



Swindon and Wiltshire Economic Assessment

Chapter 7: Policy Analysis

A report by Regeneris Consulting

May 2018



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I. Swindon and Wiltshire Economic Summary

- 1.1 The economic positioning of Swindon and Wiltshire is underpinned by the evidence base contained within the Local Economic Assessment (LEA) chapters.
- 1.2 Whilst data drawn from a framework of indicators is not exhaustive, analysis helps to provide an up-to-date review of Swindon and Wiltshire's economy, assess trends, comparator strengths and weaknesses, and interrogate new sources of information. It also supports the need to consider the relevant messaging with reference to the rural economy, Growth Zones and the potential localised effects of Brexit.
- 1.3 The LEA also helps to identify areas where questions remain and the rationale for conducting additional research is strong.
- 1.4 This evidence base is drawn from the following LEA chapters:
 - Economic Geography**
 - Business and Enterprise**
 - People and Communities**
 - Sustainable Economic Growth**
 - Growth Trajectory**
 - Economic Asset Review**
- 1.5 This document takes the key findings from these chapters to initiate consideration of future policy implications.
- 1.6 This will help to inform a wider strategic review, including the likely development of a Swindon and Wiltshire LEP (SWLEP) industrial strategy, which will align with government ambitions and demonstrate a place-based approach to growth.

2. Economic Strengths and Challenges

2.1 Economic Geography

Key Conclusions...

Swindon and Wiltshire are embedded within a regional, national and global economic context, determining the area's resilience, susceptibility to shocks, potential for inclusive growth, and ability to support the development of sustainable communities.

The SWLEP area is made up of three individual FEMAs. **The three FEMAs are considered to be the most robust and appropriate way to understand the economic geography** and used to inform spatial planning and economic development interventions.

Three designated Growth Zones which align with the FEMAs, are considered to have the **greatest capacity for supporting sustainable growth and offer a strong platform to promote key growth locations**.

Commuter patterns demonstrate the interrelationships with neighbouring economic centres such as Bath, Bristol and the wider M4 corridor. This flow of labour is likely to have evolved since the 2011 Census, as a result of infrastructure improvements and digital disruption.

SWLEP has a role to play in delivering transport improvements, enhancing connectivity both within and between urban areas as a mechanism for securing growth and agglomeration benefits. Connectivity improvements can expand labour market catchments and support businesses via access to required skills.

Analysis of sector supply chains provides insights into the extent to which these are embedded in the SWLEP area and isolates the leakage of spend to wider areas. **This shows that there are no standout sectors which exhibit high levels of embeddedness within SWLEP – Creative Industries (15%), Professional Business Services (13%), ICT/Telecoms (13%) and Envirotech (13%) rely most heavily on locally-based supply chain companies**. SWLEP has an opportunity to work closely with the Department for International Trade (DIT) and local authority partners to strategically manage foreign-owned companies and those dependent on EU suppliers to embed them further by facilitating stronger links with local supply chains.

SWLEP will need to work closely with DIT and industry representatives to explore trade and investment opportunities, and work in partnership with industry to develop sector strategies.

Some economic geographies such as Growth Zones could be more exposed to the consequences of Brexit than others, driven by different factors. Each Growth Zone will need a tailored policy response.

The outward-facing nature of the Swindon and Wiltshire economy, evidenced via supply chain, export and labour market data, sets the basis for its interaction with domestic and foreign markets. **This is both a strength and a weakness and means that SWLEP is exposed to macroeconomic shocks**, as evidenced by the 2008 recession.

The identified housing market areas provide an appropriate geography for meeting housing need, with SWLEP having a role to play in supporting the delivery of housing to accelerate economic growth.

The provision of infrastructure such as education, retail, and a leisure and culture offers contribute to the influence of Swindon and Wiltshire's economic geography, with SWLEP having a role to play in facilitating investment in these areas.

2.2 Business and Enterprise

Key conclusions...

