February 2026

Fast Growth Cities Economic Analysis

Public First 2026

Cambridge City Council

Milton Keynes City Council

Norwich City Council

Oxford City Council

Peterborough City Council

Swindon Borough Council

The Fast Growth Cities commissioned Public First to

Characterise each of the Fast Growth Cities (FGCs), highlighting the unique assets and challenges facing each city, and highlighting consistent themes.

Conduct a set of forward-looking growth scenarios, grounded in historical performance, to highlight the economic potential of the FGCs.

Provide an assessment of the key drivers and constraints that must be addressed to allow the Fast Growth Cities to reach their potential.

Contents

Summary

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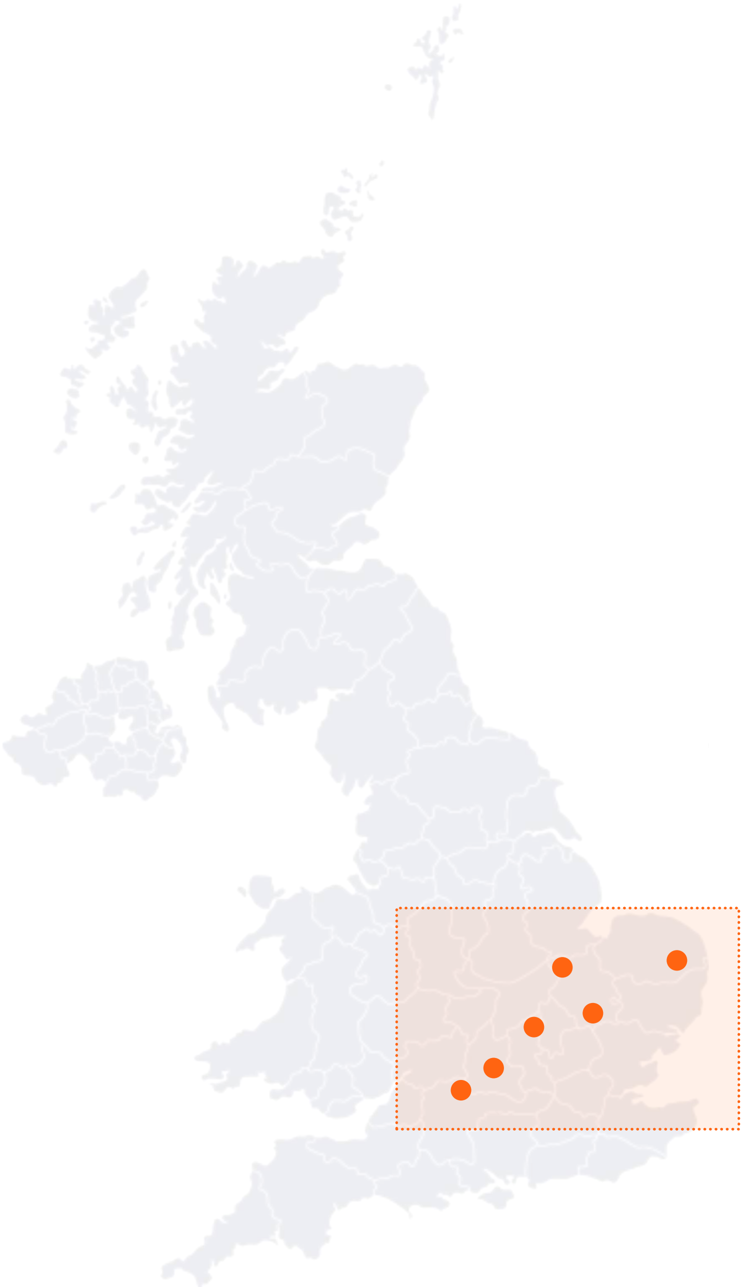
The Fast Growth Cities are made up of Swindon, Oxford, Milton Keynes, Cambridge, Peterborough and Norwich



A summary of the work

- With the right policy interventions and support to achieve strong employment growth, the Fast Growth Cities could add £21bn to the economy by 2035.
- The Fast Growth Cities have shown strong levels of growth individually over the last decade in terms of productivity, population and output, and have consistently punched above their weight in terms of output per worker, global exports and in attracting inward investment in relation to their size.
- Each city presents a unique opportunity to ensure continued growth; while each place has its own strengths and challenges, all have the potential to provide material output growth for the UK economy.
- While there are unique challenges across the group, there is a consistent need for growth to focus on inclusivity, and to ensure that improvements in output translate into material improvements in the living standards and economic opportunities of all residents of the Fast Growth Cities.
- Addressing constraints to employment growth is critical to unlocking economic progress, while enabling housing to be delivered at pace will be key. This will require a combination of smart targeted densification within city boundaries and unlocking opportunities to expand commutable housing stock by leveraging existing and future transport infrastructure.
- Our growth forecasts show that unlocking continued employment growth will have material benefits for the UK PLC, adding significant employment opportunities and output growth for the economy.

2%

Real GVA per worker growth of FGCs has sat above the UK average (1.7%)

£34bn

The FGCs have a combined £34bn of global exports, equivalent to 4% of the UK total

10%

The FGCs were responsible for around 10% of UK Venture Capital funding, despite accounting for only 2% of the population

£21bn

With the right support to achieve and maintain previous levels of growth, the FGCs could add £21bn to the economy by 2035

To unlock the full potential of the Fast Growth Cities, action is needed across three areas – transport, housing and critical infrastructure

Strategic transport investment is critical to unlocking labour markets, enabling housing delivery and supporting growth across the Fast Growth Cities. Prioritising rail and road connectivity, improving network reliability, and addressing congestion pinch points will be essential to sustaining employment growth at scale.

The Fast Growth Cities already have ambitious housing plans, which will be crucial to laying the foundations for strong growth across the Fast Growth Cities. It is crucial the delivery of these plans are supported through addressing planning complexities and risks, easing transport and infrastructure constraints, and enabling flexibility to meet housing demand across the wider region

Water and electricity capacity are emerging as binding constraints on growth. All Fast Growth Cities sit within areas of serious water stress, while electricity networks face limited spare capacity. Accelerated investment in utilities infrastructure is essential to avoid these constraints becoming a hard ceiling on growth.

The Fast Growth Cities – as a collective

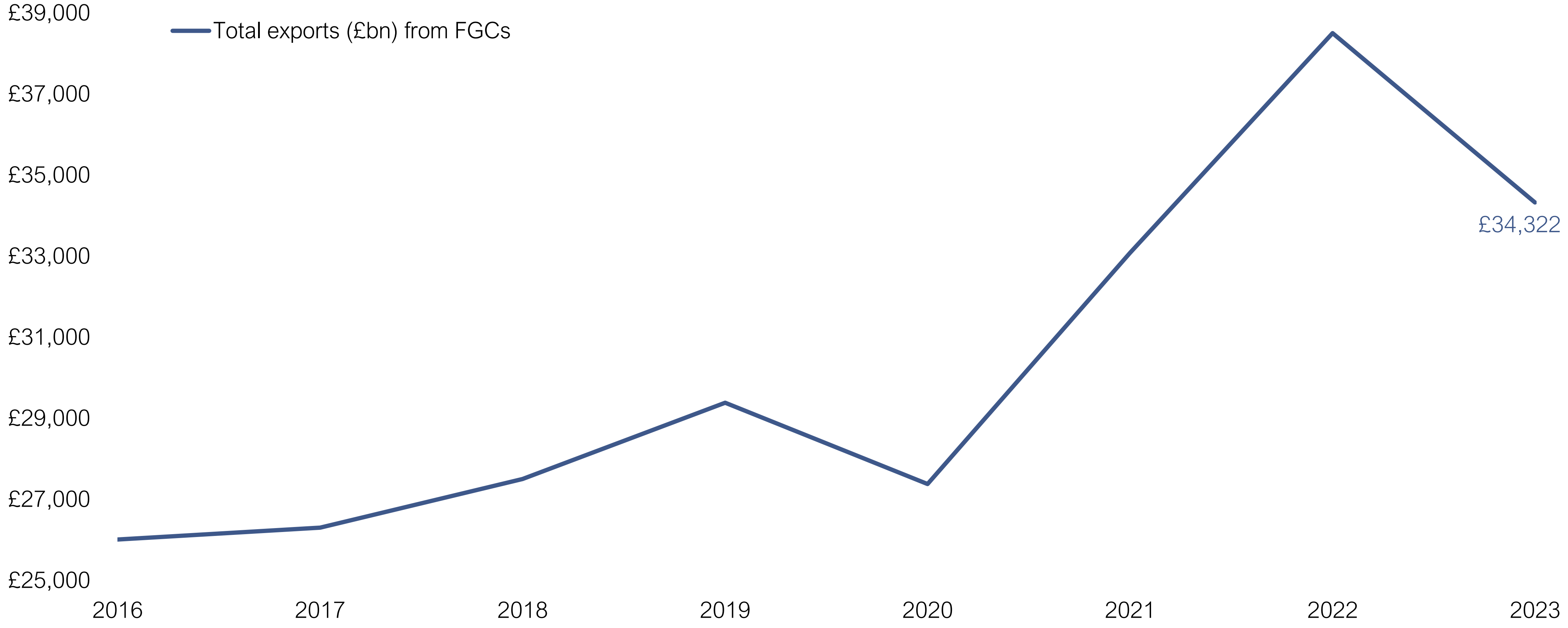
02

2026 Public First

Across the board, each Fast Growth City has been growing faster than the UK average over the past 10 years of available data (GVA)

