportunities that will be coming forward from major transformational projects including the regeneration of Skelmersdale Town Centre, Superport and Liverpool2 and Skelmersdale rail station and transport hub.

This draft West Lancashire Economic Development Strategy will help West Lancashire Borough Council to engage stakeholders in delivering economic benefits for the Borough. It will assist in attracting investment by demonstrating it has a clear direction for the future economic development and regeneration of the Borough, in particular the key regeneration opportunities for Skelmersdale, informed by an understanding of major changes in economic conditions and the local economic partnership context.

The Borough Council is committed to sustainable regeneration and growth within the Borough by supporting businesses and helping to create opportunities, improve skill levels and retain good quality jobs for local people.

### **Councillor Westley**

Leader and Portfolio Holder Regeneration & Estates  
West Lancashire Borough Council

# CONSULTATION

This draft West Lancashire Economic Development Strategy has been compiled using information from the West Lancashire Economy Study 2014, which included consultations with various key stakeholders across the Borough.

This draft Strategy was adopted by Cabinet in January 2014 and we are now looking forward to hearing **your views** on the future delivery of economic regeneration in West Lancashire.

At the end of this draft Strategy you will find a series of consultation questions relating to our proposed eight core strategic themes, we welcome your views on these questions together with any other additional points you would like to make.

You can share your views with us in the following ways:

Follow the link via our website [www.westlancs.gov.uk](http://www.westlancs.gov.uk)

Alternatively, you can post your completed questionnaire to:

Economic Regeneration Team  
West Lancashire Borough Council  
52 Derby Street  
Ormskirk  
Lancashire  
L39 2DF

Thank you for your feedback.

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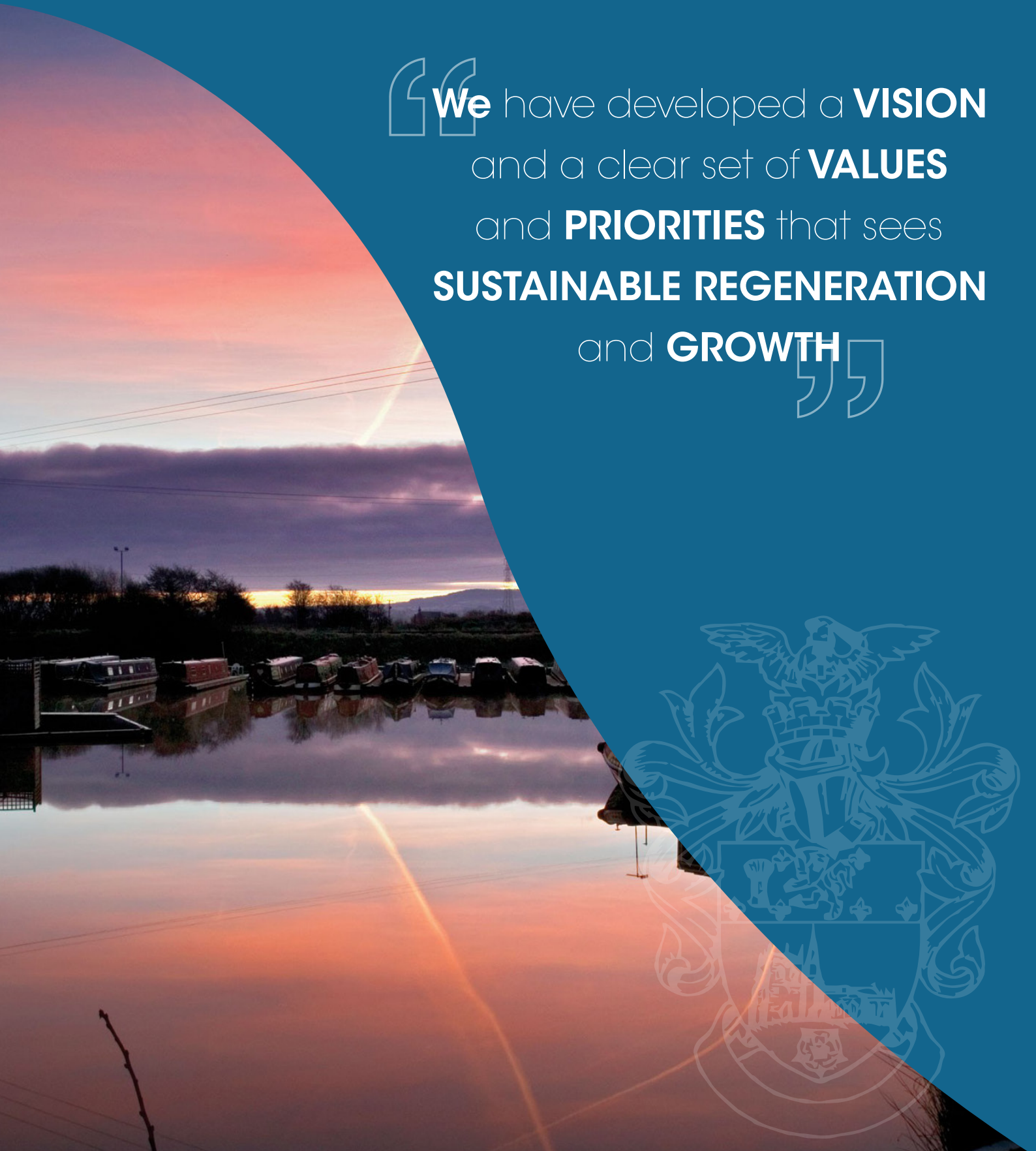
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“We have developed a **VISION**  
and a clear set of **VALUES**  
and **PRIORITIES** that sees  
**SUSTAINABLE REGENERATION**  
and **GROWTH**”



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

Home to around 110,700 residents, over 4,000 businesses and currently supporting over 44,900 jobs in a diverse mix of urban towns and rural villages and settlements **West Lancashire is a great place to live, work, study and invest.**

The majority of residents and employment are located in the Borough's three main settlements of Skelmersdale, Ormskirk and Burscough, with the Rural Parishes also performing an important role in the Borough as both residential and employment locations. These parishes contain some of the Borough's most desirable housing locations, offer a high quality of life within a rural landscape, have good schools, and support employment predominantly in the agricultural and food processing sectors. The Borough is also recognised as having the greatest amount of Green Belt designated land in England.

The Council is aware that the public sector and the manufacturing sector account for the largest employment sectors in the Borough, but we also acknowledge that we have a high concentration of employment across lower value sectors, such as transport and storage.

The Borough has experienced strong employment growth over the last decade with around 6,800 jobs, **exceeding rates of growth across all comparator areas and nationally.** However Skelmersdale has the highest levels of Job Seekers Allowance claimants and unemployment in the Borough, with around 70% of claimants in the Borough coming from one of the eight Skelmersdale and Up Holland wards.

There are challenges, but there are also some significant opportunities that lie ahead. With our partner organisations we will work to deliver strategic priorities, and we will look to our strategic partners and the private sector to help leverage funding and investment into the Borough.

## Background

West Lancashire Borough Council, and its partners Lancashire County Council and the Homes and Community Agency, commissioned a West Lancashire Economy Study in 2014 which would help support the growth of the Borough, whilst providing partners with a robust evidence base and growth projections. In addition, and in consultation with partners and stakeholders, the consultants Regeneris Consulting Ltd and Lambert Smith Hampton developed eight core strategic themes to drive forward economic growth in the Borough, together with an Action Plan setting out a suggested suite of activities over the short, medium and long term.

The West Lancashire Economic Development Strategy pulls together the baseline assessment from the Economy Study and sets out how the eight core strategic themes will act as enablers for growth for the Borough, whilst the Action Plan found at the end of this document provides details of specific activities that will drive the Strategy forward

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## Strategic Context

Given changes in economic conditions and the national move towards more devolved local economic development arrangements, with the formation of Local Enterprise Partnerships and Growth Deals, now is an opportune time to refresh our strategic thinking supported by an up-to-date economic evidence base.

The Council's Business Plan emphasises how important economic regeneration is to the Borough. We have developed a **Vision** and a clear set of **Values** and **Priorities** that sees sustainable regeneration and growth as being a key priority for us.

Being located within the County of Lancashire, West Lancashire is a member of the **Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership** (LEP). The Lancashire LEP is supportive of West Lancashire Borough Council's key projects, in particular around the growth of Skelmersdale. Our Elected Members also recognize the importance of being strategically positioned alongside the Merseyside City Region to maximize opportunities coming forward for our businesses and those looking for employment therefore in 2014 the Borough Council became corporate members of the **Liverpool Local Enterprise Partnership**.

Greater Manchester and the Liverpool City Region are both forming Combined Authorities and as a neighbouring authority we will be interested to note how these develop. The Borough Council has recently decided to accept the invitation to join the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority as an Associate Member, which we believe will strengthen our partnership working and ensure we are best positioned for the maximum benefit.

## Partnership Working

The Borough Council recognises that we cannot deliver economic growth without working in partnership. The Council works with a range of partner organisations from the public, private and third sector organisations, and we have developed strong relationships that continue to successfully deliver economic activity across the Borough.

One West Lancashire was formed from the legacy of the West Lancashire Local Strategic Partnership and is currently supported by West Lancashire Council for Voluntary Services who provide the secretariat function. One West Lancashire is a voluntary partnership which brings together leaders from the public and community, voluntary, faith and social enterprise (VCSE) sectors. The aim of this forum is to make the best use of available assets and resources in order to improve social, economic, health, educational and environmental wellbeing of the Borough.



## Future Strategy and Potential for Growth

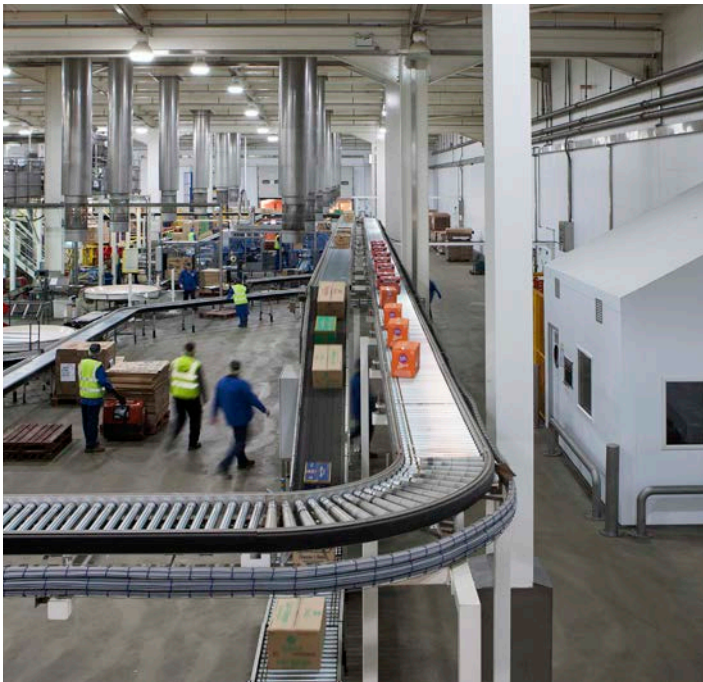
Eight core **Strategic Themes** have been developed for the Economic Development Strategy, together with a series of actions to support the delivery of each of these themes. Several '**Key Asks**', which highlight the major projects and initiatives that are essential for the Borough to truly deliver on its economic priorities and ensure economic growth in the future, have also been identified.

Strategic Theme	Key Asks
Stimulating Change	Establish a 'Skelmersdale Leadership Board' that will champion the regeneration of Skelmersdale through forceful and effective stewardship
Providing the right scale and mix of Employment Sites	Give consideration to the potential for the allocation and delivery of additional employment land within, or in close proximity, to Skelmersdale
Housing as a Driver for Change	Support for the delivery of housing estate improvements
Revitalised Town Centres	New wet and dry leisure centre in Skelmersdale Town Centre Provision of night-time economy in Skelmersdale Town Centre Public realm in Skelmersdale Town Centre Improve Ormskirk's Town Centre Offer
A Better Connected West Lancashire	Skelmersdale Rail Link and Station/Transport Hub West Lancashire 'Wheel' Rail Investment in West Lancashire
Promoting the Place	Develop a Skelmersdale brand
Supporting the Rural and Visitor Economy	Improve the positioning of West Lancashire as a visitor destination
Advantage Through Knowledge and Skills	Improved Secondary School provision in Skelmersdale Improve the Skills Gap and Raise Qualification Levels









## Challenges and Opportunities

The population of West Lancashire increased by 2,100 residents between 2001 and 2011, and to make the most of the opportunities ahead it is important that the Borough maximises the utilisation of its resident workforce. West Lancashire has seen benefit claimants fall substantially from the peak of the recession, with those **residents claiming Job Seekers Allowance** now **below the national average**. However, higher rates of unemployment and inactivity are particularly apparent in Skelmersdale due to a number of significantly deprived wards which face a number of challenges.

The Borough has experienced strong employment growth over the last decade with around 6,800 jobs, **exceeding rates of growth across all comparator areas and nationally**, with Skelmersdale being a key employment location, supporting 19,100 jobs (43% of all jobs in the borough) and experiencing an increase of around 2,200 jobs over the last 10 years.

