The Integrated Economic Development Strategy for Mid and East Antrim 2018-2030
Our Vision

By 2030, we want Mid and East Antrim to be:

- A nationally competitive economy, with output, productivity and wage rates at least 95% of the UK (including London) average.

- Northern Ireland’s leading centre of excellence for advanced manufacturing and agri-food with recognised capabilities in tourism, financial and business services and digital technologies.

- Operating with an economically active population equal in size in percentage terms to the UK (including London) average, known for its high-level skills, and providing critical labour mass in our priority sectors.

- A proud, vibrant, and ambitious place, which collaborates with other centres, encourages business and its investment, and is recognised for people wanting to live and work here.
I am delighted to introduce Amplify, the new Integrated Economic Strategy for Mid and East Antrim.

The Elected Members of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, together with our partners, are fully committed to working together to deliver sustainable economic growth in our Borough. The message is clear - Mid and East Antrim is ‘open for business’. For me, there has never been a more exciting time to work in local government, as we begin to transform not only Council services but public services right across Northern Ireland.

Amplify aligns closely with the focus, drive and strategic priorities outlined in the Northern Ireland Executive’s Programme for Government and the supporting Economic and Industrial Strategies. We will continue to work closely with central government colleagues and our MPs to strategically position our Borough as an ideal place to live, work and invest in by 2030.

At a local level ‘Growing the Economy’ is our number one strategic priority. Council will remain at the forefront of driving change and pump priming economic growth. With responsibility for developing the spatial plan for our area, we will make the required planning decisions, initiate key development proposals and work collaboratively with all partners through our Community Plan, ‘Putting People First 2017 – 2032’. Along with partners, we are ideally positioned to lead the development process to create jobs, support the growth of new and existing businesses, develop employment and skills opportunities and secure key infrastructure investment in our Borough.

We fully recognise the challenging economic climate we operate in and rather than be daunted by the challenges posed by an economy in flux, we have chosen to embrace change and strive to ensure Mid and East Antrim is ideally positioned to adapt to and thrive in an ever-changing economy.

I trust that you will find Amplify relevant, refreshing and modern in its direction, intent and commitment. We commend this strategy to you and assure you of our ongoing commitment and confidence in our ability to deliver on its priorities. Working together, we can continue to ensure that Mid and East Antrim will remain a significant economic hub in Northern Ireland. We believe that the implementation of Amplify will contribute significantly to the future growth of not only the Mid and East Antrim area but ‘Northern Ireland plc’ as a whole.
1 Introducing Amplify

Amplify is a new and fresh Integrated Economic Development Strategy for Mid and East Antrim, for the period 2018-2030. Amplify’s strategic framework is intended to catalyse and guide the work of all stakeholders as they strive to improve the prospects of the area’s people, businesses and communities.
Amplify is built on the strong foundations of the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council’s Corporate Plan 2015-2019 with its vision of: “Working together to create a better future for all.” Critically the Corporate Plan places ‘Growing the Economy’ as the number one strategic priority for the Council area.

Based on key evidence and using extensive partner consultation, Amplify will focus on driving and delivering a clear short, medium and long-term strategy right through to 2030. We understand that there are no easy short-term solutions to the challenges we face as a community. However together we firmly believe that the opportunities to radically grow the economy are fully realisable over the duration of the plan.

At its core Amplify will provide the engine and navigation necessary to plot a safe and practical route to deliver upon our economic and business goals. Our area has experienced significant challenges in recent years. Amplify seeks to provide innovation, certainty, and stability for the benefit of our people, businesses and communities. Our approach has been all embracing but is laser focused on the key outcomes we wish to deliver. In parallel, the strategy has been designed with flexibility at its core, allowing us to act dynamically and assertively in the face of new challenges or opportunities that will likely emerge across the duration of the plan.

Effective strategy requires strong foundations and pillars of action; consequently, Amplify will be delivered through five critical strategic economic priorities: Enterprise and Entrepreneurship; Innovation; Employment and Skills; Infrastructure and Inclusion and Wellbeing.

The five strategic pillars central to Amplify, complement and dovetail into the objectives of the broader Community Plan for Mid and East Antrim. The strategy and plan acknowledges the fact that the proposition of an attractive place to deliver high value jobs, employment and economic growth requires the further development of a relevant and highly skilled local workforce. Amplify will focus on a proposition which blends infrastructure, talent, technology and lifestyle to attract both new investors and to grow and enhance our local, vibrant, indigenous business sector.

The strategy has also been forged in reality. Recent seismic economic shocks have resulted in some large-scale job loses within the highly prized manufacturing sector across the Borough. Ultimately, the true test of our plan and resolve will be the way in which all stakeholders embrace this new approach and turn these recent challenges into opportunities. Our manufacturing base remains a highly prized strength and our workforce must and will be supported to pivot to new opportunities as they arise over the coming months and years.