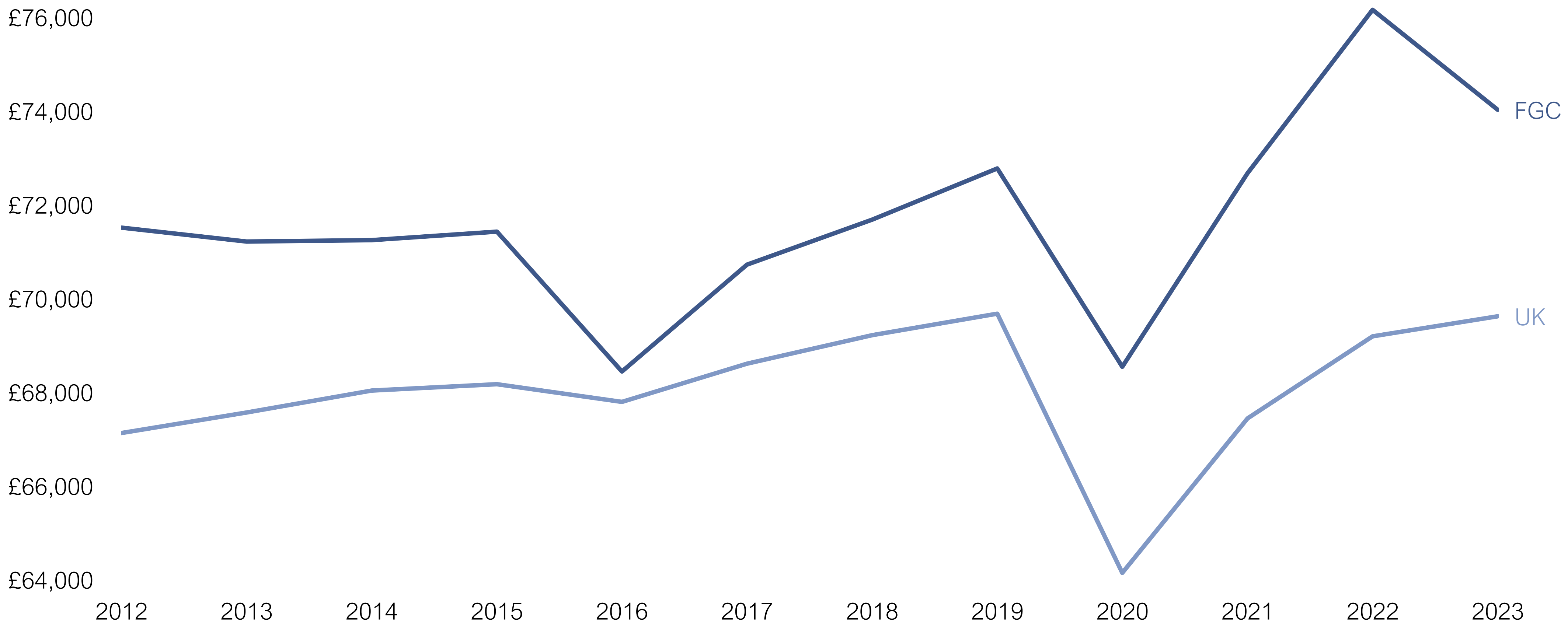
CAGR growth rates: ONS - Gross domestic product (GDP) chained volume measures

The FGCs have also shown continued growth in exports, consistently contributing around 4% to total UK exports



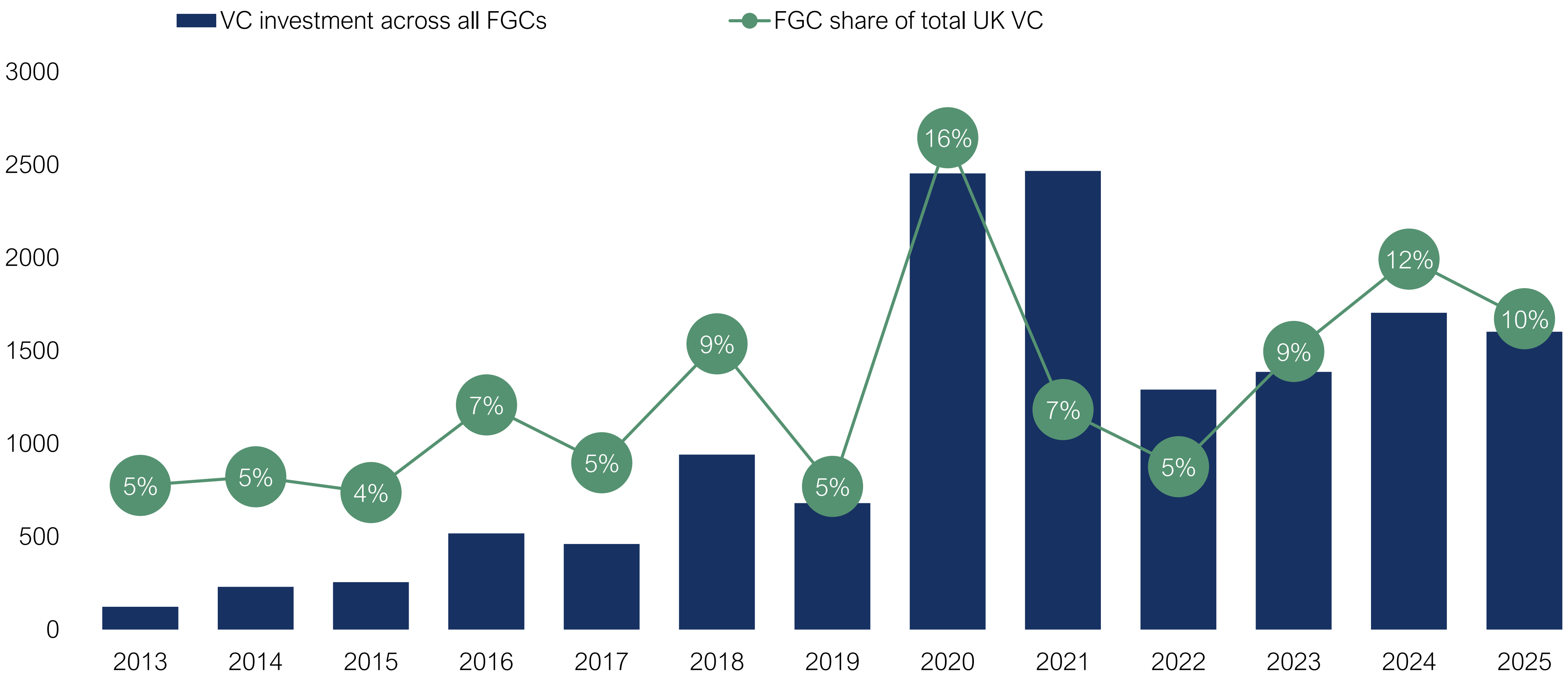
ONS: Subnational trade time series

As a collective, the FGCs have consistently tracked above UK wide levels of real GVA per worker



ONS: Regional gross domestic product (GDP) local authority reference tables., ONS: Employment by Local Authority District within Region

The FGCs have also shown a trend of attracting increasing amounts of Venture Capital, with the Cities attracting around 10% of total UK investment despite being under 2% of the UK population



Deal Room - Venture capital investment dataset.

Diving deeper into the cities – from west to east

03

Swindon

3.1

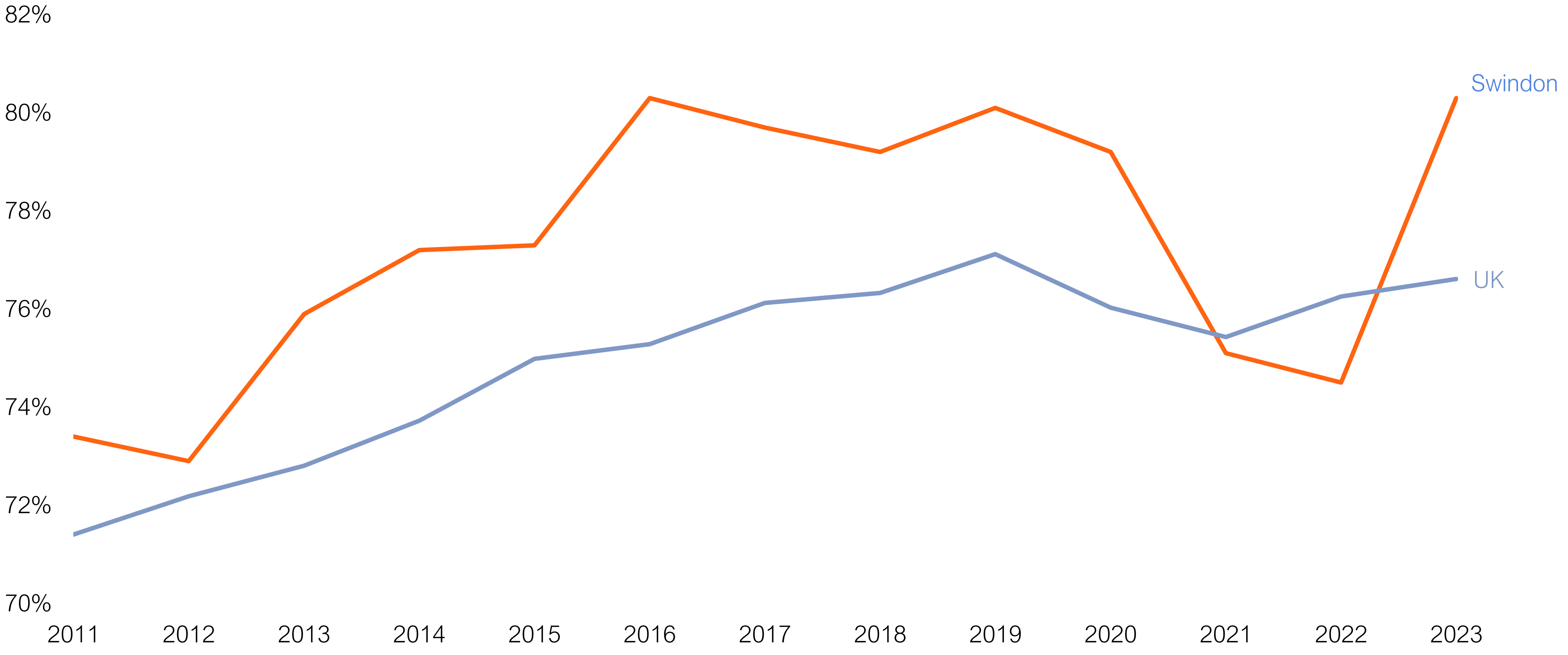
Swindon

With dense private sector employment, impressive levels of productivity and excellent levels of affordable business and residential property, Swindon presents a unique opportunity to scale high per-capita performance, and add to UK PLC.

Population (2024): 243,875

GVA Growth CAGR (2013-2023): 1.8%

With the exception of COVID years, Swindon has consistently had much higher levels of employment than the UK national average



ONS: Employment by Local Authority District within Region

With consistently strong employment, excellent productivity, and affordable commercial and residential space, Swindon is a prime candidate for strong and impactful growth

£101k

Swindon boasts impressive productivity levels, with GVA per worker sitting at £101k per year. The Centre for Cities finds Swindon to be the third most productive city in the UK.

6.84

Swindon stands out for its accessible housing market, with a house price to average earnings ratio of 6.8, well below the country average (7.6).

5th

Ranked as the 5th best city outside London in PwC's 'Good Growth Index' for 2025. Highlighting not just its performance in growth, but its ability to deliver people focused growth.

ONS: Sub-regional productivity, ONS: House price (existing dwellings) to residence-based earnings ratio dataset, Centre for Cities: Cities Outlook 2026.

Despite strong productivity growth and high employment, employment growth (2013-2023) has been impacted by employment shocks, such as the Honda plant closure in 2021

CAGR growth rates: ONS (2013-2023) - Employment by Local Authority District within Region

The potential to scale per capita performance in Swindon is yet to be fully realised, with opportunities to enhance the city's offering, enhance liveability and drive future employment and business growth

0.3%

Overall employment growth has slowed in the most recent 10 years of data.