The public sector and the manufacturing sector are the largest employment sectors in the Borough, accounting for 11,100 jobs and 6,300 jobs respectively. However, the

Borough also has a high concentration of employment across lower value sectors, including transport and storage. The significant role of the manufacturing sector as a large employer is amplified further at the Skelmersdale level, with around a quarter of all jobs (4,300).

The majority of businesses in West Lancashire are micro-businesses (i.e. have less than 10 employees), 25% of which are based in Skelmersdale, accounting for 43% of all jobs across the Borough, due to Skelmersdale's above average concentration of businesses classed as large employers.

The Council is keen to understand the requirements of those sectors that are expected to expand as a result of the significant investments in the wider Lancashire, Liverpool and Manchester city regions as they could present opportunities for West Lancashire's residents. These opportunities will include the Lancashire Enterprise Zone, **shale gas exploration, the regeneration of Skelmersdale** and significant expansion in the housing supply in the town, **Liverpool2** and the wider **SuperPort** concept, and the opportunities this could generate for the logistics sector.

# 1 INTRODUCTION & EVIDENCE BASE



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# INTRODUCTION & EVIDENCE BASE



West Lancashire is a great place to live, work, study and invest, with thriving commercial centres nestled amongst beautiful countryside, and the greatest amount of Green Belt designated land in England, which has enabled West Lancashire to protect its rural characteristics and prevent sprawl from towns towards villages.

The Borough is home to around 110,700 residents, over 4000 businesses and currently supports just over 44,900 jobs in a diverse mix of urban towns and rural villages and settlements. However, while the Borough is predominately rural in nature, the majority of residents and employment are located in the Borough's three main settlements of Skelmersdale, Ormskirk and Burscough.

While these three settlements account for a high proportion of the population and employment base, the Rural Parishes also perform an important role in the Borough as both residential and employment locations. These parishes contain some of the Borough's most desirable housing locations, have a high quality of life offer within a rural landscape, have good schools, and support employment predominantly in the agricultural and food processing sectors.

In 2009 GVA per job stood at £34.7m and with the exception of Fylde, **GVA per job across West Lancashire was higher than all comparative areas** used within the West Lancashire Economy study 2014, including a Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) average for the area of £31.8m.



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## 1.1 Background

In 2014 West Lancashire Borough Council and its partners Lancashire County Council and the Homes and Community Agency commissioned a West Lancashire Economy Study in 2014 that would identify the strengths and opportunities to support the growth of the Borough, whilst providing partners with a robust evidence base and growth projections.

Consultants Regeneris Consulting Ltd and Lambert Smith Hampton were appointed and following consultation and stakeholder engagement, the Study was signed off in September 2014. In addition to providing an up-to-date baseline report, the consultants helped the key partners to develop eight core **Strategic Themes** to drive forward economic growth in the Borough, together with an Action Plan setting out a suite of activities over the short, medium and long term.

A series of comparator areas, as well as other relevant benchmark areas (e.g. England/GB) where uses to set the baseline for the West Lancashire Economy Study 2014, these comparator areas include:

- Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens and Knowsley in the Liverpool City Region;
- Preston, Chorley and South Ribble in Lancashire; and
- Wigan in the Manchester City Region.

The draft West Lancashire Economic Development Strategy has been developed using the baseline assessment from the Economy Study and sets out how the eight core strategic themes will act as enablers for growth for the Borough, whilst the Action Plan and a series of 'Key Asks' provides details of specific activities that will drive the Strategy forward.

The West Lancashire Economy Strategy will complement the suite of strategies the Council now has in place to take the Borough forward into a prosperous future, including the Local Plan 2012-2027, the Housing Strategy 2014-2019 and the forthcoming Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy 2015, Leisure Strategy 2015-2025 and the Financial and Digital Inclusion Strategies.



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## 1.2 Corporate Priorities and Strategic Context

### Business Plan

In April 2011 Full Council adopted a four-year Business Plan to deliver its key strategic objectives, whilst balancing the budget and minimising the impact of budget reductions on frontline services. The Plan is refreshed each year to make sure that we are undertaking the right actions to achieve our longer term goals, with the final refresh taking place in April 2014. A new Business Plan is currently in development, which will take the Council forward into 2015-2018.

The Council is managing the challenging financial situation through the current four-year plan to maximise efficiency savings and increase income to bridge the gap. However, whilst every effort is being made to drive out efficiency savings, service reductions are likely in some areas and we will need to prioritise spending carefully in line with the needs of local people.

Focusing upon sustainable regeneration and growth within the Borough, the Business Plan emphasises how important economic regeneration is, both in terms of the quality of life of local people, and bringing income into the Borough, with seven key projects highlighted:

- Skelmersdale Vision
- Firbeck Revival
- Land Auctions Pilot
- Infrastructure Delivery – Transport
- Strategic Asset Management Project
- Economic Development Strategy
- Financial Inclusion Strategy

The Council has developed a **Vision** and a clear set of **Values** and **Priorities**:

### The Council's Vision is:

*“To be a Council to be proud of – delivering services that are lean, local and fair”*

### The Council's Values:

We will deliver our vision by continuing to be an innovative organisation which:

- prioritises customers and the services that are most important to quality of life;
- works as ‘one council’ to provide a joined up approach;
- is open and accountable in the way that it makes decisions;
- develops and values employees;
- promotes equality and diversity; and
- works in partnership to benefit the Borough.

Our values underpin the way in which we will deliver our priorities and achieve our vision.

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## The Council's Corporate Priorities:

- balancing the budget and providing the best possible services within the resources available;
- focussing upon sustainable regeneration and growth within the borough;
- caring for our Borough by delivering the small improvements that can make a big difference.

Minimising uncertainty for staff and stakeholders by continuing to:

- Implement a managed approach to change and explore innovation as a means to secure further value for money.

Our services will continue to prioritise the following, subject to affordability:

- Protect and improve the environment and keep our streets clean and tidy;
- Combat crime and the fear of crime;
- Work to create opportunities for and retain good quality jobs in particular for local people;
- To be a top performing landlord;
- Improve housing and deliver housing that meets the needs of local people, including affordable housing; and
- Provide opportunities for leisure and culture that together with other Council services contribute to healthier communities

## Local Plan 2012-2027

The West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 guides future development within West Lancashire over the 15 year period to 2027. It was adopted by Council on 16 October 2013 and immediately superseded the Replacement Local Plan 2001-2016.

The Local Plan 2012-2027 sets out:

- The distinctive features, issues and challenges in the Borough
- A vision of how we'd like the Borough to be in 15 years-time
- What we need to do to achieve this vision
- Key policies to help meet our goals

The West Lancashire Local Plan 2012-2027 Development Plan Document remains the key part of the Adopted Development Plan for the Borough, against which development proposals will be assessed. Further information on the background and preparation of the Local Plan, including how its policies are monitored and how to purchase a copy can be found using the following link: <http://www.westlancs.gov.uk/planning/planning-policy/the-local-plan/the-local-plan-2012-2027/local-plan-preparation-stages/stage-5-adoption.aspx> The Local Plan highlights **75 ha of new employment** land (B1, B2 and B8) will be promoted in West Lancashire between 2012 and 2027.

The housing requirement for West Lancashire for the period 2012-2027 is **4,860 dwellings** and there are various sites specifically identified within the Local Plan for residential development, with the larger locations including Skelmersdale Town Centre, land at Whalleys in Skelmersdale and land at Firwood Road, Lathom/Skelmersdale, together with Grove Farm in Ormskirk and Yew Tree Farm in Burscough.





## Housing Strategy 2014-2019

The Councils' Housing Strategy sets out our strategic housing delivery objectives which we aim to address over the five-year period from 2014 to 2019. It is acknowledged that housing market conditions and housing needs will change over time however we believe it is important to establish direction and to set out strategies and targets for improving housing circumstances in the short to medium term.

We have based our Strategy and Action Plan on analysis of our housing market and housing needs and consultation was undertaken widely with people in housing need and other stakeholders. The consultation process influenced the objectives we have established and achievement of these objectives will be subject to resource availability.

Our Housing Strategy delivery Objectives are:

1. Achieve the right supply of new homes including maximising affordable housing
2. Regenerate and remodel areas of Skelmersdale
3. Make the best use of all existing homes
4. Encourage well managed and maintained homes across all tenures
5. Encourage investment to meet specialist housing requirements
6. Deliver the Council's Sustainable Energy Strategy 2012-2020 Residential and Domestic Sector objectives.

The profile of West Lancashire as a whole is one of a Borough with high demand for housing in the private and public sector, with house prices more than 30% higher than Lancashire's average. Three main housing markets were identified within the Strategy as being:

- Skelmersdale: as well as being a free-standing employment centre and settlement, house prices are typically below those elsewhere in the Borough;
- Ormskirk: also a free-standing settlement and employment centre along with Burscough and Aughton;
- The more rural areas of the Borough: which contain smaller towns and villages, these areas are generally distinguished by higher prices and in some cases a commuter function associated with employment centres outside the Borough. This sub-market covers a large area with significant differences in accessibility to large employment centres.

A copy of the Housing Strategy 2014-2019 can be found using the following link:  
<http://www.westlancls.gov.uk/media/113555/final-housing-strategy-2014-2019.pdf>

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## 1.3 A Great Place to Live, Work, Invest and Study

In 2009 the West Lancashire economy was estimated to be worth £1,707m based on workplace based Gross Value Added (GVA) estimates, GVA per job stood at £34.7m and with the exception of Fylde, **GVA per job across West Lancashire is higher than all other comparative** areas, including a Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) average for the area of £31.8m.

West Lancashire has a diverse local economy from well-known international companies through to large numbers of entrepreneurial small and medium-sized firms.

The major industries within the Borough include:

- Wholesale and retail
- Transport and storage
- Food and drink
- Manufacturing
- Construction
- Professional services



Our manufacturing sector accounts for the largest numbers of employment in the Borough with around 15% of employee jobs, much higher than the 9% UK average. The transport and storage sector contributes to around 7% of employee jobs, again higher than the UK average of 5%

The high concentration of employment in the manufacturing and transport and storage sectors is amplified further at the Skelmersdale level. 23% of employee jobs (4,300) are based in manufacturing in Skelmersdale and 10% (1,800) based in transport and storage.

Skelmersdale has an **above average concentration** of employment in the **financial and insurance sector**, linked to the location of the Co-Operative Bank's main customer service and 'back office' facilities in the town centre. In addition Skelmersdale has a concentration equivalent to the national average of employment in the professional, scientific and technical service sectors.

There is also a cluster of public sector organisations across the Borough, contributing to around 26% of employee jobs (11,100), making it the largest employer in West Lancashire, slightly less than the UK average of 28%.

West Lancashire covers 347 square kilometres and offers a wide contrast between open farmland and small picturesque villages that offer a very good quality of living and community life, to the larger vibrant market towns of Ormskirk and Burscough and Skelmersdale a hive of urban activity with thriving employment areas and busy shopping centres.

A recent mapping exercise undertaken in 2014 of all the employment areas within the Borough revealed how vibrant and busy the areas are, with few properties standing vacant sending out a very clear and positive message that **West Lancashire is a great place to do business.**

The large employment areas within the Borough include:

- Pimbo Industrial Estate, Skelmersdale
- Gillibrands Industrial Estate, Skelmersdale
- Stanley and XL Business Park, Skelmersdale
- Burscough Industrial Estate
- Simonswood Industrial Estate
- Ormskirk Business Park



Our towns and villages provide access to local services whilst supporting key businesses providing local employment opportunities. The key major service centres are:

- Skelmersdale Town Centre
- Ormskirk Town Centre
- Burscough Village Centre

## 1.4 Geographical Advantage & Strategic Links

West Lancashire is a predominately rural Borough within the county of Lancashire, bordered by Preston and the Ribble Estuary to the north, Knowsley and St Helens to the south, Sefton to the west and Wigan, Chorley and South Ribble to the east.

Although the Borough is part of Lancashire, its geographical position as the southernmost Borough within the county means that West Lancashire is part of the wider labour market for the larger urban areas being in the advantageous position of such close proximity to the city regions of Liverpool and Manchester spatially and in terms of employment travel flows. This dual identity is important in understanding West Lancashire now, but also the opportunities which may emerge in the future.

West Lancashire has excellent accessibility to the strategic road network as well as easy access to the port of Liverpool, Liverpool John Lennon, Manchester and Blackpool Airports with the M58 motorway running along the south of the Borough, through Skelmersdale and linking West Lancashire to the M6 network and the M57 and M62 motorways. This means that the majority of West Lancashire can be accessed from the motorway network within 15 minutes, with the rural areas to the north of the Borough requiring a longer journey time to the motorway network (c. 30 minutes).

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## 1.5 Skelmersdale

Skelmersdale is West Lancashire's key economic driver for growth with great potential for major transformational projects coming on stream over the next few years including Skelmersdale Town Centre Regeneration and a Skelmersdale rail station will ensure the Borough is well placed to attract inward investors as well as many new business opportunities.

A large proportion (43%) of all employee jobs in West Lancashire are already located within Skelmersdale, the challenge will be to ensure our local workforce is equipped with the necessary and relevant skills to take up employment opportunities in the future.