In addition, we have committed to creating a vibrant business culture with a specific focus on both advanced manufacturing and agri-food. We must play to our strengths and stake our differentiation in a competitive market. The strategy however will also support the growth of new industry sectors, including digital, tourism, financial and business services. Town centre regeneration, tourism and marketing as well as strong support for the creation of an enterprise and entrepreneurial culture will bring a fresh and revitalised culture to the Borough.

Finally, the plan includes a number of exciting strategic infrastructure projects, which are currently live, or under consideration. These include the redevelopment of the St. Patrick’s Barracks site in Ballymena; the creation of an Advanced Manufacturing Centre of Excellence; Strategic Infrastructural Improvement Projects including Roads, Energy and Broadband development; as well as masterplans for key tourism and regeneration projects. These flagship projects will be visual and physical examples of our energy, commitment and dedication.

Amplify, ‘A Shared Vision for Growing the Economy’, proudly announces that Mid and East Antrim is open for business. It brokers and affirms that our partners are committed to working ‘hand in glove’ with our businesses and communities to ensure the rapid and consistent growth and prosperity of the Borough over the next two decades.

Linda Williams
Director of Economic Growth, Tourism and Regeneration
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council
Linda.williams@midandeastantrim.gov.uk

Amplify Growing the Economy of Mid & East Antrim
2 Situating Mid and East Antrim

The development of Amplify has drawn heavily on data produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, and the wider UK Office of National Statistics, with a view to characterising how the area is performing and illustrating the socio-economic profile of the Borough.

Following this data is presented through five key economic lenses - Enterprise, Skills, Innovation, Infrastructure, and Inclusion and Wellbeing - all of which operate as drivers of productivity.
Population
Overall, the Borough has a population of around 138,000, which is 7.4% of the Northern Ireland population. Its three main towns are Ballymena (30,000 residents), Carrickfergus (28,000) and Larne (19,000), which has a port with passenger and freight connections to Scotland.

Location
The area is located close to Belfast, with Carrickfergus forming part of the wider Belfast Metropolitan Area. This is significant as Belfast is the main driver of the Northern Ireland economy, with the city region accounting for approx 20% of Northern Ireland’s population. Mid and East Antrim is in close proximity to two airports (Belfast International and Belfast City Airports) and Belfast and Larne Harbours. Overall, the area is generally well served by transport links with good road and rail connections into Belfast. Recent upgrades to the A8 and A26 have helped to improve connectivity with the city. Mid and East Antrim’s location and its quality of connectivity (road, rail, ports and airports) needs to be exploited more effectively to attract people to live, work, visit and invest in the Borough.

There are relatively high numbers of residents in the former Council areas of Carrickfergus and Larne who travel into the Belfast City Council area each day for work. In the former Carrickfergus Borough Council area, 5,100 employed residents work in Belfast (28% of the overall employed population of the area) and in the former Larne Borough Council area, 2,150 employed residents work in Belfast (15% of the overall employed population of the area). With recent improvements to transport links, there are opportunities to assist more residents to find work in the city, as well as encouraging city workers to move to Mid and East Antrim.

Business Base
There are 4,700 businesses in the area, which represents 6.6% of all businesses in Northern Ireland. Key employers include Wrightbus, Moy Park and Ciga Healthcare (based in Ballymena), Caterpillar and Terumo (based in Larne) and AES and Ryobi (based in Carrickfergus) to name but a few. Mid and East Antrim has existing sectoral strengths in manufacturing, engineering, and agri-food with other key employers in the energy supply and life sciences sectors.

Employment by Sector
The manufacturing sector is a key driver of the Mid and East Antrim economy. According to the 2015 NI Business Register and Employment Statistics the manufacturing sector accounts for 9,173 jobs (one in five local jobs) with double the level of employment compared to Northern Ireland as a whole and three times the UK average. The official manufacturing statistics are due to change following the closures of JTI Gallaher and Michelin. ‘Wholesale and Retail Trade’ is another significant employer with 9,000 jobs, again at a higher level than both Northern Ireland and the UK. Mid and East Antrim has a lower concentration of jobs in high value sectors such as ‘Information and Communication,’ ‘Finance and Insurance’ and ‘Professional, Scientific and Technical’ services relative to NI and the UK. The most relevant standard industrial classification codes to Amplify’s five priority sectors are advanced manufacturing, agri-food, tourism, financial and business services and digital.

Over the last 20 years, Mid and East Antrim’s economy has grown faster than the UK and NI.

Mid and East Antrim’s economy is currently worth around £2 billion in GVA (Gross Value Added) and has performed well in recent years, experiencing faster annual growth relative to the rest of NI and the UK. In 2013, a quarter of total output in the local economy was attributable to the manufacturing sector – more than triple the equivalent share of 8% for the UK and much higher than 13% in Northern Ireland.

