

# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Corporate Scrutiny Committee - 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021

### Innovation District Update

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Marcus Kravis

Report Author: Mark Wathen, Lead Specialist Economic Development and Prosperity

#### 1 Executive Summary / Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This paper contains an update on recent activity and progress and follows a request to explore the links between the resolutions made by the Executive in November 2018 and the activity to deliver inward investment and the Innovation District.
- 1.2 The EiBC consultancy contract was completed in line with the scope and expected outcomes of the contract which allowed for consideration of alternative approaches.

#### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 This report is provided as an update paper to note.

#### 3 Risk Assessment

- 3.1 This report is an update on progress to establish SWT as the Innovation District for note by the Scrutiny Committee.

#### 4 Statement of Portfolio Holder

- 4.1 Statement by Cllr Marcus Kravis *“As Portfolio Holder for Assets and Economic Development, I confirm that I am content that the resolutions made by Taunton Deane Borough Council (TBDC) in 2018 have been taken into account when taking the activity to deliver the innovation district and inward investment forward and am proud of the achievements of this Council to date.”*

#### 5 Summary

- 5.1 The Innovation District action plan is in its early formative stage and will continue to be a long term evolving programme of activity responding to new and emerging opportunities and policy direction for investment from Government, academia, research and development businesses and the private sector, working collaboratively.

- 5.2 In July 2020 the Education and Innovation Business Consultancy (EiBC) were appointed to produce a feasibility report which assessed and validated and refined an initial concept or proposed an alternative concept for the development of an innovation/technology park in Somerset West and Taunton.
- 5.3 During the research and development of the report EiBC, Council officers and stakeholders found a considerably changed innovation landscape in 2020/21 when compared to 2018 and that matters had progressed significantly over the intervening period including:
- i. The business case for a Taunton Digital Innovation Centre.
  - ii. The Somerset NHS Foundation Trust 50/50 private sector led Joint Venture (JV) with Rutherford Diagnostics Ltd to establish a Community Diagnostics Centre including healthtech innovation space, the first of its kind in the UK.
  - iii. Strategic masterplanning of the Firepool regeneration site including innovation and commercial 'move on' employment space.
  - iv. An outline masterplan for Nexus 25 employment land and potential Local Development Order.
  - v. The final publication of the Taunton Garden Town Prospectus and Taunton 2040 Vision.
  - vi. The development of the "Gravity" campus and enterprise zone.
- 5.4 During the research and development stage of the feasibility study it was identified that there was a significant opportunity to extract more value from existing employment land allocations and to make individual assets greater than the sum of their parts.
- 5.5 Through the research it became apparent that the potential to utilise current available employment land would ensure employment, education, business growth and local supply chains were supported across the entire district rather than a focus on a single innovation campus site within the District.
- 5.6 To that end, the concept of a networked Innovation District was born (alongside other actions) and adopted by SWT, the public summary published on SWT's business facing website in March 2021. The work to develop this activity further was outlined in the SWT Economic Development Strategy approved by Full Council in February 2020.
- 5.7 The Innovation District work programme continues to progress the recommendations of the Scrutiny Task and Finish Group (November 2018) and the decision by the Executive in November 2018 to "Investigate the feasibility of an office for the creation of a Research and Innovation Centre. TDBC and the subsequent Council should undertake a prompt detailed feasibility study into the viability of such a centre. Effective use of appropriate partnership working [will be] crucial to the success of such a venture."
- 5.8 The EiBC consultancy contract was completed in line with the scope and expected outcomes of the contract which allowed for consideration of alternative approaches to a single Innovation campus within SWT, other options to be considered.
- 5.9 This approach ensured that the contract would produce a realistic and deliverable plan that could be taken forward with short-, medium- and long-term benefits for the District, rather than limiting to the consideration of one option only. This approach ensured that SWT were considering best use of public funds and benefiting from the professional opinion of the independent consultants.

- 5.10 The next phase of the Innovation District work programme includes further conversations with education providers in the region, leading innovation, research and development business and agencies as part of the establishment of the District as the first Rural Market Town Innovation District in the UK.
- 5.11 During the next phase of the Innovation District work programme further conversations will be had with SWT Members, following presentations of the work carried out and evidence base collected during the next phase, to ensure members are able to input into the development of the Innovation District.

