

Greater Norwich Local Plan 2025–2045 Economy Topic Paper

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1. Summary and local context

Greater Norwich is among the UK's most productive and fast-growing economies outside London and is already playing a critical role in supporting national productivity, innovation, inward investment and long-term fiscal returns.

The Local Growth Plan (Norfolk Economic Strategy 2024-29) and economic strategies for each of the districts already set out economic visions and objectives for the area and the GNLP 2045 will play a pivotal role in helping to deliver these plans.

This topic paper looks at various issues and themes relating to the economy and town centres and asks several questions in order that we can start to look at the possible directions that economic policies could take, bearing in mind plan-making and decision-making policies set out within the draft NPPF. Key considerations will include:

- A need for greater flexibility to meet both current and future economic needs and to respond to a modernising economy.
- Creating the conditions for businesses to thrive, in terms of both emerging and high growth economic sectors and the foundational economy.
- Strengthening the skills of our workforce.
- Reasserting Norwich city centre as the economic and cultural heart of Greater Norwich.
- Supporting town centres, the rural economy and tourism.
- Overcoming barriers to economic growth.

2. Coverage in current Policy, the draft NPPF and Implications for the GNL P 2045

Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2025)

Chapter 7: The economy

- Development plans should set out a clear economic vision which takes a positive, proactive and realistic approach to encouraging sustainable economic growth. It should allocate sites to implement the vision and to meet current and future economic need. Sites and premises should be flexible and adaptable in order to respond to a modernising economy.
- Given changing commercial property requirements, development plans should not be overly prescriptive about the types of uses that would be accepted unless there is a clear and justified rationale.
- Support for the sustainable growth of business in rural areas.
- Support for the effective and efficient movement of goods through planning for freight and logistics.

Chapter 8: Town Centres

- To promote the long-term vitality and viability of town centres, development plans should be informed by a strategy for town centres in the area.
- Development plans should set out a hierarchy of centres and allocate a range of suitable sites, although before town centre boundaries are expanded, existing vacant town centre sites and intensification should be considered.
- Town centres should be prioritised, followed by well-connected sites and then accessible locations. The sequential test and impact assessment should be used.
- Consideration should be given to the use of design guides, design codes, masterplans and Article 4 Directions.
- Diversification of uses and intensification and provision of residential accommodation can support the overall vitality and viability of centres.
- Retained and improved access to local shops and facilities which provide day-to-day services for the local community is supported.

GNLP 2024

The adopted local plans for the three Greater Norwich districts are made up of a suite of policy documents. Primary among these is the existing Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP), alongside the Development Management (DM) policies for each district, Area-specific Action Plans (AAPs) and several Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). A full list of policies relevant to the economy, guidance documents and other evidence is set out in Table 3 of the Appendices. The two most relevant policies within the GNLP 2024 are policy 6 (the economy) and policy 7 (strategy for the areas of growth) and summaries of these two policies are given below. Mention is also made of related NPPF policies or lack of NPPF guidance as relevant.

Policy 6: The economy

- Policy 6 allocates employment land. In accordance with the NPPF 2025 employment land should be allocated in development plans. These allocations will need reviewing.
- As well as strategic employment sites, the GNLP 2024 seeks to allocate and retain sites for small, medium and start-up businesses and supports rural enterprises. Whilst the NPPF 2025 covers rural business development, it does not distinguish between strategic and small-scale businesses.
- The GNLP 2024 promotes tourism, leisure, environmental and cultural industries. The NPPF does not refer to these industries so consideration needs to be given to how they can continue to be promoted through the GNLP 2045.
- Policy 6 highlights the importance of skills, education and training. The NPPF 2025 does not cover these, so their inclusion should be considered in the GNLP 2045.
- Policy 6 sets out a hierarchy of defined centres which is required through the NPPF. This hierarchy will need reviewing.
- The GNLP refers to both the sequential test and impact assessment. These are both covered through the NPPF 2025, although consideration needs to be given to an appropriate threshold for impact assessments.
- The GNLP 2024 allows for conditions to be applied to restrict offices, light industrial and research and development changing to other uses within class E. The NPPF is clear that specific uses should only be defined where there is a justified rationale.

Policy 7.1: The Norwich urban area including the fringe parishes

- Policy 7.1 sets out how Norwich City Centre's strategic role as key driver of the Greater Norwich economy will be strengthened. It promotes mixed use development, the intensification of land and start-up spaces for specific sectors and resists the loss of office floorspace within the article 4 direction area. The NPPF promotes broadening the mix of uses (including residential uses) but also supports the use of Article 4 directions where they are justified.
- In terms of town centre uses, policy 7.1 seeks to support retail along with a complementary range of uses, focusing any new floorspace within centres. It promotes diversification including for leisure, culture and entertainment and residential at upper floor levels. This accords with the NPPF.

