

## **CONSULTATION QUESTIONS & Responses**

Consultation List:

Internal:

- Housing
- Planning
- Sustainability
- Cllr Tillotson
- Matt Bradford

External:

- Loughborough University
- Loughborough College
- BID
- Shepshed Town Team
- MP's
- FSB -
- E Mids Chamber

Seven questions as part of the consultation exercise.

The 7 questions and responses:

**Q1. Are the four main strategic priority areas of Places and Infrastructure, Business Environment, People, and Innovation appropriate?**

- The proposed priorities seem to be appropriate.
- Would recommend that the People section becomes People & Skills
- Yes, however we would suggest that 'People' should become 'People **and skills**' and should be considered in moving to be the priority as they are the key part of the strategy and central to the work of Charnwood and partners.
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**Q2. Has the Strategy omitted any significant objectives which, in your view, should be included? (If so, what are they and why are they important?)**

- Notes are track changed to the attached document and under each are some suggestions of additional objectives most of which are in process so far through various initiatives. I've tried to draft text in the comments so if you do choose to add them, you have some proposed text already.
- One suggestion I would make is that you could potentially provide more specificity on named projects or partners – for example in some cases Town Deal projects are named (Town Centres - section A bullet 4) in others there is no explicit reference to specific projects (People – section C bullet 1 / 2 no mention of work undertaken by LUinc. in support of businesses hence the suggestion of 'building on...' addition) appreciate you can't namecheck everyone / thing but just an suggestion.
- See my suggested additions in Business Environment Section A - on clusters, John Weightman recently share this information which might be of interest and relevance:

<https://www.centreforcities.org/publication/innovation-hotspots-clustering-the-new-economy/#:~:text=Hotspots%20are%20places%20where%20innovative,work-ers%20within%20and%20between%20companies>

In this respect, this strategy could make more specific mention of existing and growing clusters and 'strengths of Charnwood' hence my suggesting to include more on sport, health, wellbeing, net zero, manufacturing etc. you will see this features in a number of comments on Business Env section.

- Another point, not captured in my comments made in document, is that there might be more which could be said about exploration of how best to leverage value from local clusters in support of those most in need across our communities – Town Deal Healthy & Innovative Living Project is a good example of this in action.
- Another point to consider is whether the strategy captures the strong need for the workforce to upskill into new technologies. With the emergence of AI and a variety of advanced manufacturing methods and new ways and means of working it would be good to see more captured on the need to upskill people in new technologies in particular corresponding with the governments science and technology – and again this being for the whole borough not just the tech focussed areas. Again, Town Deal offers a vehicle to 'deliver' on this and connecting with the University DigiLabs and Lou College initiatives.
- Within Places and Infrastructure A. we would suggest including all the Towns Deal projects as a collective, these could be referred to as a 'building on the success of'...and 'we will work with partners to continue the delivery of...'
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- Within Places and Infrastructure B. Delivering Infrastructure and Employment Land/Premises we would propose an additional bullet point that references skills needed to deliver this infrastructure – working with partners to develop an offer that can be part of a package that attracts large employers to the area.
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- Within Places and Infrastructure C. Developing a Strong Borough-Wide Economy and Sustainable Practice there is a reference to digital, we feel the strategy would benefit from a focus/objective on AI and digital transformation to enable Charnwood to be forward thinking with the infrastructure to support the future needs of businesses in the area.
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- Within Business Environment there is no reference to Loughborough University Incubator which delivers this in the local area, alongside activity from the Business Gateway Hub at the LLEP. We would suggest including these organisations and the work they deliver to reduce the chance of duplication and ensure complementary support. This comment is also relevant to the People C. Encouraging Entrepreneurship.
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- Within Business Environment B 'attract and support potential investors', we would suggest also including the 'development of the support package', this offer could be very impactful across all partners including training providers to attract business and investment to the area.
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- Within People A. 'Building a Skilled and Learning Workforce' – we aren't clear on what this sentence is trying to say.
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- Within People A. 'Building a Skilled and Learning Workforce' – bullet point two 'bring employers and education together. This is activity undertaken by the East Midlands Chamber in

their role as the Employer Representative Body for the Local Skills Improvement Plan and therefore there may be a duplication here. We would suggest that the Local Skills Improvement Plan is also referenced in the strategy.

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- Within People A. 'Building a Skilled and Learning Workforce' – bullet point three 'encourage graduates to remain in the borough'. We would also propose consideration being given to engagement of businesses during study and offering of work placements across Further Education and Higher Education to enable this to happen. Our experience has found that students grow loyalty and commitment to businesses when they engage with them and if this can be earlier in their study, they are more likely to stay post-graduation.
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- Within People A. 'Building a Skilled and Learning Workforce' – the student population in the area and connection between people, skills and business growth doesn't feature here however we believe it is key to delivering a skilled workforce and so inclusion should be considered.
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- Within Innovation there isn't reference to the role of Further Education and Colleges role. There may be a point missing here in terms of the process innovation that businesses can deliver where large R&D isn't required but small improvements replicated in a process can lead to business innovation. This is particularly relevant to our SME population of businesses and connects with existing work being delivered by the college and into innovation organisations such as Innovate Edge hosted out of the East Midlands Chamber.
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- Place planning is key when considering any influx of businesses or expected population growth and how capital/infrastructure investment will be targeted in this area. Place infrastructure including education infrastructure, and more practically school and college places should be considered to connect the infrastructure and place objectives. In addition, there is an ongoing need for local student accommodation post 16 that isn't referred to in the infrastructure section. This would drive economic development within Charnwood, and we would recommend this is included within the strategy with support and incentives for those who are able to partner to enable this to be delivered.
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**Q3. Does the Strategy include too many objectives?**

