



SOLENT  
**LOCAL**  
ENTERPRISE  
**PARTNERSHIP**

# SOLENT 2050

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Solent 2050 sets out a long-term strategy to unleash the Solent's distinctive strengths that can power the local economy to increase productivity and support our communities to prosper in a fast-changing world.

Our vision for the Solent in 2050 is: *to be the globally leading maritime cluster and at the forefront of innovations to adapt to climate change, with towns and cities that are fantastic places to live, trade and with opportunities for all our communities to flourish.*

The Solent is recognised as a global leader in the marine and maritime sector and plays an important international gateway role to spearhead UK trade and investment. With a population of around 1.3 million people and 41,600 enterprises, the region also boasts strengths in advanced manufacturing, aerospace, digital and computer science. We are a globally-facing region with immense knowledge assets within our academic, research and industrial base, talented people with a strong cultural identity, boasting a world-leading natural environment that perfectly positions the Solent as the place to do business and grow.

Strategically-located at the centre of the UK's south coast with sheltered estuaries and harbours, a double high water, and an outstanding environment, the Solent has a natural coastal geography that has drawn people, international commerce and innovation for millennia, laying down the strata that have helped shape the Solent as the UK's Coastal Powerhouse. This status continues to evolve and strengthen today in a world of increasing globalisation and technological disruption, fuelled by the unparalleled aggregation of marine and maritime assets that have clustered in the Solent, anchored by the flourishing port cities of Southampton and Portsmouth.

Its gateway function means that the Solent performs a critical role for the UK economy. For every £1 of additional investment spending the Solent region, it is estimated that UK GDP increases by between £2.35 and £3.15. This underlines the critical role that the region plays in supporting other parts of the country, such as the North and Midlands, which depend on the trade flows which pass through the Solent and the sectors and associated economic value we facilitate. In doing so, the Solent forms a key component of UK competitiveness – which has become increasingly relevant as we establish new trading relationships in a post-Brexit era – and we want to play a key role in levelling up prosperity and opportunity across the UK.

The outbreak of Covid-19 brought with it challenges for our economy unlike any that have been seen before. The pandemic and associated restrictions imposed on our everyday lives caused a major economic shock to the global economy, and businesses and communities across the Solent have been affected by this. All aspects of the region's economy have been impacted in some way, and in some respects, the future in the aftermath of the pandemic will look very different. As a region it is vital that we not only continue to support a return to business-as-usual through our immediate work to support businesses and to guide the economic recovery of the Solent area over the short term, but also take action now to ensure we can be more resilient to future disruptions and seize the opportunities for innovation and the benefits of doing things differently that have been brought about by the pandemic. We remain committed to delivering this new ambitious and long-term vision and strategy for the area to build a positive growth agenda for the Solent region in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic as we collectively Build Back Better.

This Strategy offers a bespoke approach for building on these strengths to achieve sustainable and transformative growth in the Solent, with a vision of building a more prosperous and productive regional economy. It will protect our natural assets and communities from the effects of climate change given our unique geographical constellation of islands and peninsulas, and the major coastal cities of Portsmouth and Southampton, and secure the renaissance of our coastal towns and their adaptation within a changing economic landscape.



The Strategy aims to unite the region's illustrious history across the marine and maritime sectors with the region's world-class universities and colleges. The Solent will build on its strengths to become a leading hub for decarbonisation and environmental innovation, and an international centre for the incubation and application of ground-breaking Net Zero technological solutions. This will help deliver an ambitious and innovative local economy, whilst driving a green recovery and protecting and enhancing our region's natural capital and ensuring opportunities are created for all our communities as we look to level up prosperity.

Underpinning this overall vision are **seven strategic priorities** around which our plan for future activities to transform the Solent is framed:

- 1. A world-leading marine and maritime economy**, building on our existing assets and global competitive advantages to strengthen the UK's international trading relationships.
- 2. Pioneering approaches to climate change adaptation and decarbonisation**, linked to our coastal setting, and establishing real expertise which other regions – nationally and globally – can learn from.
- 3. The UK's capital of coastal renaissance**, harnessing new technologies and approaches to revitalise and level up economic opportunity across all of our coastal communities.
- 4. A thriving visitor, creative and cultural economy**, capitalising on the Solent's superb natural beauty and rich maritime history.
- 5. Developing a world-class talent base**, helping people at all stages of their career build the skills they need to respond to new technology and drive an innovative knowledge-based economy.
- 6.** An outstanding business environment that encourages innovation, fosters collaboration and enables businesses of all sizes and sectors to thrive.
- 7.** Health and wellbeing at the heart of economic success, through a focus on building strong, healthy and resilient communities that can prosper in a fast-changing world.