Skelmersdale is a vibrant business location with a number of easy access employment areas, busy shopping centres and attractive wooded valleys and cloughs within the town. It has been an established base for many **international and well-known household** names, including:

- [Pepsico-Walkers](#)
- [SCA Hygiene Group](#)
- [Turtle Wax UK](#)
- [Proctor & Gamble](#)
- [Asda Distribution](#)
- [Great Bear Distribution](#)
- [Kammac](#)
- [NSG Technical Centre \(Pilkington Glass\)](#)

Skelmersdale town centre regeneration is being progressed by a partnership between the Borough Council, Homes and Communities Agency and developer St Modwen Development Ltd, and supported by Lancashire County Council to deliver a comprehensive vision. In 2012 planning permission was secured for a multi-million pound project to bring a mix of leisure, retail and environmental enhancements. With exciting new developments taking place in and around the town centre this demonstrates the great confidence partners have in Skelmersdale, who are also continuing discussions to bring forward residential development sites that form part of the town centre regeneration proposals.

Skelmersdale has seen some fantastic new facilities developed in recent times, including the £42m West Lancashire College building, the £2m JMO Sports Park and a new £2m Youth Zone in the heart of the town centre, anticipated to open in Autumn 2014. The Council's Leisure Strategy 2015-2025 is currently in development and will help to inform the future direction of, and investment in our leisure services across the Borough,

In addition, the Borough Council has worked closely with the HCA to build 17 new Council homes in Elmstead, Tanhouse the first to be built in West Lancashire since the 1990's, and together we are bringing forward four parcels of land in the Whalleys area leading to a potential 630 new homes.

The Firbeck Revival Project is a comprehensive £5.5m home improvement scheme taking place within Skelmersdale which has so far seen internal and external energy saving installations such as double glazed uPVC windows and doors, roofs and internal roof insulation, external improvements including canopies, cladding and removing old bin stores to give a clean modern new look. In addition, Council owned properties have also benefited from new bathrooms and kitchens and demolition is underway on ten unsightly three-storey blocks of flats and additional borrowing has been secured to enable the building of up to 44 new properties, bringing the total investment to £8m.

A recent mapping exercise has been undertaken of all the industrial and employment areas by the Economic Regeneration team with the expectation that some areas could be remodeled to provide more modern, fit for purpose business premises. However, the results of the mapping exercise demonstrated low vacancy rates within all of the employment areas across the Borough and that they were in fact bustling with enterprise.

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## 1.6 Visitor and Rural Economy

West Lancashire has a strong visitor economy, attracting around 2.6m visitors per annum and generating around £112m to the local economy. Our visitor economy is shaped by its rural landscape, with 92% Green Belt and mostly flat land it is a perfect destination for gentle pursuits such as family friendly walking and cycling routes together with some serious hills in Parbold and Up Holland for the more skilled and competitive cyclist.

We are home to a number of well-established wildlife areas such as the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust, Martin Mere; the Lancashire Wildlife Trust, Mere Sands Wood; the Leeds Liverpool Canal, which winds its way through the heart of the Borough; and the Ribble Estuary Regional Park to the north bordering Preston and South Ribble.

There are strong links already established with Marketing Lancashire who provide support to market and promote the Borough as part of the wider Lancashire offer. West Lancashire attracted 2.7m visitors in 2013 which generated an estimated £135m in revenue, supporting 1,886 jobs. The Lancashire economy is the second largest in the region behind Manchester, and in 2013 Lancashire welcomed over 63m visitors generating £3.5bn in revenue and supporting 56,000 jobs.

As a result, the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership has identified the visitor economy as one of its key priorities for growth, together with the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) which provides financial support to tourism and rural businesses and initiatives. The Liverpool City Region also acknowledges how valuable the visitor economy is placing it firmly within its key priorities.

Sefton Council and West Lancashire Council have been working closely on a visitor economy project known as the Sefton and West Lancashire VISIT which aims to promote sustainable means of transport for visitors across both areas. The project has resulted in several walking and cycling routes being developed and marketing literature being produced, together with physical improvements for cyclists and walkers including cycle hire at key locations which is proving increasingly popular for visitors and students.

To benefit from investment and support in the rural and visitor economy, West Lancashire needs to continue to work with Marketing Lancashire to maximise all opportunities available and ensure we dovetail into any County-wide programmes that the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership develops, including the RDPE and by working with others on projects such as the Ribble Estuary Regional Park which would provide benefits on a wider geographical footprint potentially enabling additional financial support to be levered in to support larger cross-boundary projects. The Council also needs to be looking towards the Liverpool Local Enterprise Partnership (Liverpool LEP) and the Merseyside authorities for opportunities on how we can work together on joint initiatives.





## 1.7 Educational Excellence

West Lancashire can boast excellent educational establishments with a College located within the heart of Skelmersdale Town Centre and a University firmly established within walking distance of Ormskirk Town Centre.

### Edge Hill University

Edge Hill University has been **shortlisted for the Times University of the Year**, the fourth time in seven years the University has been shortlisted for the most prestigious accolade in the higher education sector, this achievement follows the University's rating as the top in the North West for Student Satisfaction and graduate employability (2013) has grown from strength to strength in recent years.

The University boasts over 9,000 full time undergraduate students and around 3,000 employees on an **award winning** 160 acre campus, which has seen investment of £180m in the last decade.

As well as the superb facilities on offer within 'Sporting Edge', The Arts Centre and the Rose Theatre, there are three faculties within the University:

- Faculty of Arts and Sciences
- Faculty of Education
- Faculty of Health and Social Care

The University has a range of business support services available through the Business Solutions Team. Support includes business growth through knowledge and research, training and professional development and knowledge transfer partnerships.

The University is a world-leading establishment, a centre for teacher training since 1885. The Faculty of Education is the second largest provider of teacher training in the country and the largest provider of secondary teacher training and 95.8% of PGCE trainees in employment or further study six months after graduation (2011/12).





## West Lancashire College

Following the merger with the Newcastle Group in 2007, the College's aim is to create a high performing college of national stature that meets the learning and skills aspirations of all the communities it serves. The College was able to make a considerable investment in the heart of Skelmersdale by opening a brand new state of the art £43m campus in 2011.

The new campus boasts realistic working environments providing learners with real life work experience enhancing employment prospects. Facilities include:

- The Imagery - hair, beauty and holistic salons.
- The Atrium – silver service training restaurant
- Little Learners Nursery
- Hope Theatre
- Café West
- The Loft at West Lancashire Construction Academy.

The College is graded '**Outstanding**' by Ofsted and holds **Beacon Status** in the FE sector. They have over 4,500 students, supports over 1,000 businesses and are placed within the **Top 10%** of Colleges nationally.

Engaging closely with employers, the College offers bespoke training programmes tailored to each business, as well as offering free skills training, work experience placements and apprentices.



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## 1.8 Equality and Diversity



The Borough Council continues to be committed to equality, not only with its own in-house recruitment, selection and training, but across the community too. The Equality in Employment Policy applies to all individuals working at all levels and grades, including all other employees such as consultants, contractors, apprentices and work experience placements. The Council has a dedicated Equality & Diversity Strategic Steering Group with representation from across all Council services.

This Strategy wants to ensure that the local labour market is well placed to take advantage of the potential economic growth opportunities coming forward from the transformational projects highlighted within this document.

Activities delivered through the West Lancashire Challenge project are aimed at supporting individuals who have barriers to unemployment, training or work experience. New initiatives are being developed as the project evolves, for example providing individuals with the support, guidance and accessibility to IT in preparation for Universal Credit.



# 2 DEMOGRAPHIC & LABOUR MARKET TRENDS

“West Lancashire has a **HIGHER SHARE** of **EMPLOYMENT** in **SKILLED OCCUPATIONS** than a number of **COMPARATOR AREAS**”



**TRAC**  
testing regulatory and compliance



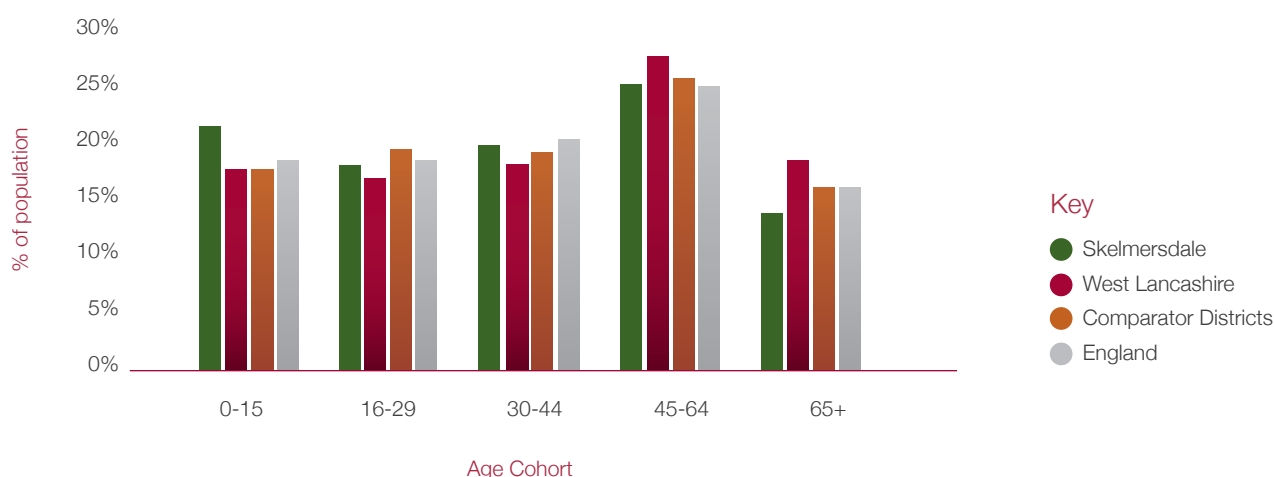
# DEMOGRAPHIC & LABOUR MARKET TRENDS

## 2.1 Population

The Borough has a population of 110,700 residents, which accounts for just less than 10% of Lancashire's total population, Skelmersdale contains over a third of the Borough's population with around 40,700 residents (2011 Census).

The current age structure shows that the Borough has an older than average resident population. The population aged over 45 years make up just 47% and the younger age groups 16-29 and 30-44 comprise just over a third at 35%.

Skelmersdale has a comparatively younger population with 22% aged 15 years or under, compared to 18% for the rest of the Borough and only 14% aged over 65 years, compared to 19% for the rest of the Borough. Figure 2.1 shows the Age Structure of the Borough's population.



This analysis highlights that in the upcoming years, as the 45-64 age cohorts enters retirement age, there is likely to be a notable ageing effect on the population of the Borough. West Lancashire's working age population as a proportion of total population has already contracted from 64% to 63% over the last decade. The proportion of working age residents within the Borough is lower than the average across the comparator districts (66%) and nationally (65%).

In 2012/13 around 81% of males aged 16-64 were economically active and 78% of females, and although the economic activity rate amongst males falls slightly behind the GB average, economic activity amongst females in the Borough surpasses that across GB and the comparator districts by around 6%.

Between the 2010/11 and 2011/12 there was a marked increase in the number of economically active females across West Lancashire. The proportion of females aged 16-64 who were economically active increased from 72% to 78%, equivalent to an absolute increase of approximately 1,200 economically active females. It is this increase in economically active females which has driven the overall Borough-wide increase in economic activity across the period, enabling the proportion of economically active residents in West Lancashire to return above the GB average by 2011/12.

This information will enable projects such as the WL Challenge to develop initiatives to target and support those individuals within the community who are having difficulties accessing training and/or employment opportunities, in particular males aged over 50 years.

## 2.2 Occupational Structure and Workplace Analysis

West Lancashire has a higher share of employment in skilled occupations than a number of comparator areas, including Liverpool, Wigan, St Helens, Preston and Knowsley. However compared to the national average the Borough has a lower proportion of residents working in the most highly skilled occupations (managers and professionals), with these two groups representing 38% of employment. This unfortunately demonstrates that the Borough has failed to keep pace with the national average in terms of creating highly skilled employment opportunities for residents.

The Borough is also over-reliant on the public sector for high skill employment opportunities with clear evidence showing that almost all of the highly skilled occupations have been created within the public sector, with 44% of residents in these occupations compared to 38% in England and Wales. There is a large concentration of healthcare and education professionals, likely to be explained by the presence of Edge Hill University and Ormskirk & Southport Hospital.

Other other key sources of demand for higher level skills are from the financial and professional services sector, which accounts for 16% of total demand, and the distribution, hotels and restaurants sector which accounts for 15% of total demand. However these sectors have failed to create significant numbers of new job opportunities for high skill residents over the last ten years.

The concentration of employment in low value occupations is further amplified if the Skelmersdale area is looked at in isolation. The 2011 Census shows employment is heavily concentrated in low value sectors, predominantly in process plant, machinery and elementary occupations, with 30% of all jobs in these occupations. Skelmersdale also has a low level of employment in higher skill roles, with just 8% of all jobs in manager, director and senior official positions compared to 11% England average, and 20% of all jobs in professional, associate professional and technical positions compared to 30% across England. Figure 2.2 provides details of the proportion of all employment by occupation, Residence based analysis, 2011.