Policy 7.2: The main towns

- The GNLP 2024 allocates new employment sites and sets out that retail and other town centre uses should be located in or adjoining town centres. This accords with the NPPF 2025.

Policy 7.3: The key service centres

- The GNLP 2024 allocates new employment sites. This accords with the NPPF 2025.

Policy 7.4: Village clusters

- The GNLP 2024 allocates new employment sites and sets out that other small-scale employment may be acceptable through the reuse of rural buildings. This accords with the more permissive approach set out within the NPPF 2025.

Development Management Policies Plans

The Development Management Policies Plans for all three districts were adopted over 10 years ago when planning policies around employment and town centres were a lot more restrictive. Furthermore, the policies were adopted prior to the changes to the Use Class Order in 2020 and the General Permitted Development Order in 2021 and refer to use classes which are no longer applicable and try to control changes which are now permitted development.

The NPPF now has a much more permissive, flexible approach towards the use of employment sites with a clear focus on the ability to adapt to a modern economy efficiently – this is in contrast with a more restricted approach where all three authorities allocated sites for particular uses and set clear tests to be met in order for development to be acceptable.

In terms of town centre policies, there is now a much more permissive approach at the national level towards economic growth and the development of town centres. The DM policies for example set thresholds for maintaining specific uses, such as retail, within defined areas which are no longer in conformity with the NPPF. Largely due to the rapid change in the retail economy in recent years, the benefits of diversification and allowing complementary uses have been recognised, particularly in terms of increasing footfall, preventing vacant units and creating a vibrant centre throughout the day and into the evening.

The NPPF also introduces a more permissive approach to allowing agricultural and forestry development outside settlements, the reuse of existing buildings in the countryside and dwellings in the countryside for rural workers.

Taking into account the above, it is likely that many of the development management policies for all three authorities are out-of-date. However, there are some locally specific elements within them which have helped contribute to the success of Greater Norwich's economy and consideration will need to be given to which policies/parts of policies will need to be carried forward/reflected within the GNLP 2045. This may include some of the following:

Broadland District Council

- Defined centres hierarchy
- Tourism accommodation

Norwich City Council

- Retail centre boundaries
- The late-night economy
- Hot food takeaways
- Restrictive conditions on retail warehouses
- University of East Anglia
- Norwich airport

South Norfolk Council

- Working from home
- Business operations within residential areas
- Holiday accommodation
- Food and drink establishments (including takeaways)
- Equestrian development and change of use of agricultural land
- Thresholds for sequential test and impact assessments for out-of-centre proposal
- Rural workers accommodation
- Conversion and re-use of existing buildings in the countryside
- Agricultural and forestry development

3. Early policy direction of thoughts

Table 1: Early policy direction of thoughts

Policy theme	Initial direction of travel (post-2025)
Flexibility and long-term growth The NPPF sets out that development plans must have a clear economic vision which takes a positive, proactive and realistic approach to encouraging sustainable economic growth. It must allocate sites to implement the vision and to meet existing and anticipated need over the plan period.	Consideration needs to be given to how the plan can be flexible to respond to a modernising economy and meet both current and future economic need. How can we ensure that we deliver the right types and mix of commercial space where it is needed and are there any employment sites that require ongoing/new protection for specific end users/industries?
The emerging and high growth economy The Norfolk Local Growth Plan aims to support the following specialist clusters and sectors: • Life sciences • Clean energy • Agri-tech and agri-food • Financial services and insurance • Digital Tech • Advanced manufacturing and engineering	How can the GNLP 2045 help create the conditions for businesses in these sectors to grow and thrive so Greater Norwich can play a leading role in these industries of the future?
The foundational economy As well as high growth and emerging sectors, it is important to look at the foundational economy which provides a high number of jobs, contributes to GVA (Gross Value Added) and supports Greater Norwich's residents. This includes: • Culture, heritage and visitor economy • Construction • Health and Social Care • Retailing	How can the GNLP 2045 help protect and sustain our foundational economy?

