

Forth Valley Regional Economic Strategy

Consultation Draft

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Foreword

This Regional Economic Strategy is a significant milestone and way-finder towards our future, setting out the direction and pace of change we shall lead in order to ensure that the Forth Valley remains competitive, resilient and robust in the face of global change. This strategy describes how Forth Valley is well positioned to drive inclusive economic growth and environmental sustainability for Scotland.

Regional economic partnership working is vital because it enables diverse stakeholders—local authorities, businesses, academia, and communities to collaborate on shared goals that transcend administrative boundaries. This regional working will help pool resources, align policies, and leverage collective strengths to address complex challenges such as demographic shifts, infrastructure gaps, climate change, and economic inequality. By working together, Forth Valley can amplify its voice in national policy discussions, attract investment, and deliver more inclusive, sustainable growth. This collaborative approach fosters innovation, improves service delivery, and ensures that economic benefits are distributed more equitably across communities. Furthermore, this strategy will shape Forth Valley's contribution to Scotland's Public Service Reform Strategy: Delivering for Scotland which sets out commitments to change the system of public services to be preventative, better joined up and efficient to deliver for people.

This strategy has been developed in partnership with Forth Valley's three councils, Falkirk, Clackmannanshire and Stirling, and with government partners and agencies. It sets out an evidence base of our economy today, the future challenges we collectively face and how, through collaboration, the Forth Valley economy can become more sustainable, inclusive and resilient.

Building upon existing, diverse collective strengths of the local economies of Falkirk, Clackmannanshire and Stirling Council areas, will support our business base to grow and for public services to flourish, enabling the region to further develop as a great place in which to live, work, learn, visit and invest.

Leader, Falkirk Council

Leader, Clackmannanshire Council

Leader, Stirling Council

Executive Summary

The Forth Valley Regional Economic Strategy outlines a bold and collaborative vision for the region to become Scotland's most inclusive, productive, and sustainable economy by 2035. Developed collaboratively by Falkirk, Clackmannanshire and Stirling Councils, alongside national agencies and private sector partners, the strategy outlines a comprehensive framework for regional growth, resilience, and innovation.

Forth Valley is strategically located at the heart of Scotland, home to over 300,000 residents and 9,000 businesses, and attracts 9 million visitors annually. The region boasts sectoral strengths in manufacturing, life sciences, digital innovation, food and drink, tourism, and logistics. Major investment programmes—including the Stirling & Clackmannanshire City Region Deal, Falkirk Growth Deal, and the Forth Green Freeport—are expected to deliver over £7 billion in economic benefit and create thousands of high-value jobs.

The strategy is aligned with national and regional policy frameworks, including Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation and the Public Service Reform Strategy. It introduces ten strategic programmes focused on skills development, business support, inward investment, tourism, climate adaptation, and connectivity. These programmes are designed to leverage regional assets, address structural economic challenges, and deliver a just transition to net zero.

In order to deliver a just transition to net zero, an inclusive economy and improve regional productivity, considerable support and collaboration will be required. Government funding and support is required for programme delivery and procurement reform, plus support for national economic assets within the Forth Valley Region. The private sector will also be critical to realising the vision and missions and will play a key role in the delivery of each programme.

Community Wealth Building is a central pillar of the strategy, promoting inclusive economic development through fair work, progressive procurement, plural ownership, and local investment. The strategy also emphasizes the importance of internal and external connectivity, with plans to improve transport infrastructure and digital access across urban and rural areas.

Governance will be strengthened through the establishment of regional structures which will coordinate delivery, monitor progress, and ensure alignment with regional priorities.

Immediate next steps include formalising governance arrangements, developing a detailed action plan with clear ownership and monitoring frameworks. The strategy is designed to be dynamic, evolving annually to respond to emerging challenges and opportunities.

By harnessing its collective strengths and fostering deep collaboration across sectors and geographies, Forth Valley is poised to lead Scotland's transition to a green, inclusive, and innovation-driven economy.

Introduction

The Forth Valley Regional Economic Strategy is a significant milestone and sets the future economic direction to ensure Forth Valley remains competitive, resilient and robust in the face of global change. The Forth Valley sits at the heart of Scotland, with over half the Scottish population within an hour's journey. Home to over 300,000 people, with over 9,000 businesses, the region attracts 9 million visitors annually and has great strengths and huge opportunities to grow.

This strategy also reflects the work of the UK and Scottish Governments, and the shared emphasis they have on the importance of people, place and their connectivity. It is constructed upon the building blocks of our indicative regional spatial strategy, the Forth Valley Regional Skills Strategy, the case for greater internal connectivity made by the Forth Valley Connectivity Commission, as well as the Falkirk and Grangemouth Growth Deal, the Stirling & Clackmannanshire City Region Deal and other major capital investments which demonstrate how regional economic delivery supports national growth.

The UK and Scottish economies currently have structural weaknesses in productivity, innovation and exporting relative to our core competitor economies. Only through a collaborative approach and by empowering regional economic decision-making, including making specific large-scale interventions in our economic infrastructure, can Forth Valley reach its full potential and achieve a just transition to net zero, generate inclusive growth and improve productivity.

To address these weaknesses, the Forth Valley Regional Economic Strategy will leverage the strengths of the local economies in each of our three council areas of Falkirk, Clackmannanshire and Stirling. By focusing on the key pillars of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET), namely; people, place and connectivity, we can further develop our skills base, grow our key sectors and businesses operating within them and offer higher value employment. This dual approach of place-based and sector-specific intervention is recognised globally as the most effective way in which to boost regional economic activity, and within the context of the Climate Emergency, align it with environmental responsibility. Importantly, it is also critical to fully embed Community Wealth Building principles regionally as a key toolkit to deliver an inclusive wellbeing economy. This strategy also outlines the sectoral strengths of the Forth Valley, and how we may continue to support them, whilst also including a range of place-based interventions demonstrating impact.