Productivity has improved over the last decade… but a gap still remains

Over the last decade, Mid and East Antrim has made significant progress in improving the productivity of its workforce. By 2013, local productivity had improved to 87% of the UK average (£39,000 set against a UK figure of £46,000, and £39,000 in Northern Ireland). Even given the recent JTI Gallaher and Michelin closure announcements, the projections from Cambridge Econometrics (CE) suggest that Mid and East Antrim will continue to have a high proportion of production jobs which usually generate higher levels of productivity.
.....and continued growth is predicted for the economy up to 2030, but it will be largely ‘job-less’ growth

The Mid and East Antrim economy is in transition following the closure announcements at manufacturers JTI Gallaher and Michelin. Projections from Cambridge Economics to 2030 take account of these job losses, as well as the economic uplift anticipated from the proposed changes to Corporation Tax in 2018. Whilst these projections do not allow for other positive or negative interference effects other than at the top level, they do help pose some important questions and highlight areas of potential exposure going forward.

Mid and East Antrim is projected to grow to a £2.8 billion economy by 2030, increasing at an annual rate of 1.9% - below the equivalent annual growth rate for NI (2.3%) and the UK (2.2%). This increase in GVA will therefore largely be driven by productivity improvements, with Mid and East Antrim forecast to close the productivity gap to 95% of the UK average. By 2030, each worker is expected to be producing an average of £54,500 compared to £59,496 in the UK. Productivity in the local area is also expected to stay above that of NI (£52,405).

Although GVA is expected to grow in the coming years, this is largely expected to be job-less growth with a marginal net increase of 1% predicted between 2013 and 2030. This is well below the forecast employment growth rate for the UK (12.6%) and NI (9.5%) during this period. Employment in Mid and East Antrim is not expected to return to 2010 levels until 2030.

There are some expanding sectors in the economy, accompanied by a small cohort of more productive industries

There are positive signs for the Mid and East Antrim economy, with a strong number of high value ‘expanding sectors’ defined as those industries which will experience growth in both GVA and employment. Examples include the ‘Finance and Insurance’, and ‘Professional, Scientific and Technical’ industries. The most significant sector expected to expand is ‘Information and Communication’ – with an increase in GVA of over 200% and an increase in employment of over 100%. Although these sectors are currently quite small in terms of GVA output, the new Strategic Framework includes Financial and Business Services and Digital as emerging priority sectors.

Adjusting sectors refer to those industries where productivity improvements are being realised and as such an increase in GVA and decrease in employment is expected. Mid and East Antrim has a small cohort of adjusting sectors, such as ‘Real Estate’, ‘Public Administration’, and ‘Health and Social Work.’ In particular, Manufacturing is an adjusting sector. To minimise the overall impact of job losses from this sector, it is important that the benefits of increased productivity are maximised.

FIVE KEY ECONOMIC LENSES

Lense 1: Enterprise
Mid and East Antrim needs more start-ups and growing Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

Mid and East Antrim has seen a reduction in its business base in recent years, falling by 4% over the last decade. In 2017, Mid and East Antrim had 552 businesses per 10,000 working age population, which was lower than the equivalent figures for both Northern Ireland (604) and the UK (609).

Encouraging enterprise and increasing business registration rates must be a key priority of Amplify. Increasing registrations will require targeted action to create a new culture of enterprise within the local economy and education system, accompanied by the necessary support needed to nurture new ventures.

Like other parts of Northern Ireland, broader entrepreneurship activity is low

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 8.8% of the UKs working age population has been involved in early stage entrepreneurship activity. Over the last three years, the average figure for Mid and East Antrim was 8.7%, inline with the UK average and 2.5% higher than the average for Northern Ireland of 6.2%.

www.amplifymidandeastantrim.com
**Lense 2: Innovation**

Mid and East Antrim needs to do more to encourage and nurture business innovation

The industrial structure of Mid and East Antrim presents a number of economic challenges, with a high proportion of enterprises in relatively low-value sectors. For example, in 2017, 29% of all active enterprises were based in agriculture – higher than the equivalent rates of 25% for NI and 6% for the UK. The area also has fewer businesses involved in knowledge-based activity with just 7% of all enterprises involved in professional, scientific or technical industries, well below the UK average of 18% and below the Northern Ireland figure of 8%. The evidence suggests that there is a need for Mid and East Antrim to support more high-value and technology-rich start-ups, perhaps as part of the manufacturing supply chain.
**Lense 3: Skills**

Labour market participation in Mid and East Antrim is higher than NI as a whole but a gap remains with the UK.

The local population in Mid and East Antrim is well engaged in the labour market, with slightly higher employment and activity rates compared to NI as a whole. In 2016, the economic activity rate for Mid and East Antrim was 76% - above the equivalent rate of 74% for Northern Ireland but below that of the UK (78%). Similarly, the employment rate in Mid and East Antrim (74%) in 2016 was higher than the equivalent rate for Northern Ireland (69%) but however in line with that of the UK (74%).

Mid and East Antrim has a skilled and motivated workforce, but with potential to increase higher-level skills.

Mid and East Antrim performs relatively well in terms of the proportion of working age population with no qualifications. The latest (2016) data shows that 13% of Mid and East Antrim’s working age population have no qualifications, less than that of the Northern Ireland figure 16%, however above the UK figure of 9%.