	Skelmersdale	West Lancashire	England
Managers, Directors & Senior Officials	8%	11%	11%
Professionals, associated professionals & technical	20%	28%	30%
Administration & Secretarial	11%	11%	11%
Skilled Trades	11%	12%	11%
Caring, Leisure, Sales, Customer Service & Other	20%	18%	18%
Process, plant, machinery, elementary occupations	30%	21%	18%

Table 2.1 Proportion of all employment by occupation, Residence based analysis, (Census 2011)

## 2.3 Earnings

West Lancashire has the highest resident median gross weekly earnings (£505.80) when compared to the comparator districts, however it has the lowest workplace median gross weekly earnings (£440.60), this is likely due to the proximity of Liverpool where the workplace earnings exceed resident earnings and a likely destination for West Lancashire residents to work.

The median West Lancashire resident's weekly earnings have grown by 28% since 2002, while national weekly earnings have grown by 31%, and resident's earnings in 2013 standing at £506 per week compared to £521 per week nationally. West Lancashire suffers from a low-wage economy in many sectors with a high proportion of residents travelling out of the Borough for work, typically to well-paid jobs in the city regions of Liverpool, Manchester and Preston, those who live and work in the Borough typically have lower earnings. Figure 2.3 shows the median gross weekly earnings in the Borough for both resident and workplace analysis.

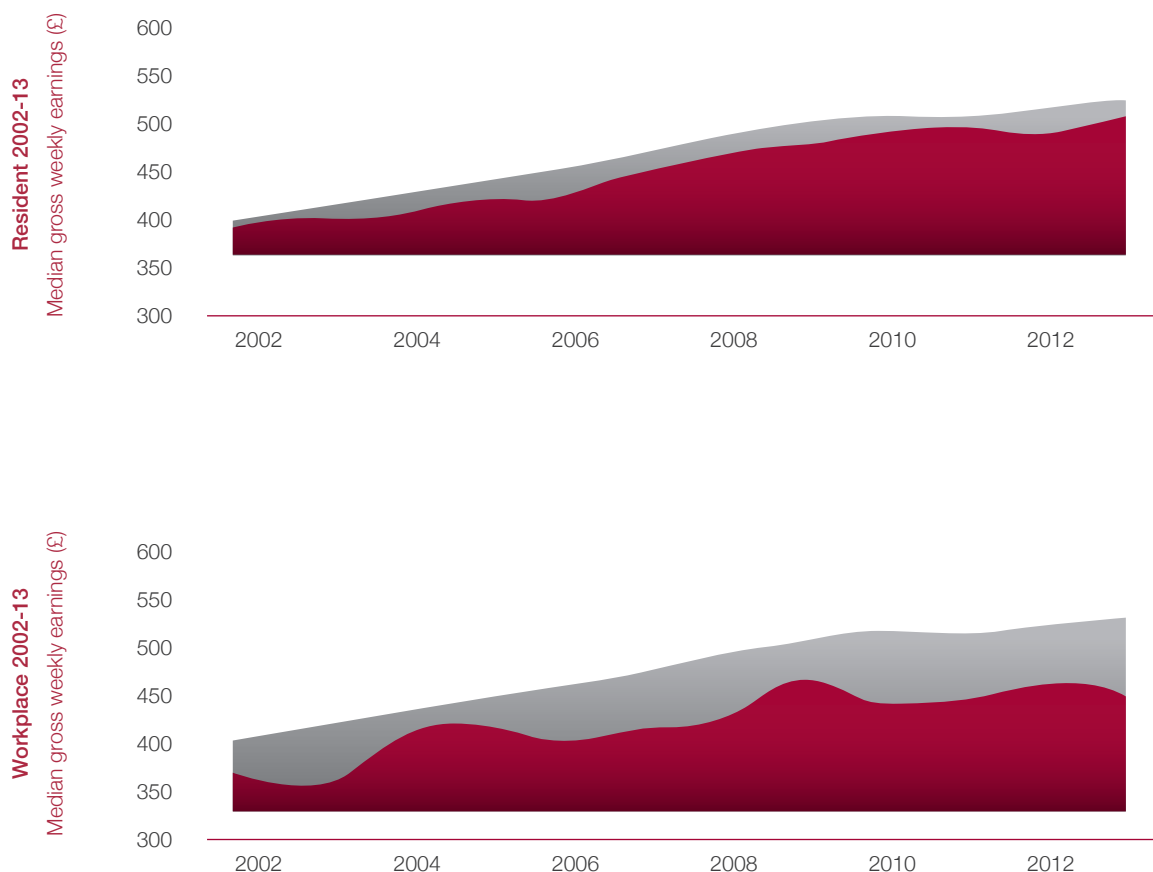


Figure 2.2 Median Gross Weekly Earnings in West Lancashire – Resident and Workplace Analysis, ONS, Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, 2013 2013

### Key

● West Lancashire

● England



## 2.4 Qualifications and Skills

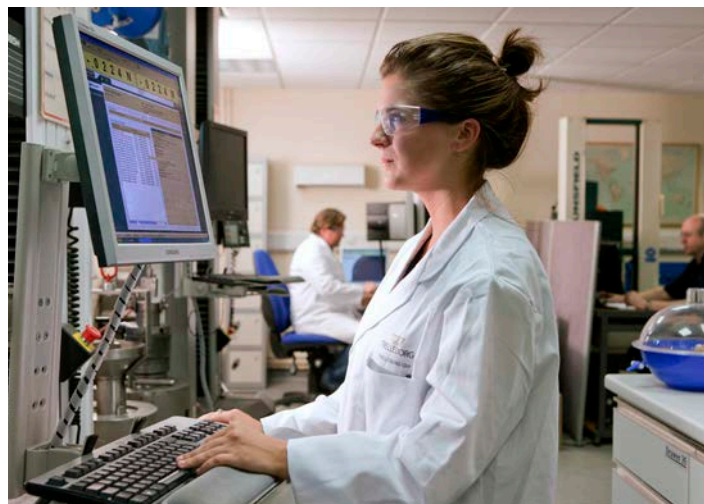
Analysis of qualifications amongst West Lancashire residents shows that only 25% of its working age population (WAP) (16-64) are qualified to degree level (NVQ level 4) and above, compared to 34% across GB. The Borough is ranked 7th out of the 8 comparator districts for its proportion of working age residents with NVQ 4 or above.

Around 12% of the Borough's working age residents have no qualifications compared to 10% nationally. Across all other qualification levels (NVQ Level 1+, NVQ Level 2+ and NVQ Level 3+) the proportion of the Borough's residents which hold each qualification type falls behind the GB average, with the exception of those with other qualifications (any qualifications outside of NVQ 1 to 4) which is equivalent to that of the GB average.

West Lancashire's relatively low proportion of residents with higher level qualifications is reflected in the occupational structure of West Lancashire's work place employment base, which is more concentrated in lower value occupations, such as elementary occupations. Both findings are also mirrored in the relatively low workplace weekly earnings across West Lancashire. If West Lancashire aims to attract inward investment, create new employment opportunities, raise wages levels, and sustainably grow its economy, there will be an on-going imperative to raise the skill profile of its residents across the whole spectrum of basic, intermediate and higher level skills.

Data from the 2011 census of population reveals that 16% of Skelmersdale residents (age 16 and above) are qualified to level 4 and above, compared to 25% across West Lancashire and 27% England average. There are also a particularly high proportion of residents with no qualifications across Skelmersdale, representing around 30% of its population, compared to 24% across West Lancashire and 23% nationally.

Skelmersdale's noticeably poor level of residents with higher level qualifications closely reflects its occupational structure amongst resident jobs which is largely concentrated in lower value occupations. Within Skelmersdale, the Birch Green, Digmaor and Moorside wards have particularly low levels of qualifications, which is again in line with noticeably large concentrations of employment in low value occupations across these areas.





## 2.5 Unemployment and Benefit Dependency

Some areas within the Borough suffer from deprivation, the major concentrations being in Skelmersdale, in particular within the wards of Birch Green, Digmaor, Tanhouse and Moorside. There are 73 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the Borough highlighted by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2010 (IMD 2010). Of these 73 LSOAs 17 are within the top 30% most deprived LSOAs nationally, 19% are within the top 20% and 7% are within the top 10%.

Analysis of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) claimant count data has shown that Skelmersdale has the highest levels of claimant count unemployment in the Borough. In fact, around 70% of claimants in the Borough come from one of the eight Skelmersdale and Up Holland wards. Averaging across these wards results in a claimant count rate of 5.0% for Skelmersdale (almost 1,300 claimants), almost double the 2.6% rate measured across the Borough. This disparity is also mirrored in the index of multiple deprivation data referred to earlier, which accounts for employment and income deprivation amongst other factors. In fact, all fifteen LSOAs with the highest IMD scores were located in Skelmersdale wards.

Area	Claimant Count Rate (% of Working Age Population)
Ashurst	3.3
Birch Green	6.9
Digmaor	8.0
Moorside	6.1
Skelmersdale North	4.2
Skelmersdale South	3.8
Tanhouse	7.5
Up Holland	2.4
Skelmersdale	5.0
West Lancashire	2.6

Source: ONS, Job Seekers Allowance Claimants

Table 2.2 JSA Claimant Rates (%) in Skelmersdale, February 2014

## 2.6 Travel to Work Patterns

Travel to work patterns provide an insight into the strength of an area as an employment base through its ability to retain local labour and to the extent in which it relies on imported labour to fill local employment opportunities. It is also a helpful analysis in understanding the labour market relationship between different areas, which is particularly important for West Lancashire given its position in close proximity to larger city-regions

In July 2014 the ONS released the 2011 origin and destination statistics from the 2011 Census. The data revealed in that year approximately 19,800 workers from other areas travelled into the Borough for employment, while 22,000 West Lancashire residents travelled out of the Borough for work. Overall, West Lancashire is a net exporter of labour with a net outflow (i.e. outflow minus inflow) of around 2,200 workers in 2011. This net outflow results from several key factors:

- The proximity of West Lancashire to neighbouring city regions, with larger, growing and successful economies and employment opportunities, such as in Liverpool, Manchester and Preston
- The Borough's employment base is less diverse, offering fewer opportunities, and a lower wage economy
- The Borough's good road and motorway infrastructure which enables ease of commuting, as well as train links in some parts of the borough.

Despite a sizeable proportion of residents remaining in the Borough for work, an in-flow of around 19,800 workers suggests opportunity for improving the retention of its resident labour force, and the constraints in doing so, such as a miss-match of resident skills and the occupational and/or sectoral composition that may exist across

## Migration

Migration flows illustrate the economic linkages between West Lancashire and its neighbouring authorities. Table 2.3 below shows net migration flows for West Lancashire and the comparator districts over the decade from 2002. Estimates indicate that there were an average of 360 net migrants into West Lancashire per annum between 2002 and 2011.

	2002-2011	10yr annual average	5yr annual average
Chorley	4,700	470	450
Wigan	4,700	470	550
Preston	3,700	370	-320
South Ribble	3,700	370	320
West Lancashire	3,600	360	180
St. Helens	700	70	160
Sefton	-1,400	-150	130
Liverpool	-2,200	-220	-540
Knowsley	-5,600	-560	-640

Source: ONS Mid-year population estimates 2002-2011 (2013). Data rounded to the nearest 100. Annual average figures rounded to the nearest 10.

Table 2.3 Net Migration 2002-2011

Over 4,500 UK residents migrate into and out of the Borough each year on average. International migration flows represent a small proportion of total migration (about 7% of all in-migrants and 5% of all out-migrants). Total net migration has averaged 360 people per annum since 2002. Over the most recent five years the annual average has reduced to around 180 net migrants.

Tables 2.4 and 2.5 show the total in and out migration for the Borough for the year ending June 2012. The migration counts for each of the top 5 districts which experience the greatest flows of migrants into and out from West Lancashire are also shown.