The Forth Valley Regional Economic Strategy is positioned to align with a variety of national, regional and local strategies, summarised within Table 1.

Table 1: Strategic Alignment Framework

Level	Policy / Strategy
National	United Kingdom - The Growth Plan (2022) - Industrial Strategy (2025) Scotland - National Strategy for Economic Transformation (2022) - Regional Economic Policy Review (2022) - National Planning Framework 4 (2023) - Scottish Enterprise: Focus on Economic Transformation (2024) - Public Service Reform Strategy: Delivering for Scotland (2025) - Programme for Government (2026)
Regional	Forth Valley Regional Partnership - Falkirk Growth Deal Heads of Terms - Forth Valley Connectivity Commission Reports - Forth Valley Regional Skills Strategy and Action Plan - Forth Valley Local Growth Fund Investment Plan - Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy - SESTran 2035 Strategic Plan - Stirling & Clackmannanshire City Region Deal Heads of Terms - TACTran Regional Transport Strategy
Local	Clackmannanshire - Local Outcome Improvement Plan - Climate Change Strategy - Local Development Plan - Community Wealth Building Strategy - Wellbeing Economy Plan Falkirk - The Falkirk Plan - Climate Change Strategy & Action Plan (2023–2030) - Local Development Plan - Economic Strategy - Growth Deal - Tourism Strategy - Town Centre Vision - Forth Green Freeport Vision Stirling - The Stirling Plan - Climate & Nature Emergency Plan (2021–2045) - Economic Strategy (2022–2030) - City Centre Strategy (2022–2030) - Tourism & Events Plan 2026-2031

This strategy describes how we shall develop these three strategic programmes to support the business base across our regional economy, and enable the delivery of high quality public services for all.

To deliver on these programmes and associated regional interventions the Scottish Government's Regional Economic Policy Advisory Group report, published in December 2022, recommended the Scottish Government establish eight Regional Economic Partnerships (REPs) which bring together local government, the private sector, education and skills providers, enterprise and skills agencies, and the third sector to accelerate growth at regional and national levels. Specifically, the report highlights some potential benefits and opportunities through regional working, including:

- More decision-making at regional level on strategic priorities and how to deliver them meaning work can be done at greater pace.
- Establishing a Regional Intelligence Hub helps develop regional expertise and analysis to assist decision making, reducing the need for paid consultants.
- Simplifying funding sources, including from the UK and Scottish Governments, to enable more strategic use of investment.
- Increasing joint working with the Scottish Government to help REPs implement their economic strategies.

These principles are central to our economic work across the Forth Valley. They also align with the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2026-2031 as well as the Forth Valley local authorities Transformation Through Collaboration programme.

The Forth Valley Region Economy

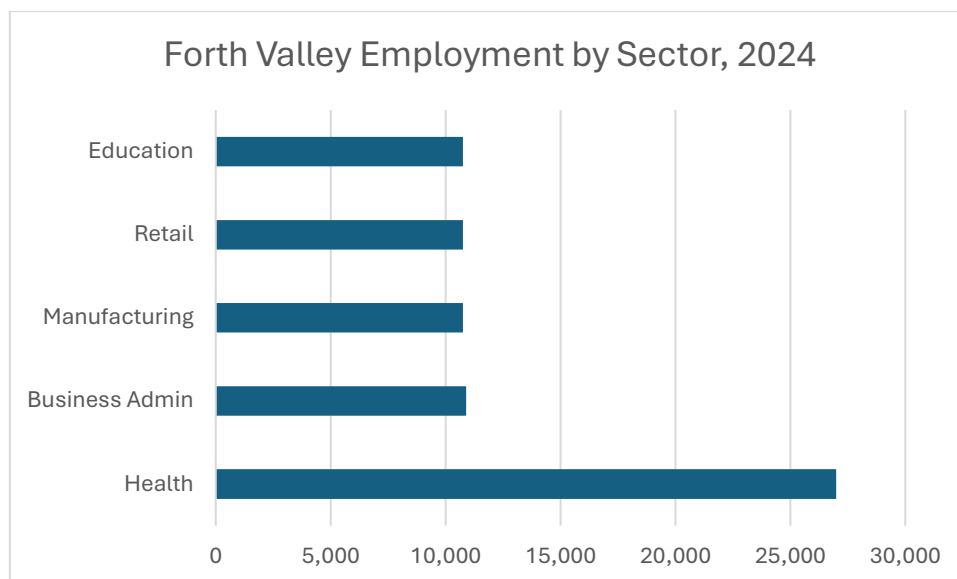
This section provides a summary of the Forth Valley Region's economy as it is in 2025, its key attributes and some of the distinctive strengths of our three council areas. The Forth Valley is the heart of Scotland and is home to:



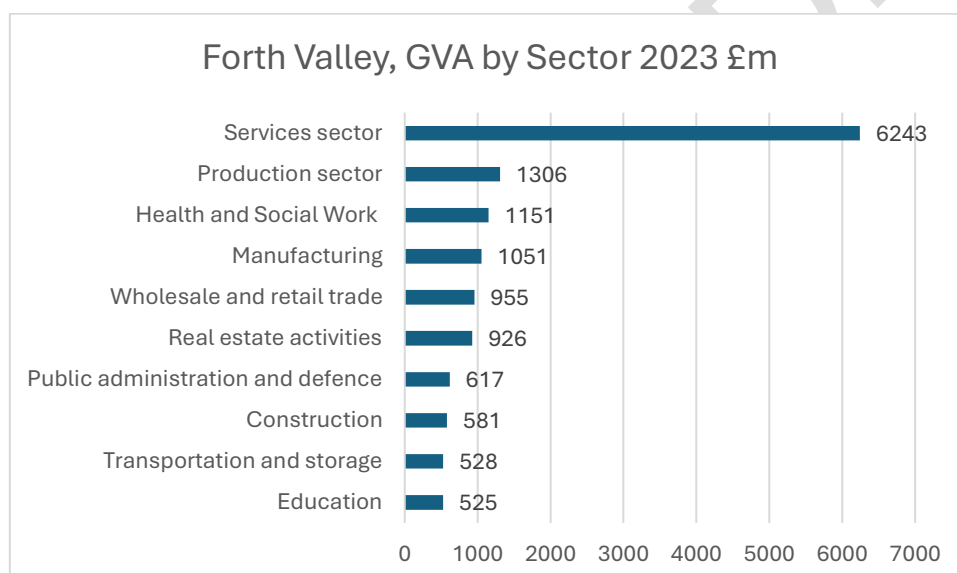
Forth Valley has a diverse, robust and versatile economy. It is underpinned by a strong core which plays a major role in our efforts to harness the opportunities of manufacturing, tourism, net zero and artificial intelligence.

	Number of Businesses	Number of Employee Jobs
Services	6,280	106,225
Production	50	1,800
Manufacturing	420	10,750
Construction	1,150	8,800
Agriculture	545	1,350
Total	8,345	128,935

Source: Office for National Statistics, (2024), *UK Business Counts*



Source: Office for National Statistics, (2024), *Business Register and Employment Survey*



Source: Office for National Statistics, (2023), *Regional Gross Value Added (GVA)*

City Region Deal, Growth Deal, Local Growth Fund and Green Freeport

The Forth Valley can also boast significant levels of current and planned investment, through programmes including:

- Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal
- Falkirk and Grangemouth Growth Deal, and
- Forth Green Freeport.
- Local Growth Fund

These investment programmes, which are designed to attract match funding from the private sector, will help to consolidate our business base, preserve and create high-value jobs, transform our town centres and address climate change.

Forth Valley is the only area in Scotland to have two City Deal and Growth Deal within a single region, highlighting the need to ensure alignment and joint working whilst exemplifying Forth Valley's critical importance to the UK and Scottish economies and its central role in the transition of the chemical, manufacturing and logistics sectors for a low-carbon future.

Although carbon intensive industry has been our mainstay for a century or more, with coal and shale mining and the development of the petrochemical complex at Grangemouth, the Forth Valley also has a wide range of other sectoral strengths, such as tourism, food and drink, and manufacturing, each of which has significant growth potential in developing a stronger regional economy. By collaborating between the three local authorities, and our network of partners, we can better align our programmes and projects, and this strategy points to a clear path to our transition to a green, wellbeing economy.

Sector Strengths in the Forth Valley

The Forth Valley has a diverse range of businesses with strong representation in key national sectors, which contributes to our collective economic strength. Across the region, vibrant businesses operating within each of the national priority sectors drive forward their ambition. The Forth Valley draws strength in depth from this diversity, making it increasingly resilient and robust.

Our proximity to Glasgow and Edinburgh City Regions, and connected road and rail networks, provides access to the reach of their airports to 120 international markets. The presence of Scotland's busiest trade gateway, at Grangemouth, also strengthens the position the Forth Valley as a key location for international trade.

This is supported by strengths in education, skills development, and employability. Forth Valley boasts world-class research and further and higher education at the University of Stirling, and Forth Valley College is an original regional pathfinder for the sector. Our local partners, across education, skills development and employability are well placed to lead on the delivery of our integrated regional skills and employability plan, to support our sectors.

Strategic Sectors

Manufacturing

Manufacturing in the Forth Valley has a critical national asset in Grangemouth, as a key industrial hub for petrochemicals and chemical manufacturing as well as strengths in the whisky industry and advanced engineering across the region.

The region's manufacturing landscape is undergoing significant transformation, influenced by economic shifts, technological advancements, and environmental considerations. While the Forth Valley's manufacturing sector faces challenges due to the impending closure of traditional facilities, there is a concerted effort to pivot towards sustainable and innovative manufacturing practices, such as bio-based manufacturing and more advanced manufacturing opportunities as well as supporting manufacturers to increase exports.

The Forth Valley's rich industrial heritage provides a strong foundation for this transition and will be aided by major investment programmes (City Region and Growth Deals and Forth Green Freeport) to support transition of the sector, its businesses, and investment to help develop skills for the future.

Creative Industries and Digital Innovation

The Forth Valley is rich in culture and heritage assets, with a built environment matched only by the beauty of the natural landscapes in which it is located.

Such an impressive array of landmarks makes the Forth Valley the perfect place for art and music festivals, open air concerts, and other large events – both indoors and out – and our calendar is growing annually. Across the Forth Valley, our music venues are being developed to accommodate bigger events, bringing people back into our city and town centres.

We are also developing other core creative industry elements, e.g. in screen production with the Forthside Film Studios, and the new Falkirk Arts Centre, supported by government funding, backed up by considerable commercial interest.

The Forth Valley's thriving digital sector is a magnet for investment and this draw has seen the development of a Digital District, right in the heart of the city of Stirling. CodeBase Stirling provides high quality and tailored space for digital tech businesses to develop products, grow their business and collaborate with peers and academia.

