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Tamworth Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan

(June 2025)





1. Introduction

For 300 years (between 600 and 900), Mercia - one of the three main Anglic kingdoms - dominated England south of the Humber estuary. King Offa was crowned in Tamworth and during his reign (757 to 796), the town became the de facto capital of Mercia. For more than a century, Tamworth was a vitally important centre of governance, administration and trade, at the heart of England's pre-eminent kingdom.

Over the following thousand years or so, the fortunes of the town ebbed and flowed, but towards the end of the 17th century it was still recognised as one of the most populous towns in the Midlands. Further growth followed, fuelled by the industrial revolution through the 18th and 19th centuries, with Tamworth benefiting both from its proximity to coal mines and its strategic location on the canal and road networks. Textiles became the town's main industry, led by the Peel family, which produced two MPs including one of the country's most notable Prime Ministers, whose 'Tamworth Manifesto' played a crucial role in the development of party politics in the UK. The visitor economy was also very significant, with Tamworth being at the centre of a number of trade routes and providing food and accommodation to travellers.

The middle of the 19th century saw the arrival of the railways with the Midland Railway route from Derby to Birmingham and the London and North Western Railway, which provided direct trains to the capital. A split-level station was developed just outside the town centre, where these two main lines cross each other at right angles.

A new addition to the town's economy in the 1930s was the Reliant Motor Company, famous for its three wheeler Robin and its Scimitar brands. It remained a mainstay of the local economy for more than 60 years.

During the post-war years, from a relatively low base, the population of Tamworth grew rapidly as it absorbed some of the overspill from the West Midlands Conurbation and its boundaries were relaxed to incorporate some surrounding settlements.

And today, Tamworth ticks along. But ticking along is both a pale reflection of its often glorious past and a terrible shortcoming of the town's potential. This Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan aims to provide the impetus that can put Tamworth on a new trajectory, befitting of its past status and future prospects.



2. The Institutional Context

This is a time of great change for Tamworth, but with uncertainty also comes opportunity. The Labour Government is committed to economic growth and Tamworth's challenge is to set out the case for how it can make its contribution, provided funds for investment can be made available.

Furthermore, the institutional landscape is shifting. In December 2024, and as part of its wider devolution proposals, the Government published plans which would see all district, borough, county and city councils in Staffordshire abolished and replaced with larger unitary authorities, led by an elected Mayor. The Mayor will have greater powers over key areas such as housing, transport and economic development, and greater control over the money spent on these areas.

The Government invited Councils to submit proposals setting out what would work best in their area. On 21 March 2025, initial proposals were submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on behalf of Cannock Chase District, East Staffordshire Borough, Lichfield District, South Staffordshire District, Stafford Borough and Tamworth Borough councils, with final business cases due by 28 November 2025. The new unitary councils for Staffordshire are due to go live in 2028.

Also in March 2025, the Government confirmed that funding for Midlands Engine would come to an end on 31 March 2025. For more than a decade, the Midlands Engine Partnership had brought together local authorities, business leaders, the region's universities and other partners to attract investment, drive regional growth and promote the interests of the Midlands nationally and internationally.

As a result of these actual and proposed changes, Tamworth Borough Council finds itself in an interesting position. In extremis, it could do nothing and wait for the combined authority that will replace it to assume its responsibilities or it could go full steam ahead, investing significant resources to boost the local economy and set an agenda that the successor body could hardly fail to ignore. Will it go out with a whimper or a bang?



3. Economic Analysis

Population and Workforce

Over the past five years, the population of Tamworth has increased at a steady rate, in line with the Staffordshire average and twice as fast as the national average. The Tamworth workforce (those who are between 16-64 years old) makes up 62 per cent of the total population of Tamworth, marginally above the Staffordshire average, and marginally below the West Midlands and GB averages.

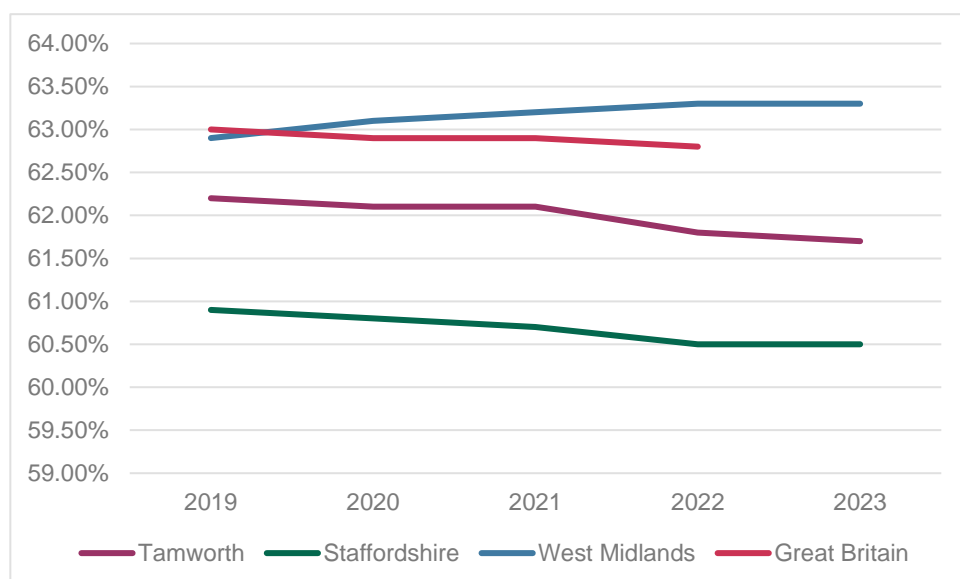
Table 1: Demographic data (2023)

	Tamworth	Staffordshire	West Midlands	Great Britain
Population	79,639	886,294	6,085,687	65,692,918*
5-year growth rate (2019-2023)	3.30%	3.26%	2.78%	1.48%*
Sex				
Males (%)	49%	49%	49%	49%*
Females (%)	51%	51%	51%	51%*
Age				
0-15	19%	17%	21%	18%*
16-64	62%	61%	63%	63%*
65+	19%	22%	16%	19%*
Working age Population (16-64)	49,514	543,875	3,757,887	41,283,834

*2023 data unavailable. 2022 data used.

Since 2019 there has been a small reduction in the working age population in line with national trends, suggesting an aging population (increasing number of retirees and relatively smaller number of new entrants into the workforce).

Figure 1: Share of working age in Population, 2019 - 2023





Economic Activity and Inactivity

Tamworth has a slightly lower economic activity rate but a marginally higher employment rate, compared with regional and national averages. It also has a significantly lower unemployment rate when compared with the West Midlands and Great Britain.

Table 2: Economic Activity and Inactivity (2024)

	Tamworth	Staffordshire	West Midlands	Great Britain
Economically active*	38,166	445,978	2,931,152	32,201,391
Active % †	77%	82%	78%	78%
In Employment	37,630	451,416	2,780,836	30,962,871
Employment rate (%) †	76%	83%	74%	75%
of which are employees †	72%	72%	66%	66%
of which are self-employed †	N/a	8.8%	8%	9%
Unemployed	400	8,900	130,000	1,494,000
Unemployment rate (%) §	1%	2%	4%	5%
Economically inactive	11,400	97,900	830,000	9,082,000
Economically inactive (%) †	23%	18%	22%	22%

* - Numbers are for those aged 16 and over

† - % are for those aged 16-64 (i.e., working age population)

§ - % is a proportion of economically active

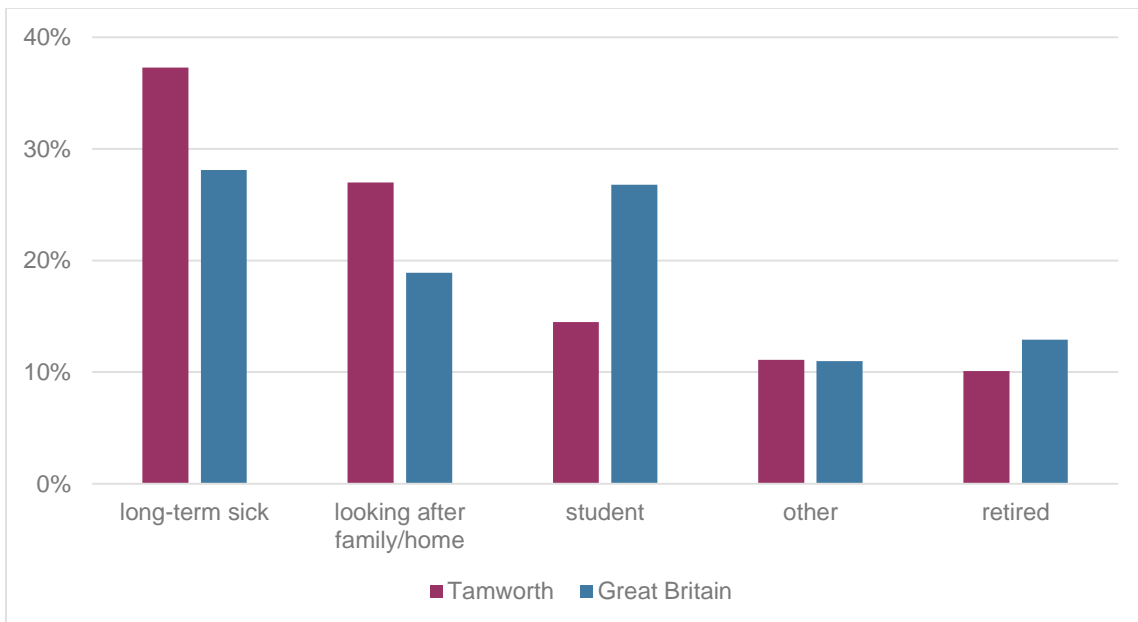
It should be noted that labour market estimates, including the above for economic activity and inactivity, are not wholly accurate and rely on varying sample sizes.