Achieving all of these priorities will be challenging. However, as this Strategy shows, the Solent has superb assets and strengths at its disposal. Together these can be leveraged as a set of enabling factors to overcome key challenges to productivity growth and set a path to achieving our vision for the Solent in 2050.

As well as positively transforming the Solent as a place to live, work and invest, achieving this vision will directly support the UK's Build Back Better plan for growth and responds through a dual proposition – to 'level up' productivity performance within the Solent and relative to other parts of the South East, and to enable the UK to become more competitive on a global stage.

The Solent's role as a gateway to international trade and its strong visitor economy will be a vital part of how an outward-facing UK interacts with the rest of the world. In pioneering innovative approaches to vitally important challenges – including climate change adaptation and the ageing population – the Solent can offer invaluable knowledge and experience to UK society as a whole.



# OVERVIEW OF THE SOLENT 2050 STRATEGY

## SOLENT 2050:

To be the globally leading maritime cluster and at the forefront of innovations to adapt to climate change, with towns and cities that are fantastic places to live, trade and with opportunities for all our communities to flourish.

## Our vision is underpinned by seven priorities:



A world-leading marine and maritime economy



Pioneering approaches to climate change adaptation and decarbonisation



The UK's capital of coastal renaissance



A thriving visitor, creative and cultural economy



Developing a world-class talent base



An outstanding business environment



Health and wellbeing at the heart of economic success

## We will leverage our enabling factors to deliver future actions:

A Celebration of our Cultural, Heritage and Creative Assets

Skills and Talent that Employers Need

Improved Connectivity

Embracing and Innovating New Technology

Strengthened Natural Capital and Net Zero

Placemaking

We have developed a set of future actions to deliver each of the seven priorities as detailed below:

1.

## A WORLD-LEADING MARINE AND MARITIME ECONOMY

We believe that the Solent is well placed to address the economic recovery and productivity challenges set out in the UK's Build Back Better plan for growth and lead the way in developing the ambitions of the Maritime 2050 strategy. We want to leverage the potential of our marine and maritime economy to drive productivity improvements by facilitating high value R&D and innovation activity, open up access to new global markets to boost UK trade with the rest of the world, and attract investment in high tech business facilities, infrastructure and skills. Our future actions to support this include:

1. Developing Maritime UK Solent as a transformative private sector cluster partnership to bring together the Solent's Marine maritime strengths and assets and champion the region as a globally significant maritime hub. Maritime UK Solent forms part of a network of regional maritime cluster that foster collaboration among business and academia and work with Government in the UK's maritime regions, providing leadership to ensure continued growth and prosperity of Solent's Maritime Sector.

2. **Establish the Solent Freeport** as a 'once-in-a-generation' opportunity to level-up local communities, turbocharge post-Brexit trade and invest in a Net Zero future, in turn helping to create more than 32,000 jobs and unlock £1.35 billion private sector investment into the Solent area.

3. Establish a **Marine Innovation Hub** within a Solent port alongside leading maritime Universities and industry partners to support research and development into pioneering marine and maritime innovations and maximise the economic impacts of clustering and agglomeration.

4. Work with partners to deliver the **Solent Institute of Technology** to support vocational professional pathways into the Solent's world leading marine and maritime industry and associated advanced manufacturing and technical pathways.

5. Linked to the Solent Freeport opportunity, explore the potential to develop **'smart' ports** at the Ports of Southampton and also Portsmouth in order to better connect the region with global trade routes.



## 2.

# PIONEERING APPROACHES TO CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION AND DECARBONISATION

Through this Strategy we set out a plan to embed clean growth principles at the heart of our ambition for growth, recognising the role these can play in driving local productivity growth by enhancing economic resilience to climate change, improving energy efficiency and stimulating innovation across a range of clean growth activities and applications (such as transport and technology). We want to secure the shift to a Net Zero carbon economy by growing our capacity for sustainable energy production and transport and investing to help our region mitigate the impacts of climate change which impact upon our communities. Our future actions to support this include:

1. Deliver the **Ten Point Plan for Building Back Greener in the Solent** to showcase the region's green growth credentials, ambitions and local response to the Government's national Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution. This identifies key actions to adapt to climate change and accelerate the achievement of net zero, building on the recently designated Solent Freeport with its focus on clean growth, green skills and jobs.