Businesses and entrepreneurs can also benefit from a new Techscaler Hub, which is helping start-ups and scale-ups at every stage of growth.

These developments build upon sustained investment in and support for digital innovation, with Codebase Stirling, our University and College all helping to generate the highest percentage of creative industries and the second highest tech employees.

Stirling is the Scottish local authority with the second highest percentage of its local workforce employed in digital tech, home to the UK's largest tech incubator CodeBase, and the University of Stirling is ranked third in Scotland for Computer Science.

Life Sciences and Health Innovation

Scotland is one of Europe's largest life sciences and biotech clusters, and the Forth Valley sits at its heart. The University of Stirling offers undergraduate degrees in Biology, Cell Biology and Applied Biological Sciences, producing work-ready graduates, developed in partnership with industry and delivered jointly with Forth Valley College, which also offers a range of courses suitable for technician-level roles as well as Modern Apprenticeships in Life Sciences.

In addition to the Forth Valley University College Health Partnership, which was the first formal regional partnership between a health board, university and college. The Partnership focuses on research, innovation, learning and careers and Forth Valley is within easy reach of Scotland's main NHS teaching hospitals.

The growing field of med tech is well suited to region's strengths beyond its profile in life sciences, combining with the region's strengths in digital innovation.

Many of the region's life sciences and med tech businesses have been started at Stirling University Innovation Park and alongside multinational companies such as Merck, the local

sector is characterised by a strong showing of successful founder-led businesses. Indeed, Stirling's burgeoning life sciences and med tech sector has been buoyed by attracting significant investment from industry, investors, and national agencies in recent years.

Food and Drink

The Forth Valley has an extremely active food and drink sector, with collaboration and learning through the Forth Valley Food & Drink Network, from developing innovative production methodologies in the milk sector, to the efficient distribution of products of our national logistics networks, from the research and development of new technologies, right through to the presentation on the plate, or in the glass.

Our food and drink sector does it all and is perhaps a model for other regional economies on their journey to a green economy. Whether in the development of new skills to improve milk yields whilst reducing the carbon footprint, capturing craft skills such as coopering for the whisky sector, decarbonising food production, cutting-edge glass making and award-winning brewing, the Forth Valley is well on its way to a low carbon Food and Drink sector. Tackling food poverty is also a priority, with regional anchor institutions collaborating across the regional economy with the likes of Forth Environment Link, Forth Valley College, the NHS and the three local authorities all working to ensure that vulnerable groups are supported.

Aquaculture is the fastest growing agricultural sector in the world. The University of Stirling's Institute of Aquaculture is the UK's top-rated aquaculture research and training department and a leading centre, which through academic expertise, technical consultancy and industry collaborations, is proactively addressing sustainability, food security, and business growth.

Supported by £17 million from the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal, the soon-to-open National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub (NATIH) will deliver state-of-the-art lab facilities where experts will conduct commercially relevant research in partnership with leading companies – equipping researchers and graduates with the skills required by the blue food economy of the future.

By working even more collaboratively at the regional level, we can develop closer links between projects on the ground, and the ground-breaking research being led locally.

Transport and Logistics

Located at the heart of Scotland's transport networks, the Forth Valley is ideally placed to act as a logistics hub.

Grangemouth Port plays a vital role in the region's economy. As Scotland's largest port, it handles approximately 9 million tonnes of cargo annually, including fuels, machinery, and steel products. The port's strategic location and infrastructure make it a crucial component of the supply chain for various industries.

In addition to being Scotland's principal Freight Hub, and now home to the Forth Green Freeport, the Forth Valley is at the centre of Scotland's Railway network, offering excellent passenger connectivity from Forth Valley's urban centres to the City Regions of Edinburgh and Glasgow. These connections then extend to the North, through the Tay Cities and onto the Highlands & Islands and the North East. This status as a transport and logistics hub is

enhanced by the presence of key private sector companies involved in manufacturing and the movement of goods.

Health and Wellbeing

The Forth Valley has a wealth of opportunities to maintain and build health and wellbeing. From groundbreaking facilities at the Clackmannanshire Wellbeing Hub, to the outstanding sports offer at Grangemouth Stadium and the much-loved Peak in Stirling – all connected by an extensive active travel network around the Forth and at the feet of the Ochil Hills.

In another ground-breaking collaboration, the NHS in Forth Valley, our regional college, and the University of Stirling have developed the University College NHS Partnership. Its focus is on research, innovation, learning and career development, bringing together a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and experience to help unlock research funding and support the development of new learning opportunities across health and social care.

The Dementia Services Development Centre (DSDC), based at the University of Stirling, is an international centre of knowledge and expertise dedicated to improving the lives of people with dementia. The centre provides a range of education and training programmes that grow the confidence, knowledge and skills that make a difference to people with dementia and improve professional practice and career development.

The DSDC has already piloted a range of work internationally, and locally, with interventions into place-making changing the nature, form, and function of both public and private spaces. From the design of housing to outdoor spaces that are appropriate for people with dementia, to public buildings and private places, the DSDC is pioneering place-making for an increasing section of the global population.

The Intergenerational Living Innovation Hub (ILIH), planned to be based in Alloa, together with the Scottish International Environment Centre SIEC, will be a leading centre for eco-living solutions. The twin focuses of ageing population and climate change represent two of society's biggest challenges. Bringing together world-leading research, innovation, business and skills development, the Hub will create a focus to transform the narrative from one of challenge to opportunity.

