



Swindon and Wiltshire Economic Assessment

Chapter 1: Introduction

A report by Regeneris Consulting

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I. Introduction

- I.1 The 2017/18 Local Economic Assessment (LEA) for Swindon and Wiltshire provides a strong evidence base for the Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (SWLEP) to shape its strategic decision making. This includes a focus on the development of Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) and the UK's economic growth agenda.
- I.2 Moreover, the LEA will:
 - support SWLEP in its representations to government
 - provide a robust evidence base and rationale to support funding bids
 - collate a shared approach to economic evidence gathered across partners
 - identify key strengths and opportunities to attract new investment from domestic and international sources
 - provide evidence to inform the development of local plans and the implementation of planning
 - act as the platform from which to engage and develop relationships with neighbouring LEPs and authorities on common opportunities and issues.
- I.3 Alongside the detailed statistical evidence base, the LEA places an increased focus on understanding the factors at play within the Swindon and Wiltshire economy and its future growth prospects. This draws on multiple sources of information, data and policy to provide a rounded analysis of the wider context within which the SWLEP economy operates.
- I.4 Differentiating the study from previous research, the LEA also looks to draw out key messages relative to themes that are of interest to SWLEP. The reports therefore provide insights around the function of the rural economy, Growth Zones and potential impacts of Brexit, where the evidence base allows conclusions to be made.
- I.5 The LEA provides clear recommendations regarding the priorities for SWLEP and the implications for the emerging Local Industrial Strategy, particularly where there may be a divergence from the existing Strategic Economic Plan (SEP).

1.1 Approach

I.6 The LEA is an important document that underpins local decisions and policy making. In doing so, it draws together an expansive research base to add value, depth and insight into the analysis of the SWLEP economy. Critically, the LEA is forward-looking, taking into account projections and future trajectories to determine economic the area's prospects.

I.7 Key outcomes of this approach include:

Creating a timely and robust evidence base from which to draw upon.

Shaping the direction of strategy and future policy making.

Setting the basis for the development of strategic partnerships where commonalities exist.

Highlighting local competitive advantages that form the basis for prioritisation.

Unlocking new research questions, where there is a need for additional investigation.

Figure 1.1 LEA Approach



Source: Regeneris, 2018

I.8 The 2017-18 LEA draws on a themed evidence base which draws out key findings with respect to the following research questions:

An analysis of the factors at play within the economy – understanding of the local economy, weaknesses and threats, and prospects for growth through analysis of socio-economic datasets.

The prospects for the Swindon and Wiltshire economy as the Brexit negotiations commence – identify and evaluate the areas that are most likely to be impacted by Brexit to assess the extent of economic exposure.

An analysis of the role and function of SWLEP's three growth zone areas alongside the economy of our rural area – assess how economic growth can be spatially distributed across SWLEP, acknowledging the importance of growth zones, urban areas and the rural economy.

The business view perspective on the future of the SWLEP economy – summarising qualitative insights which are integral to gaining a grass roots view of local economic performance and the barriers holding back growth.

A clear understanding of infrastructure conditions and barriers to growth – providing a baseline of infrastructure which is critical to economic growth and will support the development of SWLEP's important sectors.

Reviews the performance of the Swindon and Wiltshire economy with that of other LEPs across England – analysis of SWLEP's economy in the context of national performance and the characteristics of other LEPs.

- I.9 With regards to understanding the implications of Brexit, the LEA draws out analysis where relevant and evidence allows. As such, some chapters feature a greater level of commentary, reliant upon the relative availability of data which can be analysed in the context of Brexit. Given the current stage of Brexit negotiations and a lack of certainty around policy outcomes, it is inherently difficult to quantify likely impact. That said, there will likely be further opportunities to assess the impacts of Brexit on the SWLEP economy, as certainty increases, and a wider pool of research is published. These could be considered as part of a future LEA commission or iterative updates.

I.2 Geographies of Analysis

- I.10 The LEA builds on previous research by establishing a deeper grain of analysis. It does so by looking at the characteristics of different geographies across SWLEP. As well as breaking down the performance of Swindon and Wiltshire unitary authorities, where data allows, analysis is presented at the level of other spatial geographies which are of importance to SWLEP. These include:
- Three Growth Zones
 - SWLEP's rural areas¹
- I.11 Importantly, the LEA provides a richness of insight by contextualising SWLEP's economic performance with that of agreed comparator geographies. This relativity helps to isolate economic strengths, weaknesses and the extent of linkages to neighbouring areas.
- I.12 These are summarised as follows and form the basis for contextual analysis throughout all LEA chapters, where data allows.

Table I.1 LEA Comparator Geographies

Geography	Value of Comparison
Dorset LEP	
Enterprise M3 LEP	
GFirst LEP	To identify where there may be future opportunities for joint working
Heart of the South West LEP	
Oxfordshire LEP	To underpin the development of a future Local Industrial Strategy
Thames Valley Berkshire LEP	
Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP	Comparison areas distributed to the north, south, east and west
West of England LEP	
South West Region	
UK/England	

I.3 Structure of the LEA

¹ Note – the LEA uses DEFRA's rural definition to economic performance and conditions

- 1.13 The LEA adopts a succinct approach which is structured around five key themes. Collectively these provide a comprehensive overview of local economy conditions, with an emphasis on statistical analysis. Each chapter comprises a number of key indicators, which build a balanced view of the factors that drive economic growth².

Table 1.2 LEA Framework Structure

Theme	Strands
1. Economic Geography	Economic Linkages
2. Business and Enterprise	Structure of the Local Economy Enterprise and Innovation Business Needs
3. People and Communities	Demography and Geography Labour Market Skills Economic and Social Inclusion
4. Sustainable Economic Growth	Natural and Historic Environment Low Carbon Economy Transport Provision and Other Infrastructure Housing
5. Growth Trajectory	Economic Growth Skills and Occupations
Additional Chapters	Introduction Economic Asset Audit Policy Analysis Statistical Appendix

Source: Regeneris, 2018

- 1.14 Each chapter is presented as a stand-alone document, with a summary of key findings and consideration of policy implications forming the backbone of analysis.
- 1.15 In tandem with the five chapters, each features a supporting Statistical Appendix. These provide a full breakdown of the evidence bases which underpin each chapter and include links to secondary sources that form part of the narrative.

² The LEA Framework incorporating a full breakdown of indicators, is included in the Statistical Appendix