The local economy is sizeable, valuable and has grown, particularly since the recession with a rate on par with national levels of growth. Yet **SWLEP is lagging other LEPs on measures of productivity and output is driven by lower-value sectors**. Rural areas also make a significant economic contribution.

Swindon and Wiltshire are exposed to productivity losses linked to Brexit, being more acute in Swindon. Given the inherent limitations of modelling, these are only a forecast and don't reflect the nuances of local trade patterns.

Business growth levels have been encouraging and exceed comparator areas, occurring across Swindon, Wiltshire and the Growth Zones. Business density is most pronounced in urban areas where agglomeration is present, with rural areas also home to significant business numbers, at lower density.

Employment growth has also been positive and comparably strong, with greater growth experienced in Wiltshire. Unsurprisingly, the greatest density of employment is concentrated in key economic centres, whilst **types of employment in SWLEP are distinct, with Wiltshire more reliant upon part-time labour**. In the context of business growth, SWLEP has experienced lower levels of expansion, with **sectors such as Professional and Financial, Retail, Public Admin, Education & Health and Construction propelling the growth of the business base**.

Growth Zone employment growth has been impressive, with the Swindon-M4 Growth Zone maintaining its importance in overall size, and the A350 Growth Corridor has experienced considerable growth. Prospects for the Sailsbury-A303 Growth Zone appear to be encouraging, based on the policy direction and support for target sectors.

The public share of employment in SWLEP remains higher than comparator areas, suggesting a greater level of resiliency to austerity and stabilisation since the establishment of a Wiltshire unitary authority in 2008/09. This needs to be viewed in the context of national policies and the re-shaping of public service delivery, however. **Given the government's continued commitment to austerity and changes to local authority grant funding from Whitehall, public sector employment has scope for future fluctuation**.

SWLEP's economy is specialised, with distinct strengths. Sector performance is varied, suggesting mixed prospects and growth opportunities. **Employment and**

business growth does not always correlate and the importance and performance of sectors across Swindon and Wiltshire is different.

Sector specialisation offers an opportunity to explore linkages with neighbouring geographies where commonalities and shared strengths exist and informs impacts caused by Brexit.

Priority and ‘watch list’ sectors remain important to the local economy. Relative performance across Swindon and Wiltshire variable in terms of specialisation and growth. The policy focus on these sectors seems to be strong, although **a balance should also be sought in terms of the sectors which provide the greatest levels of employment, versus those that are specialised and growing.** An example of this would be the Knowledge Economy, which is the largest sector (measured by employment) and offers opportunities to deliver more productive jobs. By contrast, the Life Sciences sector is the most specialised offering comparative advantages and scope for future development, yet it has a smaller employment base than other sectors. SWLEP will need to form a view as to the relative balance of sector prioritisation.

Sector specialisation of Growth Zones helps to determine respective distinctiveness, shared strengths and communicate benefits to a wider audience (such as investors and the labour market). **Specialisation in certain sectors is pronounced across the Salisbury-A303 (Life Sciences, Energy), Swindon-M4 (Advanced Manufacturing, Life Sciences) and A350 (Energy, Life Sciences) Growth Zones,** which also offer productivity gains.

Sector-based analysis further reinforces the economic value of rural areas and the extent to which these geographies support priority and ‘watch list’ sectors. In some cases, specialisation is exhibited in higher-value sectors and strong growth is also apparent.

There is scope to further emphasise the importance of rural areas and their ability to accommodate growth in local policy. That said, traditional land-based industries in rural areas, face challenges associated with Brexit and agricultural policy reforms.

SWLEP is largely a small business economy, a fact also reflected in business turnover levels, with a smaller proportion of companies generating higher levels of turnover than comparator LEPS. The greatest concentration of larger businesses is in urban centres, but rural areas are also home to a variety of small, medium and larger businesses. This reinforces **the important economic role of rural areas.**

SWLEP supports entrepreneurship through the creation of new businesses, particularly in Swindon. **Businesses also have strong survival and sustainability prospects in Swindon and Wiltshire, with there being a challenge around ensuring these have the potential to develop and grow.**

Scale-up data demonstrates that the local economy is home to businesses with considerable growth potential, but other LEPS anchor businesses which generate greater levels of turnover and employment. There is an opportunity to enhance local infrastructure to support scale-up businesses and encourage economic activity to engage with local assets.