Tourism

Our vibrant visitor economy enjoys 8 million trips per annum to a wide range of attractions, now including modern icons such as the Falkirk Wheel and the Kelpies at Helix Park and the revamped Japanese Garden at Cowden. Soon to follow will be the National Art Park along the Forth & Clyde Canal between these two marvels of engineering, building upon our long-held reputation for active interpretation of our beautiful built heritage, anchored by stalwarts such as Stirling Castle and the Wallace Monument.

We have strong collegiate approach to tourism in the Forth Valley, with the three local authorities recognising the benefits of working in partnership to celebrate and promote our collective world class assets to the travel trade, through the Forth Valley Tourism Development partnership.

Our strategic sectors shall all play an integral part in ensuring that we are globally competitive, increasingly productive, and raising levels of innovation and driving greater internationalisation for our business base.

The Forth Valley will prioritise its strategic sectors in its combined inward investment approach as we strive to attract more growth and external investment to the area.

Strategic Regional Tools – Community Wealth Building & Connectivity

The Forth Valley is a leader in Community Wealth Building. The region, as with the rest of Scotland, is engaged in the rollout of Community Wealth Building principles as a key toolkit to deliver an inclusive wellbeing economy. Transport and connectivity are vital considerations in making the Forth Valley a more prosperous, productive and inclusive place. This strategy reflects a shared emphasis on the importance of people, place and connectivity. It is constructed upon the case for greater internal connectivity outlined by the Forth Valley Connectivity Commission.

Community Wealth Building

Community Wealth Building is an economic development approach which has been embraced by many parts of Scotland. Community Wealth Building is underpinned by five key pillars, covering all aspects of economic and community development, including:

- **Plural Ownership** – Developing and growing small-to-medium enterprises, community organisations and Inclusive Democratic Business Models – like co-operatives, employee-owned businesses and social enterprises – is important because they can help to lock wealth in-place locally.
- **Finance** - Increasing flows of investment within local economies by harnessing and recirculating the wealth that already exists. This includes redirecting local authority pension funds and supporting mutually owned banks and credit unions.
- **Fair Work** - Anchor institutions can have a defining effect on the prospects of local people. Recruitment from lower income areas, following Fair Work First principles and building progression routes all improve local economies.
- **Progressive Procurement** – Developing dense local supply chains of businesses is crucial to support local employment and retain wealth locally.
- **Land & Property** - Deepening the function and ownership of local assets held by anchor institutions, so that financial and social gain is harnessed by citizens.

Clackmannanshire, as a pilot area for Community Wealth Building, is a leader in this field and recognised internationally – meaning that wider the Forth Valley is ideally positioned to continue to lead, through further development of the Community Wealth Building approach. This includes the creation of the Forth Valley Regional Anchor Board – with focus on the Fair Work, Procurement and Property pillars, which can bring impacts at scale – and local actions to continue to build wealth in our communities.

Connectivity

The Forth Valley is at the heart of Scotland, connecting Scotland's main metropolitan areas of Glasgow and Edinburgh. In addition to being Scotland's principal Freight Hub, and now home to the Forth Green Freeport, the Forth Valley is at the centre of Scotland's railway and motorway network. It also provides the gateway to some of Scotland's key visitor attractions, including Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park.

The region also has important internal connections, supporting business and personal transport around the region and the three main urban centres of Alloa, Falkirk and the city of Stirling. The Forth Valley also benefits from superfast broadband connections in the most

highly populous areas with further need to tackle digital exclusion and faster connectivity in the rural areas of Stirling.

Challenges do remain around transport connectivity, and this strategy seeks to address gaps in our local and regional transport network. This work will be undertaken across the 3 councils working with the Regional Transport Partnerships and taking account of the aspiration summarised in the Forth Valley Connectivity Commission report. The Net Zero agenda provides considerable opportunity as the 3 Councils are committed to working towards a Net Zero economy. This will help transform our Transport and Energy systems to significantly improve economic activity.

The Forth Valley Connectivity Commission, which was established in September 2021, brought together senior figures from across the region under an independent Chair, with academic support from the University of Stirling, as well as other members with regional economic and transport expertise.

The Commission gathered evidence from across the Forth Valley, considering connectivity challenges facing the regional economy, and proposes a programme of recommendations that builds on major investments to support our transition toward economic and environmental sustainability. The Commission identified three interlocking connectivity challenges;

- Securing a transformation from a carbon-intensive towards a Net Zero region.
- Supporting people and their places to be more productive.
- Planning for a just transition and inclusive growth across the entire region.

These challenges will be addressed at the regional scale, recognising the differences and similarities in each of the three council areas, through joint working between the local authorities, Regional Transport Partnerships, government and transport delivery partners.

Vision and Values

The Forth Valley Vision

By 2035 Forth Valley will have the most inclusive, productive and sustainable economy in Scotland.

Values- Collaboration

Working together to enhance connections, reduce duplication of effort, grasp opportunities and maximise economies of scale by anchoring investment in the Forth Valley – our partners in the private sector are key to understanding business needs and delivering opportunities in productivity, employment and investment.

All three local authorities in the Forth Valley share a common goal to enhance the area for all of those who live, work and play in the region.

By developing and strengthening partnership working, across matters as diverse and connected as the Regional Economic Partnership, Regional Transport Partnerships, Community Health and Care Partnerships in conjunction with our NHS and more, we can ensure that through deeper engagement and collaboration our region will maximise its potential for all.

Values- Inclusivity

Working in partnership with our business community, we will grow our economy in a way that tackles inequality and provides opportunities and benefits for everyone, with a focus on fair employment, good quality jobs, and ensuring that education and skills development are accessible and inclusive.