At the opposite end of the scale, 30% of Mid and East Antrim’s working age population has an NVQ Level 4 or above qualification, compared to 31% in Northern Ireland and 36% in the UK. Therefore the vast majority of Mid and East Antrim’s working age population has qualification below NVQ Level 4, in part reflecting the low levels of knowledge economy jobs.
Lense 4: Infrastructure
Mid and East Antrim has strong economic links to wider functional economic areas, supported by good transport infrastructure.

Mid and East Antrim is a diverse area with a complex mix of urban and rural places and importantly, different linkages to wider functional economic areas. The former Larne and Carrickfergus Borough areas have strong linkages and major outflows of resident workers to Belfast as the regional economic centre. According to Census 2011 Travel to Work Data, there are far more employed residents than jobs in Carrickfergus and Larne. In contrast, the former Ballymena area is much more self-contained with the majority of employed residents working in the area. Ballymena also attracts a significant number of workers itself, mainly from Ballymoney and Antrim.

The strategic location of Mid and East Antrim is supported by good transport infrastructure, facilitating travel to and from surrounding areas. In addition to hourly rail links from all three towns into Belfast, Mid and East Antrim benefits from its own port location at the Port of Larne and close proximity to airports (Belfast International and George Best Belfast City). Recent upgrades to the A8 and A26 have helped to improve road travel between the local area and Belfast.

Average house prices in the Borough are the fourth lowest in all Council areas in Northern Ireland.

According to the NI House Price Index November 2017, the average cost of a house in the Borough is £123,234, the fourth lowest of all council areas in Northern Ireland. Attractive house prices help position the area as a desirable place to live for those working in Belfast and surrounding areas, increasing the resident population and generating a new stream of spending in the local economy.
Mid and East Antrim has untapped tourism potential

The area boasts a number of tourist attractions, including Carrickfergus Castle, the Causeway Coastal Route and The Gobbins’ Cliff and Coastal Path. Working with neighbouring Council areas and Tourism Northern Ireland, Council will exploit this untapped tourism potential through promotion, collaboration and further infrastructure improvements, as part of the Tourism Strategy for the region.

The availability of superfast broadband in Mid and East Antrim is mixed, with issues remaining in more rural areas of the region

In 2014, 86% of premises in Carrickfergus had access to superfast broadband. This was higher than the equivalent rates for NI (77%) and the UK (75%). However, superfast provision was considerably lower in other areas of Mid and East Antrim, with 63% of premises in Larne and 62% of premises in Ballymena able to access high speed connections. With a lack of availability persistent in rural areas, there is a need to accelerate the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project to address these issues and deliver a more level playing field throughout Mid and East Antrim. With high-speed broadband recognised as a key driver of productivity, there are also opportunities to maximise the infrastructure that is already in place by providing additional broadband support to businesses.

Availability of employment land...but a lack of business accommodation

There are areas of employment and industrial land available for development in or around the Borough’s three main towns. With over 300 hectares of zoned land, less than 50% is currently developed. Most availability is to be found at Woodside Road in Ballymena, Troopers Lane and Kilroot in the Carrickfergus area and Larne Harbour and Drumahoe in Larne.

There is potential that larger businesses interested in investing in the Borough may be in a position to develop some of these sites.

A lot of the existing accommodation for small businesses is managed by the three Enterprise Agencies.

Ballymena Business Centre has over 100 units around 100,000 sq.ft of workspace and office space across five sites around Ballymena and is 95% occupied. Carrickfergus Enterprise has 54,000 sq. of workspace and office space and is 100% occupied. LEDCOM has around 100,000 sq. of workspace across it’s Willowbank Business Park with 90% occupancy and LEDCOM Industrial Estate with 80% occupancy.

New business accommodation of around 20,000 sq.ft is now available at The Innovation Centre at Ecos, Ballymena. The facility provides ‘science park-styled’ shared and private workspaces with meeting space and business support. Even with this development, stakeholder feedback indicated that more space for both start-ups and established firms is required.
The ongoing need to regenerate towns and villages

Larne has benefitted from Council’s recent investment in their public realm infrastructure, completed in 2017, along with Ballymena due for completion early 2018. Improvements were also made to Carrickfergus town centre. However, with a struggling retail sector and limited night-life offering, there remains significant work to regenerate all towns and villages across Mid and East Antrim.

The Northern Ireland retail vacancy rate is 15%. Comparable data shows Ballymena vacancy rate is 13%, with Larne 18% and Carrickfergus 29%.

One important recent initiative was the creation of Northern Ireland’s first Business Improvement District (BID) in Ballymena. This business-led programme will invest up to £1 million over the next five years in promoting and regenerating Ballymena’s town centre.

Investment in the Borough’s rural villages and settlements will also be important to improve the opportunities for local residents, but also in terms of strengthening the tourism potential of the area. The rural landscape is a major draw for visitors to Mid and East Antrim and therefore the facilities and infrastructure need to be in place to maximise the economic impact of tourism.