3.9/10

The Thriving Places Index places Swindon below average for scores on participation, culture, and community cohesion, suggesting more could be done to boost the cities offering as a community and as a place to live.

-13%

There has been a drop in the number of new businesses in Swindon over the past 10 years.

ONS: Employment (thousands) by Local Authority District within Region, Centre for Thriving Places: Thriving Places Index 2024, ONS: Business Demography – Count of Birth of New Enterprises

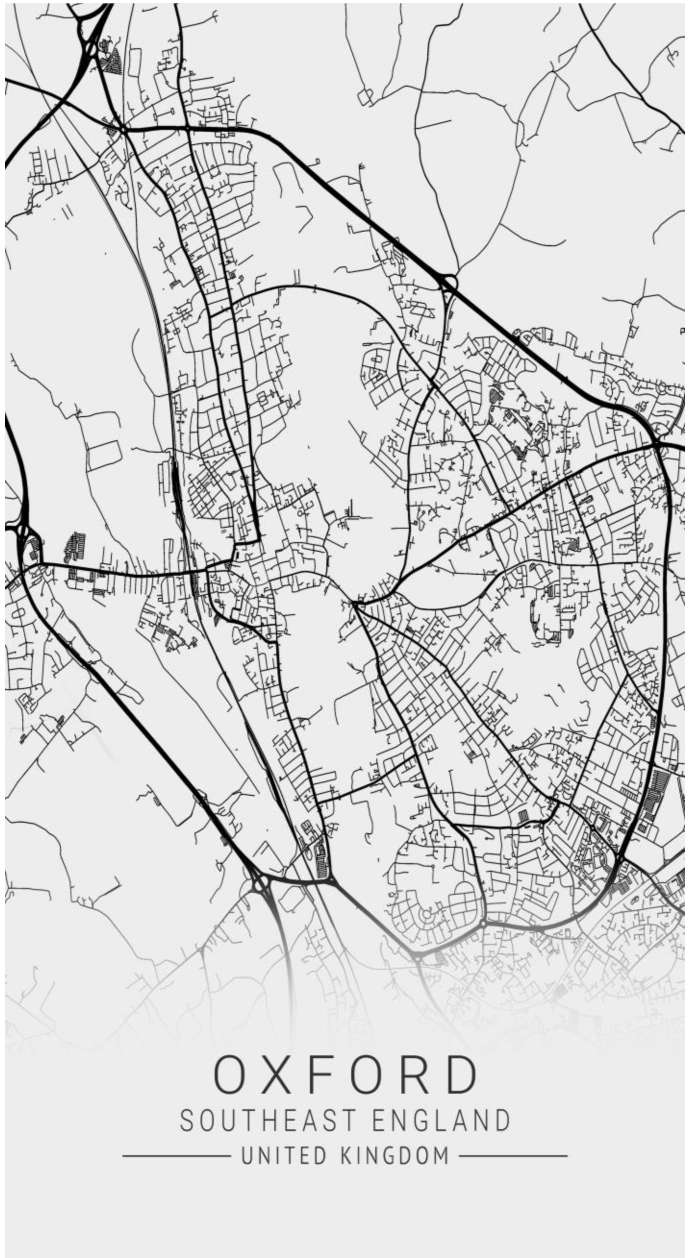
Swindon: supporting regeneration to unlock scalable, inclusive growth

Swindon combines high productivity, strong private-sector employment and comparatively affordable housing, positioning it as one of the Fast Growth Cities with the greatest potential to scale per-capita performance into material national economic gains. However, realising this potential depends on addressing a set of interlinked barriers around town centre regeneration, transport connectivity and infrastructure capacity. Targeted government support to unlock viability – particularly through early investment – would enable Swindon to deliver its Heart of Swindon Vision, supporting up to 8,000 homes and 6,000 jobs, while ensuring the benefits of growth are felt across Swindon.

- Support the viability of the Heart of Swindon Vision regeneration programme
  Because early public investment is required to unlock land value uplift on key town centre sites and crowd in long-term private sector delivery of homes and jobs.
- Provide catalytic capital support for a flagship town-centre entertainment venue
  Because a viable, high-capacity venue would act as a major anchor for regeneration, boosting footfall, land values and investor confidence across the town centre.
- Support estate-based and complex social housing regeneration
  Because some older estates and tower blocks present viability and asset-management challenges that cannot be addressed through Housing Revenue Account (HRA) investment alone, despite significant local commitment.
- Address rail affordability and service connectivity constraints
  Because high rail costs to London and limited cross-regional services undermine sustainable commuting, labour market access and Swindon’s role within wider growth corridors.
- Enable delivery of committed and proposed rail enhancements serving Swindon
  Because improved east-west, north-south and station access connectivity is critical to unlocking development sites such as Knowledge Central and integrating Swindon into national growth networks.
- Support proactive planning and delivery of electricity grid capacity upgrades
  Because emerging grid constraints risk becoming a near-term barrier to regeneration and employment growth within the Heart of Swindon Vision area.

Oxford

3.2



Oxford

With high levels of the population holding degree level qualifications, and a track record of spinning out high quality commercial opportunities from academic institutions, Oxford has a strong base from which to drive innovation focused growth.

However, many of Oxford's key science and business parks lie outside of the cities administrative boundaries, making it more difficult to implement plans to connect the local population with key employment centres.

Population (2024): 166,034

GVA Growth CAGR (2013-2023): 1.9%

Oxford has a highly skilled population in the area. Around, 74% of the population have a degree level qualification (RQF4+)

ONS (2023), Annual Population Survey – Population (16-64) with degree level qualification (RQF).

With exceptional levels of business creation, foreign investment and a highly skilled workforce, Oxford is in a prime position to grow, creating globally competitive businesses and employment opportunities

225

Between 2011 and 2022, the University of Oxford generated 225 spin-out companies, the highest number of any UK university.

£7.8 bn

Oxford is one of the UK's top-performing areas for net Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) earnings at the International Territorial 2 (ITL2) level.

74%

74% of the working age population hold a degree level qualification or above, making Oxford the highest skilled population of any UK city.

Royal Academy of Engineering: Spotlight on Spinouts, ONS: Foreign direct investment involving UK companies by UK country and region, (directional): inward, ONS: Annual Population Survey

However, much of Oxford's potential to provide housing, office and lab space requires development outside of the current city boundaries. Wider administrative boundaries will be key to tackling housing and commercial space shortages, and ensuring that growth works for all, tackling inequalities in the city.

11.2

Oxford has the worst median house price to earnings ratio (11.2) of any city outside London. This poor affordability extends to the rental market, with average rents at £1,915, 40% higher than national averages.

6 areas in 20% most deprived

At the Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) level, Oxford is home to 6 of the top 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. In contrast, it is home to 21 of the least deprived neighbourhoods, highlighting significant inequality in the city

3.4%

Oxford's unemployment rate rose from 2.6% to 3.4% between 2022 and 2023, while the South-East average fell slightly to 2.9%

ONS: House price (existing dwellings) to residence-based earnings ratio dataset, ONS: Price of housing, local, ONS: English indices of deprivation 2025, ONS: Modelled percentage of economically active people aged 16 years and over without a job and actively seeking work dataset

Oxford: enabling agglomeration-led growth through strategic governance and delivery

Oxford is one of the UK's most innovation-intensive cities, with globally significant strengths in research, science and advanced technology. However, economic data shows that employment growth is increasingly outpacing housing delivery, constraining labour supply, inflating housing costs and limiting the scale of agglomeration benefits. These pressures are exacerbated by fragmented governance and tightly drawn administrative boundaries that prevent growth from being planned and delivered at the functional economic area level. To sustain inclusive growth and maximise Oxford's contribution to national prosperity, central government support is required to enable strategic governance, coordinated planning and accelerated delivery of housing, transport and utilities infrastructure.

- Approve the 'Greater Oxford' three-unitary authority model as the foundation for growth
  Because simplified, strategic governance with appropriate boundary changes is essential to plan and deliver housing and infrastructure at the scale Oxford's economy requires.
- Enable strategic planning and housing delivery across the functional economic area
  Because Oxford's current administrative boundary cannot accommodate the homes needed to sufficiently support jobs, agglomeration and growth.
- Support delivery of housing at scale, including affordable homes
  Because aligning housing supply with employment growth is critical to sustaining productivity and preventing growth from being displaced elsewhere.
- Provide planning policy flexibility to unlock viable, higher-density development in accessible locations
  Because density near jobs and transport is essential to maximising land efficiency and supporting sustainable growth.
- Commit to nationally significant transport investment serving Oxford
  Because rail modernisation, strategic highways and integrated public transport are critical to labour mobility and agglomeration benefits.
- Unlock utilities capacity and environmental infrastructure to support growth
  Because electricity, wastewater and flood infrastructure constraints are already delaying development and risk becoming binding limits on growth.
- Support data-led planning, including PlanTech and infrastructure modelling
  Because coordinated national, regional and local modelling is needed to align housing, transport, utilities and environmental investment.

3.3 Milton Keynes

Milton Keynes

With a decade of strong GVA and employment growth, and strengths in high value professional, scientific and technical services, Milton Keynes presents an opportunity to continue to drive significant GVA contributions to the UK economy.

Population (2024): 305,884

GVA Growth CAGR (2013-2023): 2.1%

Milton Keynes has shown a decade of impressive growth, despite already having the 19th largest total GVA output of any Local Authority in the UK

ONS (2013-2023) - Gross domestic product (GDP) chained volume measures

With high levels of productivity and total employment, Milton Keynes is one of the largest net providers to UK output. High numbers of fast-growing businesses signal that there is potential to further scale this crucial city to provide additional economic value.

6.3%

Milton Keynes is home to a high proportion of fast-growing businesses (businesses with employment expanding by over 20%).