2. Support the development of a **Decarbonisation Cluster and Nature Based Solutions Hub** in the Solent to bring key assets and ideas together to foster innovation and application of green technology. This would build on existing sector strengths and specialisms including Ultra-low Sulphur Investment at Fawley Refinery, WightLink Hybrid Ferry, and Cheetah Marine's development of the world's first hydrogen powered catamaran, as well as unique opportunities that our coastal setting provides for carbon capture (such as sea kelp forests and mud flats).

3. Work with the Port of Southampton to implement a **'Shore to Ship' Power initiative**, a pathfinder project that will enable shore power capability for cruise ships allowing compatible vessels to switch off their auxiliary engines to deliver a zero emissions cruise facility at the Port of Southampton. This will be the first major commercial berth and cruise terminal fitted with this technology in the UK, supporting Europe's number one cruise Port to adopt innovation in its transition to support cleaner vessels as part of our wider ambitions around the 'greening of marine'.

4. Prepare a **Natural Capital Baseline Assessment** for the Solent, building on the specific New Forest Natural Capital Study published in 2021. This will develop a baseline natural capital audit in order to identify areas of importance for wildlife conservation and areas of wildlife risk.

5. Develop a **new LEP-wide fund** to invite applications to bring forward low carbon solutions for the Solent's marine and maritime sector. This could be used to encourage investment in AI technology and its applications within coastal maintenance, such as the monitoring of marine and maritime environments.

3.

## THE UK'S CAPITAL OF COASTAL RENAISSANCE

Through this strategy, we want to secure a renaissance of and level up our existing coastal communities – such as Gosport, Havant, the Hamble peninsula, the Isle of Wight and the Waterside area of the New Forest – so that they are better positioned to confront the challenges of tomorrow and promote inclusive growth. In tandem, we want to pioneer the next generation of coastal-urban living by adopting innovative practices and smart technologies in terms of improved transport and digital connectivity, and coastal living. Our future actions to support this include:

1. Work with partners to develop a comprehensive **integrated transport strategy** that delivers city-to-city connectivity enhancements through adoption of technology, sustainability and modal integration. This will build on successful proposals to establish a Future Transport Zone and to secure additional Transforming Cities Funding within the Solent.

2. Accelerate and expand the roll out of **next generation digital technology** so that gigabit connectivity can be accessed across the Solent, helping to facilitate online learning initiatives in support of skills and training needs, the shift towards more flexible and agile working post Covid-19, and to respond to changing business needs.

3. Collaborate with local research institutions and policymakers to explore the feasibility of autonomous travel solutions in various locations throughout the Solent, also including along the Hayling Billy Trail.

4. We will work to support local authorities and developers to **deliver planned new communities** which can provide high-quality, sustainable and connected new ways of living, through intelligent design, piloting new technologies and smart infrastructure delivery. We will help to apply learning from innovative new community development to the benefit of existing communities in the Solent.





4.

## A THRIVING VISITOR, CREATIVE AND CULTURAL ECONOMY

With its unique combination of outstanding natural environments, coastal communities, associated marine and cultural heritage and an array of world class visitor attractions, there is a significant opportunity to develop a distinctive tourism offering for the Solent. We want to capitalise on this to develop a thriving visitor economy that also raises the profile of our superb creative businesses and cultural offer. Our future actions to support this include:

1. Develop a Solent visitor economy strategy that provides the basis for a unified marketing and visitor engagement strategy with the aim of creating a streamlined and enhanced visitor experience across the region. This will capitalise on the growing domestic tourism market and opportunities to develop a more connected and holistic visitor economy ecosystem that can thrive.

2. Create a **destination management offer** for the Solent to ensure that we promote our unique maritime heritage assets, including Portsmouth Historic Dockyard, Titanic and Bucklers Hard, and more effectively 'package up' these assets to create a distinctive identity to the Solent's tourism offer.

3. Work with partners to optimise the implementation of the **Gosport Heritage Action Zone**, to ensure that Gosport's unique military history is sustained and supports the physical, economic and social regeneration of the Borough in the future.

4. Support the economic recovery, future growth and sustainability of the **cruise industry** at our two ports, and fully integrate this sector as part of the wider Solent visitor economy strategy through the development of tailored offerings.

5. Support the **bid for Southampton to be City of Culture 2025**, that celebrates Southampton's cultural, community, arts and heritage offer and links these to the wider Solent visitor economy, as well as underpinning opportunities for current and future generations.