Lense 5: Inclusion and Wellbeing

Economic inactivity in Mid and East Antrim is lower than for NI as a whole, but there has been an increase in the number of people claiming benefits

In 2016, the economic inactivity rate in Mid and East Antrim was 24% - below the equivalent rate of 26% for NI but above that of the UK (22%). Despite this, there has been an increase in the number of people claiming at least one type of benefit in recent years. Benefit claimants in the local area rose from 12,400 in 2008 to over 15,570 in 2017 – an increase of approximately 25%. Despite this, the claimant rate in Mid and East Antrim is now 18% which is lower than the Northern Ireland rate of 19%.

Deprivation in Mid and East Antrim is below NI levels but pockets remain in various communities and housing estates

Across the 11 Council areas, Mid and East Antrim has the fifth lowest proportion of the most deprived super output areas across Northern Ireland. Around 12% of the super output areas in Mid and East Antrim are considered to be in the top 20% most income deprived areas across Northern Ireland. Similarly, 17% of the super output areas in Mid and East Antrim is in the top most employment deprived areas in Northern Ireland. Although there is already good support provided by a range of social enterprises, these communities need more intensive support to better equip them to be able to contribute to, and benefit from future economic growth in the local economy and the surrounding areas.
## 3 The Strategic Economic Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Priority</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise and Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Too much reliance on a small number of employers... Need more start-ups and growth from indigenous firms Need to attract more business investment into the area</td>
<td>Increase birth rate and growth of local firms Create a culture of enterprise in the business and education system Grow the indigenous business base and attract new inward investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Low levels of innovation and limited higher education engagement Low number of Knowledge Economy jobs</td>
<td>Increase the level of innovation, research and development and further education/higher education engagement Encourage new technology firms to the area Develop a strong innovation ecosystem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 sectoral emphasis: Advanced Manufacturing, Agri-Food, Tourism, Financial and Business Services + Digital</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Strategic Fit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Building real economic capacity and capability

Improving the profile and branding of Mid and East Antrim, for Foreign Direct Investment

**STRATEGIC PRIORITY**

- **Employment and Skills**
  - **RATIONALE**
    - Risk of losing highly skilled workers
    - Need to move skills up the value chain and also improve employability skills
  - **OBJECTIVES**
    - Retain as many JTI/Michelin skills as possible
    - Change mindset towards entrepreneurship and vocational training
    - Support local firms to grow through tailored skills support

- **Infrastructure**
  - **RATIONALE**
    - Untapped potential of local environment and assets and need to regenerate towns and villages
    - Need to use land and property assets better to showcase and promote the Borough for investment
  - **OBJECTIVES**
    - Improve profile of the Borough for investment and tourism
    - Improve start-up accommodation/grow-on space and superfast broadband connectivity
    - Improve towns and villages and east-west connections

- **Inclusion and Wellbeing**
  - **RATIONALE**
    - Continuing pockets of deprivation and economic inactivity
    - Insufficient awareness of job opportunities in some areas
  - **OBJECTIVES**
    - Increase economic activity levels
    - Promote employment and training opportunities for all
    - Promote social economy

5 sectoral emphasis: Advanced Manufacturing, Agri-Food, Tourism, Financial and Business Services + Digital
3 The Strategic Economic Priorities in Focus
ENTERPRISE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Increase the business birth rate
Mid and East Antrim area’s growth has been largely delivered by a small number of large manufacturing and agri-food employers. The recent manufacturing closures will result in the loss of between 9% and 13% of total GVA outputs.

The current situation presents an opportunity to generate a large number of new start-ups in the area, to help create a more diverse, competitive and dynamic local economy.

Increase the growth of local firms
Although important to continue to support the large employers that remain in the Borough, there needs to be renewed emphasis on nurturing a broader pool of existing SMEs to grow, innovate and export.

There are strong performing businesses in Mid and East Antrim and Invest NI manages a portfolio of some 200 growth-orientated firms that can access tailored support in innovation and exporting.

The strategy calls for greater promotion of the support that is available through Invest NI but also additional support for the next tier down to create a stronger pipeline of growth firms in Mid and East Antrim. We want to create a larger pool of indigenous SMEs that can grow, export and create new employment opportunities in the Borough. The Council and local partners will have a key role in delivering this support.

Create a ‘Culture of Enterprise’ in the business and education systems
Developing a new culture of enterprise needs to start from a young age and more needs to be done to promote enterprise in our schools. As is the case in many parts of Northern Ireland, the school system tends to focus on academic achievement with a view to young people progressing on to Further and Higher Education. However, this may not be appropriate for all and there should be more work done with schools to promote entrepreneurship from an early age through similar initiatives.

Grow the indigenous business base and attract new inward investment
The most recent council area profile shows investment figures for Mid and East Antrim for the period 2012-13 to 2016-17. During that period, total investment was £195m, £70m of which was from externally owned businesses.