## 6 **SWT Innovation Framework in March 2021 under the delegated authority of the Portfolio Holder**

- 6.1 Over the last few months, SWT has been working to understand its knowledge economy and innovation assets, clusters and businesses to help further develop the knowledge economy opportunities for its businesses and residents looking to the future and as a commitment made in the Economic Development Strategy published in March 2020.
- 6.2 It has provided a clear way forward for developing **a framework for action for the short term but with an eye to a longer term gain**, as the initial innovation clusters and innovation board is established, building on immediate opportunities.
- 6.3 **It is to be stressed that this is the start of an evolving journey involving a range of partners linked to the emerging Somerset West and Taunton Innovation District concept.**

## 7 **Update on the significant progress made in the 9 months since the adoption of the Innovation District Framework**

- 7.1 Since the approval of the Innovation District Framework (and EiBC recommendations), work has been taking place on:
- working up the Innovation District concept to put to the market
  - aligning SWT town centre, marketing and inward investment work programmes with the Innovation District
  - continuing the dialogue with the high-tech businesses and innovation organisations that will 'anchor' the Innovation District. Further conversations are planned with the Director of Regional Innovation and Impact at Exeter University.
  - continued discussion with the Local Enterprise Partnership about the shape and commissioning of LEP wide innovation support.
  - discussions relating to the integration of the Barclays Lab virtual innovation ecosystem across the UK to support peer to peer knowledge transfer and events.
  - the opening of the Rutherford Diagnostics Centre for healthtech and the start on site for build of the Digital Innovation Centre
  - discussion with Host Somerset about developing student accommodation with our regeneration team in Taunton on behalf of Bridgwater and Taunton College and University Centre Somerset.
  - the feasibility study of additional employment land in West Somerset to meet the express demand of businesses looking to expand in the West Somerset geography and grow the local knowledge based talent pool.

- consideration of partnering with a leading independent and impartial organisation with expertise in connecting businesses and public sectors to cutting edge research on the development of innovation centres, and how to grow new markets. The organisation would provide capacity and expertise to the Innovation Leadership Group and deliver a routemap through the process of establishing an Innovation District. This work would help to facilitate future conversation with members and wider stakeholders about the critical stages of the innovation journey and routemap, as they support other innovation districts across the UK. Discussions with Somerset County Council and other Districts in Somerset to position this work are underway that takes into account the transition to a Unitary Council and into a Somerset wide Innovation Place, examining how we might collectively unite the innovation assets and innovation support under collective stewardship and oversight.

***Excitingly, new market opportunities have arisen during this time which the Innovation District work is capitalising on including:***

**a) Artificial Intelligence(AI)/Big Data & Digital:**

- With funding confirmed in September 2021, build will commence on a £9.5m Innovation Centre on Firepool in October/November.
- UKHO have undertaken a £0.5m commercialisation accelerator programme linked to the utilisation of its maritime AI/Big Data.
- Visit Somerset is developing an AI/Big Data platform for the visitor economy utilising latest digital technologies and techniques.

**b) Healthcare, medtech and e-health:**

- The Joint Venture between Somerset NHS Foundation Trust at Musgrove Park and Rutherford Diagnostics Ltd has led to the opening of the innovative Rutherford Diagnostics Centre in October 2021.
- Healthcare partners and Bridgwater and Taunton College have run 12 week National Re-training Skills Bootcamps in e-health and digital upskilling. SWT officers are working with Sedgemoor District Council to support a Levelling Up bid to support the establishment of a centre of excellence in Social Care aligned to the SWT Innovation District work. SWT officers have worked with Plymouth and Exeter Universities and the Academic Health Science Network on a LEP wide healthcare technopole.
- An Expression of Interest has been submitted to the Connected Places Catapult “Homes for Healthy Ageing Programme” to secure support for SWT to be a “demonstrator site” to match solutions from healthtech and care innovators with insights and capabilities of local authorities and housing associations to harness innovation and growth to build a healthier future for the UK. If successful SWT could be one of 5 organisations receiving up to £0.5m to support this work during 2021-2022.

**c) Creative/cultural:**

- SWT secured funding from the £4m Business Rates Pool to support the capacity of both our cultural and digital sectors. A £0.5m Community Renewal Fund bid was submitted in June 2021 by the Somerset Arts and Business Cultural Alliance (SABCA) to support innovation and growth within the creative and digital industries. SWT officers have submitted a Levelling up bid

for Wellington's ToneDale Mill which has support from the creative, cultural, fashion and textile industries.