An alternative measure of unemployment is the Claimant Count which at 3.5% is just above the County average (3.1%) but below the regional (5.8%) and national (4.4%) averages. The Claimant Count relates to people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance or receiving Universal Credit principally for the reason of being unemployed.

Amongst Tamworth residents who are economically inactive, more than one third are long-term sick, a significantly higher proportion than is the case nationally. There is a similar pattern in respect of those who are economically inactive due to looking after their family or home. In the context of the push by national government to get more people into work, it is evident that these issues merit further consideration, perhaps in particular in view of the new Connect to Work programme.



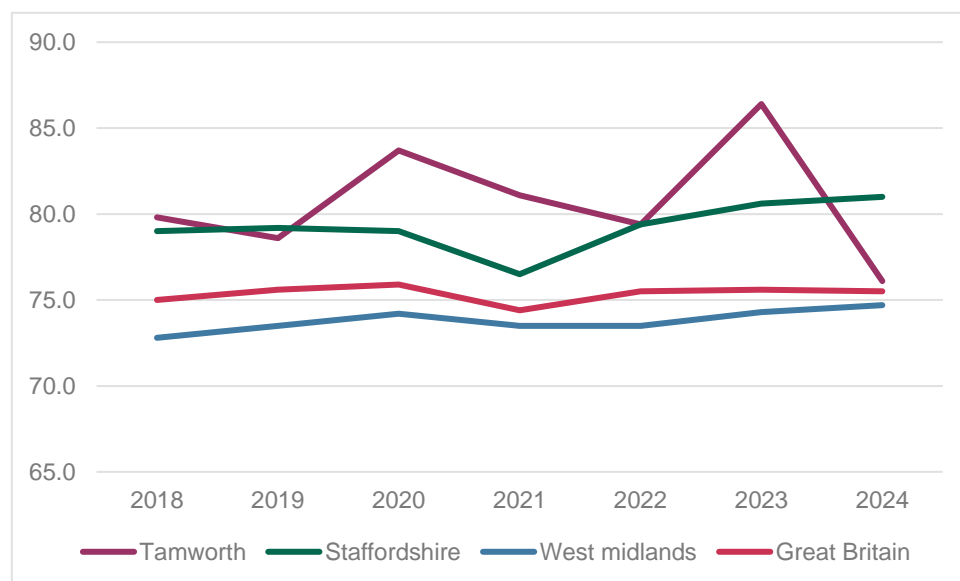
Figure 2: Economic Inactivity by Reason, 2024



Employment Rate

Despite a seemingly strong employment rate from 2018 to 2024, staying well above the regional and national averages, the most recent estimates place the local employment rate for Tamworth at a similar level to these wider benchmarks. The employment rate in Tamworth is notably volatile, and seemingly unaffected by most regional and national trends. The shock seen between 2023 and 2024 for Tamworth is noteworthy, dropping 10 percentage points within a year – equivalent to the loss of around 5,000 jobs locally.

Figure 3: Employment rate, 2018 - 2024





Employment by Industry

Distribution and Hospitality (G and I) make up one third of all employment in Tamworth, with Banking, Finance, and Insurance (K to N) and Manufacturing being the second and third most prominent sectors in terms of numbers of employees. Together these three form more than half of Tamworth's employment base, which is consistent with the regional average.

Where Tamworth differs is in having proportionately less employment in Public administration, Education, and Health (O to Q) – 12 percentage points below the GB figure– and proportionately more employment in Distribution, hotels and restaurants (G,I) – 8.6 percentage points above the national average.

Table 3: Share of total employment by industry

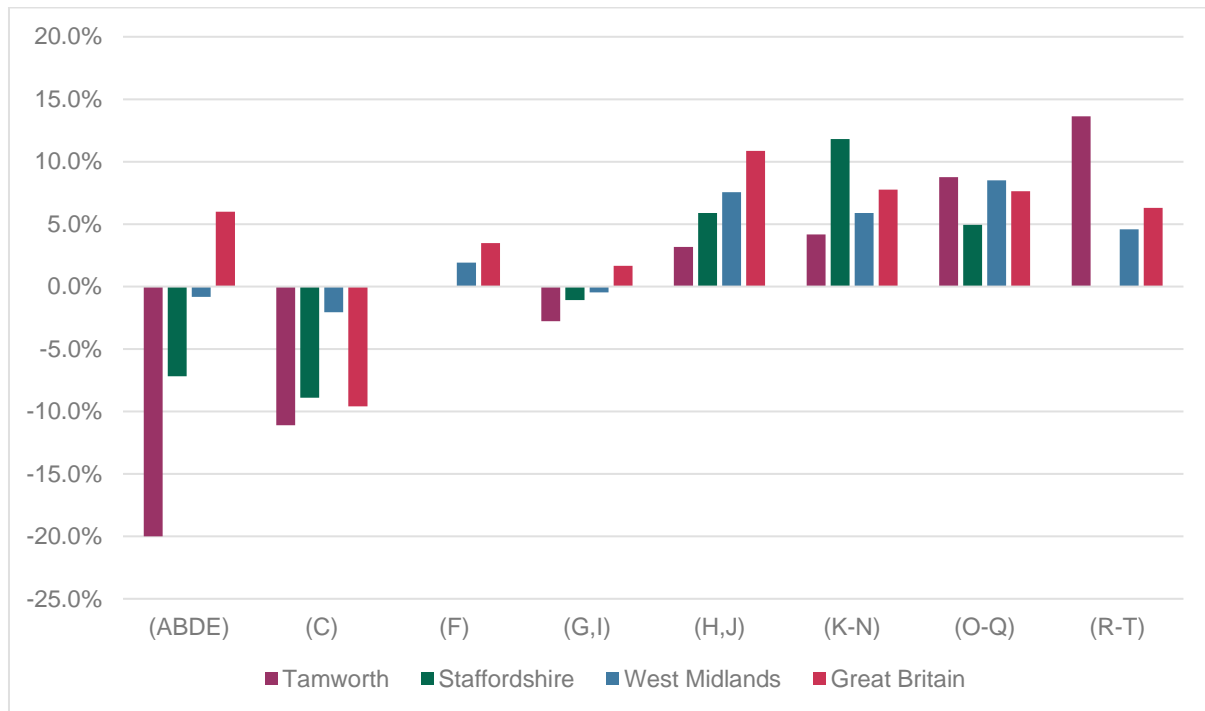
Broad Industry Classification	Tamworth	Staffordshire	West Midlands	Great Britain
Agriculture, fishing, energy, and water (ABDE)	0.5%	2.0%	2.1%	1.9%
Manufacturing (C)	13.7%	11.4%	10.1%	7.5%
Construction (F)	6.0%	5.8%	4.4%	4.8%
Distribution and Hospitality (G,I)	30.1%	25.4%	22.8%	21.5%
Transport and Communications (H,J)	11.2%	10.0%	9.0%	9.5%
Banking, Finance, and Insurance (K-N)	19.2%	17.0%	20.6%	23.2%
Public admin, Education, and Health (O-Q)	15.0%	23.6%	26.7%	27.1%
Other Services (R-T)	4.3%	4.7%	4.4%	4.5%

Over the past six years there has been a significant reduction in employment in Agriculture, Energy and water (A,B,D,E) and Manufacturing (C) and an increase in services sectors. Again, this trend was not exclusive to Tamworth but similar across Staffordshire and the West Midlands. The differences between Tamworth and wider geographies were in the Construction (F) sector, where Tamworth experienced no change but expansion occurred elsewhere; and in hospitality and retail industries where the contraction was in contrast to national expansion. In addition, Agriculture, Energy and water (A,B,D,E) expanded by five percentage points nationally, but contracted regionally and in Tamworth; Other services, such as arts and entertainment, expanded in Tamworth more than any other industry on any level of analysis (albeit from a relatively low base).

What is unclear is the extent to which the changes in the sectoral composition of the local economy are being facilitated or held back by the availability of people with skills and experience that are needed for jobs in expanding sectors.



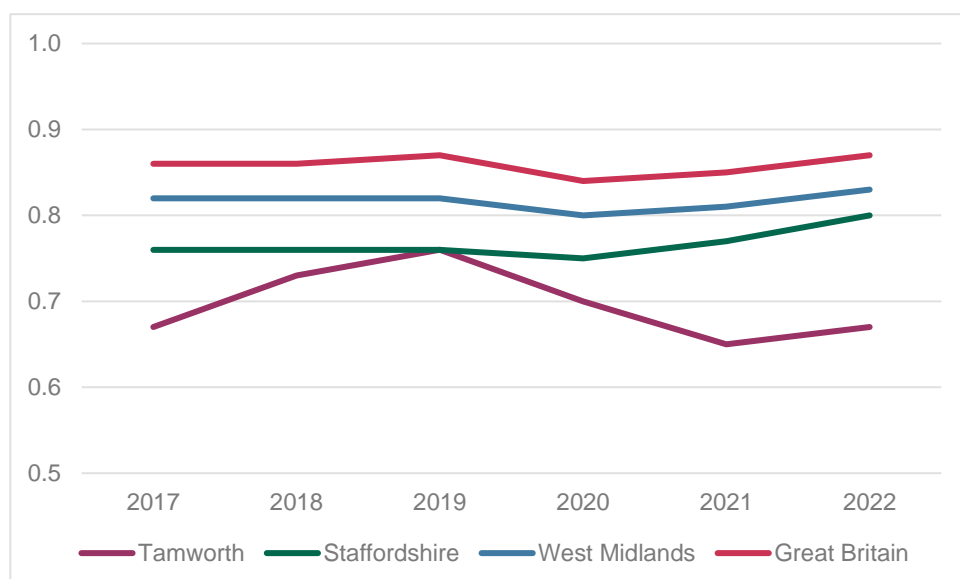
Figure 9: 5 year growth rate by sector, 2019-2023



Job Density

Job density considers a local area as though it were a closed economy and the extent to which local jobs are available to local people. This creates a ratio, where a job density of 1.0 means there is one job for every resident of working age. Between 2017 and 2022 job density in Tamworth has remained relatively low compared to the West Midlands region. The most recently published data (2022) shows that for every 100 people of working age there are only 70 available jobs, compared with regional and national averages, which have on average 15 more available jobs per 100 people of working age.