189,000

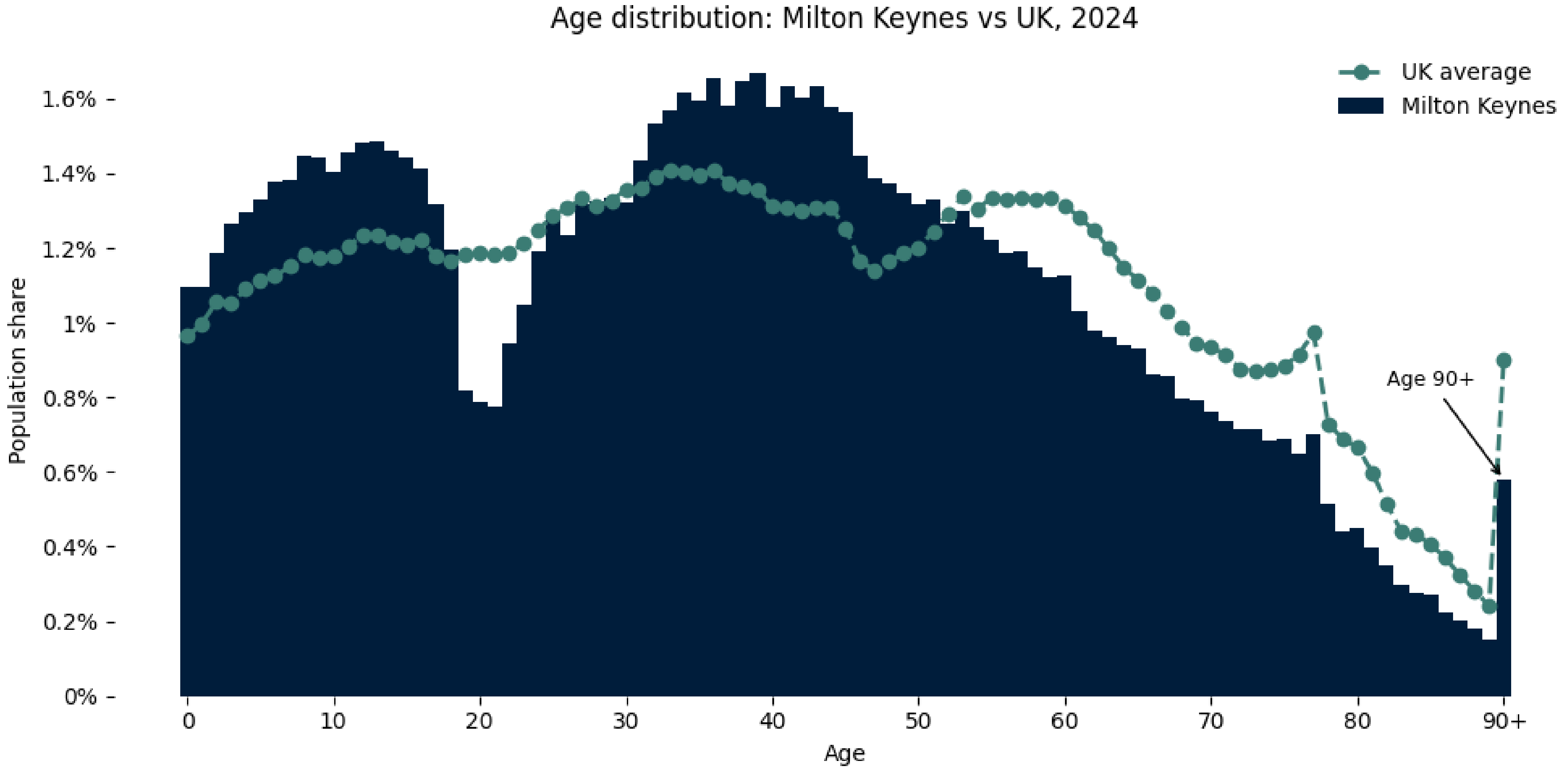
With over 189,000 jobs, Milton Keynes is in the top 8% of local authorities for total employment.

19th

Milton Keynes has the highest total output (GVA) of the FGCs and the 19th highest GVA of any Local Authority in the UK (top 6%).

ONS – High growth businesses , ONS - Employment (thousands) by Local Authority District within Region., ONS - Regional gross domestic product (GDP) local authority reference tables

Despite having a strong ratio of working age to pension age population, Milton Keynes has a notably low proportion of 16-25-year-olds. Furthermore, the city is in the top 25% of urban areas in the UK for net youth migration, with 1.5% of this age group leaving the city every year. As the largest city in the UK without a dedicated university, this highlights the need for strengthening further education opportunities



ONS - Annual mid-year population estimates by age dataset, ONS: Internal Migration Estimates

Despite strong economic performance, Milton Keynes must address key structural barriers to scaling growth and ensuring its benefits are shared locally. Challenges around housing affordability, skills provision and persistent deprivation risk constraining future growth and limiting access to opportunity. Targeted action to address these pressures will be critical to sustaining long-term economic success.

No dedicated University

Milton Keynes is the largest city (by population) without a dedicated university. The development of higher education opportunities will be critical to supporting further growth in the city.

9.9

High housing affordability ratio above the national average, highlighting challenges in the availability of affordable housing. Given the ambitious housing targets in Milton Keynes' Local Plan, measures to support delivery of the plan are critical to addressing affordability.

8 places in top 10% most deprived

Despite strong economic output, Milton Keynes is home to 8 of the top 10% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. The city has made signs of progress in deprivation statistics, suggesting it is on the right track to address these concerns.

ONS - House price (existing dwellings) to residence-based earnings ratio dataset, ONS: English indices of deprivation 2025

Milton Keynes: supporting scale through devolution, transport and delivery flexibility

Milton Keynes is one of the UK's fastest-growing and most productive cities, with a decade of strong employment and GVA growth and a critical role in national housing delivery. However, rapid expansion is placing increasing pressure on transport and infrastructure capacity, while delivery constraints risk slowing future growth. Despite its success, Milton Keynes faces a risk of being overlooked at a time when targeted support could unlock further housing delivery, improve connectivity and sustain its contribution to national economic growth. If government is serious about accelerating growth and housing supply, Milton Keynes must be treated as a priority growth location rather than a finished success story. With the right devolved powers and delivery flexibility, Milton Keynes can continue to scale as a nationally significant growth engine

- Enable the next round of devolution and support the creation of a Mayoral Strategic Authority
  Because devolved powers and flexibility would allow Milton Keynes to align housing, transport and infrastructure policy with local growth pressures and opportunities.

- Support delivery of Mass Rapid Transit through the New Towns Taskforce
  Because a city-wide MRT system would transform connectivity, unlock housing and employment sites, and support sustainable growth, but requires upfront national investment.

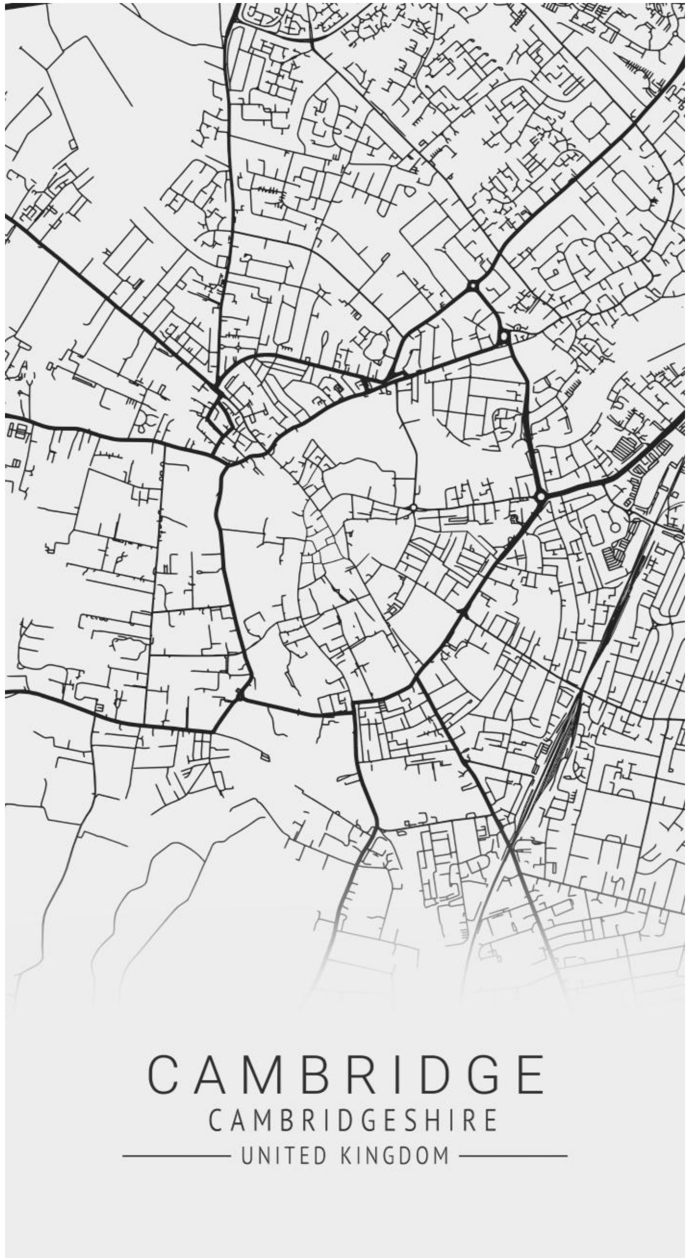
- Provide flexibility in infrastructure funding and delivery mechanisms linked to planning reform or devolution
  Because rigid, site-by-site Section 106 and tariff requirements constrain delivery where viability varies significantly across the city.

- Enable city-wide balancing of developer contributions to fund strategic infrastructure
  Because allowing more viable sites to support less viable sites would unlock delivery of transport, grid and water infrastructure without additional public expenditure.

- Support coordinated investment in power, water and transport infrastructure
  Because emerging capacity constraints risk becoming binding limits on growth in one of the UK's most important housing and employment centres.