- The opening East Quay in Watchet, a cultural, creative and makerspace enabling collaboration and sector innovation.
- The Collar Factory, a new co-working space in Taunton, is opening offering creative studios, meeting, networking and event space to supportive innovation in the sector.

#### **d) Innovation ecosystem and higher level skills (education)**

- The launch of 'T' levels and University Centre Level 6 courses in Information Technology and 'Big Data', Nursing and Healthcare supported by the Institute of Technology.
- Bridgwater & Taunton College (BTC) has been approved by the Nursing & Midwifery Council (NMC) to deliver a Nursing Degree and Nursing Degree Apprenticeships across Adult Nursing and Mental Health pathways. The NMC has also recommended the approval of the Trainee Nurse Associate programme. All the programmes are validated by the University of the West of England (UWE), with the apprenticeships due to start this year. Bridgwater & Taunton College has become the first college in the UK to achieve this recommendation. These degree pathways enhance the degree provision at University Centre Somerset and have been developed in direct response to Somerset's skills gaps in nursing.
- A Somerset wide Bootcamp for 10 businesses (4 of which are in the SWT area) to help inform future innovation ecosystem development.

#### **e) Circular natural capital economy:**

- Plans are continuing on the development of circular sustainable economies in West Somerset, including the development of an Exmoor strategy which recognises the opportunity for new entrepreneurial start-ups in sustainable circular economy businesses, using its natural capital to counter climate change.

#### **f) Renewable energy/nuclear:**

- SWT officers are working with the HotSW LEP, Nuclear South West, EDF and the Nuclear Decommissioning Agency to ensure that opportunities for supply chain, education and training are maximised and aligned with the development of the Innovation District.

#### **g) Inward investment and place making and promotion:**

- Appointment of a marketing and communication agency to develop a marketing and communications plan, and a range of propositions to target and attract inward investment to the area, including the innovation, clean tech and clean energy sectors.
- The Nuclear South West proposition is already well developed and more recently an Autonomous Maritime Vessels national proposition incorporating the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) was produced with the Department for International Trade.

- Inward Investment articles have been published in the South West Insider Investment magazine which was circulated around the UK as well as profiling the Innovation District at the annual UK Science Park Association conference.

7.2 Further developments are expected during the course of 2021/22 including building on the launch of the Government's Innovation Strategy and Levelling Up White Paper which will have more detail around innovation places and a multi-year approach to the UK's Prosperity Fund from 2022 onwards.

## 8 **Specific responses to the final resolutions of the Affordable Employment Land Task and Finish Group 2018**

8.1 This section aims to respond specifically to explore the links between the final resolutions related to the Affordable Employment Land Task and Finish Group's report, which was affirmed by the Executive in November 2018 and the eventual EIBC report. The resolutions made in 2018 have been delivered by a diverse approach and are not solely found in the EIBC report.

The recommendations in the 2018 report were:

**Resolved** that the Executive noted the Task and Finish Group's Report and recommended the following:-

### **1. Affordable Employment Land:**

- a) TDBC and the subsequent Council must build on the Affordable Employment Land Report undertaken by Peter Brett Associates by commencing an urgent reappraisal of all employment sites
- b) TDBC and the subsequent Council to explore the delivery of Affordable Starter Employment Units via different delivery models including varying forms of Local Development Orders, and expedient Council enabling through a standalone approach or development partner involvement.

### **2. Investigate the feasibility of an office for the creation of a Research and Innovation Centre:**

- a) TDBC and the subsequent Council should undertake a prompt detailed feasibility study into the viability of such a centre. Effective use of appropriate partnership working was crucial to the success of such a venture.

8.2 **The response in respect of gap analysis of each of the above in turn is as follows:**

#### **1a) Affordable Employment Land**

**Somerset West and Taunton Local Plan development** - the National Planning Policy Framework requires the planning system to be genuinely plan-led. The Council will be reviewing its employment sites through the Local Plan review process considering them for their sustainability, appropriateness, deliverability, attractiveness as employment sites, infrastructure requirements and other local

benefits that could be delivered. The Council will also consider where employment development should be retained in order to deliver sustainable communities. The Planned approach to reviewing employment sites ensures that decisions on the location of new employment and the specific sites is considered in conjunction with all other strategic planning matters and not in a silo.

This process will be informed with up-to-date evidence on employment land needs. Emerging evidence suggests a need for 44,800 sqm office floorspace and 53 ha of industrial land between 2020-40 although the appropriate target will be determined through the Local Plan review.