- Subject to the additional proposed objectives the number of objectives seems to be just right. Particularly as for many we have 'live' projects already seeking to address these and therefore there is good chance we will make solid progress together on them.
- The overarching number of 4 seems to be correct. In considering suggestions above we would recommend the inclusion of 2 or 3 objectives within these.

**Q4. Does the strategy provide a useful platform upon which collaborative working and delivery of actions can be developed?**

- Certainly; though through suggested additions I have tried to add depth to these and articulate wording which might be relevant if we work together on joint bids or explore other opportunities in the future (e.g. comment on Town Centres section C bullet 3 is an example of this)

- The objectives outlined do provide a framework for collaborative working however we would need to be clearer on the intent and where accountability sits to maintain engagement in the delivery of the strategy. Further detail in the actions and monitoring section would help us to understand this.

**Q5. What would be your ‘Top 3’ areas of action from those which are included within the draft Strategy?**

This is difficult to answer! All of it is very important to us but I would consider the following top priorities from my perspective:

- 1) Town Centres – animating the town centres and Loughborough as a place for people to setup businesses but also to live and engage in community and leisure
- 2) CREATING A FERTILE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT FOR GROWTH – promotion of business support to businesses and what the support offer comprises, who deliver it etc. & ENCOURAGING ENTREPRENEURSHIP – working with individuals to inspire them and support them to explore entrepreneurship and to upskill to understand how to plan, experiment, build, test, and develop new businesses and innovations
- 3) SUPPORT A PROGRESSIVE, KNOWLEDGE BASED ECONOMY WHICH FOSTERS INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO BUSINESS - Building up and raising profile of our clusters and particular strengths across the Borough
- Support the facilitation of the supply of major employment sites and enable infrastructure through planning and growth delivery mechanisms. – we would recommend including skills here as referenced above.
- Work with partner organisations to provide opportunities which encourage graduates to remain employed or in business within the borough. – we would recommend considering during study opportunities also as referenced above.
- Support innovation and key sectors’ growth partnerships / networks – we would recommend a reference to colleges and the role of further educations here as reference above, either within this objective or as a separate objective in this section.

**Q6. Is the Strategy relevant to the needs of businesses in Charnwood?**

Yes it’s relevant, though the action plans should give greater specificity to how this activity will unfold.

Also, picking up a comment made in the document on Business Env introductory section, suggest there should be greater reference made to SMEs and/or more ‘established’ small businesses as well as earlier stage and/or knowledge based businesses.

The SME voice is extremely important within the area and this doesn’t seem to feature heavily enough within the strategy. The focus on inward investment and the reference in Business Environment A. Creating a Fertile Business Environment for Growth supports a lot of the ongoing activity. Is there an opportunity to be more ambitious here to support further impact for existing businesses? We would also suggest aligning the areas referred to here with the people and skills challenges outlined in the People section to ensure consistent messaging.

**Q7. Will the Strategy help facilitate an inclusive approach to economic development, for all parts of the borough and for people and businesses of diverse circumstances?**

The objectives outlined do provide a framework for this, further connectivity across the strategy between the objectives may help to broaden the impact.

**General Comments given:**

- Sport, physical activity and health have no mention in the strategy. The volume of businesses in the area and events that these generate is really valuable to the local economy.
- We would suggest there would be value in broader reference to the wider regional investment connections, such as the Freeport, as employment opportunities here will benefit people from within Charnwood, this connection may also assist with driving the Charnwood strategy.

I like the 4 main strategic priority areas and I can't think of any other main areas for inclusion and yes, clearly relevant to the needs of quality businesses.

I did wonder if there were too many objectives, but couldn't come to any conclusion about which ones to omit and I believe it does provide a sound basis on which to work with partners. We could combine People and building a skilled workforce.

It is hard to identify what is more important, but my top 3 areas of action are:

- working with partners to drive forward regeneration opportunities.
- Create a fertile business environment for growth.
- Sustain high levels of employment.

While I am substantially happy with the document, I have a few minor thoughts:

In developing a strong borough wide economy, do we want to encourage more homeworking? Could we instead change the end of this paragraph, after Charnwood, to limit the need to travel and enable homeworking, while recognising that in most cases 100% homeworking is not desirable ( could also add as high levels of homeworking is known to impact other parts of the economy and also have a detrimental effect on the mental health of individuals).

In creating a fertile business environment for growth: work with partner organisations to promote Charnwood as a vibrant easily accessible area for business activity and growth.

And finally, in either People or building a skilled workforce, could we say develop strategies and opportunities to encourage local graduates to stay local.