Cambridge

3.4



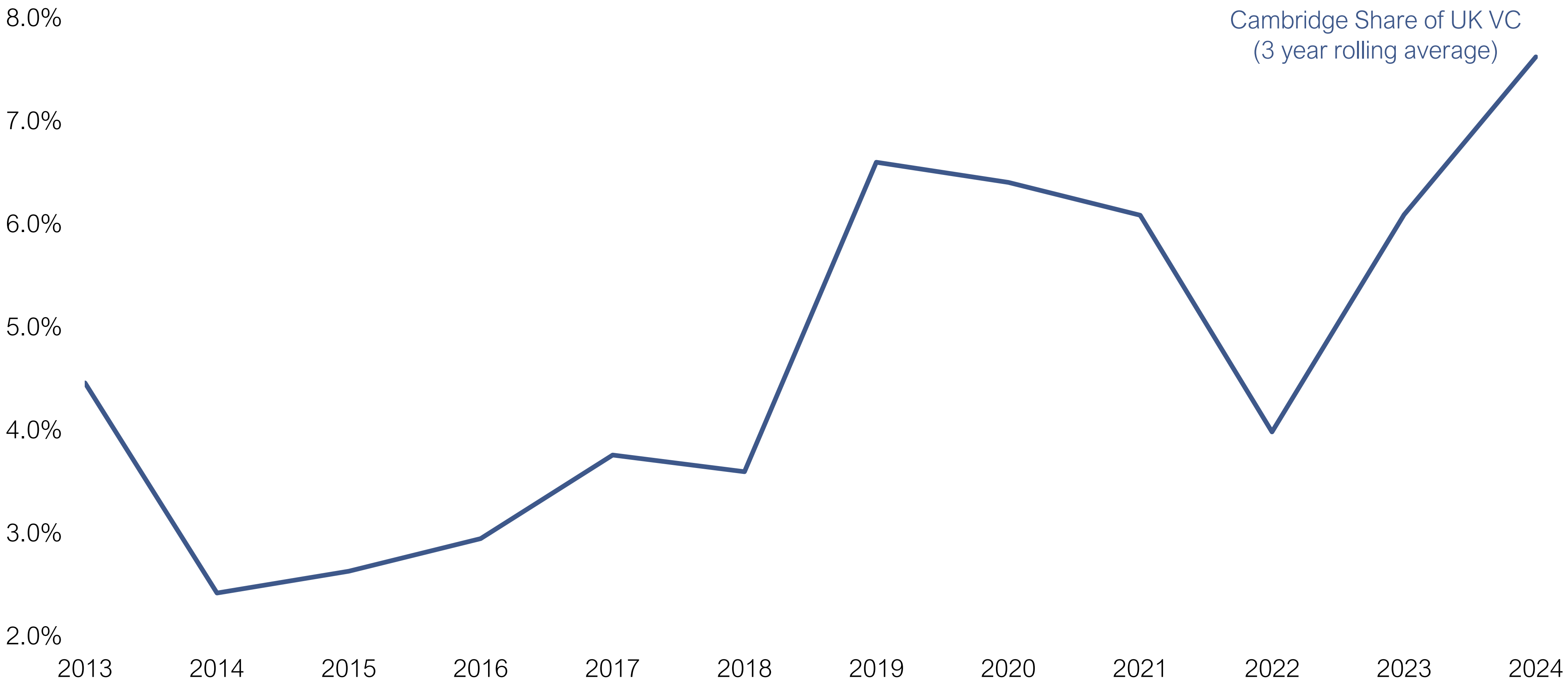
Cambridge

With world leading levels of innovation intensity, strong funding for venture firms and strong recent growth, Cambridge has the potential to scale world leading per capita performance into material outputs for the UK economy.

Population (2024): 149,352

GVA Growth CAGR (2013-2023): 2.7%

Despite being only 0.2% of the UK population, Cambridge consistently attracts large shares of total UK Venture Capital investment, with the current 3-year average sitting over 7%



Deal Room - Venture capital investment dataset.

Cambridge is one of the most intensely innovative places in the world, attracting significant amounts of investment. As a result, it has displayed extraordinary population and output growth over the past decade

2nd Globally

With over 6,000 patent applications and 33,000 scientific publications per million people, Cambridge is second only to Silicon Valley in WIPOs innovation intensity rankings.

£3.3bn

Cambridge attracts a notable 1.6% share or £3.3bn of the UK's net FDI earnings, underscoring its global appeal to investors.

67%

Very high share of the population in Cambridge hold a degree level qualification or higher. Edinburgh and Oxford are the only cities in the UK with a a higher proportion

WIPO: Innovation Intensity Rankings, ONS: Foreign companies' earnings from foreign direct investment in the UK (inward), ONS: Annual Population Survey

Despite high investment and innovation in the area, unemployment within the city is higher than other Fast Growth Cities

ONS - Modelled percentage of economically active people aged 16 years and over without a job and actively seeking work dataset.

Significant investment in infrastructure is required to unlock additional, large scale commercial and residential development, ensure that growth addresses inequality and sustainability challenges and further Cambridge's existing global competitiveness and meaningful contribution to UK economic growth

5 areas in 30% most deprived

As measured by the 2025 Index of Multiple Deprivation, Cambridge is home to 5 of the top 30% most deprived neighbourhoods (LSOAs) in the country. In contrast, it is home to 15 of the least 10% deprived LSOAs, highlighting inequality in the city.

£1,774

Average rental prices are comparable with many parts of London and sit 30% above UK averages. Similarly, median house price to earnings ratios are 11.8, second only to Oxford for cities outside London.

3.16%

Driven in part by high housing costs in relation to wages, Cambridge's Gross Disposable Household Income has grown at a slower rate than the national average over the last decade.

ONS: English indices of deprivation 2025, ONS: House price (existing dwellings) to residence-based earnings ratio dataset, ONS: Total GDHI at current basic prices, pounds million

Cambridge: removing infrastructure and housing constraints to sustain globally significant growth

Cambridge is a world-leading science, technology, and innovation powerhouse, attracting a disproportionate share of venture capital, research activity and high-value employment. However, continued growth is increasingly constrained by water scarcity, transport congestion and acute housing affordability pressures. Without accelerated infrastructure delivery, these constraints risk limiting Cambridge's ability to scale its global strengths into broader economic output, while exacerbating inequality and slowing improvements in living standards. Addressing these barriers is essential to sustaining Cambridge's contribution to national economic growth and ensuring that success remains inclusive and sustainable.

- Accelerate investment in water supply and wastewater infrastructure investment serving Cambridge
  Because the city sits within an area of serious water stress, and limited supply capacity and infrastructure is already restricting new housing and employment development.

- Improve sustainable transport connectivity within the city and to key science parks, business parks and employment hubs
  Because roads choked by car traffic are limiting labour mobility and constraining productivity in high-value sectors.

- Prioritise investment in sustainable transport infrastructure in the wider Greater Cambridge area to support housing and employment growth
  Because improved public transport, active travel and orbital connections are essential to deliver the additional homes and employment sites in our ambitious, developing Greater Cambridge Local Plan.

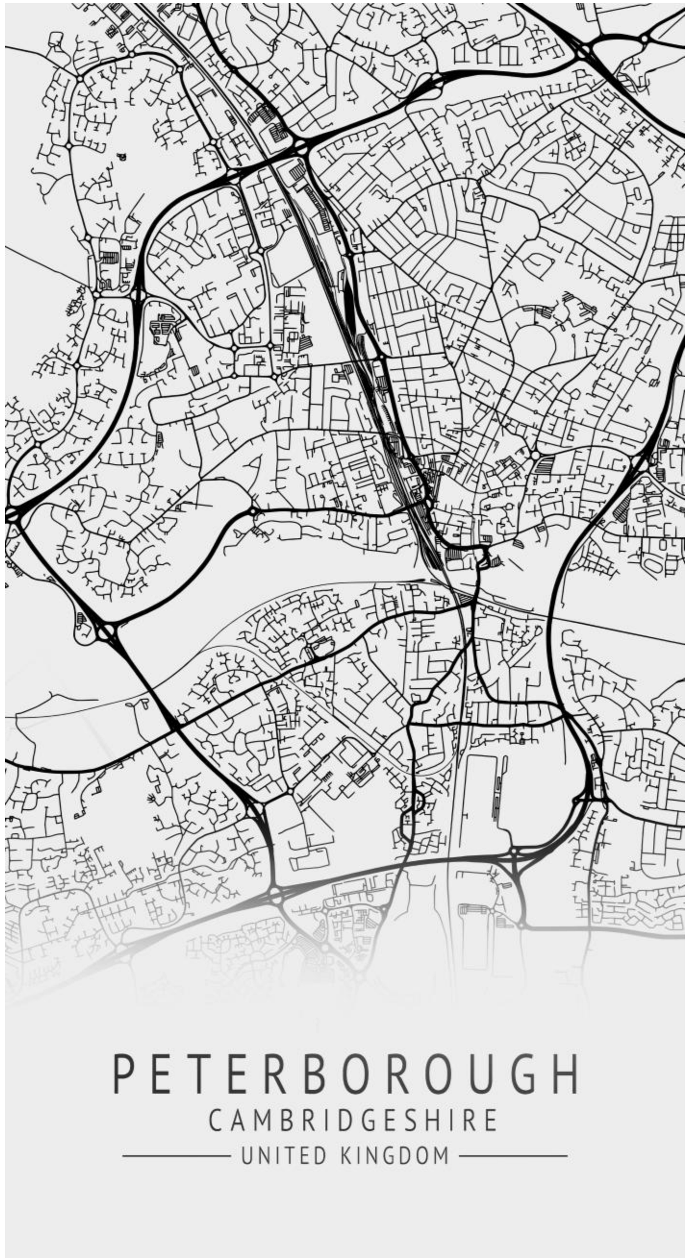
- Supporting the delivery of housing at scale, including a strategic partnership between the council and Homes England to deliver a further 1,000 social and affordable homes
  Because some of the least affordable housing in the country is excluding workers from opportunity and contributing to declining living standards and inequality in one of the UK's most productive cities.

- Aligning governance arrangements with Greater Cambridge's functional economic area and established labour and housing markets
  Because a unitary council on a Greater Cambridge footprint would help improve strategic decision making on the housing, infrastructure and improved public services needed to support continued economic growth.

Peterborough

3.5

2026 Public First



Peterborough

With strong enterprise growth, modern connectivity, and low housing costs, Peterborough has the foundations for expansion, and prioritising higher-level skills and tackling inequalities will convert momentum into long-term impact for the UK PLC.

Population (2024): 223,655

GVA Growth CAGR (2013-2023): 2.1%

Peterborough has seen impressive increases in the number of businesses in the City, with the 14th highest business growth since 2013 in the UK

ONS, (2013-2023) - UK Business Counts - enterprises by industry and employment size band.

Peterborough has experienced strong population, employment and business growth, indicating that the city has a solid foundation to build on – provided policy ensures that future job creation translates into high-quality employment opportunities.

14.2%

With population growth well above the UK average for local authorities (7%), Peterborough is home to a fast-growing population. The Centre for Cities report Peterborough as the 5th fastest growing city in the UK in terms of population

23.9%

Peterborough has seen impressive employment growth over the past 10 years of data (2013-2023), far exceeding the UK average (13.9%)

7.4

Housing in Peterborough is the most affordable across FGC areas, reflected in its lowest affordability ratio.

ONS: Population estimates – local authority based, ONS, Job density – local authority based, ONS: House price (existing dwellings) to residence-based earnings ratio dataset, Centre for Cities: Cities Outlook 2026.

The proportion of Peterborough's working age population with degree qualification or above is low

ONS (2023), Annual Population Survey – Population (16-64) with degree level qualification (RQF).

Despite positive momentum, Peterborough must ensure that growth is translated into better outcomes for all residents, and inequalities across the city are addressed.

31%

Low levels of the population hold degree level qualifications. The new Anglia Ruskin University campus in Peterborough presents an opportunity to grow this proportion going forwards.

4.5%

High multidimensional deprivation, placing Peterborough in the bottom half of UK areas.

30%

Peterborough records the highest child poverty rate among FGC areas, exceeding the national average.

ONS: Annual Population Survey, ONS: Households by deprivation dimensions, ONS: Children in Relative Poverty

Peterborough: converting momentum into long term growth

Peterborough has seen strong enterprise and job growth, a fast-growing population, and some of the most affordable housing across the Fast Growth Cities. However, lower levels of higher-level skills, infrastructure constraints and persistent deprivation risk limiting the city's ability to translate recent momentum into sustained growth that deliveres tangible benefits for the people living in the city. Targeted government support to strengthen skills provision, enable strategic development and unlock transport and utilities infrastructure would allow Peterborough to scale its contribution to national growth while improving outcomes for its residents.