	All		Working Age Population (WAP)		% that are WAP
	Count	% of total	Count	% of total	
Sefton	870	17.3%	560	14.2%	64.2%
Wigan	480	9.5%	330	8.5%	69.5%
Liverpool	330	6.6%	260	6.5%	76.9%
South Ribble	190	3.7%	130	3.4%	70.7%
Knowsley	170	3.3%	110	2.9%	67.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,035</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3,930</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>78.1%</b>

Table 2.4 In-Migration to West Lancashire 2012

	All		Working Age Population (WAP)		% that are WAP
	Count	% of total	Count	% of total	
Sefton	930	18.4%	650	16.0%	69.6%
Wigan	510	10.1%	370	9.2%	72.1%
Liverpool	360	7.1%	300	7.5%	84.6%
Chorley	190	3.7%	130	3.1%	67.1%
St Helens	160	3.1%	130	3.1%	78.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,060</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>4,040</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>79.8%</b>

Source: ONS Internal Migration by Local Authorities in England and Wales, Year Ending June 2012. Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

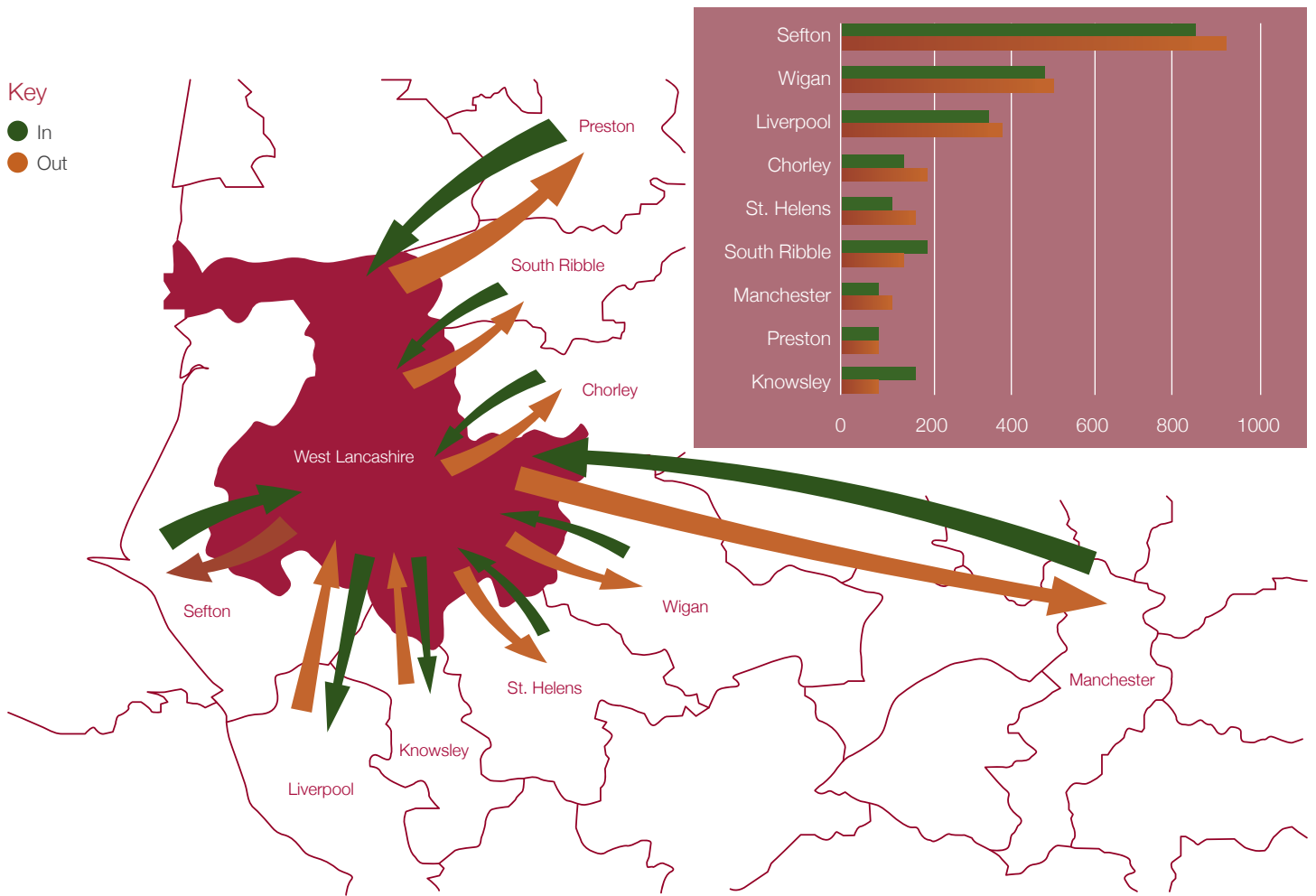
Table 2.5  
Out-Migration from West Lancashire, 2012

The numbers of people who migrate into and out of the Borough are broadly in balance. Net migration is slightly negative when only working age adults are included in the figures - the data shows that in 2011 there were around 100 more working age out-migrants than in-migrants. 78.1% of in migrants are working age, but 79.9% of out migrants are working age.

The estimates can also be broken down by age. They show that in-migration is higher amongst younger age groups. Around 40% of in-migrants are aged 16-24, whereas 36% of out-migrants fall into this age group. Therefore there is a slight net inflow of students/young working-age people (of around 170). These individuals move from a wide variety of locations – only 20% of the total in-migrants in this age category originate from the top 5 districts by rank order, compared to 35.5% of all working in-migrants. This is likely to be influenced by the presence of Edge Hill University which draws in students from around the country.

Figure 2.3 illustrates the flows of internal migration into and out of West Lancashire during 2012. The nine districts shown constitute around 50% of domestic migration flows for the Borough. It is apparent that the largest flows involve Sefton, Wigan and Liverpool. For each of these districts, a slightly greater number of people migrated out from West Lancashire into these districts than migrated from these districts into West Lancashire. South Ribble and Knowsley are the only two districts where net migration into West Lancashire is positive.





Source: ONS Internal Migration by Local Authorities in England and Wales, Year Ending June 2012, ONS. Migration flows of fewer than 100 people are not shown.

West Lancashire's closest linkages are with Sefton; accounting for around 18% of all migration flows. Around 40% of West Lancashire's in-migrants originate from Sefton, Wigan, Liverpool, South Ribble or Knowsley. The Borough's housing offer, the natural environment (green and rural landscape), and its high quality of life offer are all attractive pull factors which shape the significant flows of domestic migrants into the Borough. The Borough's towns and villages continue to attract residents who desire a better overall quality of life than is on offer in nearby urban areas, and who are willing to commute further in order to access job opportunities in the city regions of Liverpool, Manchester and Preston.

## 2.7 Employment and Business Base Trends

### Employment

The latest Business Register Employment Survey (BRES) data indicates that West Lancashire supports around 44,900 jobs. The total number of employee jobs in West Lancashire has increased over the last decade (2003-2012) by around 6,800 jobs, equivalent to a 19% increase. This compares favourably with the growth rate across the comparator districts, which on average experienced a -3% loss of jobs over the last decade, while nationally (GB), there was a 1% increase in jobs.

Skelmersdale plays a critical role in shaping the Borough's employment base and heavily influences the overall employment trend across the Borough. Skelmersdale supports around 43% of West Lancashire's total employment base, being home to around 19,100 jobs in 2012. The major employment locations in the town, including industrial estates such as Pimbo, Gillibrands and Stanley, as well as the town centre and White Moss Business Park account for the majority of this employment.

Skelmersdale has seen a very healthy rise in employment over the last decade. Employment in Skelmersdale has increased by around 2,200 jobs, equivalent to a 13% increase in the total number of jobs in the town. This increase in jobs in Skelmersdale has made a significant contribution towards the Borough's overall employment growth, accounting for around two fifths of all job growth across the West Lancashire. Skelmersdale clearly plays an important role as West Lancashire's large urban centre as a provider of employment and driver of growth in the West Lancashire economy.

Skelmersdale's key role as a local employment base is also evident during periods of employment decline. In the period between 2008 and 2009, West Lancashire experienced a

net loss of 1,200 jobs (3% decline). Over the same period Skelmersdale experienced a loss of approximately 1,300 jobs (7% decline). Despite the decline in employment between 2008 and 2009, West Lancashire and Skelmersdale have, more recently, experienced an increase of around 1,100 and 500 jobs respectively from 2009 to 2012. This equated to an average annual growth rate of around 1% across both areas, which compares favourably to an average -0.6% and 0.1% average annual growth rate across comparator areas and GB respectively.

Table 2.5 illustrates growth in jobs across West Lancashire and each comparator area between 2009 and 2012. Over this period, West Lancashire has experienced a 3% increase in new jobs in the Borough (a growth of 1,100 new jobs), **the highest rate of job growth of all comparator areas**, with the exception of South Ribble which, according to the latest BRES data, has experienced extraordinarily high levels of growth over the same period (+12%).





Area	2009	2012	Absolute change	% growth
Great Britain	26,642,600	26,720,000	77,400	0.3%
South Ribble	49,000	55,000	6,000	12%
West Lancashire	42,200	43,300	1,100	3%
St. Helens	60,500	61,500	1,000	2%
Skelmersdale	18,200	18,700	500	3%
Knowsley	55,500	56,000	500	1%
Chorley	40,200	39,200	- 1,000	-2%
Liverpool	228,600	226,400	- 2,200	-1%
Wigan	99,900	95,700	- 4,200	-4%
Preston	87,400	81,900	- 5,500	-6%
Sefton	92,400	85,000	- 7,400	-8%

Source: ONS, Business Register and Employment Survey 2009-2012

Table 2.6 Change in jobs from 2009-2012

## Sectors

In 2012 the public service and manufacturing sectors were significant employers, accounting for 26% (11,100 jobs) and 15% (6,300 jobs) of all employees respectively. The retail and the accommodation and food services sectors accounted for the next largest share of the Borough's employee base – accounting for around 9% and 8% of all West Lancashire employees.

West Lancashire's predominantly rural nature and the key role of the agriculture sector across the West Lancashire economy, is not reflected in the analysis due to the limitations of BRES data which excludes farm agriculture employment. As a result, the data suggests that the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector plays a limited role in the West Lancashire employment base, accounting for a mere 0.2% (100 jobs) of employment.

However, this is not an accurate reflection of the importance agricultural employment plays in the Borough. Although a few years older, employment statistics from DEFRA for 2010 highlighted that around 2,300 people worked in West Lancashire's agricultural sector. This equated to around 5% of total employment when measured by BRES in 2010. Compared to England (where agricultural employment accounted for 1.2% of total employment) there was four times the concentration of employment in the agricultural sector in West Lancashire. Of those employed in agriculture in the borough, 55% were full-time workers, 20% were regular part-time workers, and 25% were casual workers.

Overall, West Lancashire has a higher concentration of employment compared to the GB average across lower value sectors, which tend to have a lower occupational skill requirement, thus reflecting West Lancashire's occupation and skills base.

Analysis of the sectoral distribution of employment in West Lancashire compared to the distribution nationally allows a comparison of the relative concentration of employment by sector in the Borough. This is called Location Quotient (LQ) analysis. A LQ above 1 for West Lancashire highlights that the Borough has a particular specialism/concentration within a sector compared to the national economy as a whole, as highlighted within Table 2.6 below.

Sector	West Lancashire		Great Britain		LQ West Lancashire Vs. GB
	Number	%	Number (000's)	%	
Public sector	11,100	26	7,463	28	0.9
Manufacturing	6,300	15	2,298	9	1.7
Retail	4,000	9	2,726	10	0.9
Accommodation & food services	3,600	8	1,818	7	1.2
Transport & storage	3,100	7	1,211	5	1.6
Professional, scientific & technical	2,700	6	2,000	8	0.8
Business administration & support services	2,700	6	2,231	8	0.8
Wholesale	2,300	5	1,086	4	1.3
Construction	2,200	5	1,194	5	1.2
Arts, entertainment recreation & other services	1,312	3	1,182	4	0.7
Financial & insurance	1,200	3	1,036	4	0.7
Motor trades	1,100	3	460	2	1.5
Mining, quarrying & utilities	700	2	353	1	1.3
Information & communication	600	1	1,031	4	0.4
Property	200	1	426	2	0.3
Agriculture, forestry & fishing*	100	0.2	207	0.8	0.3

Source: ONS, Business Register and Employment Survey, 2012

Table 2.7 Employee Jobs across West Lancashire and GB, 2012

\*Note: Excludes farm agriculture sectors

West Lancashire has always had a high concentration of employment in the manufacturing and transport and storage sector, amplified further at the Skelmersdale level. Nearly a quarter (23%) of employee jobs (4,300) are based in the manufacturing sector in Skelmersdale and 10% (1,800) are in the transport and storage sector. These proportions significantly exceed the level nationally with more than double the concentration of employment in both sectors locally. Unlike West Lancashire's employment base, **Skelmersdale has an above average concentration of employment in the financial and insurance sector.** This is linked to the location of one of the Cooperative Bank's main customer service and 'back-office' facilities in the town. **Skelmersdale also has a LQ equivalent to that nationally** for its concentration of employment in the **professional, scientific and technical service sectors.**



# 3 HOW WE ARE SUPPORTING LOCAL ECONOMY NOW



# HOW ARE WE SUPPORTING OUR ECONOMY NOW?

## 3.1 Strong Partnerships



Being located within the County of Lancashire, West Lancashire is a member of the Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The Lancashire LEP are supportive of West Lancashire Borough Council's key projects, in particular around the growth of Skelmersdale town centre and Skelmersdale rail station. In 2014 the Borough Council also became corporate members of the Liverpool Enterprise Partnership as West Lancashire's Elected Members recognised the importance of being strategically located to maximise the opportunities coming forward for our businesses and those looking for employment.

The Borough Council recognises that we cannot deliver all the necessary services our businesses and residents require and that partnership engagement is critical. The Borough Council works with a range of partner organisations from the public, private and community, voluntary and social enterprise sector, and we have developed strong relationships that continue to successfully deliver economic activity across the Borough.

One West Lancashire was formed from the legacy of the West Lancashire Local Strategic Partnership and is currently supported by West Lancashire Council for Voluntary Services (WLCVS) who provide the secretariat function. One West Lancashire is a voluntary partnership which brings together leaders from the public and community, voluntary, faith and social enterprise (VCSE) sectors. The aim of this forum is to make the best use of available assets and resources in order to improve social, economic, health, educational and environmental wellbeing of the Borough.

The Borough Council has worked closely with a range of partners from the public, private and the community/voluntary/faith and social sector on various capital and revenue economic programmes and projects over recent years. Many of the current initiatives are highlighted within this Strategy



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## 3.2 Let's TALK Business

The Borough Council has a strong track record of delivering economic regeneration programmes and projects, including the flagship West Lancashire Investment Centre in Skelmersdale.