As well as growing indigenous SMEs, the area needs to do all it can to position itself for high quality and sustainable inward investment, through the development of a strong investment proposition and close working between Council and Invest NI.
INNOVATION

Increase level of innovation, research and development and engagement with Further and Higher Education

Consultation feedback suggests that innovation activity in Mid and East Antrim is low and limited to a number of the larger firms in the Borough. The lack of a university campus is notable, although there are nearby locations in Belfast, Jordanstown and Coleraine.

There are, however, some good examples of industry-higher education engagement locally. Caterpillar and Wrightbus are involved in the Northern Ireland Advanced Composites and Engineering Centre with Queen’s and Ulster Universities and Wrightbus has set up a Research and Development Centre with Queen’s University to develop composite technologies. Moy Park is also working with Queen’s University on business leadership training and there are other individual Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs) involving local firms.

There is perhaps stronger engagement between local firms and Further Education sector, specifically Northern Regional College, which has two campuses in Ballymena, providing specialist equipment, which can facilitate firms at their Integrated Manufacturing Centre in Ballymena. It also provides programmes targeted at micro and small businesses in the advanced engineering and manufacturing sectors.

Innovation is key to economic competitiveness and drives productivity improvement. Amplify will review the current activity taking place locally and will use this to promote innovation support from the universities, Invest NI and others to a broader number of firms. As an example, more could be done to promote research and development tax credits, so that firms have a better understanding of what is categorised as research and development and can then re-invest funds into their business.

Encourage new technology firms to our area

As shown in earlier evidence, there is a limited population of digital and technology firms in Mid and East Antrim and low levels of knowledge economy jobs. The redevelopment of the Ecos Centre in Ballymena with Science Park style workspace through a management agreement with Catalyst Inc is an important initiative, which will encourage more technology-based firms to the Borough. However, this is just one initiative and more support needs to be provided to create more higher-value jobs in our priority sectors, particularly around advanced manufacturing, agri-food, financial and business services and digital sectors. This support could include promoting Foreign Direct Investment, creating suitable sites and premises and the delivery of tailored business and start-up programmes.

Develop a strong innovation ‘ecosystem’

We want to create an effective innovation ecosystem where all support agencies, businesses and communities are working together to encourage innovation and economic growth. Across all stakeholders in public, private and third sectors, there is a need to embrace new developments in innovation, such as the shift from closed to open innovation.
EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS

Retain as many JTI Gallaher and Michelin skills as possible
Local agencies are supporting workers affected by the two closures. The priority is to redeploy these workers as quickly as possible, either through helping them set up in business, or by finding alternative employment, either in Mid and East Antrim or indeed elsewhere. Some of the skilled labour has already moved to other manufacturing firms and this is important for the area to retain as many of these skilled workers as possible. There needs to be continued engagement with the two firms through the ongoing redundancy process from the relevant business and skills support agencies. The work of a Manufacturing Task Force (MTF) will support these efforts.

Change mind sets toward enterprise and vocational training
Amplify will improve the skills of young people to better equip them for the world of work. Due in part to the presence of large manufacturing employers, there has perhaps been some complacency amongst young people that they will leave school and immediately find a job. This is no longer the case and there needs to be more effort to promote enterprise and vocational skills in local schools as well as promoting Higher Education opportunities where appropriate. Enterprise in schools is not just about promoting entrepreneurship but also fostering a more pro-active ‘can-do’ attitude to work and learning.

Similarly, there needs to be a new culture of enterprise within local businesses, which encourages ongoing workplace training and continuous process development. What Amplify wants to establish is a new mind set, where all workers are given the skills support they need; from basic literacy and numeracy skills up to higher level technical qualifications.

A focus will be developing strategies for all five priority sectors (advanced manufacturing, agri-food, tourism, financial and business services and digital) to better understand our assets, the opportunities for growth in these areas and the development needs of our businesses.

Support local firms to grow through tailored skills support
A range of skills and training programmes are already available in Mid and East Antrim through Northern Regional College, other Department for Economy initiatives and Invest NI. These need to be promoted more effectively to ensure greater take-up through events, case studies and better knowledge of employer and employee training needs. This needs to focus and align to the priority sectors that we believe will help to drive future economic growth in the Borough.
**INFRASTRUCTURE**

*Improve the profile of the borough for investment and tourism*

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has always been important for the Northern Ireland economy and there will likely be new opportunities following the proposed changes to Corporation Tax in 2018. In light of these changes, and more generally, we need to be ready with a strong FDI proposition, which covers sites and premises, local skills and links into Further and Higher Education support networks.

From a planning perspective, the new Council clearly has an important role in facilitating the development of new sites, where it fits with the Local Development Plan. Using its new responsibilities for planning and economic development, Council needs to take a proactive approach to working closely with investors and communities to encourage new employment opportunities. Particularly following recent job announcements, Council and our partners need to make sure people know that Mid and East Antrim is open for business.

Our local environment and quality of life are key assets for our place. The area has a strong tourism product with untapped potential and with further development, this can create economic benefits across both urban and rural parts of Mid and East Antrim. We need to increase the profile of Mid and East Antrim as a place to invest, live, work and visit.