SWLEP is attracting inward investment and FDI, with this leading to the creation of new employment and the safe-guarding of existing jobs. There is fierce competition for investment, however, and Swindon and Wiltshire will need to work hard to attract and secure this from the UK and abroad. **Infrastructure, quality of life, housing, labour supply and employment space are all key ingredients to securing comparative advantages and differentiation. Brexit also poses risks around trade and inward investment pipelines,** as investments are put on hold due to continued uncertainty.

The local economy exports goods to overseas markets, suggesting **SWLEP is more reliant on export-intensive employment and EU trade than comparator areas.** Whilst this demonstrates Swindon and Wiltshire's economic interconnectedness, **exposure to Brexit trade impacts may be considerable, with economic output liable to decrease.**

R&D is a valuable indicator of innovation within the economy, with **SWLEP experiencing activity in a business and government context, which on some measures, is comparably high and significant innovation investment has been secured.** This is a strong platform from which to build local innovation assets.

It is important that rural areas are able to share in the economic benefits of research and innovation, with technology and infrastructure driving productivity gains and entrepreneurship. However, Brexit challenges may require further consideration, such as the replacement of European funds which have played an important role in the rural economy and stimulated research and innovation activity.

The dynamism of the South West's capital and equity investment markets are relatively low, whilst favourable skills and qualifications will not be sufficient to engender innovation, especially in the context of skills gaps and shortages.

Employment in innovation-focused sectors suggests SWLEP has local strengths, including in specified priority and 'watch list' sectors across Swindon, Wiltshire, Growth Zones and rural areas. Other measures of innovation tell a different story, with Swindon and Wiltshire faring less well comparatively. **A policy response will need to both support the growth of innovative sectors whilst boosting other measures of innovative capacity in order to remain competitive with comparator LEPs.** This includes building on the existing research and innovation ecosystem and enabling businesses to capitalise on innovation assets, leading to supporting the drive for greater economic outputs. There is also a rationale to focus on areas of specialisation, including those identified in the South West England and South East Wales Innovation and Science Audit.

SWLEP has a variety of tangible and intangible assets that are well-placed to accelerate innovation amongst the business base and attract new investors to the area. This includes quality of life, digital connectivity and new University of Wales Trinity St David campus in Swindon Dyson Institute of Engineering and Technology offers opportunities for commercialisation of innovation.

There is also a strong strategic commitment to support innovation, with opportunities to consider wider partnerships and common strengths, building on the South West England and South East Wales Innovation and Science Audit.

Whilst there is no definitive source of business sentiment, there are common perspectives around confidence and barriers to growth. Positive perspectives are tempered by persistent issues. Brexit is casting a shadow over business investment, driven by uncertainty. Challenges such as skills shortages and gaps, transport connectivity, rural community access and availability of commercial property evidence the need for a strategic approach.

2.3 People and Communities

Key conclusions...

SWLEP's population has been growing, but is being squeezed by demographic factors, including a shrinking WAP share, leading to a tightening of the labour market. And the threat of a 'demographic crunch' in the context of forecasted labour demand.

Swindon has the most ethnically diverse population in SWLEP, suggesting strong international links and an opportunity to develop improved economic linkages and celebrate cultural diversity, especially as the UK prepares for Brexit.

SWLEP has been successful in attracting migrant labour particularly in Swindon, supporting economic growth and providing businesses with the skills they need to thrive. This demonstrates SWLEP's economic embeddedness but poses risks in the context of Brexit.

Employment and economic activity rates offer positive messages regarding the overall health of the local economy and the extent to which the population is contributing to growth. Comparative advantages versus other LEPs suggest that SWLEP has a strong foundation from which to build on, albeit there are signs of a tight labour market.