Figure 4: Job Density, 2017 - 2022





Occupational Differences

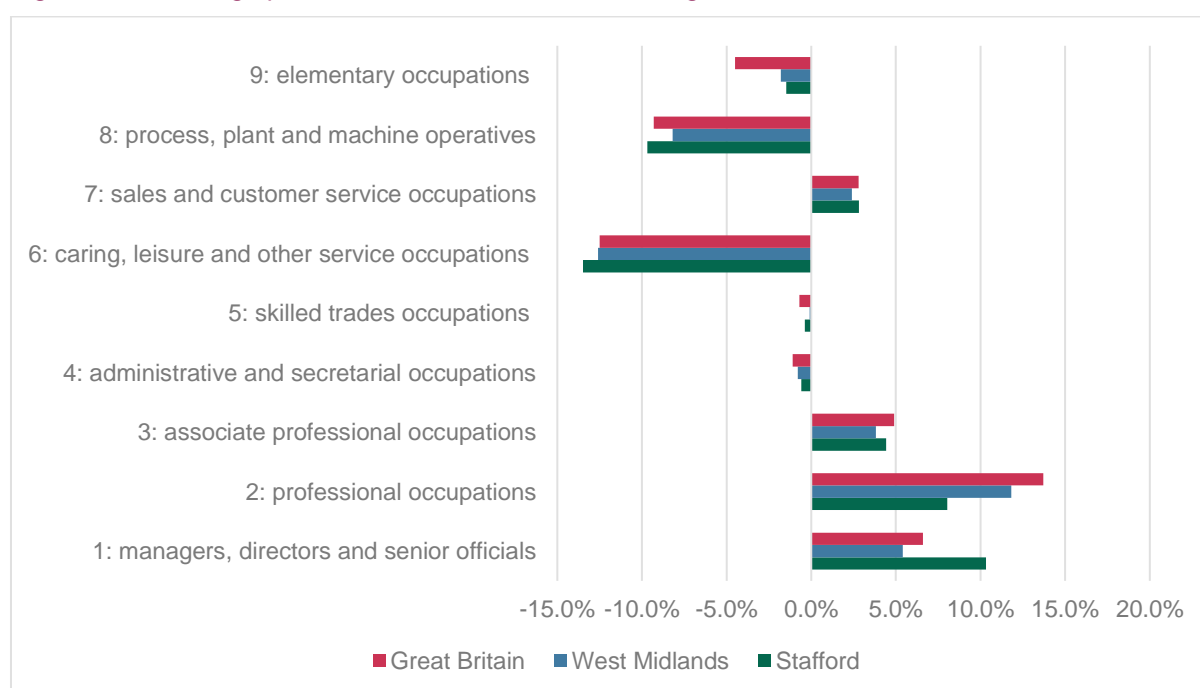
In Tamworth, Care, Leisure, and other service occupations make up the largest proportion (20 per cent) of all occupations, followed by Process, plant, and machine operatives and Elementary occupations. In the first two cases, this is in stark contrast to the importance of these occupations within wider geographies, with Care, Leisure, and other service occupations two and a half times more prevalent in Tamworth than in Staffordshire/West Midlands/Great Britain and Process, plant, and machine operatives and Elementary occupations nearer three times more significant in Tamworth as in those wider geographies.

Table 4: Share of employees by Occupation, 2024

Occupation	Tamworth	Staffordshire	West Midlands	Great Britain
1: managers, directors and senior officials	4.4%	14.7%	9.8%	11.0%
2: professional occupations	12.9%	20.9%	24.7%	26.6%
3: associate professional occupations	10.4%	14.8%	14.2%	15.3%
4: administrative and secretarial occupations	10.5%	9.9%	9.7%	9.4%
5: skilled trades occupations	9.4%	9.0%	9.3%	8.7%
6: caring, leisure and other service occupations	20.9%	7.4%	8.3%	8.4%
7: sales and customer service occupations	3.4%	6.2%	5.8%	6.2%
8: process, plant and machine operatives	14.7%	5.0%	6.5%	5.4%
9: elementary occupations	13.4%	11.9%	11.6%	8.9%

The corollary of that is a notable difference between Tamworth and regional and national averages in respect of higher value occupations, such as senior positions, professionals, and associates. Such positions take up around 50 per cent of the labour market in Staffordshire, West Midlands, and Great Britain, but make up only just over one quarter (27.7%) of occupations in Tamworth.

Figure 5: Percentage point differences, Tamworth and larger areas





Skills Differences

The table below shows the structure of the working age population by highest level of qualification attained, measured using the relevant Registered Qualification Framework (RQF) or equivalent ('+') to a certain level. Less than a quarter of Tamworth's workforce is qualified to RQF4+ (equivalent to a qualifications in higher education, higher apprenticeship etc.¹) which is substantially lower than regional and national averages.

Table 5: Share of workforce by skills

Qualification level	Tamworth	Staffordshire	West Midlands	Great Britain
% with RQF4+	23.50%	38.80%	42.50%	47.30%
% with RQF3+	45.80%	62.90%	63.60%	67.80%
% with RQF2+	88.60%	89.10%	84.30%	86.50%
% with RQF1+	89.50%	93.30%	87.50%	89.00%
% with other qualifications (RQF)	6.80%	2.80%	5.20%	4.60%
% with no qualifications (RQF)	3.70%	3.90%	7.30%	6.50%

Vacancies

According to Lightcast data, during the whole of 2024 a total of 1,688 Tamworth businesses (three quarters of the business population) posted 12,132 unique vacancies (more than the combined total of all Tamworth's unemployed and economically inactive residents (11,800). Of these posted vacancies, 57 per cent had a salary attached, the median being £28,000. The vast majority of postings (83 per cent) did not specify any educational requirements. However, 7 per cent did require a further or higher degree, the same percentage as cited up to GCSE or equivalent. The three most commonly cited skills requirements were communication skills, customer service skills and management skills

The most popular unique postings by occupation are listed in the table below.

Table 6: Unique Job Postings by Tamworth Businesses by Occupation (2024)

Occupation	Unique Postings
Sales Related Occupations n.e.c.	472
Warehouse Operatives	390
Cleaners and Domestic	383
Large Goods Vehicle Drivers	342
Care Workers and Home Carers	314
Customer Service Occupations n.e.c	311
Secondary Education Teaching Professionals	297
Teaching Assistants	264
Fork-lift Truck Drivers	243
Book-keepers, Payroll Managers and Wages Clerks	491

¹ RQF4+ also includes higher national certificate (HNC), level 4 award, level 4 certificate, level 4 diploma, level 4 RQF. see <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels> for list of all equivalent qualification at each level.



Number of Businesses

In 2024, there were 2,220 registered businesses² in Tamworth. In comparison to other local authority areas in Staffordshire, Tamworth is below the average of 371 businesses for every 10,000 residents. For broader context, Staffordshire is just above West Midlands average which in turn is considerably lower than the national average. Business density in Tamworth is around 24 per cent lower than the Staffordshire average, 13 per cent lower than the West Midlands average, and 31 per cent below the national average. **Simply put, if the number of Tamworth businesses was in line with the national average, the town would boast an additional 984 businesses, representing a 44 per cent increase on its existing business base.**

Table 6: Number of businesses and number for every 10,000 residents of population

	Number of businesses	Business per 10,000 population
Tamworth	2,220	282
Cannock Chase	3,480	346
Lichfield	4,820	451
Newcastle-Under-Lyme	3,560	289
Staffordshire	32,575	371
West Midlands	192,235	323
Great Britain	2,645,840	407

Even when working age population is considered, the relativities are little different. In Tamworth, there were 454 businesses for every 10,000 residents of working age, compared with a national average of 646 (2024). On this basis, business density in Tamworth is 30 per cent below the national average.

² Number of VAT and/or PAYE registered enterprises



Business Births and Deaths

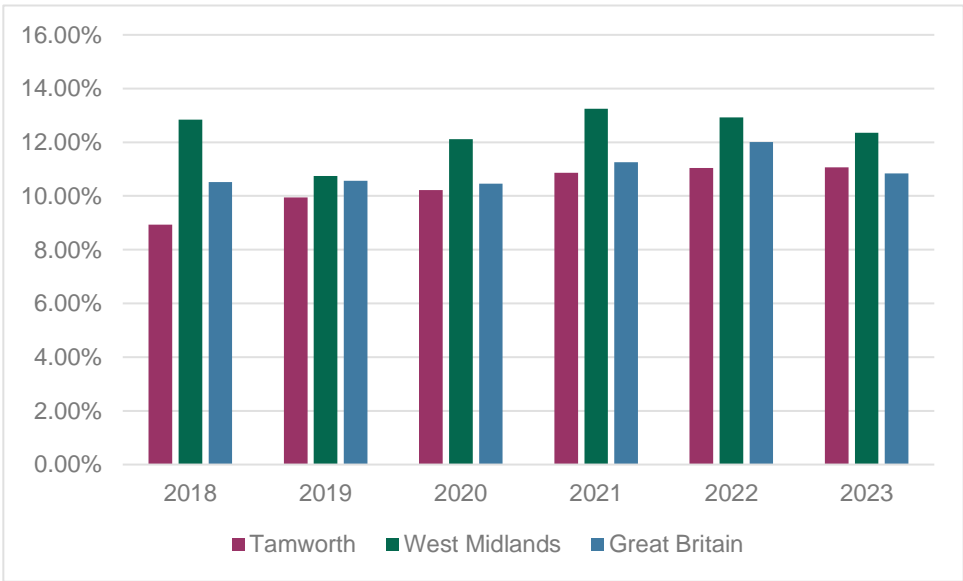
Between 2018-2023, Tamworth experienced a steady rate of business starts, of around 10% a year. However, this still left Tamworth below the regional and national average growth rates. Although the gap has narrowed in more recent years, this has been mainly due to slower growth regionally and nationally than a marked improvement in Tamworth's performance.