The new Mid and East Antrim Tourism Strategy has an important role in setting out what we can do to develop the tourism product and promotion. The new Tourism Strategy is based around five strategic themes, which aim to develop the product and enhance the visitor experience.

- The Causeway Coastal Route
- Culture and Heritage
- Events and Festivals
- Destination Marketing
- Destination Management
Improve start-up accommodation/grow-on space and superfast broadband connectivity

Through Amplify we want to increase the number of start-ups and growing local businesses. We need to have the right property portfolio to support these aspirations. Although there are some existing start-up units across the Borough, some of which are managed by the Enterprise Agencies, most of these are occupied. New accommodation has been developed at the Ecos Centre, Ballymena, but we need more premises for start-ups and also those successful firms looking to expand within the Borough. This type of business needs to be central to major developments being planned around Ballymena (St Patrick’s Barracks). Larne and Carrickfergus would also benefit from similar investments.

Superfast Broadband is becoming a must for most successful businesses, enabling the adoption of new technologies. Improving broadband coverage and infrastructure remains a priority particularly for some of the more rural parts of Mid and East Antrim. Project Kelvin has provided the area with fast connectivity to North America as well as improved connectivity to mainland Europe. We need to make sure we are fully exploiting the opportunities from this investment. We also need to make sure that businesses are fully exploiting the economic benefits of superfast broadband.

Improve our towns and villages and east west connections

Town centres are clearly important hubs for investment and tourism. They also contribute to a sense of place and quality of life for residents. There have been recent investments in public realm improvements and a new Business Improvement District (BID) has been set up in Ballymena to lever in more investment. However, the lack of a night-time economy in the three main towns, and indeed in our other more rural settlements, encourages residents to spend their money outside the Borough.

Ballymena has traditionally been one of Northern Ireland’s key retail destinations. However, it has suffered recently from the economic downturn and new trends in online and out-of-town retail. Through the BID and other support, the aim is to ensure that the town can retain its status as a key retail and commercial hub in Northern Ireland.

More generally, there is need to think more creatively about how to make best use of our town centres. This includes how Amplify and can improve the retail product, create space for local events and festivals, develop a vibrant night-time economy, and encourage more business start-up activity. Simply put, Amplify calls for a more innovative approach to planning and managing our towns and villages.

Mid and East Antrim brings together the three former boroughs of Ballymena, Larne and Carrickfergus. As mentioned earlier there have always been strong links between Larne and Carrickfergus into Belfast but Ballymena, with its larger population and business base, has acted more as a self-contained local economy. Links between east and west have therefore been quite limited. In order to create a more cohesive economy, more could be done in terms of public transport provision to bring together all parts of Mid and East Antrim.

Belfast Wider Region City Deal

As a member of the Belfast Wider Region City Deal, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council have welcomed the announcement by the Prime Minister, Theresa May in the November 2017 Autumn Statement of her intention to support Northern Ireland’s first City Deal. Our Council is actively working in partnership with our Council partners on the submission and delivery of the City Deal projects. These projects will help assist in the delivery of the objectives of ‘Amplify’ which focus on an increase in job creation, GVA and productivity.
INCLUSION AND WELLBEING

Increase economic activity levels
Although economic activity rates are relatively high, there remains work to do in certain locations in our urban areas, to ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute to the local economy. Much work has been done in the Neighbourhood Renewal Areas in Ballymena, as well as the more deprived estates in Carrickfergus and Larne. However, there continues to be social issues, which prevent people from realising their economic potential. Amplify therefore calls for more targeting of enterprise and employability support in the more deprived areas.

Promote employment and training opportunities for all
The objective of Amplify is to grow the local economy through helping local businesses and to ensure all residents can fulfil their economic potential. Many residents work in the Borough but there is also a sizeable number that work outside Mid and East Antrim. Although their direct economic output will be captured elsewhere, a lot of their income will be spent locally (e.g. in shops, restaurants and bars) which in turn sustains local employment and GVA. When supporting young people and the unemployed into work, partners need to promote relevant employment opportunities regardless of where the jobs are based. As already highlighted, there has traditionally been a high number of residents from the former Carrickfergus and Larne Borough Council areas commuting to Belfast for work. Improvements to transport links will make this easier in the future.

Promote the social economy
The theme of enterprise which runs through this Strategy includes encouraging more social enterprise start-ups and promotion of support to established social enterprises.

There are almost 500 social enterprises in Northern Ireland, with over 12,000 employees and a further 13,000 volunteers. The social economy in Mid and East Antrim has a key role in terms of promoting social cohesion, neighbourhood renewal, helping people into work and improving the environment. Social enterprises and community groups make an important contribution to delivering public and commercial services, as well as contributing to the local retail and tourism offer. There needs to be continued support for the good work that is currently being delivered by social enterprises and more encouragement of alternative supply chain models, such as the creation of local engineering supplier Advance Engineering by the Wright Group in Ballymena.

www.amplifymidandeastantrim.com
SECTORAL EMPHASIS

Advanced Manufacturing

Current profile
Manufacturing currently accounts for a fifth of local jobs (9,173) and a quarter of GVA output. According to recent research by Manufacturing NI, it is estimated that there are around 3,560 jobs in advanced manufacturing.