- Support expansion of Anglia Ruskin University Peterborough and delivery of the Centre of Excellence
  Because expanding higher-level skills provision is critical to addressing low RQF4+ attainment and supporting higher-value employment growth.

- Enable the establishment of a Mayoral Development Corporation
  Because an MDC would provide the powers and coordination needed to accelerate regeneration, housing delivery and employment-led development.

- Support designation of a Special Economic Zone
  Because targeted incentives and planning flexibilities would help attract investment and scale Peterborough's fast-growing business base.

- Commit to strategic transport investment, including A47 dualling and new north–south stations
  Because improved connectivity is essential to unlocking housing sites, supporting logistics and linking residents to jobs.

- Support enhanced energy and water infrastructure investment
  Because emerging utilities constraints risk delaying development and undermining growth in one of the UK's most affordable growth cities.

- Provide planning flexibility to support housing delivery at scale
  Because enabling a mix of tenures and site-specific approaches is essential to maintaining affordability while supporting employment growth.

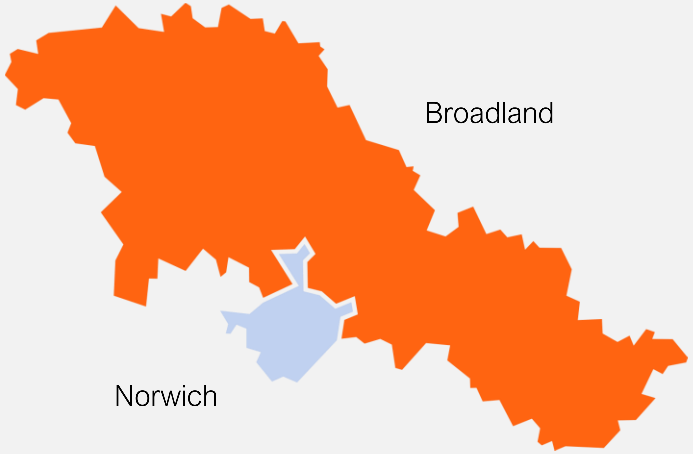
Norwich

3.6

Norwich

High business survival rates, affordable residential property and a young population give Norwich a strong base to drive growth but is constrained by poor connectivity to the rest of the UK.

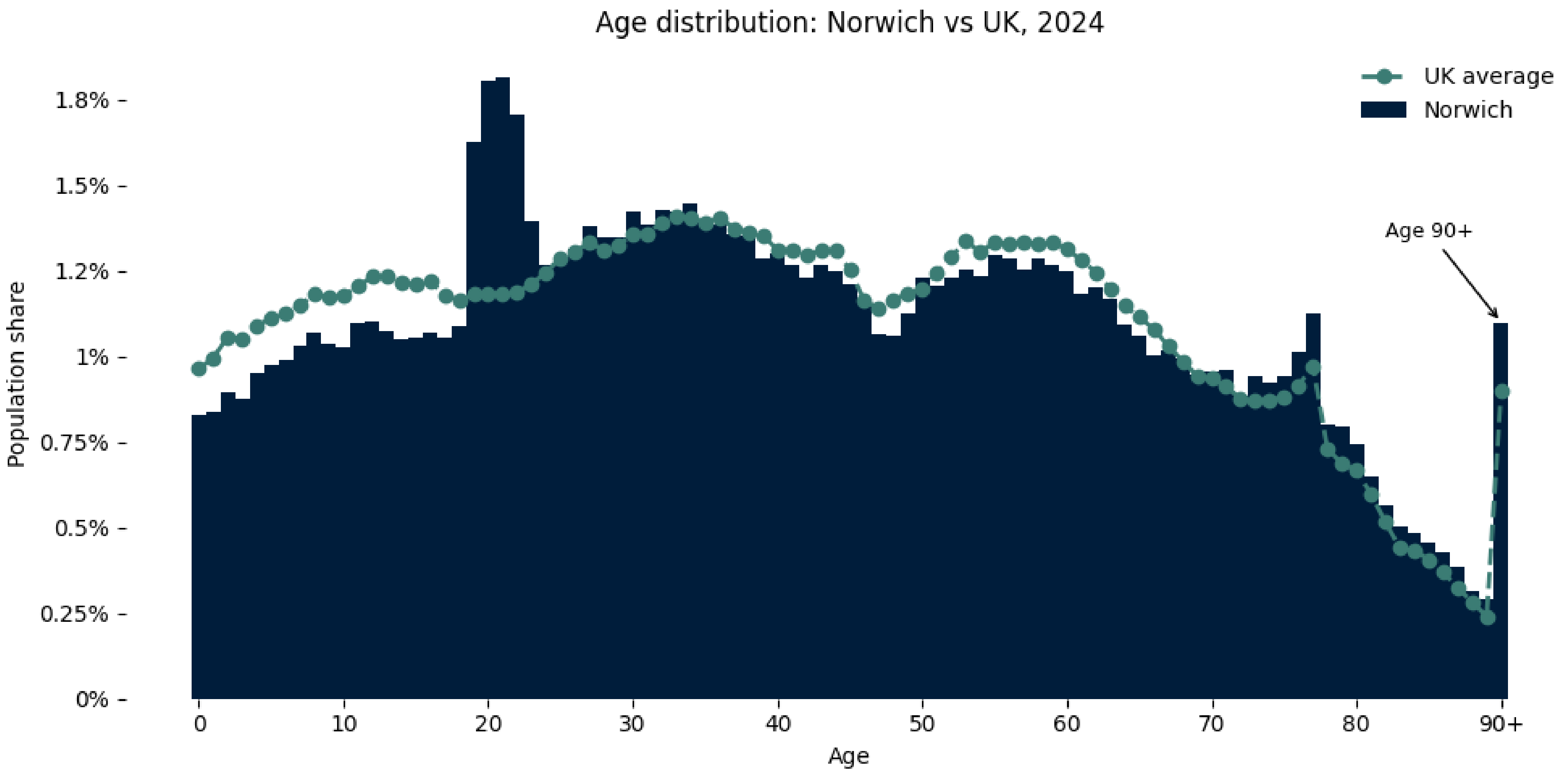
Much of the high growth areas in Norwich fall within the boundary of Broadland (coloured in orange). The statistics quoted in this report capture activity across both Local Authorities.



Population (2024): 285,339

GVA Growth CAGR (2013-2023): 2.0%

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



ONS - Annual mid-year population estimates by age dataset.

With a share of working age residents well above national averages, a strong supply of affordable housing, and high business survival rates, Norwich has a solid foundation to drive future growth.

62.2%

Norwich leads FGC areas in business survival, with a 3-year survival rate of 62.2%. Both 3- and 5-year survival rates are well above UK averages.

63%

A large share of Norwich's population is of working age, strengthening its labour force base.

7.1

Norwich offers comparatively affordable housing, The median house price to earnings ratio is well below national averages, and average rental prices 16% below the national average.

ONS: Business demography, Survival Of Newly Born Enterprises., ONS: Annual mid-year population estimates by age., ONS: House price (existing dwellings) to residence-based earnings ratio dataset.

Despite being below UK average, Norwich has the highest proportion of its residents in poor health, highlighting the need for growth to drive positive outcomes for the entire population of Norwich

ONS (2021) - All usual residents by general health dataset.

Norwich is hindered by poor connectivity to the rest of the UK and must ensure that any future growth focuses on solving deep rooted inequalities and deprived areas in the city.

21.8%

Child poverty rate above national average by 1.5%, showing the need for growth to focus on ensuring improvements for all residents.

No Motorways

Norwich is the only FGC with no motorways. Additionally, despite being 100 miles away, train times to London are 1hr 50min. This is similar to London - York times despite York being 140 miles away.

3.6%

High household deprivation – many households deprived in three or more dimensions including education, employment, health or housing.

ONS: Children in Relative Poverty, ONS: Households by deprivation dimensions

Norwich: addressing connectivity, skills and infrastructure constraints to sustain growth

Norwich combines strong business survival rates, a young working-age population and comparatively affordable housing, giving it a solid foundation for growth. However, poor national connectivity, skills shortages and infrastructure delivery delays risk constraining housing and employment growth and limiting the city's ability to scale its contribution to the UK economy. To ensure growth is sustained and inclusive, Norwich requires targeted government support to strengthen skills capacity, improve infrastructure responsiveness and ensure strategic governance frameworks prioritise urban growth.

- Strengthen skills and workforce development, with a focus on the construction sector
  Because shortages in construction and related skills are directly constraining housing delivery and slowing growth.

- Improve responsiveness and forward planning from utility providers
  Because delays in confirming capacity and delivering connections for power, water, wastewater and broadband are stalling development even where planning consent is in place.

- Support stronger coordination between government, regulators and utility companies
  Because infrastructure provision must better align with local growth plans to avoid unnecessary delays and cost inflation.

- Ensure devolved governance structures prioritise urban growth and regeneration
  Because the Mayor and Combined County Authority hold critical powers over transport, skills, housing and regeneration that are central to addressing Norwich's growth constraints.