## 5.

# DEVELOPING A WORLD-CLASS TALENT BASE

We want to invest in skills and talent development to enable the Solent to cultivate a dynamic and agile skills ecosystem that is able to support locally-significant industries and respond to innovation opportunities. Through Solent 2050 we want to roll out innovation in careers education for marine and maritime to more of our industry sectors and provide opportunities for people at all stages of their career to build the skills they need to take part in an innovative knowledge-based Economy. Our Future actions to support this include:

1. Work with partners to deliver the **Solent Institute of Technology (IoT)** to support vocational professional pathways into the Solent's maritime industry as well as associated advanced manufacturing, digital and technical pathways. This will spearhead the delivery of higher technical education in STEM subjects to underpin productivity growth within the Solent's world leading marine and maritime economy.

2. Deliver **world class employer-led training facilities** for our key growth sectors as part of the Solent Freeport and its flagship **Green Growth Institute**. This would meet the government's objective for Freeports to create high-skilled jobs in ports and the areas around them.

3. Support **Solent-wide skills development initiatives that place local employers at the centre of talent proposals** to ensure the local skills system delivers the skills our employers need.

4. Through our local networks and partnerships, deliver **targeted support to those sectors experiencing chronic skills shortages** (such as logistics, health care, hospitality) in order to boost the supply of suitably qualified local labour.

5. Work with the Solent Skills Advisory Panel to implement our **Skills Strategy and Action Plan** to support local educational establishments in developing skills programmes that fit the changing nature of key strategic opportunities including the marine and maritime sector.

6. Secure flexibilities in the **Apprenticeship levy** to support the development of skills and talent in priority sectors and to support re-training, particularly within the fields of absolute autonomy and digital.

7. Work in partnership with the Careers and Enterprise Company to deliver the Enterprise Adviser Network that actively matches Solent business leaders with local schools and colleges to provide access to meaningful employer encounters and experiences.

6.

## AN OUTSTANDING BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

The Solent's diverse economic foundation supports a varied business base and one with strong potential for growth. We want to facilitate a world-class business environment that enables businesses of all sizes and sectors to thrive and seize opportunities associated with new ways of working in a post Covid-19 world. This will be underpinned by a palpable culture of creativity and innovation, complemented by an exceptional business support offer that inspires our businesses to realise their growth ambitions right here in the Solent. Our response through Solent 2050 focuses on business resilience and continuity following the Covid-19 pandemic in the short-term, followed by a longer-term emphasis on productivity growth as the economy recovers. Our future actions to support this include:

1. **Expand the package of business support and funding opportunities available for Solent businesses** via the Solent Growth Hub and secure additional national funding for businesses as new government interventions emerge.

2. Establish a Trade and Investment Hub for businesses for seeking to develop new business relationships on an international basis, building on the opportunities presented by Solent Freeport.

3. Work with industry partners to develop **sector-specific interventions** tailored to the short term needs and priorities of our strategic clusters including marine and maritime, visitor economy and advanced manufacturing, supported by development of peer-to-peer business networks to facilitate cross sector working and diversification.

4. Through the Solent Growth Hub, deliver a locally responsive **Business Resilience Programme** including targeted support to enable firms to adapt to new technologies (such as enhancing digital and e-commerce capabilities), diversify or access new markets (including exporting opportunities) and support business start-ups amongst residents re-entering the labour market as a result of Covid-19.

5. Facilitate a **world-class, globally competitive trading environment** for businesses as part of the Solent Freeport and support the landing of new businesses and new investment attracted to our Freeport.



6. Establish a Solent-wide Taskforce to explore issues of **diversity in the workplace** and how our region's business base can lead the way in promoting equal labour market opportunities for all of our communities.

7. Ensure our businesses have access to the talent and skills they need to grow through delivering a world-class **Solent Institute of Technology**.

8. Establish a **Solent supply chain network** to facilitate resilient, inclusive local supply chains and a collaborative approach to procuring local products and services.

9. Work with local partners to elevate the contribution that the Solent's social enterprises can make to supporting economic recovery and growth, by establishing a **Social Enterprise Economy working group** and exploring opportunities to develop a dedicated Social Enterprise Hub in the Solent.

10. Explore opportunities for commercialising new ideas through the LEP funded **Zero to One programme**, run by the University of Southampton's Web Science Institute.