The research also indicates that Mid and East Antrim is one of three Council areas in which advanced manufacturing jobs are concentrated, where employment concentrations in the more advanced aspects of manufacturing were typically 50 percent higher than the Northern Ireland average.

Mid and East Antrim is known as one of Northern Ireland’s manufacturing heartlands, and although there have been some major recent set-backs, the skills and work ethic of the local manufacturing and engineering firms are major assets to build on further. Manufacturing firms also account for a large share of Northern Ireland exports.

Opportunities for sector growth
Recognising that lower level manufacturing will continue to shift to lower-cost economies, Mid and East Antrim needs to focus on higher value advanced manufacturing through a greater emphasis on innovation and collaboration. The area is already home to some key manufacturing employers such as Wrightbus, Caterpillar and Ryobi.

Although there is expected to be a net decrease in manufacturing (but still significant demand for replacement supply), it is expected to still account for 6,500 local jobs and 13% of the total workforce by 2030.

Through Amplify, the aim is that most of these jobs will be highly skilled and well-paid advanced manufacturing jobs. Specific opportunities such as the Advanced Manufacturing Centre of Excellence, will be explored and articulated in an upcoming advanced manufacturing strategy.
Agri-food

Current Profile
This is one of the most successful sectors across Northern Ireland, and Mid and East Antrim has strong traditions and capabilities both in terms of agriculture, food production and food processing.

Nearly a third of local businesses are in the agricultural sector. Employment in food manufacturing is part of the total 9,173 manufacturing jobs in the Borough and includes Moy Park, based in Ballymena, which is one of the area’s key employers.

Opportunities for sector growth
With a growing global focus on food quality, safety and provenance, an area like Mid and East Antrim is well placed to develop as a leading centre of excellence. The Agri-food Strategy Board predicts an annual jobs growth of 3-4% and major increases in GVA.

With high levels of exporting, both advanced manufacturing and agri-food are important sectors as Northern Ireland continues to try to re-balance the regional economy. Specific opportunities will be explored and articulated in an upcoming agri-food strategy.
Tourism

Current Profile
Mid and East Antrim’s local environment and quality of life are key assets. Tourism has a key role to play in terms of attracting visitors, but also in terms of attracting businesses and new residents. There are already around 4,000 tourism-related jobs.

Key local attractions include The Gobbins and Carrickfergus Castle and quality accommodation is available in the area through 4* hotels and Tourism NI graded guest houses and B&B’s.

Opportunities for sector growth
The new Tourism Strategy identifies the need to build business capabilities and the quality of the visitor experience around five strategic themes:
- The Causeway Coastal Route
- Culture and Heritage
- Events and Festivals
- Destination Marketing
- Destination Management

The main area of opportunity is around promoting the Causeway Coastal Route, ensuring The Gobbins’, Galgorm, Game of Thrones locations and Carrickfergus Castle are a key part of the visitor itinerary. These types of attractions have the potential to draw more visitor spend to the Borough. The focus for tourism is to attract more people, to stay longer and spend more.

The area currently mainly attracts day trips from the Northern Ireland market and there are opportunities to work more closely with Tourism NI to attract more GB and International Visitors.
Financial and Business Services

Current Profile
As Belfast continues to grow, Mid and East Antrim should position itself for back-office functions in the financial and business services sector. There are currently around 2,000 jobs in related sectors.

Opportunities for sector growth
With strong transport links into the city and proximity to the airports, there is real opportunity to grow the sector further. Specific opportunities will be explored and articulated in an upcoming financial and business services strategy.

Digital

Current Profile
Although the area only has around 300 ICT jobs, the new innovation facility developed at the Ecos Centre in Ballymena, will be an important development in creating more technology jobs in the future.

Opportunities for sector growth
According to MATRIX, Northern Ireland has a real opportunity to build on its present capability in software engineering, data analytics, networks and sensors and cyber security.

Although Mid and East Antrim does not have a university campus, there are opportunities to position Mid and East Antrim as a key location for new jobs in this growing sector within the wider Belfast City region. Specific opportunities will be explored and articulated in an upcoming digital strategy.
4 In Closing

The development and implementation of Amplify presents a major opportunity for our place and Northern Ireland more widely, and those organisations within it working for the benefit of our businesses, people, and communities. Amplify provides the sounding board for us to argue our case for economic development with commitment, conviction, and clarity.

Amplify and its partners have committed to carrying the strategy forward. Now, other partners need to come alongside the partnership to provide their inputs, support and resources. Whatever the scope and scale of the part you can play, we hope you will feel able to play it - for the benefit of our sub-region, its businesses, and its people.
Further Information

T 028 2563 3190
E amplify@midandeastantrim.gov.uk