Figure 6: Business Births as a percentage of Existing Businesses, 2018 - 2023



In parallel, the rate of business deaths in Tamworth has been on a gently upward trend over the past five years, moving from around 9% to 11%. Although still retaining a lower rate of business closures than the regional average, the steady rise has overtaken the national average. Perhaps more significantly, it has overtaken the rate of business births, resulting in a reduction in stock.

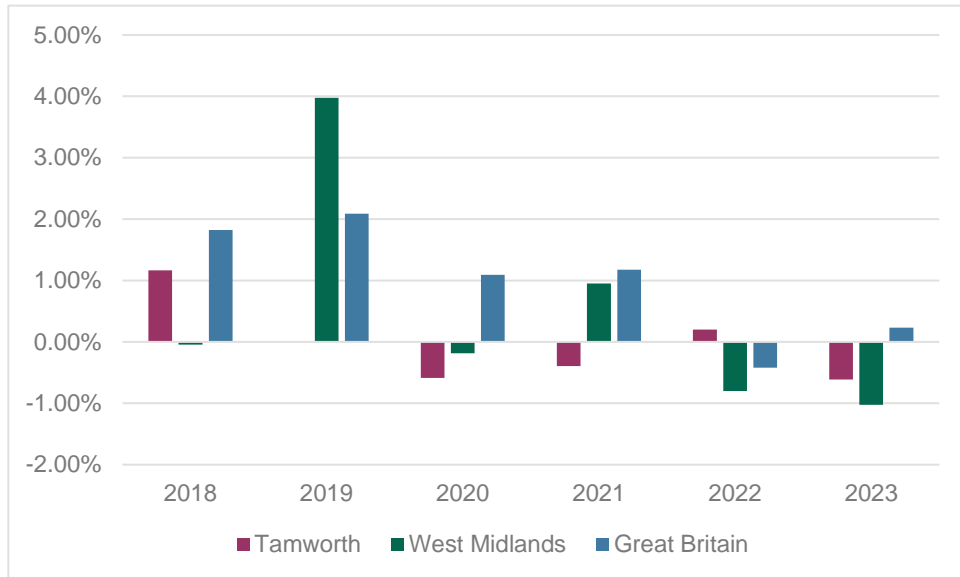
Figure 7: Business Deaths as a percentage of Existing Businesses, 2018 - 2023





The net impacts of these trends in business births and deaths are revealed in the cumulative totals, with GB and the West Midlands both expanding their business bases between 2018-2023, by 6% and 3% respectively, and Tamworth experiencing a minor contraction of 0.2% in business stock over the period.

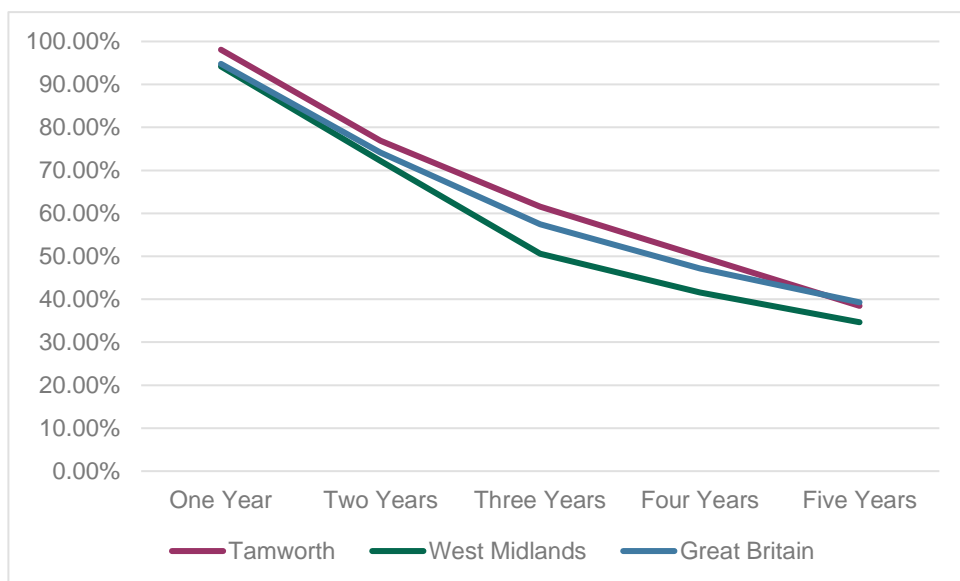
Figure 8: Annual difference between Business Birth and Death rates



Business Survival

Over the course of five years from start up, new businesses in Tamworth have a slightly higher survival rate than the national average, and a softer downward trend than the regional average. This shows a 10 per cent difference at the third-year mark between Tamworth and the West Midlands but rejoins the national average at the five-year stage. This suggests that any suggestion that business surviving three or four years no longer require support is misplaced and indeed that there may be scope for intervention to determine what is happening to Tamworth businesses at this stage and how any problems might be addressed.

Figure 9: Average business survival rates, By Age and Geography, 2018 - 2023





Sectoral Shifts

In 2023 there were 2,240 businesses based in Tamworth, 60 fewer businesses than in 2018, representing a reduction of 3 per cent. In contrast, Staffordshire saw growth of 0.3 per cent, the West Midlands 3 per cent and Great Britain 2 per cent. Strong growth in the number of construction, arts & entertainment and administrative businesses in Tamworth failed to compensate for significant reductions in the numbers of professional/scientific, manufacturing, transport & storage and information & communication businesses.

Business Sector	2023 No.	Business	2018-2023 Change	2018 No.	% change
Construction	405		+60	345	17%
Wholesale & Retail	365		-10	375	-2.67%
Professional, Scientific & technical	285		-45	330	-13.64%
Administrative and Support	180		+15	165	9.09%
Manufacturing	180		-35	215	-16.28%
Transport and Storage	170		-30	200	-15.00%
Accommodation and food	120		-15	135	-11.11%
Other Service activities	105		-5	110	-4.55%
Information and Communication	105		-25	130	-19.23%
Real estate activities	90		5	85	5.88%
Human health and social work	80		5	75	6.67%
Arts, entertainment, activities	50		15	35	42.86%
Finance & insurance activities	45		5	40	12.50%
Education	35		0	35	0%
Public admin & defence	10		0	10	0%
Water supply, sewerage, waste	10		0	10	0%
Electricity, gas, steam/air con	5		5	0	
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	5		-5	10	-50%



Location Quotients and Sectoral Strengths

Table 2 presents a disaggregation of the economy by industry, showing the Tamworth economy relative to the national economy, in terms of employment location quotient³ and relative productivity. The table permits an analysis of whether there are structural problems (e.g. a focus locally on low productivity sectors) or productivity problems (indigenous firms are less productive). The table is rank ordered by employment. Relative productivity represents the relative value added by each sector per employee by comparing GVA per employee to national values.

If productivity were at national levels, keeping the industrial structure constant, Tamworth's local economy would only be 1.4% more productive in terms of GVA per worker.

Table 7: Industry breakdown, employment, location quotient and relative productivity in 2022

Industry	Tamworth Employment	Location quotient	GB GVA per worker (£)	Relative Tamworth productivity
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles	7,000	1.75	54,467	140%
Manufacturing	4,000	1.83	89,830	55%
Administrative and support services	3,000	1.16	40,730	181%
Transportation and storage	2,250	1.57	51,193	103%
Education	2,000	0.81	50,589	100%
Construction	1,750	1.25	92,475	172%
Accommodation & food services	1,750	0.76	28,640	82%
Human health and social work activities	1,750	0.45	42,200	93%
Professional, scientific and technical activities	1,500	0.58	65,973	56%
Information & communication	1,000	0.77	104,476	67%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	700	1.01	41,580	61%
Public administration & defence	600	0.45	80,572	74%
Other service activities	600	1.07	63,047	177%
Real estate activities	450	0.85	493,845	97%
Financial and insurance activities	400	0.42	197,123	21%
Agriculture, mining, electricity, gas, water and waste	240	0.32	743,906	49%

³ Location quotients show the concentration of an industry within an area, creating an understanding of where there are sectoral strengths in a locality. Location quotients are calculated by the proportion of employees in a sector in the locality relative to the proportion of employees in that sector nationally.



Size of Businesses

In terms of both employment and sales turnover, the profile of businesses by size in Tamworth is similar to the distribution nationally. The only significant difference is Tamworth having a slightly smaller percentage of businesses in the smallest employment and turnover brackets.

Table 8: Relative business size distribution for Tamworth and GB by employment, 2024

Employment	Tamworth	West Midlands	GB
Micro (0-9)	87%	89%	89%
Small (10-49)	11%	9%	9%
Medium or large (250+)	2.5%	2%	2%

Table 9: Relative business size distribution for Tamworth and UK by turnover

Turnover	Tamworth	West Midlands	GB
0-100k	64%	67%	67%
100k-1m	28%	27%	27%
1m+	7%	6%	6%

Gross Value Added (GVA)

In 2022, total GVA in Tamworth was £2,135 million, which is 9.5 per cent of the total GVA for Staffordshire. Relative to the population, Tamworth performs well compared with similar localities with £27,079 per head, above the average for Staffordshire and the West Midlands – but below the national average.

if Tamworth were able to match the GVA per head figure nationally, its economy would be £1.2 billion bigger.