## **1b) Affordable Starter Units**

**A Rural Local Development Order received Full Council Approval on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020** - during the early part of 2019, the economic development team working with our planning colleagues made the development of affordable starter employment units a priority in accordance with the Executive Resolution from 2018 and developed a Rural Local Development Order which has subsequently been published and launched and fully adopted by the Full Council on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

[Employment Local Development Order \(somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk\)](https://www.somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk/employment-local-development-order)

- This LDO is a proactive planning tool to enable increased delivery of small-scale employment space in rural parts of Somerset West and Taunton, and was developed in response to demand from small businesses to set up or expand their existing operations.
- The LDO and accompanying Design Code will provide clarity on how to deliver high quality small-scale employment space appropriate to the site. It will ensure that a high and consistent standard of design is delivered, providing sustainable and stimulating working environments whilst at the same time enabling the diverse requirements of individual occupiers to be met.
- The LDO sets out to grant planning permission for small scale office, research and light industrial space across the Council area removing the need for a planning application to be made. Development must accord with all aspects of the Design Code in order to benefit from the permitted development rights confirmed by the LDO.

### **Other support for progress delivery of allocated employment land in response to need**

- **Firepool business case was approved in November 2020.** This will provide circa 600 residential units, subject to planning and circa 20000 sq/m of commercial, office and leisure uses. The site has been fallow since the cattle market closed 12 years ago. Our estimate is that this will provide FTE 350 direct jobs and up to 3000 construction jobs over the course of the programme. The space also provides space for the Digital Innovation Centre being developed in partnership with Somerset County Council.
- **Coal Orchard**, was built in 2020/21 in a location where the market could not make viable. This build continued through the Pandemic. This has provided 40 apartments, 8 commercial units and car parking for 40 cars, including EV charging. SWT have enhanced public realm and access to river, and flood mitigation is built into the design. The site has the propensity to create 94 Jobs.
- **Seaward Way, Minehead, West Somerset.** SWT built two much needed employment spaces in 2020 and this project came in under budget and produced a

4.9% yield for income. In total, 32,000 sq ft of commercial / light industrial space was built. Both units have been let, one to a local company who have been based in Minehead for 20+ years who was desperately in need of larger and more modern facilities to expand.

- **Additional employment space review is underway in West Somerset** - being able to find new employment land for industrial purposes in West Somerset has been a significant problem for many years. Aside from the recent Snazaroo development and the units next to West Somerset Railway, no new sites have come forward in over a decade. A review is being undertaken to identify land and employment site options in West Somerset to help to continue to deliver growing employment opportunities and to respond to their immediate needs.
  - **SME A** in Minehead employ 33 staff and produce products for security, medical and military personnel. They are seeking 1,200 sqm of space (12-15k sq. ft) and will create 10 new jobs. The company would be content with a discreet premise and would prefer the Minehead area.
  - **SME B** employs some 30-40 staff and produce scientific research instruments. They are seeking 2,800 sqm (30k sq. ft) and will create 15 new jobs initially. They would prefer a high profile site preferably in the Minehead area. One of the two businesses is likely to move away from the area if a site is not found. Both businesses are content with renting space from the Council and are happy to wait on the outcome of this report. They are both currently looking at options to temporarily expand. In addition to this it is recognised that one of the sites identified should be large enough to accommodate other future units if possible.
- **Town Centre/High Street affordable employment space.** SWT are also working with Town Centre locations to explore the opportunities afforded to start-up companies by using the available space created by vacant retail locations. In Wellington, a feasibility study has also been undertaken on an enterprise centre and hotdesking centre in the High Street, making use of vacant retail space as appropriate. All of these initiatives aim to respond to the need in a post Covid19 environment and be more agile in helping to meet those needs in a more flexible manner, building on the existing enterprise centre network of the County Council in Minehead, Williton, Wiveliscombe and potentially in Wellington.