These will be supported and complemented by a range of other measures to enhance the Solent's business environment as set out in the other strategic priorities



## 7.

# HEALTH AND WELLBEING AT THE HEART OF ECONOMIC SUCCESS

---

Our experience of navigating the Covid-19 pandemic and resulting economic crisis has significantly elevated the health and wellbeing agenda, which has become increasingly recognised as a critical underpinning ingredient of economic resilience and performance. Going forward, and as we look to increase local productivity and support our communities to prosper in a fast-changing world, we want health and wellbeing in its broadest sense to form a key part of Solent 2050's DNA. Through this strategy we want to embed healthier ways of living and working as we look to level up opportunity across all parts of the Solent and ensure that our health and wellbeing asset-sand business base more broadly are equipped to seize growth and innovation opportunities as society adapts to a 'new normal'. Our future actions to support this include:

1. Work with local partners to **monitor the evolving impacts of new ways of working post Covid-19 upon the region's business and workforce base** and co-ordinate targeted intervention to raise awareness and take-up of health and wellbeing support services, including opportunities to better connect our remote workforce.

2. Via the Solent Growth Hub, raise awareness of the many existing resources available to **promote positive mental health amongst businesses and employees** across the Solent, including the 'mental health toolkit for employers' developed by Public health England to help employers take positive actions to build a culture that champions good mental health.

3. Explore the potential to introduce a specific health and wellbeing dimension into the LEP's Assurance Framework and associated criteria for funding.

4. Working with the Solent Skills Advisory Panel, **explore the skills development opportunities associated with a more explicit focus on health and wellbeing**, engaging with education and training providers across the Solent to examine particular skills innovation opportunities as society adapts to a 'new normal'.

5. Via the Solent's existing business, skills and careers networks, establish a **health and wellbeing ambassadors programme** to champion the importance of good physical and mental health and wellbeing within all aspects of our economy, and provide our ambassadors with the tools, resources and support they need to raise awareness, promote and share good practice.

# A CALL TO ACTION

This Solent 2050 Economic Strategy aims to address the productivity underperformance of the Solent economy by raising our performance to above the UK average and closing the productivity gap with the wider South East.

Our substantial economic influence at a national level means investing in the Solent will strengthen the productivity and competitiveness of the UK economy, directly support other parts of the country which depend on the trade flows which pass through the Solent and the sectors we facilitate, and be critical in meeting the Government's ambition for levelling-up prosperity and opportunity across the UK. We want to re-invent the Solent economy as future-ready, highly skilled, and globally-facing, with the latent potential of our coastal communities fuelling this ambition.

The future economic dividend of realising the Solent 2050 Strategy could be substantial, for both the Solent and the UK more widely. Through our strategy we identify a broad range of interventions that offer the potential to deliver a significant uplift across the following productivity-related measures and outcomes:



**Transforming productivity** – level up Solent workforce productivity to match the UK average by 2025 and become a regional leader by 2030. This could support an uplift in economic output (measured in terms of GVA) worth at least £244m a year by 2025, and £2.8bn a year by 2030.



**Driving job creation** – supporting our strategic sectors and wider business base to create employment opportunities to power the Solent's coastal renaissance, delivering 20,000 jobs by 2025 and 50,000 jobs by 2030.



**Boosting earning potential** – close the existing 'wages gap' with the rest of the South East region to ensure that our residents benefit from increased prosperity and productivity. This could increase the earnings capacity of our workforce by over £20m a year by 2030.



**Levelling up our communities** – reducing socio-economic deprivation across the Solent by reducing the proportion of our communities falling within the 20% most deprived nationally from 16% to 14% by 2025 and less than 10% by 2030.



**Carbon reduction** – transition the Solent to a Net Zero carbon economy ahead of 2050, and Southampton by 2030, by enhancing economic resilience to climate change, improving energy efficiency and stimulating innovation across a range of clean growth activities and applications. This will be guided by the key priorities set out in the 10 Point Plan for Building Back Greener in the Solent.



**Support the development of sustainable new communities that are future ready** – delivering new homes, employment opportunities and driving coastal renaissance across the Solent.



**Digital revolution** – roll out 5G and gigabit fibre across all parts of the Solent by 2030 to achieve world class digital connectivity for all communities.

In this context, Solent 2050 is designed to be an ambitious, high-level strategy that seeks to remain relevant in a changing world. We have identified a series of tangible short to medium term actions and interventions to help address the challenges facing the Solent – and the UK more widely. It provides a blueprint for how we can build a stronger platform to support the region's long-term productivity and competitiveness to 2050.

**But the Strategy is also a wider call to action, setting out a vision for our region that we hope enthuses our residents, local businesses, academic institutions and other organisations to play their part.**