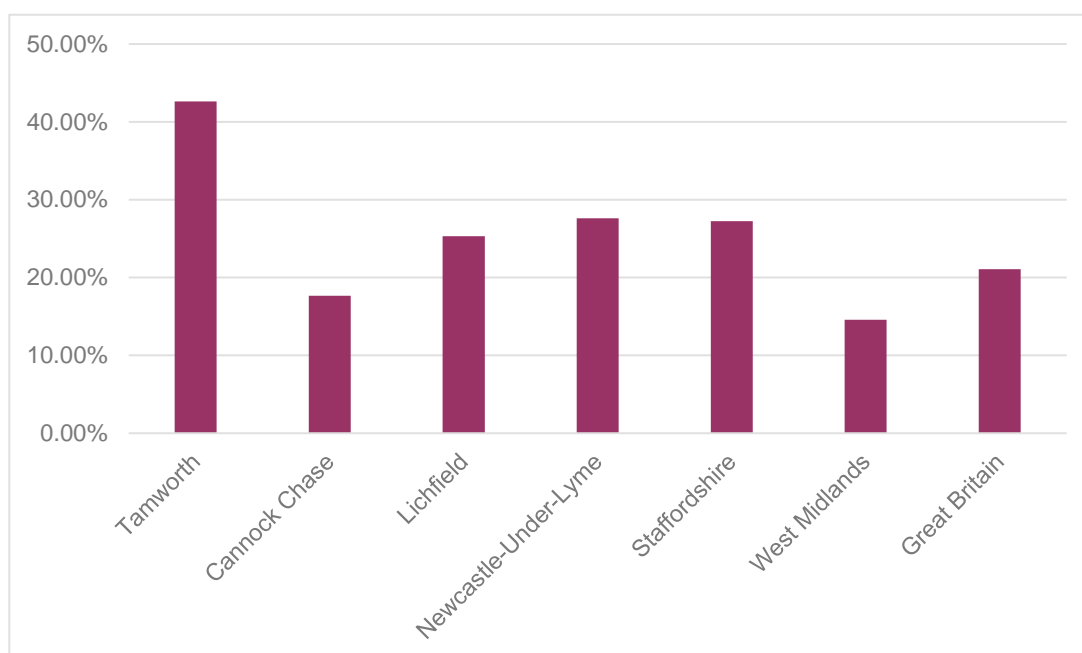
Table 10: Total industry GVA and productivity in 2022

	Total GVA (million £)	GVA per head (£)
Tamworth	2,135	27,079
Cannock Chase	2,436	24,216
Lichfield	3,024	28,293
Newcastle-Under-Lyme	2,702	21,961
Staffordshire	22,490	25,823
West Midlands	160,370	26,925
Great Britain	2,758,280	42,384



Total GVA in Tamworth increased by 43 per cent from 2017 to 2024, from £1,497 million to £2,135 million. This represents far higher growth than other local districts, and substantially better performance than regional and national growth rates (15 and 20 per cent respectively). This suggests that there is a core of Tamworth businesses that have been doing very well indeed in growing their turnover (given that the stock of businesses has not increased).

Figure 10: Total 5-year GVA Growth 2017 - 2022



Furthermore, looking more specifically at GVA per job filled (as opposed to population), Tamworth has the highest figure of all local authorities in Staffordshire, as well as being above both the regional and national averages. This suggests its business base is highly productive.

GVA by Industry

The structure of the economy, as shown by share of total GVA by industry, again highlights the differences between Tamworth and the national economy. Relative to the national average, this shows Tamworth to have a disproportionately high amount of GVA generated by Distribution and Hospitality services (G and I), and a relatively low amounts from Banking, Finance, and Insurance services (K-N) as well as from Public administration, Education, and Health (O-Q)

Table 11: Share of total GVA by industry, 2022

Broad Industry Classification	Tamworth	Staffordshire	West Midlands	Great Britain
Agriculture, fishing, energy, and water (ABDE)	4%	3%	4%	4%
Manufacturing (C)	9%	17%	13%	9%
Construction (F)	13%	8%	6%	6%
Distribution and Hospitality (G,I)	27%	20%	15%	14%
Transport and Communications (H,J)	9%	8%	9%	10%
Banking, Finance, and Insurance (K-N)	24%	23%	29%	35%
Public admin, Education, and Health (O-Q)	10%	17%	21%	19%
Other Services (R-T)	4%	3%	3%	3%



In summary:

- Tamworth has a fast growing population (set to be boosted further by local housing developments)
- The working age population little different to wider voerages but edging lower in line with the national trend.
- Traditionally, the employment rate in Tamworth has been consistently higher than the regional and national averages, but dropped alarmingly between 2023 and 2024.
- Job density (the availability of local jobs for local people) is relatively low.
- Economic inactivity levels include an over-representation of the number of people reported as long-term sick and of those looking after family/their home (compared to the national average).
- Distribution and Hospitality makes up one third of all employment in Tamworth and with Banking, Finance & Insurance and Manufacturing forms more than half of Tamworth's employment base (consistent with the regional average). However, manufacturing has been in significant decline over the past six years.
- Care, Leisure and other service occupations make up the largest proportion of all occupations and are two and a half times more prevalent in Tamworth than in Staffordshire/West Midlands/Great Britain.
- Higher value occupations, such as senior positions, professionals, and associates make up only just over one quarter of occupations in Tamworth, although they account for around 50 per cent of jobs in Staffordshire, West Midlands, and Great Britain.
- Less than a quarter of Tamworth's workforce is qualified to RQF4+ (equivalent to a qualifications in higher education, higher apprenticeship etc.) which is substantially lower than regional and national averages
- There are around 2,220 registered businesses in Tamworth. Business density in Tamworth is around 24 per cent lower than the Staffordshire average, 13 per cent lower than the West Midlands average, and 31 per cent below the national average. **Simply put, if the number of Tamworth businesses was in line with the national average, the town would boast an additional 984 businesses, representing a 44 per cent increase on its existing business base.**
- Over the past 6 years Tamworth has experienced a minor contraction in total business stock, due to greater quantities of business deaths than births in more recent years.
- Strong growth in the number of construction, arts & entertainment and administrative businesses in Tamworth failed to compensate for significant reductions in the numbers of professional/scientific, manufacturing, transport & storage and information & communication businesses.
- Although 60 per cent of new business starts in Tamworth survive their first three years, this dips below 40 per cent after five years.
- In 2022, total GVA in Tamworth was £2,135 million, having increased by more than twice the national average between 2017-2024. Relative to population, Tamworth performs above the average for Staffordshire and the West Midlands, but all three are well below the national average. **If Tamworth were able to match the GVA per head figure nationally, its economy would be £1.2 billion bigger.**
- Sectoral GVA figures show that productivity per worker is almost half that of the national average. This is largely attributable to employment in types of service sectors where GVA per head is especially low and to occupational structures that see fewer senior/less well paid roles. This is being exacerbated by a continuing shift towards services and away from a diminishing production sector (i.e. from activities with a higher GVA per head to those with a lower GVA per head).



4. Primary and Secondary Research

Wider Strategies

UK

'Invest 2035' is the Government's new industrial strategy – a 10-year plan which aims to deliver the certainty and stability that it says businesses need to invest in the high growth sectors that will drive growth. The Strategy will focus on tackling barriers to growth in the highest potential growth-driving sectors and places.

The launch of the Strategy is awaited (scheduled for Spring 2025, but a Green Paper published in 2024 set out the approach that can be expected. It also hinted at the main challenges that the Strategy would seek to tackle, including the UK's poor productivity record and the under-performance of city regions outside London and the South East.

The Green Paper identified eight 'growth-driving' sectors:

- advanced manufacturing
- clean energy industries
- creative industries
- defence
- digital and technologies
- financial services
- life sciences
- professional and business services

The next iteration of the Industrial Strategy will prioritise sub-sectors within these broad sectors and sector plans will be developed in partnership with business, devolved governments, regions, experts, and other stakeholders. At present, it is difficult to see businesses in Tamworth featuring heavily within these sectoral priorities, but this could change when more specific sub-sectors are identified.

In addition, there will be cross-cutting initiatives covering policy areas such as: crowding in investment; energy and infrastructure; innovation; international partnerships and trade; people and skills; and the regulatory environment.

Staffordshire

Staffordshire County Council's Economic Growth Strategy (2024) identified opportunities in a number of the County's key sectors:

- Engineering and Advanced Manufacturing
- Construction
- Advanced logistics
- Health & Social Care
- Green Economy
- Digital
- Visitor Economy
- Wholesale and retail
- Rural Economy.



Business Survey

In February/March 2025 a survey was carried out of businesses in Tamworth, eliciting a total of 29 responses.

Profile of Businesses

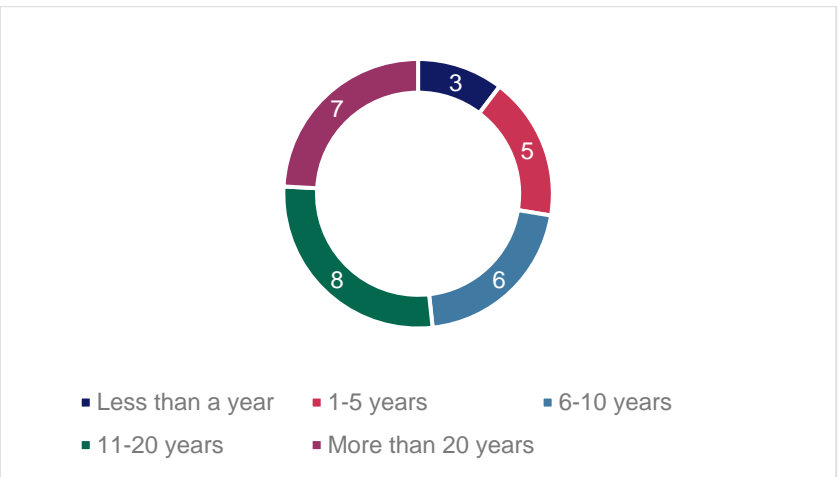
The majority of responses came from businesses within the services sector (84 per cent). This was followed by a small number of businesses from the manufacturing, construction and primary sectors. Of those in the services sector, the highest number of responses came from businesses in *Other service activities*, closely followed by *Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles*, and *Financial and insurance activities*. The full results are outlined in Table 12 below.