## **2a) Investigate the feasibility of an office for the creation of a Research and Innovation Centre:**

Research has shown that there is adequate site provision in our District – there is no evidence of need for additional office for a Research and Innovation centre space. The current offers include:

- Over the next 3 years a network of new innovation centres will be delivered in Taunton (2), Bridgwater (3), Yeovil (1).
- Additionally 3 sites in SWT (Firepool TDIC, Nexus and Blackbrook) offer further opportunities for grow-on space for knowledge based businesses with a capacity in excess of 600,000 square feet in Taunton.
- This is in addition to a further 300,000 square feet of general business and light manufacturing space at the Crown Estate and over 300,000 square feet at the Gravity site.
- Firepool has a capability to accommodate a Phase 2 innovation centre and Blackbrook, already the home for several health based knowledge based



businesses, has a key undeveloped site adjacent to the Rutherford Diagnostics innovation Centre, whilst the 40 acre Nexus site can accommodate around 377,000 square feet of knowledge based business.

- Outside Taunton, Watchet can also accommodate at least 54,000 square feet of business space at the former papermill site. All of these sites are committed and most are 'shovel ready'.
- Excluding the Crown Estate and Gravity sites and the other innovation centres coming on stream elsewhere in Somerset, the remaining SWT sites deliver in excess of half a million square feet of space with a potential to accommodate up to 4,600 direct knowledge based jobs in addition to jobs that are indirect and induced economic impacts .
- On 9<sup>th</sup> July 2021, a meeting of the initial inaugural group of over 12 private and public sector stakeholders representative of the five domains of the Innovation District were brought together to help inform the development of the workplan over the next year and to move to a more formalised stewardship group, which was avidly received by all the participants, including links to the LEP and their Innovation Board. This collaborative approach to the Taunton Innovation District embeds the principles of the integrated project delivery approach which was highlighted in the 2018 work and still has a long way to go, but the foundation pieces are beginning to be laid.

## **9. Next steps**

9.1 The next steps for the 2021-2022 Innovation District work programme will continue to be developed in line with corporate plan commitments. Some of the immediate components of the workplan are illustrated here and will be overseen by the stewardship of the recently convened Innovation Leadership Group (ILG).

### **9.2 Infrastructure**

#### **Activity will include:**

- Finalise the funding package to enable the start on site build of the Digital Innovation Centre.
- Continue to support local knowledge based businesses expand into grow-on space (two companies are actively seeking support) and engage more in detail with businesses.
- Identify regeneration opportunities and locations for student accommodation build for the healthcare sector in Taunton so that this supports full-time and part-time Higher Education and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) growth.

### **9.3 Clusters (groups of inter-related industries that drive wealth creation in a region)**

- Identify ways in which the clusters can be strengthened by providing more operational capacity.
- Undertake more detailed cluster segmentation and mapping to identify unique characteristics and unique selling points and opportunities for joint collaboration and funding.
- Start the mobilisation of other clusters including biomanufacturing, waste and circular economy.

### **9.4 Innovation support**

- Commission innovation support for Digital Innovation centre in 2021/22 and collaborate with plans to establish a HotSW Innovation Technopole service.

#### **9.5 Talent Development**

- Work with Bridgwater and Taunton college and local businesses to engage young people in the innovation district through innovation and enterprise placements.
- Align the education pathways and skillsets of young people to develop the talent pool needed by businesses within the Innovation District.

#### **9.6 Place marketing and promotion**

- Work with the marketing and communication consultants appointed over the course of the next year to update marketing and propositions for inward investment and establish place marketing protocols, ensuring they are complementary to surrounding regional clusters and add value.

#### **9.7 Funding opportunities**

- Review opportunities on the horizon and identify immediate needs.

#### **9.8 Stewardship**

- Support the establishment of the Innovation Leadership Group in terms of its terms of reference and composition.
- Identify cluster development groups/leads to engage and network the private sector businesses and the college and universities.

### **10 Links to Corporate Strategy**

**See 7.1**

### **11 Finance / Resource Implications**

This report provides an update only. No decision required that would have financial or resource implications

### **12 Legal Implications**

This report provides an update only. No decision required that would have legal implications.

### **13 Climate and Sustainability Implications**

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have climate or sustainability implications.

### **14 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have safeguarding or community safety implications.

## **15 Equality and Diversity Implications**

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have equality and diversity implications.

## **16 Social Value Implications**

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have social value implications.

## **17 Partnership Implications**

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have partnership implications.

## **18 Health and Wellbeing Implications**

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have health and wellbeing implications.

## **19 Asset Management Implications**

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have asset management implications.

## **20 Data Protection Implications**

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have data protection implications.

## **21 Consultation Implications**

This report provides an update only. No decision making that would have consultation implications.