Policy theme	Initial direction of travel (post-2025)
Workforce and education A large share of Norwich's population (63%) is of working age, strengthening its labour force base, providing a strong base to fuel future growth (Public First, 2026). Furthermore, driven in part by a strong concentration of higher education providers, Norwich is home to a high proportion of young working age adults aged 18-25, well above the UK average, presenting an opportunity to leverage the young population to drive business and employment growth.	How can the GNLP 2045 help strengthen skills and workforce development (particularly in terms of emerging sectors) and support further and higher education establishments?
The rural economy The NPPF takes a permissive approach to the development of the rural economy, particularly in relation to new and/or expanded development outside defined development boundaries and accommodation for rural workers. Particular focus is placed on supporting modernisation and diversification opportunities for farms and agricultural enterprises. The NPPF recognises that such development may need to occur in less sustainable areas that are not well served by public transport.	The diversification of existing agriculture and encouraging land-based enterprises can help support innovation and the modernisation of Greater Norwich's rural economy. However, how can we ensure that development still meets sustainability objectives and does not have any negative impact upon the character of its surroundings, or on the amenities of existing and future residents? Are there any other industries/sectors that are key drivers of the rural economy locally?
Logistics and freight The Norfolk State of Freight study will help inform a future Freight Strategy. The NPPF supports the effective and efficient movement of goods.	While the ongoing A11 and A47 trunk road enhancements and the remainder of the road and rail network provide some opportunities for logistics and freight growth, Greater Norwich is not located at the heart of national transport network and it currently seems unlikely that freight and logistics will form a key component of our economy. Notwithstanding this, there may be a need for further secure parking for lorries and coaches (and this is a requirement in the NPPF). Is there anything else that needs to be considered in terms of planning for freight/logistics and transport networks?

Policy theme	Initial direction of travel (post-2025)
SMEs and business start ups Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play an important role locally. It is important to encourage an enterprising culture in Greater Norwich and to support residents to start up their own business, and for new start-ups to survive and thrive.	The NPPF seeks to support the expansion of local businesses. What can the plan do to support local SMEs and business start-ups?
Decarbonising the economy Consideration should be given to how Greater Norwich can work toward decarbonising the economy and how future economic development can be resilient to the impacts of climate change, be sustainable and protect and enhance our natural environment.	Does the economy section need to address these issues or will they be picked up in other sections of the plan?
Barriers to growth As revealed in Fast Growth Cities Economic Analysis, Public First, 2026 the Norwich area along with Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Oxford, Peterborough, and Swindon, are among the UK's most productive and fast-growing economies outside London and already play a critical role in supporting national productivity, innovation, inward investment and long-term fiscal returns. However, employment growth is at risk due to a number of factors including: - Greater Norwich being 'seriously water stressed' with existing supply already being under pressure before accounting for additional demand that will come with growth. - The electricity grid infrastructure needs to enable, rather than constrain, growth as is currently the case. - Without improved connectivity by rail and road, the labour market will remain constrained, housing supply will not be able to expand at pace and productivity gains will become increasingly localised.	What can the plan do to mitigate these constraints and to ensure that enabling infrastructure is in place to support growth across Greater Norwich?

Policy theme	Initial direction of travel (post-2025)
Retail hierarchy and boundaries of defined centres The NPPF is clear that development plans should set out a hierarchy of centres and that new development should be located within centres identified. However, the requirement for defined primary and/or secondary shopping areas is not present in the 2025 NPPF. A sequential test and impact assessment will be needed for proposals outside of town centres.	Whilst the existing retail hierarchy is likely to be broadly fit for purpose, some amendments may be needed. For example, consideration needs to be given to where Anglia Square will sit and how Riverside is best defined. We need to consider how best to support and enhance our local and district centres and what other changes are likely to be needed, including for market towns and key service centres. Given the rapid changes retailing is experiencing now and very likely into the future, we also need to consider whether changes to existing retail area boundaries are needed, including the ongoing role of defined primary and secondary shopping areas. The NPPF sets out a threshold of 2,500 sqm gross floorspace for impact assessments. Is this an appropriate threshold in Greater Norwich? Should defined primary and secondary shopping areas be retained in the GNLP 2045?
Norwich city centre Over the past decade, Norwich city centre has experienced significant challenges, including stalled redevelopment projects, underused sites, and declining employment density. The City Centre Investment Prospectus (in progress) will provide a strategic framework for regeneration, setting out a clear vision and delivery roadmap to attract investment, guide development, and position Norwich as a vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive urban hub. It will also act as a promotional tool, while also serving as a technical document to inform policy and delivery.	The City Centre Investment Prospectus will define and articulate a clear investment narrative for Greater Norwich for the next 10 years. It seeks to translate the city's strategic ambitions into a growth and place narrative for the city with a prioritised and deliverable pipeline of opportunities, providing investors and developers with the confidence, clarity and evidence required to engage with the city and guide the realisation and delivery of its long-term growth vision. It will also operate as a roadmap for regional stakeholders and partners to align around a shared vision and define delivery roles. How can the policies within the GNLP 2045 support this work in order to strengthen the city centre?