The Council's commitment to businesses within the Borough is carried out at the highest level, with the two Managing Directors engaging directly with key businesses to better understand the needs and issues our businesses are facing.

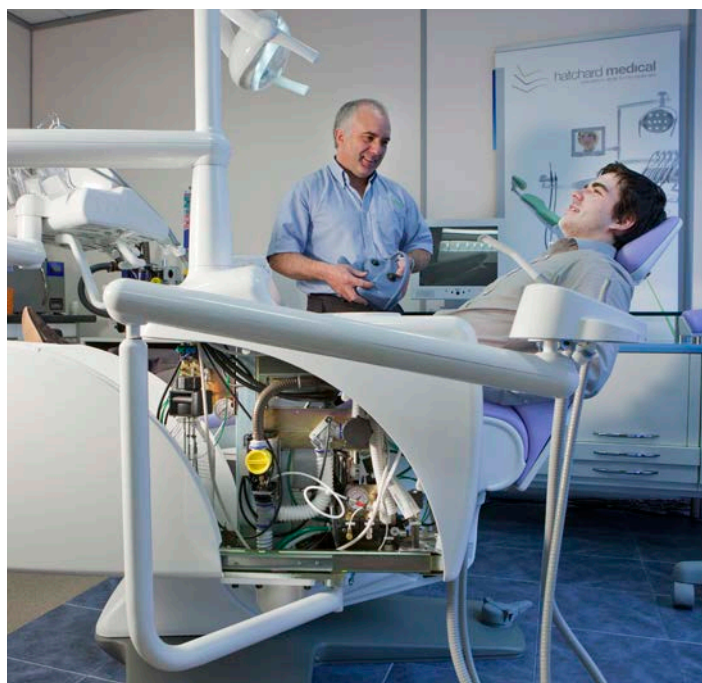
Recent times has seen the number of business support programmes steadily increasing across Lancashire, with a range of advice, support, guidance and mentoring schemes available to businesses together with grants, loans and financial support.

The Borough Council's Economic Regeneration Team acts as a one-stop-shop for all business support enquiries, we have developed a Business Support Framework that identifies the range of support mechanisms and how the Council promotes this activity through the various mediums available, including e-newsletters, direct mail and websites. We are able to support individuals to start up, indigenous businesses to develop and expand, and provide clear advice and support to inward investors through signposting and referrals to the right provider. The Council team also assists with searches for sites and premises and with various workforce solutions such as help to take on apprentices.

### Starting Up

Those individuals considering starting up in business can access a wide range of support from interactive workshops based on business basics, to one to one support and mentoring from qualified business advisors.

The Council is closely linked with the Start-Up Lancashire Programme, and the Social Enterprise in Lancashire Network (SELNET) who are the recognised lead organisation to support start-up social enterprises in need of specialist expertise and advice.



## Funding and Finance

Key programmes for supporting established businesses across Lancashire are delivered under the BOOST umbrella, with initiatives including Accelerating Business Growth (ABG) and ABG+, delivered by Regenerate Pennine Lancashire, as well as the Growing Places, Growth Sector Support Programme, Funding Circle and Rosebud loans, delivered by Lancashire County Council.

The Growth Sector Support programme which is delivered under BOOST is also offering grant funding and mentoring to help with developing information technology, product development including intellectual property and prototyping, and process innovation. Grants of up to £5000 are available to eligible non-retail SMEs in certain priority sectors.

The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) 2014-17 is anticipated to commence in 2015 and will provide support to businesses and communities located within the rural areas of Lancashire. The previous RDPE programme completed in 2013/14 and supported several businesses across West Lancashire, drawing-down funding totalling around £800k in a 3 year period.

Enterprise Vouchers up to £1000 are also available for eligible start-up businesses and businesses up to 3 years old in West Lancashire.

Government backed start-up loans are currently available and being delivered by various partners including Lancashire Community Finance and Merseyside Special Investment Fund.

There are a whole range of business support programmes taking place across Lancashire to support businesses, many of which are delivered by Universities and Colleges across the County, together with additional opportunities made available via the relationships we are developing within the Liverpool City Region that our West Lancashire businesses could potentially exploit.

It would be impossible to detail all the support programmes currently available and what may come on stream in the future, however Council officers will need to continue to keep abreast of this changing environment to ensure the businesses located here can benefit from the support and expertise that is available to further their growth aspirations.

## Sites and Premises

West Lancashire Borough Council has an extensive commercial property portfolio offering a variety of business premises to let on flexible terms and at competitive rates and a range of industrial, warehouse, storage, retail units and office suites available.

A commercial property database is maintained by the Council which includes Council owned land and property as well as those managed by intermediaries.

Businesses can search the database via the Council's website [www.westlancs.gov.uk/locate](http://www.westlancs.gov.uk/locate) or we can provide a bespoke tailored search based on a business' individual requirements.

Bespoke reports can also be provided for potential inward investors matching suitable properties, along with any additional required information such as labour market statistics, funding information and the business support available to businesses based within the Borough.





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## West Lancashire Investment Centre

Located at Junction 4 of the M58, the West Lancashire Investment Centre offers easy access to Liverpool, Manchester and Preston with great access to the region's M6/M57 motorway networks.

A flagship Council-owned office and conference facility, where tenants benefit from a fantastic modern building and facilities, which includes an on-site café, plus a dedicated on-site management team to ensure everything is in place to a business thrive. The Centre offers flexibility to accommodate growth, excellent infrastructure and connectivity, lease arrangements with no long term tie-ins, 24/7 access, a dedicated reception and administrative service as well as a Virtual Office service and excellent meeting and conference room facilities.

## Greenshoots

In 2013 the Council demolished four 5,000sq ft of unfit commercial units at Gorse Place Business Park in Gillibrands, Skelmersdale to make way for the Greenshoots development which will consist of up to eleven smaller high-spec, modern units ranging from 1,250sq ft to 2,250sq ft.

The new development will meet demand for smaller units which will be constructed to a standard sensitive to green issues and should be available to let in 2015.

The new units will offer businesses:

- A secure, gated facility
- Abundance of parking
- Yard space and internal offices
- B2-B8 use class
- Modern, high specification units with flexible terms and competitive rates.

## Workforce Solutions

The Council offers bespoke support and guidance on workforce solutions to businesses. This may include providing information on up-skilling employees or accessing local training courses, as well as signposting to Council partners to ensure businesses are aware of and can access all available support and training options available to them.

As well as enhancing the skills of current employees, guidance is also available for businesses looking to recruit, including providing information on the area's labour market, links to local educational establishments, as well as providing support to businesses that are looking to enhance their workforce by recruiting apprentices.

This area of work very much links into the West Lancashire Challenge project and the need to continue to support those currently in employment and those who are unable to secure employment or training due to barriers or complex needs.



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### 3.3 Let's Talk Skills, Training and Employment

The Skills, Training and Employment Partnership (STEP) has been in existence for over 5 years, with partners meeting on a quarterly basis to discuss Government policy, new projects and issues affecting the West Lancashire Borough. The Partnership enables all the key parties involved in the skills, worklessness and employment arena to share ideas, best practice and develop new projects. The Partnership also currently monitors the **West Lancashire Challenge** project. The Partnership is currently Chaired by the Council Leader and Portfolio Holder for Regeneration & Estates and is facilitated by the Economic Regeneration Manager. The STEP group reports into the One West Lancashire partnership to ensure joined-up thinking and best practice.

The West Lancashire Challenge project is a great example of partnership working involving key partners such as Job Centre Plus, West Lancashire College and WLCVS, together with a wide range of partners from local social enterprises, Lancashire County Council, Citizens Advice Bureau and other training, IT and digital providers. In the last 3 years, the project has achieved the following key outputs:

- Almost 300 apprentices into employment
- 363 individuals signed up to the 'Passport' scheme
- 100 financial inclusion reviews
- 40 work experience placements
- Over 50 businesses engaged (12 month period)
- 1500 volunteering hours attributed

It is likely that issues arising from welfare reforms will have a negative impact on those who are unemployed, live in areas of deprivation or have complex needs that are preventing them from accessing training, volunteering or employment. From the experience of the 'pathway' areas initiatives such as Universal Credit are already negatively impacting on particular members of the community.

Partnership working is very strong in West Lancashire, especially around the skills, worklessness and employment agenda and it is clear from those Universal Credit 'pathway' areas that it will take great partnership-working to be able to support the numbers of people who are likely to be affected by welfare reform measures.

Universal Credit roll out in the Borough began in September 2014 and we are well placed through the well-established relationships that have been developed and maintained with partners to help support those individuals affected, with the ultimate aim of helping individuals to become more 'job ready' and equipped with the digital skills to be confident to get online, apply for jobs and access the whole host of training and support that is freely available. The West Lancashire Challenge project can help to facilitate this activity if resources continue to be made available.

New and creative projects are emerging from within the Housing and Regeneration Service Area to support individual tenants into employment, training and volunteering opportunities, with a particular emphasis around the digital agenda. The Get Ahead Get Online events that have been delivered by the Economic Regeneration Team in partnership with other providers across the Borough have to date proved successful in engaging with JCP clients and unemployed housing tenants, providing support to become more digitally aware with an email address and an up to date CV.







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## 3.4 Community and Social Enterprise



There are a range of entrepreneurial community and social enterprises operating across West Lancashire, including recycling and environmental businesses through to training organisations.

The West Lancashire Social Enterprise Hub is part of a network of support linking into the sub regional network, SELNET, whose aim is to support the development of community and social enterprises across Lancashire. The nature of these enterprises means not only are they providing a range of services within the communities in which they operate, they can also provide vital grass roots support to individuals who have a range of complex issues preventing them from accessing mainstream training, volunteering or employment opportunities.

WLCVS provide a supporting role to the West Lancashire Social Enterprise Hub, which in recent times the Council committed resources to supporting, although resources are currently limited the Council continues to support the aims and objectives of the SELNET and the West Lancashire Social Enterprise Hub.



# 4 FUTURE STRATEGY & OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH



“We were able to  
**DEVELOP EIGHT CORE  
STRATEGIC THEMES** that will  
**DRIVE FORWARD** economic  
**GROWTH** in the **borough**”



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# FUTURE STRATEGY & OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

By working with Regeneris Consulting Ltd, we were able to develop eight core strategic themes that will drive forward economic growth in the Borough. We have taken these eight themes to develop an Action Plan with SMART outcomes that will enable a focused and targeted programme of activity to be delivered over the short, medium and long term.

Each of the themes set out below has a **Key Ask**, a key project(s) that we see as a priority within each theme, followed by a set of actions unique to that theme. The organisation indicated in bold purple denotes the lead organisation.



## 4.1 Theme 1 - Stimulating Change

Theme 1 is about putting in place the resources, processes and structures that are essential to capitalise on and further drive forward economic growth in local areas. For West Lancashire this will mean:

- A business facing set up, with sustained engagement at a senior level with key local businesses.
- A can do attitude and emphasis on being open for business and growth.
- A focus on prioritisation of the Skelmersdale regeneration agenda and partnership working.
- Getting West Lancashire's voice heard amongst sub regional and national partners in relation to West Lancashire's needs and opportunities.

It is recognised that the strongest performing local economies are underpinned by assertive and proactive leadership on economic development and regeneration issues, underpinned by a clear vision and agreed set of priorities. This approach to economic leadership needs to engage with stakeholders including the public, private and community/voluntary sectors at the highest level.

Skelmersdale is the key driver for growth within the Borough, therefore to ensure local businesses and residents do not miss out on opportunities, West Lancashire needs to further raise its game on a strategic level, be it on a sub-region, region or at a national level. To do this the Borough Council and our partners LCC and HCA have committed to put in place the resources, processes and structures that are essential for driving forward economic growth.

**Key Ask: Establish a 'Skelmersdale Leadership Board' that will champion the regeneration of Skelmersdale through forceful and effective stewardship**

This will require support from a range of partners, in particular the private sector, to establish a Board with strong leadership to drive forward regeneration activity for Skelmersdale

**Timescale:** 2015-2017  
**Partners:** WLBC/LCC/HCA/Private Sector

## Theme 1 Action Plan

Action	Estimated Timescale	Partners
A more forceful and effective stewardship of the Skelmersdale regeneration agenda, including the establishment of a 'Skelmersdale Leadership Board' and local business/partner Ambassadors	2015-2017	<b>WLBC/</b> LCC/HCA/ Private sector
Be more vocal amongst sub-regional and national partners of West Lancashire's needs and opportunities	2015/16	WLBC/LCC/HCA/ STEP partners/ schools
The Borough Council will become an even more business facing organisation, with sustained engagement at a senior level with key local businesses, developers and investors	2015-2017	WLBC
Develop an action plan and make resources available to further develop the approach to business engagement and support business growth enabling them to capitalize on sub-regional and national funding programmes. This needs to focus on ensuring businesses perceive WLBC as a Council which is "open for business and open for growth"	2015-2017	WLBC



## 4.2 Theme 2 - Providing the right scale and mix of Employment Sites

A key component in the achievement of the Borough's economic growth objectives will be the availability of the right balance and scale of employment sites.