### **Democratic Path:**

- **Scrutiny - Yes**
- **Cabinet/Executive - No**
- **Full Council - No**

**Reporting Frequency: Once only**

## Contact Officers

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# Appendix

## Relevant Policies and Strategies informing the approach taken and continuing evolution of the SWT Innovation District

The recent policies and associated timelines that have informed and are aligned to the Innovation District and its direction of travel are as follows:

### **Affordable Employment Land Task and Finish Group's report November 2018 (Taunton Deane Borough Council)**

**TDBC Executive Decision November 2018** to “Investigate the feasibility of an office for the creation of a Research and Innovation Centre. TDBC and the subsequent Council should undertake a prompt detailed feasibility study into the viability of such a centre. Effective use of appropriate partnership working was crucial to the success of such a venture”.

**SWT Council's Corporate Strategy October 2019** was approved by Full Council and relevant objectives that relate to the Innovation District include:

#### ***Environment and Economy***

- Work towards making our District ***carbon neutral by 2030***.
- Shape and protect our built and natural environment, supported by a ***refreshed Local Plan***, develop our heritage, cultural and leisure offer, including a ***clear vision and delivery plan for the Taunton Garden Town***.
- Encourage wealth creation and economic growth throughout the District by ***attracting inward investment, enabling research and innovation, improving the skills of the local workforce*** and seeking to ***ensure the provision of adequate and affordable employment land*** to meet different business needs.
- ***Support the town centres*** throughout the District to meet the challenge of changing shopping habits.
- ***Facilitate the development of the commercial parts of the Firepool site*** in Taunton.
- Support the ***enhancement of arts and culture provision*** within the District.

### **LEP's Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) published in 2020**

This has superseded the *South West and South Wales Science and Innovation Audit referenced in the 2018 Task and Finish Group*, prioritising those aspects that are of most relevance to the LEP's greatest chances of success. The LIS subsequently identified ***three key priorities to build on the expertise and distinctive assets of the LEP area, whilst moving to a greener economy:***

They are:

- ▶ **energy**; stemming from the construction, and legacy benefits, of one of Europe's largest infrastructure projects – the UK's first nuclear power station in twenty years at Hinkley Point C – and pioneering the development of the next generation of marine renewables;
- ▶ **engineering**: leading on the development and commercialisation of marine autonomy, and supporting the sustainable aviation challenge through development of rotary technologies and electric planes; and
- ▶ **digital**; specifically through environmental intelligence, the marine geospatial innovation market, and health and agri-technologies.

## **SWT's Economic Development Strategy approved at Full Council in February 2020**

A key stated objective was to encourage wealth creation and clean economic growth throughout the District by:

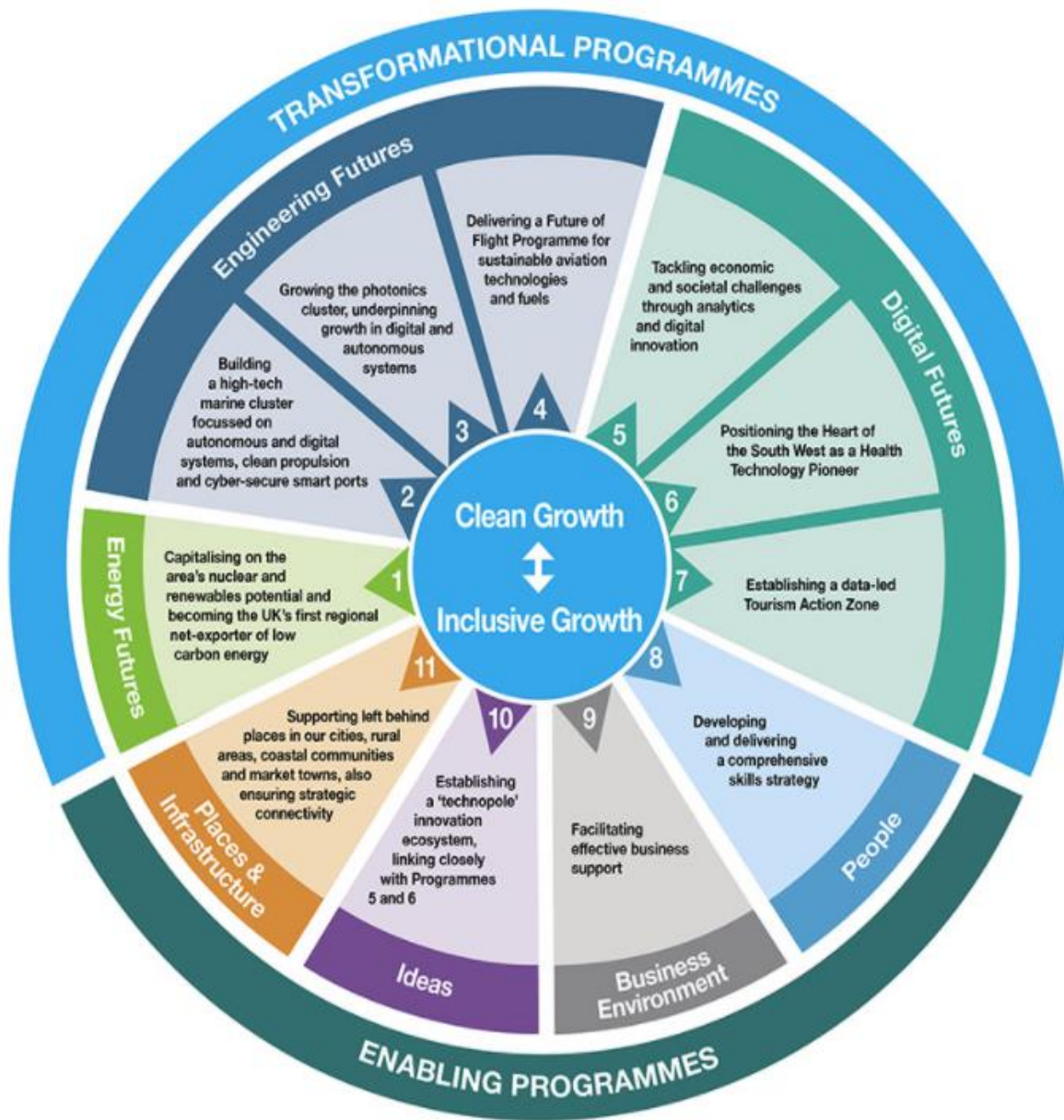
- **Attracting inward investment and enabling research and innovation.**
- SWT also committed to **explore a Higher Level Educational Research Institution and Innovation Park to explore and validate emerging knowledge economy opportunities** such as AI/Big Data and digital technologies, remote healthcare delivery and low carbon renewable energy and environmental technologies as well as exploring the circular economy and natural capital, including plastic waste recycling.
- Reviewing business and innovation support to determine the **most appropriate approach to building a sustainable Somerset wide local business and innovation ecosystem.**
- Strategic employment site development, specifically referencing **Firepool** and the development of an innovation zone.
- **Implementing a Rural Local Development Order**, supporting and promoting **Nexus 25** and our **own commercial assets and sites.**
- **Taunton Garden Town** becoming a dynamic economy of cultural, creative and digital businesses as part of a future Tech Nation Corridor.

## **Somerset Economic Recovery and Growth Plan March 2021**

The Plan was developed and **agreed by 5 Local Authorities in Somerset in January 2021** and submitted to Government and replaces the Somerset Growth Plan which was developed pre-pandemic.

The plan differentiates activities and interventions across the different phases of recovery (**Lockdown, Restart, Revitalise, Grow**), which has been adopted widely by partners across the Heart of the South West LEP.

- **LEP's Build Back Better Plan March 2021** - the Build Back Better Plan is not on its own a recovery plan from COVID-19, but is rooted in the ambitious vision of our Local Industrial Strategy (LIS), which has a distinctive focus to deliver on clean and inclusive growth.



Source: EIBC Innovation District Framework 5 Domains



Source: HoTSW LEP Building Back Better Plan Priorities 2021

The specific opportunities from the diagram and SWT's innovation domains align in the following ways:

- **Energy Futures: capitalising on the area's nuclear and renewables potential**
- **Engineering Futures: UKHO's involvement in building a high-tech marine cluster and commercialising its AI/Big Data assets**
- **Digital Futures: tackling societal challenges through digital innovation** and positioning the Heart of the South West as a **Health Technology Pioneer** and establishing a **data-led Tourism Action Zone**, with Visit Somerset now deploying AI/Big Data platforms
- **Enabling programmes (Ideas):** establishing a **'technopole' innovation ecosystem** which is not focused on Universities but on **any business undertaking R and D** and connecting them with other businesses & the knowledge base and future R&D funding opportunities