Policy theme	Initial direction of travel (post-2025)
Town centres Town centres play a vital role in the rural economy. Whilst it is unlikely that there is any need for major additional retail expansion in the main towns, it is important that they remain attractive and vibrant, have a good range of shops and services and are accessible to residents and other visitors.	How can the policies in the GNLP 2045 best support town centres and is there a need for any town centre strategies or town centre design guides to help inform decision making?
Tourism Tourism plays a key role in supporting the economy in the region, both in Greater Norwich and in rural areas. It is important that the existing leisure and tourism attractions are supported in their ambitions for growth and development, and that new enterprises are supported. To support the tourism industry, good quality hotels are needed in Norwich and other town centres along with more rural holiday accommodation. This will encourage new and returning visitors to the area.	Whilst the NPPF recognises that tourism will be a priority sector in some locations, it contains no specific policies on tourism so clear local policies may be required. How can the plan support the ongoing development of tourism, whilst remaining aware of the sustainability and environmental issues that can arise? How can we support tourism to strengthen this economic sector?
Engagement The delivery of the GNLP 2045 will involve many different partners including Local Authorities, businesses, universities, colleges and other educational provides, sector groups and business support organisations.	How can we best engage with stakeholders?

4. Evidence – what we have and what we need

Table 2: Existing evidence/strategies

Evidence	Status	Lead/ commissioner	What it informs
The UK's Modern Industrial Strategy	Launched 2025	UK Government	10-year plan to increase business investment and grow the industries of the future in the UK. The Modern Industrial Strategy seeks to provide certainty and stability to facilitate investment and create growth and identifies sectors with high growth potential and strategic importance.
Fast Growth Cities Economic Analysis	February 2026	Public First	Norwich is part of the Fast Growth Cities group which are cities recognized for their significant contribution to the UK economy. The report identifies constraints to growth.
Local Growth Plan: Norfolk Economic Strategy 2024 - 2029	Adopted 2024	Norfolk County Council	The Local Growth Plan is a strategy for growing Norfolk's economy and supporting the people who live and work here. It informs the Strategic Skills Plan, Norfolk Strategic Infrastructure Delivery Plan and other county and district level strategies. It serves as a framework for a wide range of partners including district councils, education institutes and the private sector.
Norfolk's Local Growth Plan: Action Plan	Adopted 2024	Norfolk County Council	The Action Plan provides implementation and delivery plans for the priorities in the Local Growth Plan. It outlines specific actions for each of the key themes and assigns these either short, medium or long-term timeframes.
NODA Norfolk Economic Strategy Evidence base	Produced 2024	Norfolk Office of Data and Analytics (NODA)	A companion document to the Norfolk Economic Strategy 2024, the evidence base consists of the core data sets that informed and underpinned the analysis and narrative in the strategy. It predominately relies on Office for National Statistics and other comparable central government data releases.

Evidence	Status	Lead/ commissioner	What it informs
Norwich 2040 City Vision	Adopted 2018	Norwich City Council	The long-term strategic vision for Norwich, focusing on cultural vibrancy, sustainability, and inclusive economic growth. The vision document sets out that one organization cannot do this alone. The whole city, its people, businesses and institutions need to work together.
Norwich 2040 Inclusive Economy Vision	Adopted 2018	Norwich City Council	The framework for ensuring economic growth benefits all communities, promoting fairness and sustainability.
Norwich Economic Development Plan 2025 - 2030	Adopted 2024	Norwich City Council	Five-year delivery strategy which serves as the action plan for achieving the ambitions set out in the Norwich 2040 Inclusive Economy Vision and establishes the economic priorities for the next five years.
Norwich City Centre Investment Prospectus	In progress (To be completed autumn 2026)	Norwich City Council and Norfolk County Council Economic Development teams. Consultants Montagu Evans and Inner Circle will produce the prospectus and supporting evidence.	A strategic document that will set out Norwich City Centre's vision, priorities, and development opportunities to attract public and private investment.
Norwich BID – State of the City 2025 Edition	2025	Norwich Business Improvement District	An overview of Norwich's economy, population and business landscape.