Access to the commercial powerhouses of Greater Manchester and Merseyside, including proximity to the Port of Liverpool, as well as labour supply have been the key pull factors for a range of occupiers for several decades – in particular in the logistics sector. Allied to this accessibility, the availability of large employment sites in and around Skelmersdale and the M58 motorway, with relatively low land values and lower-cost rents have also been key determining factors for the industrial developments seen to date.

As well as opportunities around logistics, West Lancashire and particularly Skelmersdale are good locations for manufacturing facilities across both the SME and larger business sectors.

The current West Lancashire Local Plan has identified a number of strategic employment sites, as well as other significant employment sites in the Borough. The Local Plan seeks to deliver 75Ha of new employment development by 2027, mainly across Skelmersdale (52Ha), with the remainder across Burscough, Simonswood and smaller sites in rural areas.

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Of the 52Ha in Skelmersdale, around 30% (17Ha) is identified as arising through the redevelopment of under-utilised/vacant land and premises within existing employment areas (e.g. Pimbo, Gillibrands, Stanley). Whilst the delivery of 17 ha of employment land through the redevelopment of land within existing employment areas is challenging, this element of the employment land supply in the Local Plan is not anticipated to come forward until after 2020, allowing time to identify the most appropriate locations for redevelopment or an alternative supply of land if redevelopment proves undeliverable. In addition, there is also the release of 10 ha of employment land in Burscough as part of the Yew Tree Farm development which will provide high quality premises for new or expanding businesses and those relocating into the Borough.

The Liverpool Local Enterprise Partnership's (LEP) Superport land demand assessment (2014) points to the need to accommodate approximately 630ha of employment land for logistics and manufacturing floorspace (80% of which is for logistics) for the forecast growth at Liverpool2. However, further work is required to ratify these forecasts and understand what proportion of any growth in demand for employment land could be accommodated in West Lancashire.

At present, West Lancashire does not have a sufficient supply of large allocated sites adjacent to, or in close proximity to the M58 corridor to take advantage of the longer-term logistics and warehousing opportunities that will emerge from the growth of the Port of Liverpool (Liverpool2). Only the XL/G-Park sites in the Stanley area of Skelmersdale, as well as land adjacent to Fredericks Diaries (now Fruitappeal) in Simonswood, are identified in the Liverpool City Region LEPs' analysis of current high quality sites of over 5ha within a 60 minute drive-time from the Port. While these sites could accommodate port-related growth in the short-medium term, a longer term position on site allocations in the Borough, particularly around Skelmersdale will be required.

We also recognise that in order to build on West Lancashire's commercial advantages (i.e. proximity to the Port, non-congested motorway infrastructure, proximity to major urban centres and markets, availability of labour and wage rates) and attract significant inward investment opportunities from businesses wishing to develop regional or even national distribution centres (RDCs/NDCs) to serve their markets, we need to begin the process of identifying future employment site allocations.

**Key Ask: Give consideration to the potential for the allocation, and delivery of additional employment land within, or in close proximity to Skelmersdale**

This requires partners working together to maximise forthcoming opportunities for economic growth by considering additional employment land opportunities.

**Timescale:** 2015-2020

**Partners:** WLBC/Liverpool LEP/Lancashire LEP



## Theme 2 Action Plan

Action	Estimated Timescale	Partners
Consider the potential for the allocation, and delivery of additional employment land within, or in close proximity to Skelmersdale to meet longer term needs	2015-2020	<b>WLBC/</b> Liverpool LEP/ Lancashire LEP
Deliver Greenshoots	2016-2018	<b>WLBC/private</b> sector
Improve the signage and the wider environment of Skelmersdale's existing employment areas, particularly at key gateways	2015-2017	<b>WLBC/LCC</b>
Work with the private sector to ensure the delivery of allocated employment land at Burscough and Simonswood	2015-2020	<b>WLBC/LCC/private</b> sector
Consider the potential for a Greenshoots 2 development, further remodeling workspaces in Skelmersdale	2018-2020	<b>WLBC/private</b> sector



## 4.3 Theme 3 – Housing as a Driver for Change

Given the Borough's location, rural nature, and mix of housing and settlements, much of West Lancashire has long been regarded as an attractive and popular residential location. In particular, commuting to employment opportunities in Lancashire and across the Liverpool and Greater Manchester city regions is relatively straightforward and attractive for many residents employed in managerial and professional roles. West Lancashire needs to build on these assets and attract more managerial and professional residents, whilst working with partners to up-skill the current local workforce and the workforce of the future.

People living within Skelmersdale are reaping the benefits from the Borough Council's £65m investment in its housing stock, with major schemes including new bathrooms in approximately 80% of the Council's homes and new kitchens in approximately 60% of the Council's housing stock. The £5.5m Firbeck Revival scheme is breathing new life into the estate, with new kitchens and bathrooms as well as double-glazed uPVC windows and doors, new roofs and internal roof insulation. Demolition on 10 three-storey blocks of flats followed by consultations on building up to 44 new Council homes on the Firbeck estate to replace most of the flats with homes that meet modern requirements of families.

Along with West Lancashire's popularity brings challenges:

- Parts of West Lancashire now suffer from an identified short-fall in new housing (as a result of relatively low levels of housing completions) and clear affordability constraints as house prices have continued to increase. Affordability is a particular concern for those on lower incomes, or those forming new households.
- West Lancashire also has an ageing population and a contracting working age population, when measured as a proportion of all residents and this position is forecast to continue. If the Borough is going to deliver economic growth, there will be a clear requirement for the Borough to grow its resident workforce to meet future employment growth needs. This is also important in sustaining the long-term vibrancy and vitality of the Borough's towns and settlements through household expenditure.

A clear regeneration opportunity is to **grow Skelmersdale further as a housing location of choice** and meet some of the challenges identified above. The West Lancashire Local Plan identifies a number of allocated housing sites within Skelmersdale, including Whalleys, Firwood Road and Chequer Lane which will accommodate around 1200 new homes, together with housing development in the town centre having the capacity for 600+ new homes. Given the appetite within Government to support housing growth, and the funding support this could potentially leverage, Skelmersdale can play a key role in meeting housing need within the Borough, but also more widely.

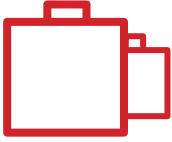
#### Key Ask: Support for the delivery of housing estate improvements

Funding to enable a rolling programme of estate improvements to be delivered in Skelmersdale. This activity is seen as a priority as it will help to increase the overall image of Skelmersdale by providing environmental and other visual improvements throughout the town.

**Timescale:** 2015-2025  
**Partners:** WLBC/HCA/LCC

#### Theme 3 Action Plan

Action	Estimated Timescale	Partners
Support for the delivery of housing estate improvements	2015-2025	WLBC/HCA/LCC
Support the delivery of significant new market and affordable housing in Skelmersdale on allocated sites, including within the town centre	2015-2025	WLBC/HCA/ Private sector
Work with the private sector to explore if additional opportunities for further new housing growth in Skelmersdale can be identified and work with partners to drive this forward	2015-2025	WLBC/HCA/Private sector
Support the delivery of homes on allocated sites in Burscough and Ormskirk	2015-2020	WLBC/Private sector
Develop employment initiatives in collaboration with house builders, contractors and training providers, to support local people into employment	2015-2016	WLBC/ West Lancashire College STEP/private sector/



## 4.4 Theme 4 – Revitalised Town Centres

Driving up the vibrancy and vitality of West Lancashire's town centres is a key part of a successful local economy. The Borough's town centre retail and leisure offer is very mixed, with a significant level of leakage of resident expenditure outside of the Borough (e.g. Southport, Liverpool, Wigan and Greater Manchester).

The objective for all the town centres must be to drive up footfall, significantly increasing the numbers of people who shop, work, use services and spend their leisure time in the Borough's main towns. While the mix of investment needed will differ for each town, there are likely to be common actions including:

- The strengthening of classic town centre functions (markets, other retail, key public services). While town centre retailing faces considerable commercial challenges, it must continue to be a core part of the role of the Borough's town centres.
- An emphasis on the development of niche strengths, which come to define the roles of the individual towns. This could include the development of cultural facilities and activities or the provision of new leisure and visitor uses (e.g. cafes, bars and restaurants).

We know that Skelmersdale's retail offer needs significant enhancement and that the leisure offer and night time economy is extremely poor. The delivery of a new town centre is something the Council and our partners have been pushing for many years. One of our key strategic actions is the delivery of the partners' comprehensive town centre development scheme for Skelmersdale, led by St Modwen.

Ormskirk has a market town offer, with a traditional town centre serving both local workers and residents. The town has rather modest comparison retailing, but a better than average leisure and night time economy, compared to other parts of the Borough. There is a need to build on Ormskirk's assets and to ensure that any weaknesses are addressed. Burscough has a smaller offer, given proximity to Ormskirk, but is perceived as being a centre which is performing relatively strongly for its size, and which there have been investments such as the Burscough Wharf development which have improved the local offer.

Revitalised town centres and improved public realm and environment can also support housing growth, can lessen leakage of expenditure, and deliver improved perceptions and investor confidence.

### Key Ask: New Wet & Dry Leisure Centre in Skelmersdale Town Centre

A major new wet & dry leisure centre located within the town centre to serve Skelmersdale and wider West Lancashire. This will strengthen the leisure offer in the town centre and promote footfall back into the centre linking directly into forthcoming Leisure Strategy 2015-2025.

**Timescale:** 2015-2020  
**Partners:** Private Sector/WLBC/LCC

### Key Ask: Provision of night-time economy in Skelmersdale Town Centre

Skelmersdale lacks a night-time economy (cinema/bars/restaurants) and it is vital than any town centre scheme brings forward these necessary facilities.

**Timescale:** 2015-2020  
**Partners:** Private Sector/WLBC/HCA/LCC/Marketing Lancashire

### Key Ask: Public Realm in Skelmersdale Town Centre

To attract residents and visitors into the town centre, it is essential that it has attractive public realm to not only complement any town centre regeneration but to draw together the current offer with the new centre, including the supermarket, library, Concourse Shopping Centre, Wet & Dry leisure facility, etc.

Timescale: 2015-2020  
Partners: **LCC/Private Sector**/WLBC/Marketing Lancashire

### Key Ask: Improve Ormskirk's Town Centre Offer

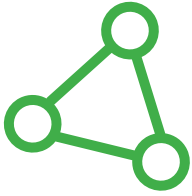
To ensure Ormskirk remains a vibrant town centre which can respond to a changing retail environment, there is a need to implement the developing Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan. This could include improving the bus station, Moor Street improvements and look at potential development sites and the general environment of the Town Centre and its marketing and promotion.

Timescale: 2015-2020  
Partners: **WLBC/LCC/private sector**

### Theme 4 Action Plan

Action	Estimated Timescale	Partners
Deliver the Skelmersdale Vision Town Centre proposals for the regeneration of Skelmersdale	2015-2020	<b>St Modwen/</b> WLBC/ HCA/ LCC/LCP
Investigate funding/ development opportunities to re-develop civic spaces and leisure facilities within Skelmersdale Town Centre	2015-2016	<b>WLBC/LCC</b>
Ensure proposals for infrastructure projects which complement the regeneration of Skelmersdale Town Centre are co-ordinated and joined-up	2015-2022	<b>LCC/WLBC</b>
Implement a skills, training and employment strategy, drawing in all the relevant partners to maximise employment opportunities for local people arising from the regeneration of Skelmersdale town centre	2015-2020	<b>STEP/WLBC</b>
Improve Ormskirk's Town Centre Offer through the implementation of the Ormskirk Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan, working with partners including local business networks and social enterprises	2015-2020	<b>WLBC/LCC/</b> Private Sector





## 4.5 Theme 5 – A Better Connected West Lancashire

The M58 motorway provides West Lancashire with a relatively congestion free route into Liverpool and towards the M6 motorway for access to Greater Manchester and Lancashire. Access to the M58/M6 motorways from Skelmersdale and the surrounding areas is particularly easy for those with access to a car or for businesses. Proximity to labour and motorway accessibility are two key reasons for the growth of logistics, warehousing and manufacturing businesses within Skelmersdale and along this motorway corridor. The development and overall success of the White Moss Business Park is also attributable to location and motorway accessibility.

While motorway accessibility is a positive for those with access to a car, Skelmersdale does not have any direct rail connectivity to other parts of the Borough, or out towards Merseyside, Greater Manchester and parts of Lancashire. Skelmersdale is the second largest town in the North West without a train station, a major factor which is inhibiting the town's growth potential. For a town of its size, location within a largely rural borough, and its socio-economic issues, this is a particularly unusual position, but one which is more a consequence of the planning/cost constraints of the New Town era. Without access to a car or train services, public bus services do serve the town. However, connecting to other towns within and outside of the Borough is often cited as being challenging for employment or leisure purposes given costs and frequency of services.

As well as poor public transport options, movement and accessibility within Skelmersdale has also been challenging for both pedestrian and cyclist. This again is a function of the principal in the New Town of separating car users and pedestrians/cyclists through the creation of walkways and under-passes/subways. These are now considered dated, undesirable, unsafe, and often not the most direct route between residential, employment, education and leisure areas of the town. With the opportunities arising around the regeneration of Skelmersdale town centre it will be important to also address public transportation/infrastructure issues facing the town, including pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, which can play a role in linking residential, retail, leisure, education and employment areas as well as other areas of the Borough.