Economic inactivity rates suggest challenges around a lack of labour market participation, aligned to the number of individuals not seeking work and increasing levels of people who are unable to seek employment.

In contrast, **unemployment levels remain higher than most comparator LEPs although lower than the national average.** A relatively static rate of decline suggests challenges related to those who are long-term unemployed, unable to make a positive economic contribution and benefit from inclusive growth.

Claimant rates reinforce issues associated with economic inactivity and unemployment, with relatively high levels observed across Swindon and Wiltshire although, declining rates hint at positive sign of progress. That said, this is lower than the national average and reflects the high level of economic activity across SWLEP and comparator areas.

Travel to work analysis clearly shows SWLEP's wider economic connections with neighbouring authority areas, through the flow of labour. Whilst self-containment within Swindon and Wiltshire is strong, the loss of skilled labour to other economic centres brings into focus competition. **Flows of labour are also dynamic, given continued investment in transport and the disruptive effects of technology.**

SWLEP's economic relationships, evidenced through travel to work patterns, with neighbouring areas reinforces the case for partnership working across administrative boundaries. There is scope to develop common approaches where economic characteristics and ambitions are shared, including place and sector-based growth and a single Local Industrial Strategy. This includes neighbouring Oxfordshire, West of England and GFirst LEPs.

The proportion of self-employed individuals in SWLEP has increased, recording the second largest increase across comparator LEPs. SWLEP's current self-employment rate ranks it 5th highest among the LEPs but higher than the national average (10.9%). The cause for this change in is nuanced and the causes of which include the rise of the gig economy and short-term contracts, technological advances, reducing the costs of self-employment and postponement of retirement.

Home working plays an important role in the function of the Swindon and Wiltshire economy, particularly in Wiltshire. The drivers for this are likely to be varied, from an accelerated rollout of digital infrastructure and the changing shape of the public sector. **Whilst home working is an indication of entrepreneurial activity, there are questions around productivity and scale-up potential.**

SWLEP's occupational structure reflects the economy's sectoral composition and reinforces messaging around a productivity challenge. The presence of lower-level occupations is more pronounced in Swindon, whilst other LEPs benefit from occupations with higher levels of economic output. **The occupational structure also needs to be viewed in the context of Working Futures projections, which sets out forecasted expectations for sector growth and associated occupations.**

The supply of higher-level skills is healthy and low levels of individuals with no qualifications are encouraging, but SWLEP lags other LEPs with its strengths being in an intermediate skills base. Existing qualifications profiles need to be viewed in the context of forecasted change and anticipated demand for higher skills, as outlined in Working Futures projections, and the extent to which these will support growth in sector-driven occupations or where mismatches may be present.

Apprenticeships remain an important component of national skills and training policy, with SWLEP making a positive contribution to delivery. **Apprenticeship starts levels have shown encouraging growth, but the data also suggests that this may not be translating into desired achievements.** There is a need to improve the supply of labour and offer strong employment prospects for local people.

Swindon and Wiltshire benefit from a good base of further education provision, leading to strong levels of participation, particularly in Swindon. However, this is focused on low to intermediate skill levels, with a lack of students studying to attain higher-level qualifications. The Post-16 review notes a variety of wider challenges, including access barriers impacting on participation in rural communities. Wiltshire benefits from an extensive network of sixth form schools, some of which are high performing.

A lack of higher education participation is also a challenge. Coupled with this is an issue of graduate retention, which is limiting the supply of skilled labour to enterprise, especially in rural areas. The delivery of new higher education

facilities in Swindon and increased further education provision will help to shift these patterns, however the impact of this is unlikely to be transformational given the tight academic focus and scale of activity.

There are challenges associated with an imbalance of skills demand versus supply. This is evident in reported skills shortages, gaps and hard-to-fill vacancies, which are all preventing local businesses from fulfilling their growth potential. Consideration also needs to be given employers demanding higher-level skills and how local institutions respond to this.