Table 12: Survey Responses by Sector

Sector		Businesses
Primary	Mining and quarrying	1
Manufacturing/Processing	Other manufacturing	2
Construction	Construction	1
Services	Other service activities	7
	Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	4
	Financial and insurance activities	4
	Accommodation and food service activities	1
	Real estate activities	1
	Professional, scientific and technical activities	1
	Education	1
	Human health and social work activities	1
	Arts, entertainment and recreation	1

Most of the respondents were well established businesses, with 6 having been established in Tamworth for 6-10 years, 8 for 11-20 years and 7 for more than 20 years. The results are depicted in **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference..**

Figure 11: Age of businesses in business survey





All 29 businesses respondents were SMEs, with the large majority (79 per cent) employing 1-9 people. The remaining 21 per cent of respondents split evenly between having 10-19, 20-49 and 100-249 employees.

Businesses were also asked what percentage of their sales go to different areas, with the options being to customers in Tamworth, to customers in other parts of the West Midlands, to customers in other parts of the UK, and as exports. As might be expected, the largest percentage of total sales was to customers in Tamworth (45 per cent). Other parts of the West Midlands and other parts of the UK each accounted for around 25 per cent of sales, with the balance 6 per cent accounted for by exports.

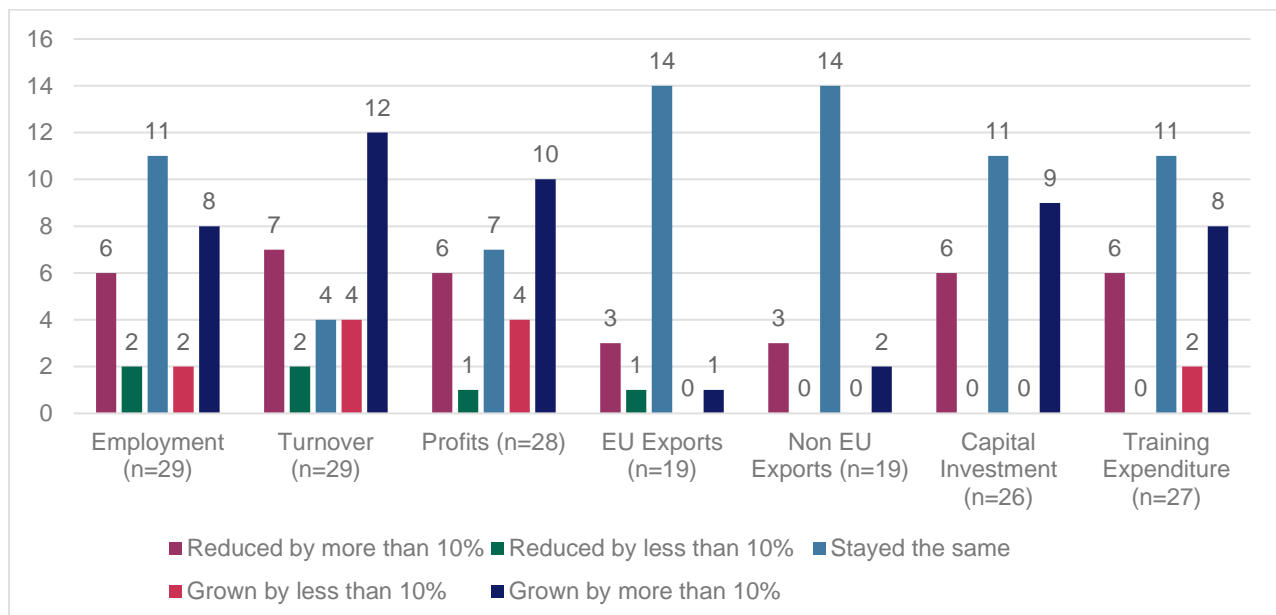
Looking back and ahead

Businesses were asked how they had fared over the past three years against a number of performance indicators, as well as being asked to predict future performance over the next 12 months.

In terms of employment, whilst the largest number of businesses reported no change it was interesting to see the extremes of significant numbers either experiencing a significant uplift or a significant decline (with more of the former than the latter).

In respect of both turnover and profit, the balance of responses indicated strong growth but again significant numbers also reported significant reductions. There was a broadly similar trend in respect of both capital expenditure and training expenditure.

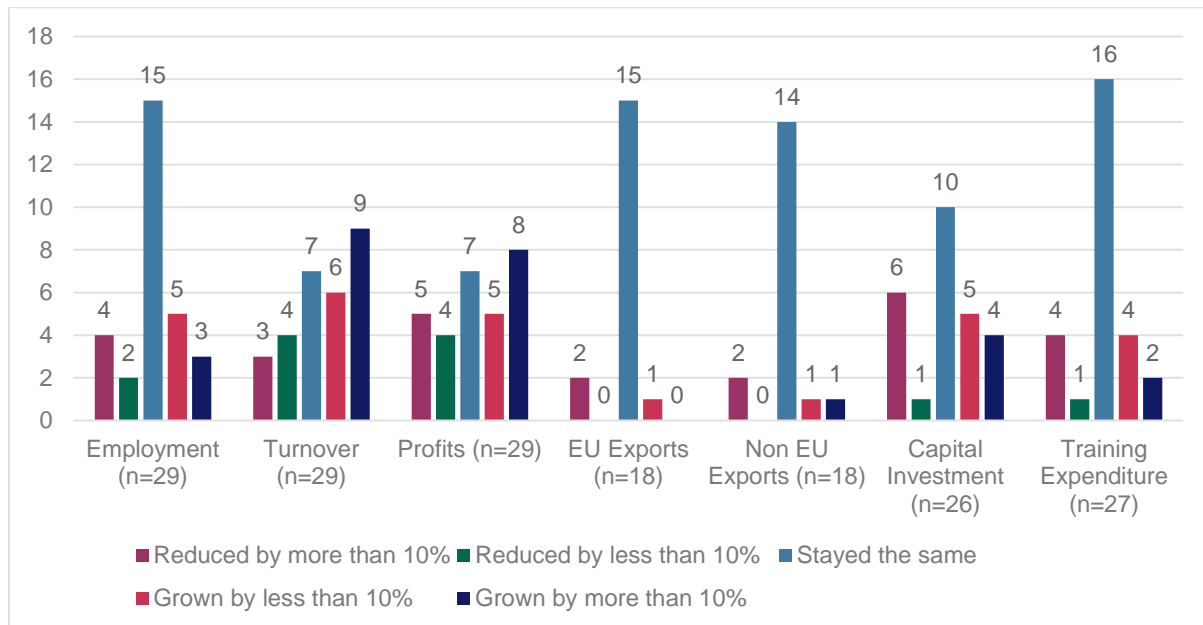
Figure 12: Recent Trends



In terms of business outlook, the expectations were that employment will be largely stable, with turnover and profit both on a positive trajectory suggesting that Tamworth's recent good record on productivity growth is set to continue. This is supported by a positive balance in respect of capital expenditure plans although training expenditure is not expected to match this.



Figure 13: Future Outlook



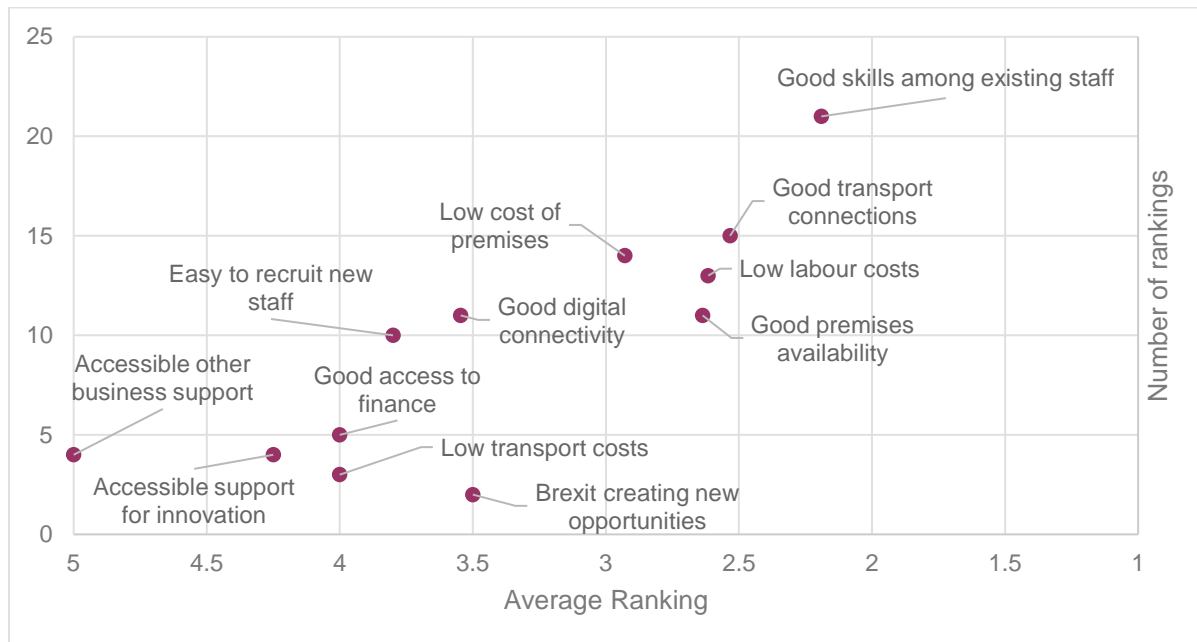
Factors affecting business

Respondents were asked to rank the top five factors that positively or negatively influence their business, with 11 positive options and 15 negative options, as well as opportunities to suggest additional factors. Analysis of the data considered both the ranking of factors and the frequency with which they were cited.