Working in partnership with service users and service providers we will ensure that support and assistance to ensure an inclusive Forth Valley is always available. Our commitment to Local Employability Partnership working, locally and regionally, also ensures that opportunities are created and offered to those who are looking.

Values- Sustainability

By ensuring we embrace the economic opportunities of net zero and meet the challenges of climate change, we will support the Forth Valley's long-term resilience and prosperity and ensure no one is left behind by the just-transition.

The Forth Valley, with excellent academic and business knowledge based here, is making significant strides towards our Net Zero Nation goal of net zero by 2045. Much of the work to achieve this is underway, led by our local authorities through Climate Emergency action planning and by public, private and third sector organisations all contributing to our common net zero objective.

In doing so, the region is working collaboratively to devise an innovative, sustainable and inclusive net zero future for the Forth Valley.

Values- Innovation

Embracing both new ideas and a willingness to take risks to find solutions to challenges – with a focus upon increasing flows of investment into the region.

By fostering collaborative working across and beyond the region, we can make the best use of the research and innovation facilities offered in the Forth valley. From the City and Falkirk Growth Deal projects to private sector research facilities, from academic research and development to support for entrepreneurs the Forth Valley has innovation at its core.

Consultation Draft

Forth Valley Regional Economic Partnership Model

The Scottish Government Regional Economic Policy Advisory Group review reported in late 2022 and made a total of 11 recommendations. The review recognised the success of regional working and collaboration and noted the positive work underway in the Forth Valley, particularly around use of the Regional Recovery Fund during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Forth Valley is the final region in Scotland to establish a Regional Economic Partnership, with options being explored to create regional structures. This links to the Scottish Government's Programme for Government as well as the Forth Valley local authorities Transformation Through Collaboration programme.

This regional work supports the National Strategy for Economic Transformation as a way to deliver a Wellbeing Economy in Scotland. It also supports the Scottish Government's Public Service Reform agenda.

The Forth Valley's three councils are ambitious to lead on regional economic development. To secure this leadership, the three local authorities will work with partners to devise and deliver a governance structure which meets the needs of communities, businesses and partner organisations across the Forth Valley.

The Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal and the Falkirk Growth Deal cover the whole Forth Valley as well as the Local Growth Fund.

The Regional Economic Policy Review made 11 recommendations to the Scottish Government, summarised below:

1. use the review to enhance regional autonomy and policy coordination through both the REPs and Scottish Government structures.
2. explore how to build capacity within REPs to achieve the greatest benefit.
3. examine the current funding landscape across the public sector, using improved policy alignment to make more joined-up funding decisions, including future funding streams such as UK Shared Prosperity or replacements.
4. analysis of funding should examine the capacity challenges created by complex, short-term and varied funding streams, and the duplication for regional partners.
5. placed-based policy alignment and portfolio coordination across Scottish Government, using improved alignment to make more joined-up funding decisions.
6. seek to raise the profile of REPs across public, private and third sector to enhance and promote the use of these existing regional structures.
7. work with regional partners to explore establishing Regional Intelligence Hubs and establishing a network that links them together.
8. regions facing high levels of economic challenge are prioritised to pilot Regional Intelligence Hubs, seeking to identify ways to close the productivity gap in Scotland.
9. Regional Intelligence Hubs could look to carry out horizon scanning and foresight analyses, working to assess how national challenges might play out region.
10. consider how REPs could make use of the Wellbeing Economy Monitor when measuring the success of Regional Economic Strategies.
11. examine how any new economic development funding provided could be allocated in a way that aligns with Wellbeing Economy ambitions.

From a regional Local Employability Partnership (LEP) – built up from council-area LEPs – to a new Regional Anchor Board to support our collective Community Wealth Building goals,

the region is mobilising to address the opportunities and challenges ahead and build on the existing structures across the region. Partnerships across the region will be central to ensuring effective working across the public, private and third sectors.

As our regional Deals in the Forth Valley mature, there will be scope to review and create stronger regional governance structures covering the entire region.

Learning from other regions, our ambition will be to create a regional form that meets the needs of our regional economy in the years ahead. This could include working collaboratively to pool expertise, data and assets to develop and inform delivery of evidence-based interventions across the region.

The delivery of the change proposed within the Framework will require a significant collective effort from a range of organisations, alignment and influence on national and regional strategy/investment and long-term governance arrangements, in-line with the recommendations above.

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Action Plan

Based on initial engagement and baseline information, a series of cross-cutting opportunities have been developed which align with our stated regional sector strengths and values, and are focussed upon where the most added value can be extracted from working together across the Forth Valley.

A series of associated programmes have been identified, which can deliver on those regional opportunities, based on some or all of the following criteria:

- **Partnership focussed and added value:** A requirement for collective involvement of more than one organisation and does not duplicate local business-as-usual activity. They are also within organisational powers of influence.
- **Meet new or emerging priorities:** A requirement to meet or address a new or emerging issue.
- **Regional investment scale:** A need to attract investors or funding that cannot be delivered by individual organisations due to scale.

The Forth Valley Regional Economic Partnership will oversee the development of the priorities and programmes into a robust action plan aligned to a monitoring and evaluation framework. As governance arrangements become more formalised further programmes will also be developed.

The focus will be to continue delivery of existing regional programmes such as the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Regional Deal and the Falkirk and Grangemouth Growth Deal, as well as the Forth Green Freeport.

City Region and Growth Deals

Investment: Over £314 million has been committed in the development of major infrastructure across the region to facilitate growth, regeneration and improve connectivity. This also includes the development of innovation, culture, heritage and tourism and programmes as well as support to enhance skills development and inclusion and to support in the region of 7,000 new jobs and over £1 billion in economic benefit.