The supply and demand of skilled labour is also brought into sharp focus in the context of Brexit and SWLEP's reliance on international migrant labour. Skills shortages and gaps are already hindering business growth and could become more acute with a reduction in the supply of labour from the EU.

Income and earnings levels are lower than comparator LEPs and reinforce the productivity challenge. There is variation between Swindon and Wiltshire and income levels obtained by residents and workers, informing commuting patterns. Analysis also poses questions around the amount of retained value in the local economy and whether a policy response is required to reverse these trends.

Deprivation remains a local issue and the most pronounced challenges are concentrated in dense, urban locations, particularly Swindon, driven by factors, including education, employment and income measures. **Deprivation challenges in rural areas, whilst less concentrated, should not be ignored** and may be significant when considering the number of affected communities.

There is also evidence that SWLEP is delivering 'good growth', which is place-based and balances the economic and social outcomes of its citizens. Over time, Swindon and Wiltshire has performed well on key indicators, however, there is strong competition from neighbouring LEPs, who have also exhibited 'good growth' characteristics.

Crime levels across Swindon and Wiltshire are comparably low and inform measures of deprivation and quality of life. This offers positive messaging which can be communicated externally, helping to secure inward and foreign direct investment and to attract skilled labour. **Crime issues also need to be understood, in the context of deprivation, unemployment and economic inactivity.**

2.4 Sustainable Economic Growth

Key conclusions...

Whilst brownfield sites are contributing to growth, a larger proportion of this has come from greenfield sites. There will be consequences versus sustainable development and the retention and protection of greenspace and rural land, and a balance may need to be found which enables rural areas to accommodate growth, alongside the regeneration of larger settlements and town centres.

The planning system appears to be functioning well, supporting economic growth. Whilst local views suggest the planning system can be bureaucratic, there is a strong acknowledgement of sustainable development delivering economic returns. Permitted development rates need to be viewed in the context of housing delivery, against the loss of valuable employment space, so that the prospects for growth and inward investment are not marginalised.

High quality greenspace, prevalent across Wiltshire, is a key economic asset. The quality of the natural environment, presence of AONBs and commitment to preservation supports a valuable tourism sector, land-based industries, and attracts investment; **there is scope to unlock further capital from the natural environment.**

SWLEP's decreasing carbon footprint suggests businesses are reaping economic benefits associated with operating efficiencies. The Low Carbon sector is a major contributor to local employment and economic activity, but there is little room for complacency given competition. Waste and recycling rates may hinder the development of a circular economy approach across SWLEP, but additional research may be required to develop a fuller picture.

Transport connectivity and access remain key challenges for the Swindon and Wiltshire economy. Important strategic investments have and continue to be made but more is needed to tackle north-south routes, connect new developments, improve access to key employment centres, enhance public transport services in rural areas and lower car dependency.

Broadband and digital infrastructure is of vital importance to economic growth and digital competitiveness. Superfast and ultrafast broadband coverage has continued to improve and prospects for further improvements are strong but continued investment is needed to deliver universal superfast coverage, plug 'not spots' and tackle the 'digital divide'. Mobile connectivity, whilst improving, remains patchy and hinders productivity.

Renewable energy capacity suggests there is scope to increase demand and draw on supplies of heat and power, reaping economic benefits associated such as greater operational business efficiencies and development of sector-based industries. Reducing a reliance on non-domestic fuel supplies may be important, post Brexit. SWLEP has seen considerable renewable energy investment, including specialist hydrogen facilities and government-backed renewable heat installations.

The delivery of new housing across Swindon and Wiltshire is a strong signal that physical growth is helping to meet housing targets. The economic benefits associated with this are significant, from the expansion of the labour market, to supply

chain opportunity and to establishing high-quality communities. **Issues associated with affordability are evident, supply pressures are accentuated by future demand and Brexit may also have a longer-term impact on house prices.**

The commercial property market underpins the local economy, sector growth prospects and acts as an inward and foreign direct investment attractor. As with housing, there is a need to ensure supply meets demand in the context of quality, flexibility and where possible, employment space is retained and upgraded.