Digital connectivity is considered a key requisite for any successful economic area (i.e. a key utility for businesses, homes, education, health and social care) therefore it is extremely important to ensure the Borough remains an attractive location for businesses and residents. The roll out of superfast broadband across Lancashire is being supported by commercial provider BT in conjunction with Lancashire County Council's Superfast Lancashire project. Superfast Lancashire's focus is to ensure employment areas have access to high-speed broadband connections, although they also have a community element it is not their main priority.

### **Key Ask: Skelmersdale Rail Link and Station/Transport Hub**

Delivery of a new rail station next to Skelmersdale town centre, with integration into the public transport network and cycling and walking provision, as well as car parking. The new rail link and station would be served by services to both Liverpool and Manchester, providing direct access to growth opportunities in both Merseyside (including those associated with the Superport) and Greater Manchester (including the Enterprise Zone at Manchester Airport).

**Timescale:** 2014/15 GRIP 2/3 work, 2015/16-2021/22 planning and implementation  
**Partners:** Merseytravel/LCC/Network Rail/WLBC

### Key Ask: West Lancashire 'Wheel'

Delivery of a circular cycling and walking route connecting major settlements, employment areas, visitor destinations, transport modes and educational establishments in the Borough. Entry points accessible by rail from Preston, Southport, Wigan/Manchester and Liverpool. This could be a major visitor draw to the Borough whilst helping to support and grow businesses along its route.

**Timescale:** 2015-2022

**Partners:** WLBC/LCC/SUSTRANS/Canals and Rivers Trust/Marketing Lancashire

### Key Ask: Rail Investment in West Lancashire

Work with key partners to investigate measures to improve the service on the Ormskirk to Preston line (including potential electrification) and to address connectivity between this line and the Southport to Wigan/Manchester line in the Burscough area, so as to provide greater accessibility and connectivity for more parts of West Lancashire by rail.

**Timescale:** 2017-2019

**Partners:** LCC/Merseytravel/Network Rail/WLBC

### Theme 5 Action Plan

Action	Estimated Timescale	Partners
Pro-actively support the development of the business case and future delivery of a new rail station and transport hub in Skelmersdale	2015-2022	LCC/Mersey Travel/Network Rail/WLBC
Develop cycle and walking infrastructure between key settlements across the Borough (West Lancashire Wheel)	2015-2022	WLBC/LCC
Develop sustainable and long-term transport initiatives to connect Skelmersdale's residential and employment areas to support job seekers to access skills, training and employment opportunities	2015-2018	LCC/WLBCSTEP
Support the implementation of Superfast Lancashire to ensure West Lancashire's businesses and residents have access to the latest digital infrastructure	2015-2016	LCC/BT/WLBC
Develop a movement strategy for Ormskirk	2015-2025	LCC/WLBC
Continued case making for rail infrastructure improvements in Ormskirk and Burscough	2015-2019	LCC/Mersey Travel/Network Rail/WLBC
Support the development of the proposed Tarleton 'Green Lane Link' to alleviate rural road congestion and support businesses	2019-2020	LCC/WLBC



## 4.6 Theme 6 – Promoting the Place

West Lancashire can often be overshadowed by its proximity to larger neighbouring authorities and city regions, with Skelmersdale perhaps suffering from some negative perceptions. However with the right approach, there is a positive story to tell about Skelmersdale being a place to **live**, a place to **work**, a place to **study**, a place to start or **locate a business** and a place to **invest** in. West Lancashire needs to find a way to shout loudly about the Skelmersdale story with a cadre of powerful, senior level advocates and ambassadors required to help to make this happen.

This theme should be seen as both an enabler of change for West Lancashire and as a key part of the efforts to reposition Skelmersdale and raise its profile and to garner support for investment priorities. Presenting a positive story about improvement and aspiration, sustained over a long period, will help businesses, potential new residents and investors to think differently about the Borough.

The Council and its partners have a substantial amount of intelligence about the Borough and Skelmersdale at our disposal, we now need to bring this together to enable partners to present a clear picture of the area’s assets and capabilities, both current and emerging, using this intelligence as the basis for creating a stronger identity for Skelmersdale. We face difficult challenges in raising our profile and improving Skelmersdale’s reputation as a place to live, a location to develop a business, a place to visit, a place to work and a place to study.

### Key Ask: Develop a Skelmersdale Brand

Developing a new brand/image will be an important step in helping to change any negative perceptions of both existing and future residents, businesses and investors

**Timescale:** 2015-2017

**Partners:** WLBC/Marketing Lancashire/HCA/Private Sector

### Theme 6 Action Plan

Action	Estimated Timescale	Partners
Improve the image of Skelmersdale through the development of a Skelmersdale brand	2015-2017	WLBC/ Marketing Lancashire/HCA/ Private Sector
Identify and utilise West Lancashire ‘Ambassadors’ from public and private sectors who will act as high profile advocates for West Lancashire	2015-2016	WLBC/Private Sector
Periodically refresh the Welcome to West Lancashire inward investor ‘script’	2015-2025	WLBC/Marketing Lancashire
Develop and periodically refresh a Skelmersdale ‘script’	2015-2025	WLBC/Marketing Lancashire/HCA



## 4.7 Theme 7 – Supporting the Rural and Visitor Economy

The rural economy, particularly driven by agriculture and agricultural processing and related sectors, plays an important role in West Lancashire. These sectors are in transition and often vulnerable to global market shifts as well as climate change. As such they need continual monitoring and support. The types of activity envisaged are:

- Signposting to opportunities for growth and diversification – e.g. tourism diversification measures, accommodation needs of Onshore Oil and Gas operators/visitors etc.
- Providing information on public grant/subsidy availability and assistance on securing it.
- Provision of small specialist workspace, which can provide a key source of economic opportunity for the Borough

West Lancashire's visitor economy attracts around 2.6m visitors per annum, generating around £112m for the local economy and despite some fantastic visitor assets as detailed earlier, consultations to develop the West Lancashire Economy Study highlighted that there is no clear visitor brand which presents a compelling case for why people would want to visit or live in West Lancashire. This results in low recognition of the Borough as a visitor destination as it has no clear identity, although the VISIT Sefton and West Lancashire project has gone some way to help raise the profile in recent times.

West Lancashire has enviable grade 1 horticultural status, with a large number of farm shops and significant production of vegetables, salads, flowers and bulbs and with some

of our smaller businesses who have diversified quickly becoming recognised and established brands, such as Lancashire Crisps. In addition to being vital components of the rural economy, these businesses could also be seen as visitor assets. There may be opportunities to develop the visitor economy and further raise the profile of the Borough through food festivals, farmers markets or promotional material which highlights the range of producers in the Borough. This is a potential project which could be investigated through the RDPE, possibly with our Local Action Group partners.

West Lancashire also sits within striking distance of the Sefton and Lancashire beaches and coastline, as well as city centre destinations such as Liverpool, Preston and Manchester. This could make us a very appealing destination for visitors to the North West looking for a rural retreat with good access to the region's main shopping and cultural centres.

While it is unrealistic to compare with some of the more established visitor economies in the sub region, there are a number of opportunities to increase the economic contribution of the tourism sector by gaining greater leverage from West Lancashire's visitor assets, and by putting across a much clearer message about why people should visit the Borough. To do this we need to work closely with our partners and the production of a new Visitor Economy Strategy for Lancashire presents an ideal opportunity for us to put this message across.

### Key Ask: Improve the positioning of West Lancashire as a visitor destination

West Lancashire is not positioned within the region's visitor economy as well as it could be, we therefore need to work closely with our cross-border partners to improve the visitor offer for the Borough.

**Timescale:** 2015-2020  
**Partners:** WLBC/Marketing Lancashire



## Theme 7 Action Plan

Action	Estimated Timescale	Partners
Improve the positioning of West Lancashire in the forthcoming Lancashire Visitor Economy Strategy	2015-2020	<b>WLBC/ Marketing Lancashire</b>
Support the 'Made in Lancashire', and other similar campaigns by encouraging more businesses to participate	2015-2025	<b>WLBC/Marketing Lancashire/ Myerscough College</b>
Actively participate in the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) Lancashire Programme to ensure activity is directed into the Borough and West Lancashire businesses benefit from support	2015-2017	<b>WLBC/LCC/ Myerscough College/ Wigan Council</b>
Market rural visitor attractions as part of the WL visitor offer	2015-2020	<b>WLBC/ Marketing Lancashire</b>
Consider the need for bespoke rural workspace/rural technology hubs and investigate opportunities	2017-2020	<b>WLBC/LCC/ Private Sector</b>



## 4.8 Theme 8 – Advantage Through Knowledge and Skills

Economic forecasts for West Lancashire present a positive picture for West Lancashire's economy. **Employment growth in the Borough is expected to outperform the national, regional and Lancashire average.** There are also a number of transformational projects within and on West Lancashire's doorstep, including the regeneration of Skelmersdale, the Lancashire Enterprise Zone, Liverpool 2 and the Onshore Oil and Gas industries which could generate significant growth in the construction, energy and logistics sectors of the Borough.

The combined effects of this sectoral growth will be a significant increase in the demand for skills in West Lancashire. Yet this will occur at the same time that a significant proportion of West Lancashire's population leaves the workforce through retirement. It is therefore essential that West Lancashire better utilises its resident workforce by raising skills levels and raising economic activity. This is a particular issue in Skelmersdale which accounts for around 70% of all unemployment claimants in the borough, and where many people living in deprived communities face significant barriers to work.

Faced with this skills challenge, it is vital that schools, the further education colleges and other training providers are aware of sectoral opportunities and can offer courses and insights which meet the needs of these transformational projects and local employers generally. Recent changes to skills policy mean that colleges have much greater freedom, and this presents opportunities for colleges and employers to come together to tailor provision to the needs of our economy. This also relies on people making well informed choices about learning and career development opportunities which will ensure there is a sufficient supply of people on the courses which are in highest demand among employers. Consultations carried out as part of the West Lancashire Economy Study identified some sectors where there is a lack of awareness of job opportunities among young people, therefore vital that young people have access to high quality careers advice and guidance which reflects the needs of the economy.

The FE and HE establishments within our Borough can play an extremely important role in shaping the skills base of the Borough over the next 10-15 years. Building on existing work, it is important that both establishments are fully engaged with the Council to ensure that the skills demanded through major capital programmes and other economic development projects are sourced within the Borough. The presence of Edge Hill University in particular is a major asset for our Borough, both in terms of its economic contribution and its supply of highly skilled graduates and specialisms in courses which are relevant to future growth sectors such as Onshore Oil and Gas. The performance of local secondary schools is also vital in shaping the understanding of local young people on upcoming opportunities in the labour market.

### Key Ask: Improved Secondary School provision in Skelmersdale

Improve secondary school provision in Skelmersdale is seen as a priority to raise educational attainment and will be an important element in the overall regeneration of Skelmersdale.

**Timescale:** 2015-2022  
**Partners:** LCC/schools/WLBC

### Key Ask: Improve the Skills Gap and Raise Qualification levels

Both the HE and FE establishments within the Borough are developing initiatives to raise skill levels and match these with local employers, however improved co-ordination and sharing of information is required in order to fulfill this objective.

**Timescale:** 2015-2017  
**Partners:** STEP/Edge Hill University/WL College/WLBC

### Theme 8 Action Plan

Action	Estimated Timescale	Partners
Support the regeneration of Skelmersdale by strengthening secondary school provision	2015-2022	LCC/WLBC/ STEP/Schools
Develop sector-focused work-based training in partnership with employers and training providers, and strengthening links between businesses and training providers	2015-2017	STEP/WL College/ Edge Hill University/ WLBC
Strengthen FE links with Liverpool Superport stakeholders to maximise opportunities in the logistics sector	2015-2016	WLBC/WL College/ Edge Hill University/ Liverpool LEP
Develop sustainable and long-term skills initiatives to support tenants and residents into employment	2015-2017	WLBC/STEP/LEP
Ensure Edge Hill University & West Lancashire College are linked into all major projects in West Lancashire as appropriate, strengthening engagement with LCC and LEP.	2015-2025	LCC/LEP/WLBC/STEP/ WL College/ Edge Hill University
Develop an Employment Charter and encourage employers, including social enterprises and 'Business Ambassadors' to sign up, this will encourage employers to consider local employment options, work experience, apprenticeships and other local skills and employment initiatives	2015-2016	WLBC/STEP
Continue to support partners in the delivery of the WL Challenge project, continue to monitor the project's success and its future sustainability	2015-2016	STEP/WLBC

# 5 SUMMARY & CONCLUSION









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# SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION



The draft West Lancashire Economic Development Strategy 2015-2025 recognises the strengths of the Borough, with highly skilled residents, a large and successful business base with many world leading companies and international household brands located here, and the good quality housing we have on offer in a predominately rural setting. However, the Strategy also highlights the challenges that the Borough will need to address in order to achieve our ambitions plans, including improving our town centres, developing a Skelmersdale brand and championing the area as a business destination with strong leadership, whilst dealing with issues of worklessness, unemployment and improving the skills gap and raising qualification levels.

The fourteen Key Asks and the suite of activities outlined in the Action Plan will be delivered over a 10 year period and reviewed periodically to ensure the Strategy remains relevant to the issues facing the West Lancashire Borough.

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