Evidence	Status	Lead/ commissioner	What it informs
Broadland Economic Growth Strategic Plan 2022-27	Adopted 2022	Broadland District Council	The Plan focuses on supporting local businesses and facilitating growth through the GNLP. The plan aims to address local barriers to growth and develop targeted responses to support growth that is clean, inclusive and productive.
South Norfolk Economic Growth Strategic Plan 2022-27	Adopted 2022	South Norfolk Council	The plan aims to maximise business and investment opportunities, create more jobs and enhance communities. It focuses on high-value clusters to enhance productivity, improve competitiveness and ultimately improve prosperity.
GNLP evidence base (B3) including Employment Land Assessments and Town Centres and Retail Study	2017 and updated 2020	GVA and Avison Young	Evidence base used to inform the GNLP 2024.

Further evidence requirements

Consideration needs to be given to collecting evidence and updating studies on the following:

- The need for existing and additional employment allocations.
- The need for further retail and town centre allocations and for retail centre boundary changes.
- Whether some underused town centre spaces should be repurposed for other uses.
- Whether certain employment allocations or retail sites require ongoing/new protection for specific end users/industries (e.g. Norwich airport, Norwich Research Park, Hethel, Sprowston retail park, Sweetbriar retail park).

- An appropriate threshold for impact assessment
- Review of the retail hierarchy and boundaries.
- The role and need for town centre strategies, design codes, design guides and Article 4 Directions in order to best support Greater Norwich's economy and town centres.

5. Spatial strategy linkages and cross-boundary issues

Role of established economic partnerships – shared data and information sources.

Economic growth aspirations of adjacent authorities – including saturating particular market sectors or failing to accommodate them.

Existing transport and freight linkages, as well as identifying opportunities and constraints.

Connectivity and accessibility of labour markets (including physical accessibility and transfer of specific skills).

Transport impacts – including barriers and ease of movement.

Infrastructure - capacity, growth opportunities, restrictions and constraints.

Ensuring housing and economic growth align across areas.

Support across boundaries for rural economic development (e.g., cross-border enterprises).

Ensuring minimal/ no conflict between economic and tourism policies and strategies.

Appendices / map book placeholders

Future appendices

It is anticipated that the following may need to be set out within appendices of the GNLP 2054.

- Retail centre boundaries (to be reviewed)
- Design codes/ design guides

Relevant policies, guidance and evidence

Table 3 below lists the most relevant policies, guidance and evidence studies related to the economy and town centres (at the time of writing).

Table 3: List of relevant policies, guidance documents and other evidence

Source	Relevant policies
GNLP link(s)	Policy 1: The Sustainable Growth Strategy Policy 6: The economy Policy 7: Strategy for the areas of growth
Related DM policies	Norwich City Council DM Policies DM1, DM16, DM17, DM18, DM19, DM20, DM21, DM23, DM24, DM25, DM26, DM27 Norwich City Council Local Development Framework South Norfolk Council DM Policies DM1.1, DM2.1, DM2.2, DM 2.3, DM2.4, DM2.5, DM2.6, DM2.7, DM2.8, DM2.9, DM2.10, DM2.11, DM2.12 South Norfolk Development Management DPD Broadland District Council DM Policies GC1, GC3, H1, E1, E2, E3, R1, R2, Broadland Development Management DPD
AAP policies	South Norfolk Council AAPs Wymondham Area Action Plan Long Stratton Area Action Plan Broadland District Council AAPs Growth Triangle Area Action Plan

Source	Relevant policies
SPDs/ guidance notes/reports	Norwich City Council SPD Main town centre and retail frontages SPD Norwich City Centre Shopping and Town Centre Floorspace Monitor and Local and District Centres Monitor (October 2025) South Norfolk Council SPDs/ guidance Food Hub SPD (2014) Norwich Research Park Development Framework SPD Working from Home Advice Note 2024 Agricultural Occupancy and Removal of Occupancy Conditions Advice Note (updated 2024) Food Enterprise Park, Easton, Local Development Order (emerging) Browick Road, Wymondham, Local Development Order (emerging) Broadland District Council SPDs/ guidance Food Enterprise Zone Local Development Order Food Hub SPD (2014) Blue Boar Land Development Brief SPD (2007)
Other evidence documents and strategies	UK's Modern Industrial Strategy Fast Growth Cities Economic Analysis Local Growth Plan – Norfolk Economic Strategy 2024-29 Norfolk Local Growth Plan: Action Plan NODA Norfolk Economic Strategy Norwich 2040 City Vision Norwich 2040 Inclusive Economy Vision Norwich Economic Development Plan 2025-30 Norwich City Centre Investment Prospectus South Norfolk Economic Growth Strategic Plan 2022-27 Broadland Economic Growth Strategic Plan 2022-27 Greater Norwich Employment, Town Centre and Retail Study