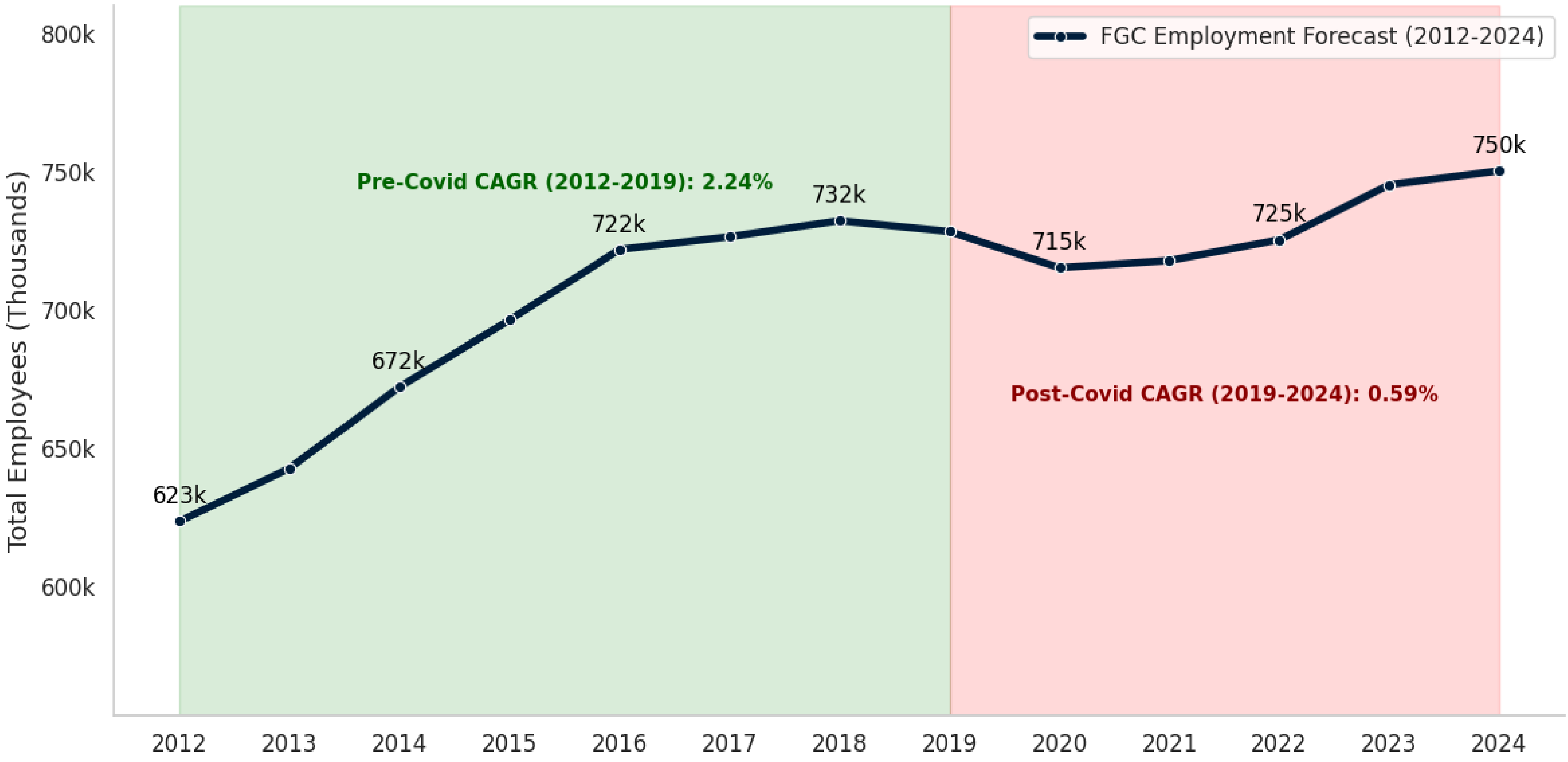
- Commit to strategic transport investment serving Norwich
  Because improved road and rail connectivity, including A47 dualling after Thickthorn, and enhanced rail links covering east to west travel, is essential to unlocking housing, labour markets and productivity growth.

- Support pragmatic boundary and functional area considerations where they unlock housing delivery
  Because limited, targeted adjustments to growth geographies could help address housing needs while maintaining sustainable development patterns.

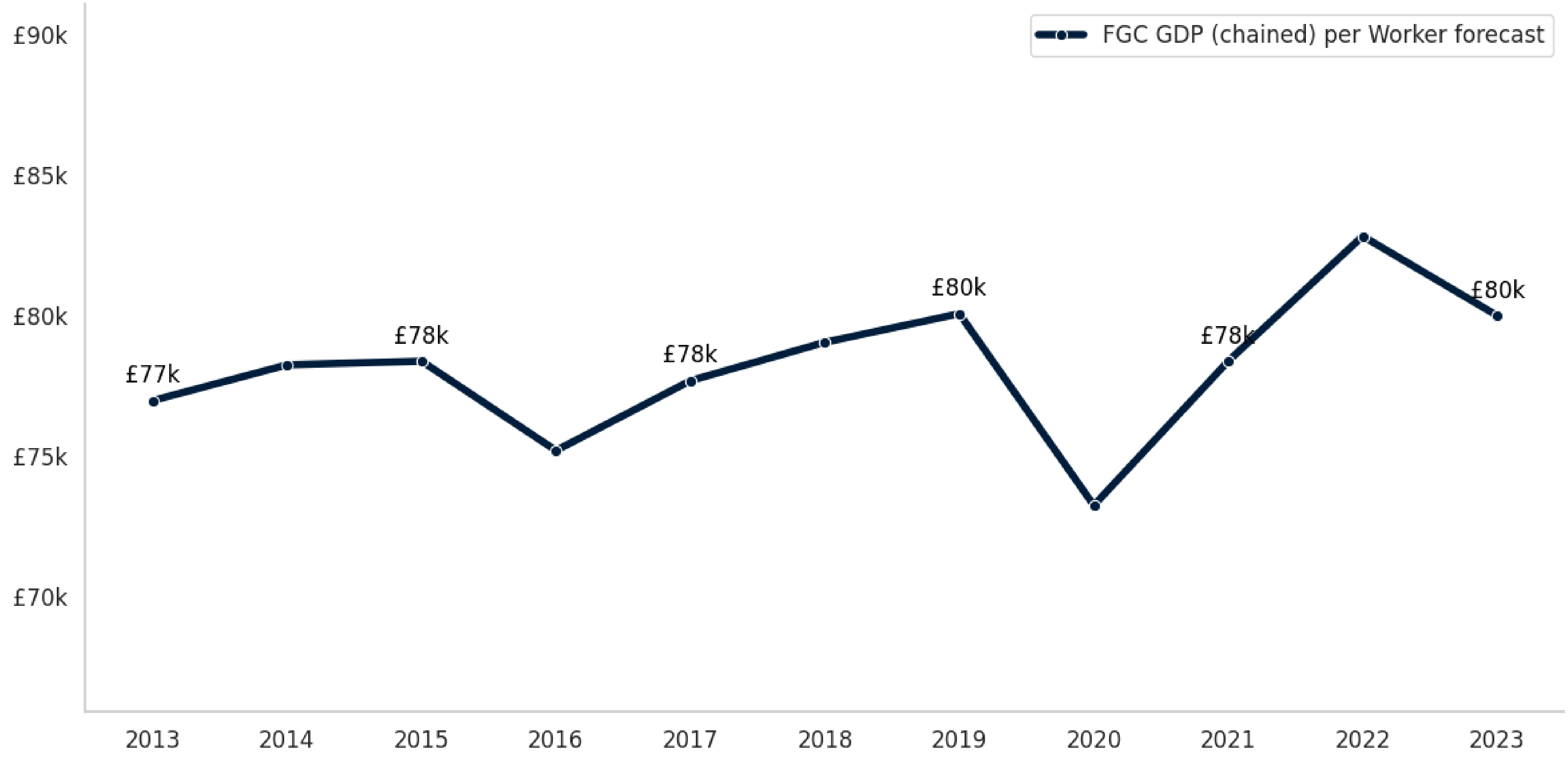
Potential for growth

4

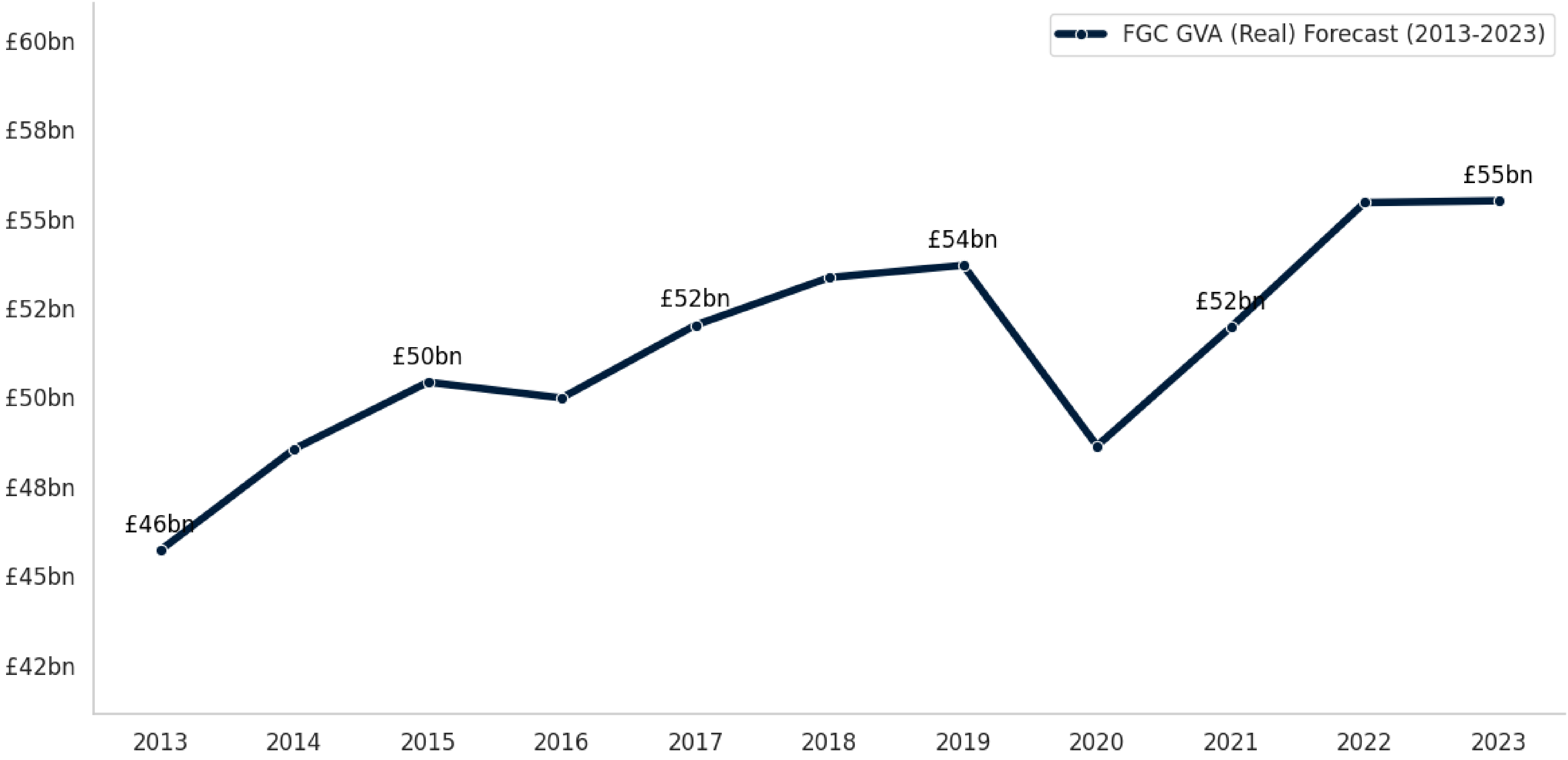
As a collective, the FGCs have shown strong employment growth over the past decade, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 1.6%



As with the rest of the UK, productivity growth has been much steadier, at around 0.4% per annum



Together this has led to a decade of strong real growth of 2% (above UK rate of 1.7%)



We model a set of scenarios based on the Fast Growth Cities achieving various levels of growth