It is clear that good skills among existing staff is the top factor positively influencing business, with both the most selections and the highest average rank. Good transport connections is the second most important positive factor, followed by low labour costs and good premises availability. At the other end of the scale, accessible other business support and accessible support for innovation were amongst the least important factors, whilst accessible support for exporting received no rankings and therefore has been excluded from the graph.



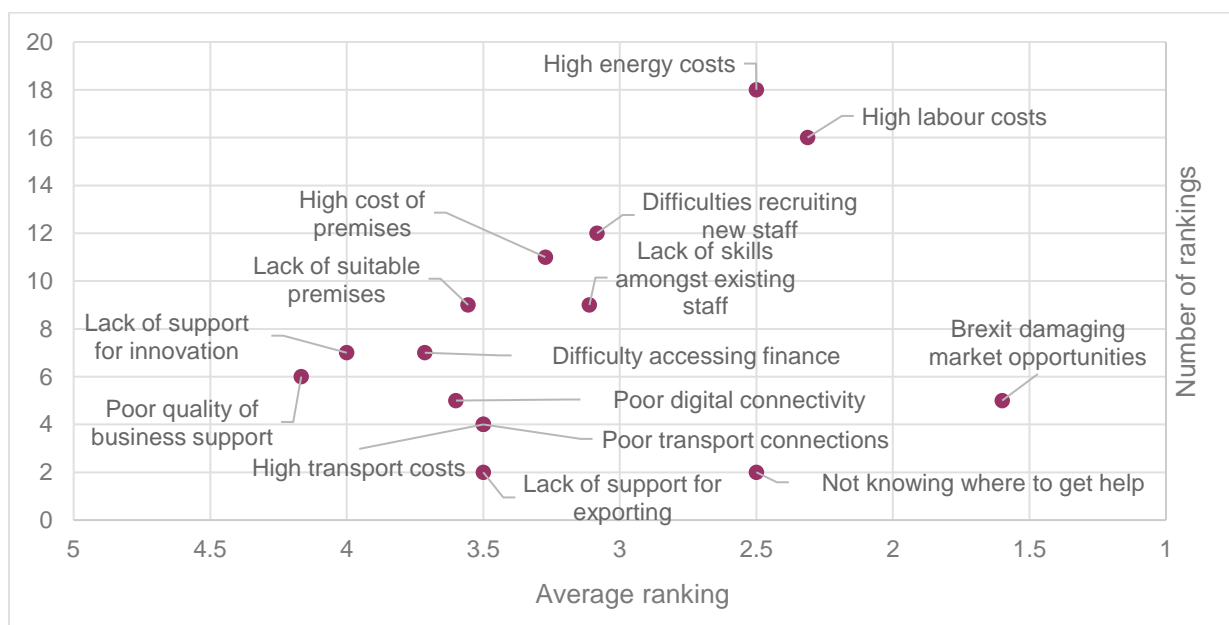
Figure 14: Positive Impacts



Respondents were given the opportunity to expand on their answers. One respondent further highlighted that skilled staff help them to retain and gain customers, while another expressed that Brexit has ruined most opportunities.

In terms of factors that negatively influence businesses, high energy costs and high labour costs both received a high average ranking and large number of references. Not knowing where to get help had a similar average to these two, but only received two mentions, while Brexit damaging market opportunities received by far the highest average, but was mentioned by only five respondents. Difficulties recruiting new staff, lack of skills among existing staff and cost of premises also appear to be relatively important factors. A number of other factors were cited, but each by only one respondent.

Figure 15: Negative Impacts





Business Support

Respondents were asked what forms of business support would be beneficial and given a wide range of options from which to choose. This clearly identified marketing/business development, promotion of Tamworth to outside audiences and gaining access to larger businesses in the local area as the three most popular options.

Table 13: Business Support Needs

Areas of support	Responses
Marketing/business development	17
Promotion of Tamworth to outside audiences	14
Gaining access to larger businesses in the local area	10
Training of staff	7
Achieving quality standards	6
Digital/IT support and advice	6
Identifying new suppliers	4
Property search/provision	4
Tackling crime	4
Innovation/R&D	3
Recruitment of staff	2
Exporting	1
Importing	1
Compliance with employment law	1

Training

Businesses were asked to indicate any types of information/support in respect to training from which they might benefit. The most popular responses were for higher level training for managers/leaders, and apprenticeships, each of which received seven responses. Of the 29 businesses that completed the survey, 10 did not select any of the options for this question, suggesting a large number of businesses do not perceive any support for training being useful.

Figure 16: Demand for Training Support





Workforce Challenges

Businesses were asked about their biggest workforce challenges. Once again, 10 respondents did not select any of the options, suggesting that they do not have any workforce challenges worthy of note. Of the 19 remaining respondents, just over 50% stated that they cannot recruit people with sufficient experience with the same number unable to recruit people with the right skills, with 8 respondents selecting both of these options. Unreliability of staff was also a significant factor.

Figure 17: Workforce Challenges



Business Accommodation

Businesses were asked what could be improved in respect of business accommodation in Tamworth. Almost all respondents indicated that there was a need for more good quality units for start-ups, especially retail and industrial businesses. Two thirds of all respondents mentioned a need for good quality move-on accommodation, especially retail and offices. Just under half of all respondents indicated a need for good quality large accommodation, especially retail.

Figure 18: Accommodation Needs





Of the 29 respondents, 16 stated they rent their business premises, with 9 stating they did not and the other 4 declining to say. Of those who rent their premises, they were asked to rate, on a scale of one to ten, how happy they are with different aspects of their accommodation. The highest rating was for external appearance but even this did not get a ringing endorsement, scoring only 6.3 out of 10.0. Ongoing maintenance and improvements to their building scored lowest.

Table 14: Quality of Accommodation

Accommodation feature	Average rating	Responses
External appearance	6.27	15
Internal quality	6.44	16
Additional facilities (e.g. bike storage, showers, kitchen etc.)	5.60	15
Ongoing maintenance	5.53	15
Improvements to the building	5.53	15

Net Zero

Businesses were to rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, the importance of the pursuit of net zero/the green agenda for both their business and to Tamworth as a business location. Although neither scored especially highly, businesses placed more emphasis on the importance of net zero/the green agenda to their business (6.33 out of 10.00) than to Tamworth as a business location (5.42 out of 10.00).

Views on Tamworth's economy

When asked about the main strengths of Tamworth's economy, a wide variety of responses were received. By far the most common response was the location of Tamworth, and the good transport links it has, with 13 respondents highlighting this. Respondents went on to state that the transport links were good in relation to both trains and roads/motorways, with particularly good links to Birmingham and London. Five respondents also stated that the history and tradition of Tamworth was its main strength, with multiple respondents expanding on this by stating that the history and tradition need to be promoted more.

When asked about what Tamworth economy's main weaknesses are, there was a clear theme which emerged, with 14 respondents stating that the town centre was the biggest weakness. Respondents added that there was poor infrastructure in and around the town centre, including a lack of parking which reduces its accessibility. Furthermore, it was highlighted that the marketing of the town centre is poor, and that more needed to be done to promote it. Three respondents mentioned their perception of the Council as lacking ambition and being insufficiently engaged with the business community.

When asked what Tamworth economy's biggest opportunities were, a wide range of responses were given. The most common response was around business support and attracting new businesses, with five responses in total. Respondents expanded on this by stating the town centre needed to attract new businesses, as well as supporting local businesses to thrive. The town centre was also mentioned by five respondents, who highlighted the opportunity around redeveloping the town centre. The history and heritage of Tamworth was mentioned by four respondents, with some of these stating that this should be central to the redevelopment of the town centre. Similarly, three respondents mentioned the potential for more tourism.

Asked about the main threats to Tamworth's economy, the most common response was centred on the town centre and its redevelopment (seven respondents). Respondents expressed concerns that there would be a lack of new development in the town centre, and were not confident that the Council would fully support the re-development that was needed nor address the issue of vacant units. The next most common issue (four responses) related to concerns around a lack of support for businesses, and the potential for poor decision making to increase costs and drive businesses out of the town. In addition, three respondents highlighted each of the risk of being left behind by other towns, the cost of business rates and threats from illegal businesses in the area.



Other Business Surveys

Previous business consultations, covering those bases within and outside the town centre, highlighted a number of issues:

- One third of businesses were anticipating turnover growth.
- 24 businesses (13%) expressed a desire to relocate/expand locally but appeared to be struggling to identify suitable accommodation (both within and outside the town centre and across retail, manufacturing and service sectors.
- 8 businesses (4 per cent) were expecting to close, of which 6 were town centre retail businesses.
- Some businesses reported difficulties recruiting and/or retaining staff.
- Town centre businesses reported high levels of crime/anti-social behaviour, commented on the poor quality environment in large parts of the town centre and bemoaned the poor quality and high cost of car parking

In addition, there were calls for the following:

- a town centre vision and strategy, to make optimum use of existing assets, guide Council interventions and to help businesses how they can better meet customer expectations.
- a separate a nighttime economy strategy.
- a gap analysis of the town centre offer to highlight opportunities that could be promoted to new businesses.
- a vacant unit strategy that ensured that unused accommodation could be re-purposed to better meet occupier needs.
- more comprehensive, up to date and accessible information on business unit availability.
- more business support for SMEs, particularly in business development and growth planning.
- a prospectus to promote investment opportunities in Tamworth.
- support for failing businesses to understand their challenges and help them where possible.