2.5 Growth Trajectory

Key conclusions...

Swindon and Wiltshire's population is growing and is projected to reach 795,800 by 2039. In absolute terms the number of working-age people will increase by +7,600 from 2016 levels. **However, in relative terms the working-age population share is decreasing by 2039, will have reduced by 5%.**

Swindon and Wiltshire have a rapidly growing older population, with an additional 71,000 people aged 65+ expected to be living by 2039. This increased dependent population will have implications for the size of the labour pool to fuel economic growth, and place pressure on service provision.

There is expected to be 145,000 job openings created by replacement demand between 2014-2024, with a further 24,000 job openings will be created by expansion, resulting in a net requirement of 168,000 job openings. The ability of the Swindon and Wiltshire economy to meet these demands presents a significant challenge.

The largest recruitment demands are anticipated to be in service sectors such as Wholesale and Retail Trade, Health and Social Work, Accommodation and Food, Professional Services and Construction and also those sectors on SWLEP's 'watch list' including Visitor Economy, Health and Social Care, and Construction. The scale of demand illustrates the importance of skills supporting local need.

There is a projected shift towards a more highly-skilled workforce. By 2024 51% of employees are anticipated to hold QCF Level 4 or above. There will be eight percentage point more employees in high-skill occupations, with a decrease in middle-skilled occupations. **This will require a focus on reskilling and upskilling of the workforce and resident population to ensure the talent pool is aligned to employer needs.**

Looking ahead, the **Functional Economic Market Assessment predicts a growth of 40,200 jobs over the 2016-2036 period at an average rate of 0.5% per annum. All three FEMA areas are expected to share in this growth, with Swindon-M4 seeing the greatest absolute rise in employment.**

Broadly, the SEP's priority and 'watch list' sectors align with projected sector growth across SWLEP. Those with particularly good growth prospects such as the **Financial and Professional Services, Education, Health and**

Construction, have a strong policy directive within the existing SEP. Moreover, policy support for **Accommodation and Food, and Information and Communications** is also well targeted.

The fortunes of target sectors such as Manufacturing and land-based industries are more mixed in employment growth terms and will require support for anticipated productivity gains. Despite government consolidation of MoD sites and the strength of military presence in SWLEP, the Public Administration and Defence sector is expected to shrink across the Swindon-M4 and A350 FEMAs.

Enabling infrastructure such as homes and sites and premises are crucial to support economic growth. Overall, Swindon and Wiltshire need to deliver 3,650 new dwellings per annum to meet identified need over the 2016-2036 period, a challenge in the context of historic completion rates. New homes will support labour market expansion, increase attractiveness to inward investors and promote a progressive growth agenda.

Employment land requirements of 12.4-14.9ha are required annually to accommodate forecast demand. If achieved, Swindon and Wiltshire will be well-placed to support growth in key sectors. **The planning system will need to respond to the assumed demands, which represent a significant increase in historic rates of development.**

3. Moving towards a Local Industrial Strategy

- 1.7 A summary of SWLEP's economic strengths and weaknesses, drawn from LEA chapters, begins to bring future policy considerations into focus. The strategic rationale is two-fold:
- a. Considering changes in the economy since the last Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) was published and whether this reflects a suitable future policy direction.
 - What has changed in terms of the health of the local economy?
 - Is the current sector focus still viable and appropriately targeted?
 - Has the spatial focus of growth changed in any way?
 - Does the SEP remain a relevant framework for action?
 - b. The launch of the government's Industrial Strategy, setting out a new vision for national prosperity and growth, driving the need to develop Local Industrial Strategies (LIS). Incentives for pursuing an LIS are key:
 - The ability to show direct alignment with government priorities.
 - Securing access to funding that requires a LIS to be in place.
 - Integration with government's continued commitment to support LEAs.
 - Form the basis for sector deals and the prospect of further devolution.
- 1.8 Within this policy context there are also considerations that are distinct to SWLEP. These include:
- The extent to which SWLEP can and should look work strategically with partners and across boundaries, including neighbouring LEAs.
 - Adopting a policy position that reflects the distinctiveness of Swindon and Wiltshire yet supports common opportunities and challenges.
- 1.9 Assuming the imminent development of a Swindon and Wiltshire LIS, key policy considerations emanating from the LEA can be structured under the five foundations of boosting productivity and earning power.