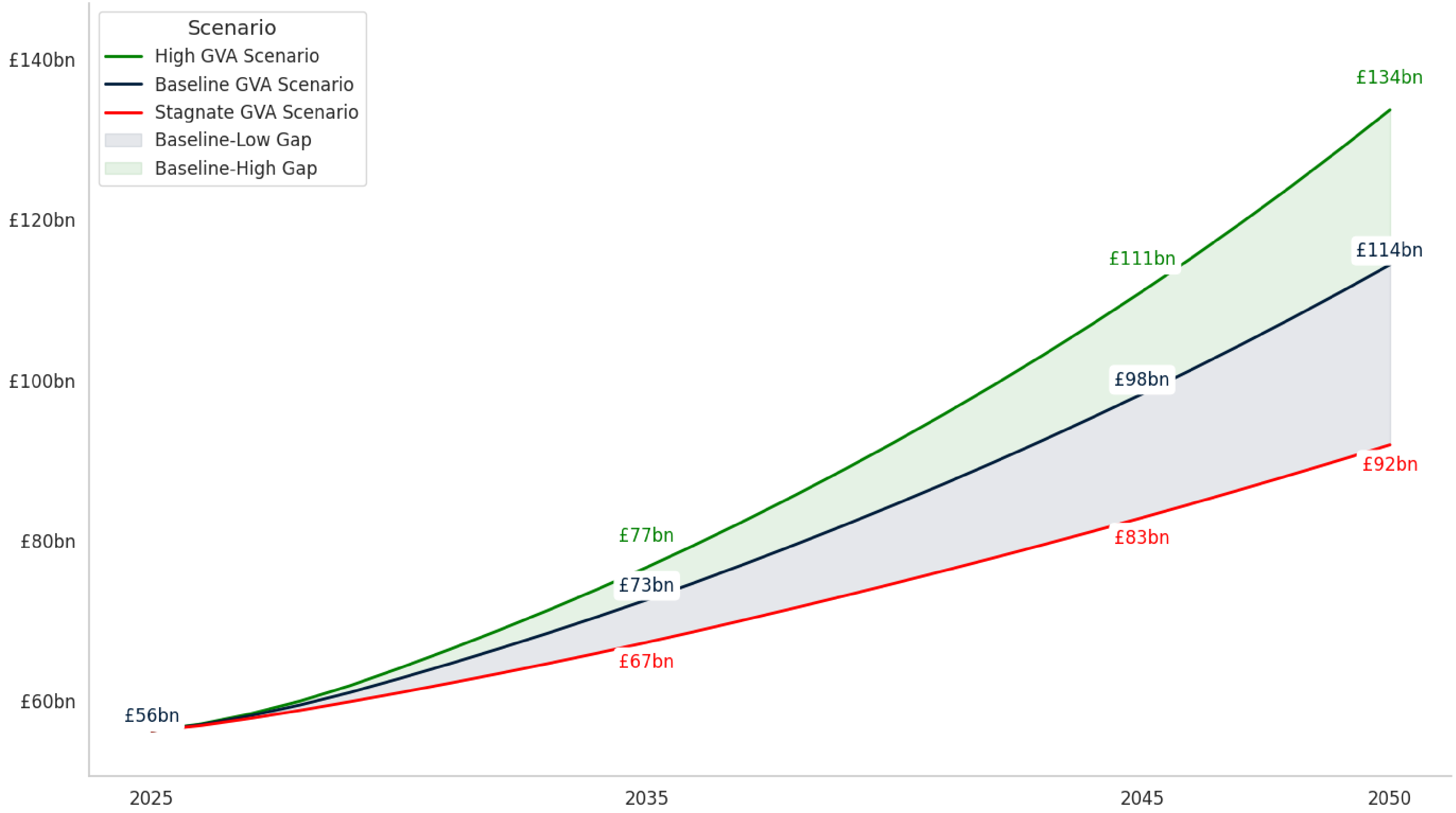
We assume that the FGC region follows productivity growth forecasts outlined in the OBR’s long run forecasts from the Fiscal risks and sustainability report.

We then model 3 scenarios centred around the employment growth trajectories of the FGC region.

1. **Stagnation:** Employment growth follows post covid trends (0.6%)
2. **Maintain:** Employment growth rises towards its strong 10-year levels (1.6%)
3. **Growth:** Employment growth rises further towards pre-covid levels (2.2%)

We present the outcomes of these growth trajectories, both in terms of additional value provided to the UK, and the additional jobs that would be required to fulfil this level of growth.

If the FGCs can maintain productivity growth and reach pre-Covid levels of employment growth, they could contribute an additional £21bn in real GVA by 2035, and an additional £78bn by 2050



Achieving growth

5

Transport is key to unlocking growth across the region

The Fast Growth Cities have the potential to contribute an **additional £21bn in GVA by 2035**, but this upside depends on sustaining high levels of employment growth. Transport is a critical enabler of that growth. Without improved connectivity by rail and road, labour markets remain constrained, housing supply cannot expand at pace, and productivity gains become increasingly localised. **Getting transport right is essential to turning strong per-capita performance into material, scalable economic output** for the UK.

- **Prioritise inter-city and regional rail connectivity across the Fast Growth Cities**
  To expand effective labour markets and support higher employment growth across the region.

- **Upgrade strategic road corridors linking Fast Growth Cities to each other and to national networks**
  While East West Rail presents a strong rail programme, there is not a corresponding road strategy. Roads remain critical for commuting, freight, and access to areas not well served by rail. Road infrastructure connecting the FGCs is mixed, varying from world class to single carriageways through villages. Connecting the FGCs into a cohesive economy means this must be addressed.

- **Match local transport infrastructure to anticipated need**
  To keep the pressure away from urban centres and to avoid housing and development being blocked. This applies both to the way people move around the cities, and how these places connect to the wider transport network

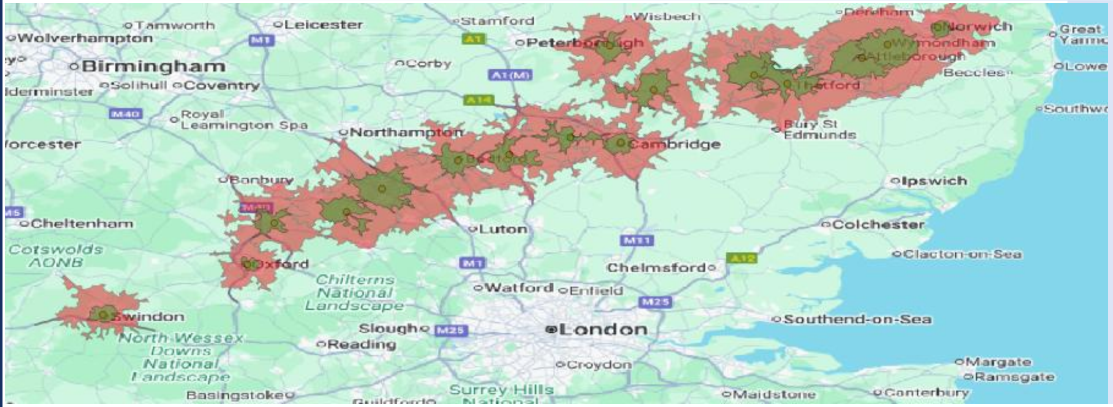
- **Maximise the capacity of existing transport infrastructure (rail and road)**
  To unlock near-term growth more quickly and cost-effectively than relying solely on new schemes.

- **Treat transport in the Fast Growth Cities as national growth infrastructure**
  Because enabling growth here supports cities with a track record of providing net gains to UK growth

- **Maximise opportunities to integrate sustainable transport solutions within FGCs**
  Wherever possible, supporting a common effort to ensure that walking, wheeling and cycling is the transport mode of choice for journeys within the FGCs.

Despite plans to expand residential and commercial infrastructure within city boundaries, leveraging future transport plans, and maximising existing transport infrastructure will be key to easing space constraints, and to ensuring growth is felt across the entire region

Through delivery of East West Rail, a continuation of the Swindon Oxford direct service, and existing rail links, **472,000 houses are within 10 minutes of a commutable station.**



1.05 million homes are within 20 minutes of these stations, highlighting the potential to unlock commutable housing and commercial development space with excellent first and last mile connectivity.

Housing is a key enabler to driving growth and ensuring outcomes address inequality across the FGCs

The Fast Growth Cities already have **ambitious plans to deliver significant volumes of new housing**, recognising that sustained employment growth and prosperity depend on expanding housing supply. However, evidence across the Fast Growth Cities shows that **delivery is increasingly constrained by the impact of affordability pressures on effective demand, local infrastructure capacity and planning complexities and associated risks**. Without additional support, these constraints risk slowing housing delivery, tightening labour markets and reinforcing deprivation and inequality — undermining the Fast Growth Cities' ability to realise their potential contribution to the UK economy.

- **Support the delivery of locally agreed housing targets through infrastructure funding and coordination**
  Because transport, utilities and social infrastructure constraints are significant barriers to delivery.

- **Provide greater flexibility to deliver housing across wider functional economic areas**
  Because rigid administrative boundaries limit delivery in high-demand cities, concentrating affordability pressures and deprivation.

- **Prioritise grant funding for Affordable Housing within high-growth cities**
  Because affordability pressures directly link to labour shortages, deprivation and exclusion from economic opportunity.

- **Accelerate planning and consenting processes for growth-critical housing sites**
  Because long lead times delay delivery even where housing is allocated and supported locally.

- **Align housing delivery support with local plans to reduce deprivation**
  Because ensuring new housing improves affordability and access to opportunity is essential to reducing deprivation and sustaining long-term growth.

Government must also address long term infrastructure constraints across the region

Water and electricity are emerging as binding constraints to regional growth. **All Fast Growth Cities sit within areas classified as 'seriously water stressed'** by the Environment Agency, meaning supply is already under pressure before accounting for the additional demands that will come with growth in the region. Strategic schemes such as the Fens Reservoir project highlight both the scale of intervention required, and the long lead times involved in securing future water resilience. At the same time, electricity networks face limited spare capacity, with delays to new connections and growing pressure from electrification. **Without coordinated and accelerated investment, utilities risk becoming a hard ceiling on growth**, undermining housing delivery, employment expansion and export-oriented sectors.

- **Treat water scarcity across the Fast Growth Cities as a national growth risk**
  Because all cities lie within areas of serious water stress, with supply already under pressure.
- **Accelerate strategic water supply schemes, including nationally significant projects such as the Fens Reservoir**
  Because large-scale interventions are required to support long-term housing and employment growth across the region.
- **Align water company investment plans with growth and housing ambitions**
  Because current supply planning is not calibrated to the scale or geography of employment-led growth.
- **Accelerate electricity network upgrades in high-growth urban areas**
  Because limited grid headroom and slow connection times risk delaying housing, commercial development and electrified industry.
- **Recognise utilities investment in the Fast Growth Cities as nationally productive infrastructure**
  Because unlocking water and power capacity is essential to realising the £21bn growth potential and wider UK economic benefits.

ENDS

To find out more, email the Fast Growth Cities secretariat at: MTullar@oxford.gov.uk