Regional Ambition: The existence of both a City Region and a Growth Deal within one economic region is unique in Scotland. While the two deals rightly have existing governance structures, to amplify the benefits of the Deals across the Forth Valley, the creation of regional governance structures which provide opportunities to maximise economic impact for the entire Forth Valley.

Forth Green Freeport

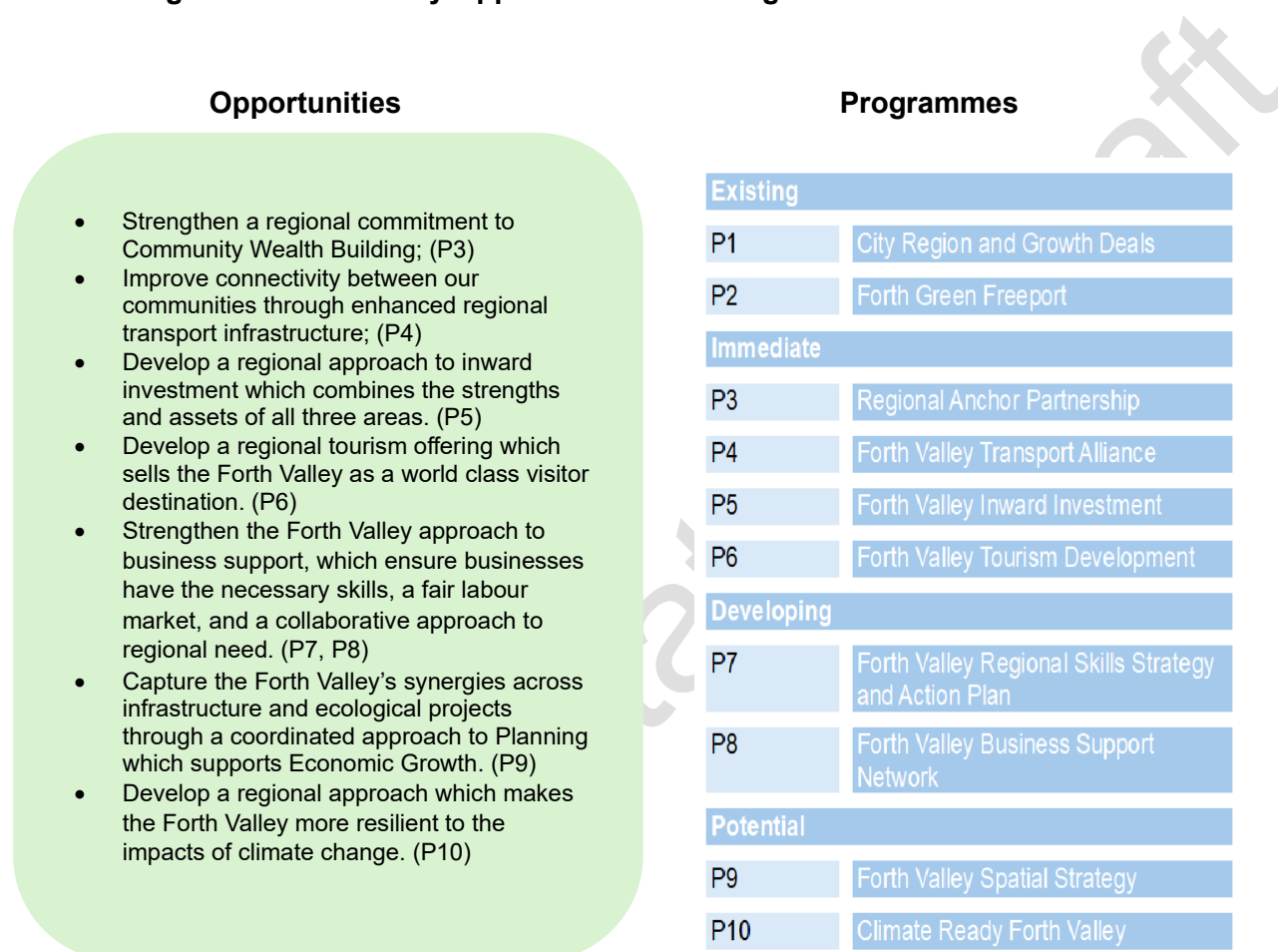
Investment: Across the entire Forth Green Freeport area - which incorporates the Local Authority areas of Falkirk, Fife and City of Edinburgh - the programme is estimated to attract a total of £6 billion in inward investment; 50,000 jobs and £4 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA).

Regional Ambition: the Forth Green Freeport will act as a catalyst for new green technologies, alternative fuels and renewable energy manufacturing – accelerating the nation's just transition to net zero. While the tax sites and immediate benefits are contained within Falkirk, Fife and the City of Edinburgh, the potential benefits for the Forth Valley region and wider supply chains is significant, not least due to the scale of development opportunity in Grangemouth. Again, the Forth Green Freeport has its own operational and

governance structures but this Strategy seeks to stimulate the opportunity for the Forth Valley, and the development of a Forth Valley-wide governance structure provides the vehicle to kickstart this.

Beyond existing activity, the strategic focus will be on progressing the immediate programmes listed in Diagram 1 (P3, P4, P5, P6) alongside the developing programmes such as the Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan and the Forth Valley Business Support Network.

Diagram 1: Forth Valley Opportunities and Programmes



Immediate Programmes

P3. Regional Anchor Partnership

Regional Ambition: The Partnership will deliver on wellbeing economy ambitions at a regional level, providing appropriate leadership at regional level,; opportunities for synergies across decisions affecting priorities within the pillars of Community Wealth Building and the wellbeing economy; and the ability to act at scale, whilst offering scope to act locally through Community Planning Partnership structures.