3.1 Ideas

- 1.10 Swindon and Wiltshire LEA is well-placed to enhance its ability to exploit innovation assets, commercialise research, attract investment and increase the productivity of key sectors. To do this SWLEP will need to address the following:
- Invest in infrastructure that can support innovation and R&D, including technology.
 - Reinforce a culture of entrepreneurship through learning, start-ups.
 - Provide a platform from which businesses can scale up and grow.
 - Secure greater investment from private and public sources.



- Build on wider regional strengths, as identified in the South West England and South East Wales Innovation Audit, including identified digital innovation and advanced engineering clusters and the automotive and hydrogen ‘corridor’.
- Increase the impact of further and higher education, retaining the best talent locally.

3.2 People

3.5 Swindon and Wiltshire’s people are the lifeblood of the local economy and underpin a dynamic and skilled labour market. People cultivate ideas, innovate and strive for economic growth and prosperity. SWLEP need to address the following to provide better outcomes for local people:

- Supporting sectors that will drive productivity and offer higher wages, such as the Knowledge Economy and Life Sciences.
- Deliver a skills system that focuses on higher-level occupations and meets the needs of employees and employers.
- Increase opportunities to participate in higher education and apprenticeships.
- Tackle entrenched issues of unemployment and economic inactivity to maximise the labour market participation.
- Pursue a ‘good’ growth agenda which takes a balanced approach to economic growth in the context of social needs, so that as many people can participate in meaningful employment as possible.
- Overcome the underlying causes of deprivation and economic exclusion.

3.3 Infrastructure

3.6 Building on an impressive base of physical and ‘soft’ infrastructure, there are opportunities to reinforce Swindon and Wiltshire’s comparative advantages and tackle issues that are holding back economic growth:

- Resolve long-standing road access and congestion issues, including north-south connectivity.
- Develop a strong public transport offer, including rail infrastructure improvements and improved access in rural communities.
- Pursue sustainable transport solutions which reduces personal car reliance.
- Ensure fixed and mobile broadband connectivity issues are resolved, providing universal coverage and bridging the ‘digital divide’.
- Delivery of education infrastructure which is high quality and fit for purpose, including those that have direct links to industry, respond to skills needs and act as a beacon for education excellence across Swindon and Wiltshire.

3.4 Business Environment

3.7 In the context of stiff competition, to attract inward investment and meet the needs of important sectors, a supportive business environment must be in place. SWLEP will need to consider the following:

- Ensure employment space meets business needs, responds to market signals and offers flexibility.
- Deliver an education system that is responsive to the needs of employers and key sectors.
- Provide a strong ecosystem of business support and access to finance.
- Support new developments that will meet the needs of businesses and help to attract inward and foreign direct investment.
- Encourage interaction between businesses, institutions and government to support growth, start-ups and rural agglomeration.

3.5 Place

3.8 The economic value of place is important. It requires consistent investment to ensure Swindon and Wiltshire will be a great place to live, local distinctiveness is retained and enhanced, and growth is well-designed and based on local need and opportunities. To deliver this objective, SWLEP will need to address the following:

- Ensure the quality of the natural environment is balanced with opportunities for rural areas to deliver economic growth.
- Deliver housing growth which creates new, affordable and cohesive communities.
- Focus economic growth on place-based sectors that are distinct and specialised, whilst exploring opportunities for new partnerships where commonalities exist.

3.9 Effectively communicate place-based advantages, such as connectivity, quality of life and location to attract inward investment and skilled labour.