P4. Forth Valley Transport Alliance

Regional Ambition: A region boasting best in class connectivity, which maximises its economic potential and quality of life for all its residents. A Forth Valley alliance is required to foster a collaborative approach to transport and provide leadership in the identification and delivery of actions to assist in improving connectivity across the Forth Valley. The initial output for the Alliance will be to agree a programme of improvements that can be implemented consistently in deliverable packages with a focus upon connected bus travel, and active travel infrastructure.

P5. Forth Valley Inward Investment Proposition

Regional Ambition: A region which attracts and encourages investment into the Forth Valley, by jointly promoting our advantages, and maximising the value of existing and new strategic funding opportunities.

The Scottish Government's Inward Investment Plan "Shaping Scotland's Economy" (2020) identified nine priority opportunity areas where Scotland's strengths meet global demand, and the Forth Valley's sectoral strengths align with these. Likewise, the Scottish Government's priorities are underpinned by three core values – net zero, digital and high-value manufacturing.

The Forth Valley has an opportunity to position itself at the forefront of Scotland's investment ambitions - particularly in relation to net zero, where it is bolstered by the industrial footprint of Grangemouth, innovation expertise at the University of Stirling, coupled with industry-leading companies who are aiding the energy transition.

Opportunity exists to combine the independent and combined sectoral, and other, strengths across Falkirk, Clackmannanshire, and Stirling to ensure a clear and robust inward investment proposition is developed where opportunities align. By working with the UK Department for Trade, Scottish Development International (SDI) and other stakeholders, the Forth Valley can present unrivalled regional investment opportunities.

P6. Forth Valley Tourism Development Partnership

Regional Ambition: individual Local Authority areas, tourism networks, independent businesses, and visitor attractions in the Forth Valley possess a great opportunity to sell their products and services to customers world-wide. Collectively, the Forth Valley is home to a collection of tourism assets, and an environment, which is the envy of most destinations across the UK and further afield. Therein lies the opportunity for a collaborative approach to tourism development and packaging a Forth Valley proposition to the travel trade to increase visitor numbers, overnight stays and spend in the local economy. The development of the FV Tourism Development Partnership also provides a mechanism to align, and maximise, the benefits of significant planned investment in culture, tourism and heritage through the City Region and Growth Deals.

Developing Programmes

P7. Forth Valley Regional Skills Action Plan

Investment: the Plan, and its agreed actions, draws on investment from across the Stirling and Clackmannanshire City Region Deal, the Falkirk Growth Deal, Forth Green Freeport, the

Grangemouth Industrial Just Transitional Plan as well as further resource from the key stakeholders.

Regional Ambition: the Action Plan was approved in June 2025 and provides a framework for collaboration around the current and emerging skills needs across the Forth Valley, shaped by three emissions – to ensure businesses in the Forth Valley have the people and skills to flourish; a just and fair local labour market; and a collaborative approach to addressing regional skills needs. The Action Plan will support the skills elements of this Strategy and, as such, the FV Regional Skills Action Plan Steering Group will report into a new regional governance structure.

P8. Forth Valley Business Support Network

Investment: Across Forth Valley in the region of £800,000 is spent supporting businesses through the Business Gateway service which is further supplemented using additional private and public sector funding.

Regional Ambition: Strengthening the existing regional approach, will seek to deliver more region-wide initiatives around business support, aligned to emerging challenges and opportunities such as the City Region and Growth Deals, Forth Green Freeport, Grangemouth Industrial Just Transition and provide a scale to attract greater investment and external funding opportunities.

Potential Programmes

P9. Forth Valley Regional Spatial Strategy

Regional Ambition: Under the [Planning \(Scotland\) Act 2019](#), all planning authorities were required to prepare a regional spatial strategy (RSS) either on their own or in partnership with other authorities. In 2020/2021, an indicative Forth Valley RSS was prepared by officers across the three Councils to provide input to the emerging national spatial strategy in NPF4. This demonstrated the added value of collaboration in planning at a regional level, alongside parallel joint working on economic and transport issues. While there is no statutory imperative to develop a formal strategy, the benefits of improved policy coordination, sustainable development, enhanced infrastructure planning, better housing delivery and economic growth can all stem from a regional spatial strategy - it is recommended that this approach is formalised again and a revised Forth Valley Regional Spatial Strategy is developed, for approval.

P10. Climate Ready Forth Valley

Regional Ambition: To establish a climate adaptation partnership between all Council's in Forth Valley, as well as key stakeholders, such as Forth Environment Link who run the Forth Valley Climate Action Hub. The overarching aim of such partnership is to address climate risks at a regional scale. With seed funding from the Scottish Government's Climate Ready Regions Fund awarded to support the development of a partnership that will be known as Climate Ready Forth Valley. The seed funding will initially be used to conduct an economic impact assessment to help understand risks and opportunities posed by climate change; identify differentiated impacts across key sectors; provide an economic rationale for investing in climate adaptation measures; and an investment plan for up to five years.

Next Steps

Over the next twelve months, following approval of the Forth Valley Regional Economic Strategy, the focus of partners will be to establish the required regional economic governance structures, prioritising the creation of a regional governance structure, and associated sub-groups.

Once the governance structures are established, the Board will focus on the development of:

- a detailed action plan which will include ownership of actions/tasks for these projects with indicative costs and a monitoring and evaluation framework; and
- an Equality Impact Assessment/Health Inequalities Assessment on the emerging action plan;

The action plan will be a living document which will be refreshed and reported on annually.