Other Relevant Research

Tamworth Wider Place Investment: Feasibility Study and Recommendation Strategy, July 2023

The study noted clear opportunities to improve the offer, including:

Visitors

- Marketing and promotion of Tamworth as a visitor destination
- Better signage and information
- Additional content (museums, visitor centre, TIC)
- More events, festivals etc.
- Improved accommodation offer
- Supporting offers, catering, retail, services, environment, public realm

Businesses

- Marketing and promotion of Tamworth as a place for business
- Creating a better environment for business
- Development of additional commercial/industrial space
- Growth support
- Consulting businesses about economic development/regeneration proposals
- More town centre living to create additional demand for town centre services
- A nighttime economy strategy

Residents

- Marketing and promotion of Tamworth as a place to live
- Improving the town centre experience (the public realm, the offer and safety)
- Increased community activity
- Improved markets
- Improved safety, security and ASB reduction in the town centre

In summary, there was a sense that there was a desire amongst businesses and residents to see Tamworth make the most of what it can offer, improve that offer and better promote that offer to visitors, residents and businesses. People want a town of which they can be proud and in which more people would want to live, work, run a business and visit.



Tourism in Tamworth 2023: Feasibility Study and Recommended Strategy

This highlighted the diverse and well-established offers in and around Tamworth, which it suggested had significant and broad appeal to a variety of demographic groups. However, Tamworth was said to capture only about 5 per cent of the visitors to Staffordshire and 92 per cent of visits are day visits. There was a consensus that the visitor economy could and should be performing better.

To that end, a number of suggested improvements were highlighted:

- Development of a clear tourism brand, adopted by all relevant stakeholders
- Better, more co-ordinated and more consistent promotion of the current offer as a whole
- Promotion of the whole of Tamworth's offer, not just a few core/large attractions
- Better co-ordination between visitor attractions, in terms of collective promotion, joint activities and routing of visitors between each other.
- Clearer approach/stronger leadership from Tamworth Council
- Establishment of a formal tourism development group
- Strengthened supporting offers, in terms of accommodation, hospitality and retail
- More investment in the team responsible for tourism promotion/establishment of a dedicated team
- Provide more business support to tourism businesses

These in turn might help to exploit the following identified opportunities:

- Identify overlooked and under-utilised assets
- Create more tours/themed visits to embrace more attractions
- Use heritage and history as a catalyst to bring forward more attractions
- Develop a museum
- Expand the events programme, in terms of numbers, locations and themes

Borough Stakeholder Engagement

A survey of 14 organisations across Tamworth (landlords, visitor attractions, facilities providers etc.) elicited the following responses:

Strengths

- Transport links
- Nearby attractions
- Historic identity

Weaknesses

- High Street offer
- High Street environment
- Poor engagement between Tamworth BC and stakeholders

Challenges

- Poor reputation of Tamworth
- Customers spending less
- Rising utility costs
- Rising occupancy costs



Town Centre Footfall

Over recent years there has been a steady decline in town centre footfall, mirroring trends across the country as retail sales volumes have fallen in the face of the cost of living crisis. Town centres have suffered disproportionately having also been impacted by the increasing appeal of online shopping.

	2022		2023		2024		YoY Change 22/23 (%)	YoY Change 23/24 (%)
April	601,832		602,205		572,671		+0.06	-4.90
May	614,537		611,541		570,898		-0.49	-6.65
June	601,875		594,901		581,989		-1.16	-2.17
Total Footfall	1,818,244		1,808,647		1,725,558		-0.53	-4.59
MoM Change (%) Apr – May/May – Jun	+2.11	-2.06	+1.55	-2.72	-0.31	+1.94		

	2022		2023		2024		YoY Change 22/23 (%)	YoY Change 23/24 (%)
July	611,015		604,693		607,182		-1.03	+0.41
August	607,831		602,020		596,674		-0.96	-0.89
September	610,939		619,513		612,251		+1.40	-1.17
Total Footfall	1,829,785		1,826,226		1,816,107		-0.19	-0.55
MoM Change (%) Jul – Aug/Aug – Sep	-0.52	+0.51	-0.44	+2.91	-1.73	+2.61		

Events

The table below summarises event activity during the Summer of 2024.

Event	Date	Charges	Footfall*
Tamworth Pride	Sat 13 July	Yes	23,591
Motionhouse Performance	Sat 20 July	No	20,553
Saxon Longboat	Fri 26-Sun 28 July	No	61,869
Athelstan 1100	Sat 27 July	No	25,765
The Wagon of Dreams	Sun 28 July	Yes	14,447
We Love Tamworth	Sat 7 September	No	25,974
Art of Tamworth	Sat 7-Sun 8 September	No	41,987
Tamworth Rotary Funday	Sat 14 September	Unknown	24,739
Tamworth Heritage Open Day	Sat 14 September	No	24,739
Food Festival	Sat 28-Sun 29 September	No	42,767

*This includes town centre visitors not attending these events

During August there are two musical performances a week, on average, in the Castle Grounds.



Employment and Skills Opportunities and Challenges

This was published by the Skills and Employability Team at Staffordshire County Council in 2024. It set out their assessment of current and future employment and skills demand and supply opportunities and challenges across the County. In respect of Tamworth it noted the following:

Strengths

- Above average employment rate (83% employment rate in 2023)
- Business survival rates above average
- High GVA growth, with the highest GVA per job filled of all local authorities in Staffordshire
- Claimant rate of unemployment lower than regional and national averages
- Economic inactivity rate below the national average but higher than Staffordshire
- Jobs growth of +3% between 2017-22
- Resident earnings above the national and regional averages

Weaknesses

- Business base declined between 2018-23, with 60 fewer businesses (-3%) in contrast to regional and national trends.
- Business start-up rate below regional and national levels
- Adult skills levels well below average
- Job vacancies dominated by low skilled roles
- The percentage of higher occupation jobs was below average
- Youth claimant rate above regional and national levels and the highest of all local authorities in Staffordshire

Threats/Challenges

- Adapting amenities and the town centre to be future proof and sustainable
- Attracting new business investment
- Continuing to increase productivity and support new business development
- Addressing labour skills shortages
- Encouraging Apprenticeship training
- Raising aspirations amongst young people and improving skills generally

Opportunities

- Capitalise on new tech e.g., AI/automation to drive key sectors
- Excellent connectivity to support growth
- Develop strong enterprise offer to encourage and support new SMEs
- Further promotion and development as key leisure and activities destination
- Repurpose town centre to encourage mixed use and future proof amenities



5. Critical Business Issues

The Town Centre

In what is a geographically small borough, it is perhaps unsurprising that Tamworth town centre should have featured so prominently in the consultations that helped to inform this strategy. It is viewed by many as the touchstone for the local economy, even though it does not fully reflect the fortunes of the town and its population as a whole. Nevertheless, what is evident is that people see the town centre as being representative of Tamworth and, to a large extent, do not like what they currently see. In essence, the decline in the retail sector is viewed by many as being synonymous with the decline of Tamworth, undermining confidence in the town and its economy.

From January to October 2024, the town centre actually saw a reduction in the vacancy rate from 17 per cent to 15 per cent, however this was almost entirely due to the demolition of 5 units on George Street. There are a total of 286 units, with the highest share being Retail (94 units), followed by Hospitality (51), Beauty/Hair/Tattooing (40) and Community/Charity (15).

However, there are grounds for optimism, not least with the volume of new housebuilding in the Borough that will boost the population and provide significant potential additional demand for retail, hospitality and leisure, provided the offer is attractive.

As at Spring 2025, the investments that form the Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) programme – for which Tamworth secured £21.65 million from central government towards a total regeneration budget from all stakeholders of around £40 million – are still underway. This means scaffolding, hoardings and disruption, adding to the frustrations of local people. As yet, they have seen none of the benefits of the investments being made, only the disbenefits. Furthermore, this is against a backdrop of a town centre – like many others across the country – in decline. Nevertheless, the key components of the FHSF programme are as follows:

- Enterprise Hub: Refurbishing part of the former Tamworth Co-Op department store into a new enterprise centre for small businesses.
- Castle Gateway: Delivering an improved entrance from the town centre into the castle grounds by enhancing the Castle Gatehouse area and adjoining historic Market Street properties
- College Quarter: Relocating South Staffordshire College's Tamworth campus into the larger part of the former Tamworth Co-Op department store
- Middle Entry Refurbishment: Refurbishing and improving the retail precinct, creating new flexible space for start-ups and niche businesses.
- St Editha's Square: Transforming the town centre square into multi-purpose outdoor space for entertaining and events

Much of the funding is allocated to specific projects and there may be a need for additional investment to fill any gaps and/or generate added value e.g. through public realm works that can enhance and better connect the works that are underway.

With a separate town centre regeneration strategy under development, it would be inappropriate for this document to impinge on the work of the specialist team conducting that assignment. Nevertheless, it is hoped that there is merit in flagging some of the key issues that came to light in the consultations carried out as part of this exercise.



The Retail Offer

Regardless of the success of Ventura, the introduction and subsequent rapid expansion of online shopping has played a large part in the decline of Tamworth and many other town centres. Therefore, there needs to be a reimagining of the town centre: what is it for and what does it need to offer?

The overall sense is that Tamworth town centre lacks both vibrancy and quality, in stark contrast to the hugely successful Ventura Retail Park, barely a mile outside the town centre. A large amount of floorspace in the Ankerside Shopping Centre is vacant and there is a seemingly disproportionate number of barber shops, nail bars, discount stores and charity shops.

The proposal to create small retail spaces for start-ups, available on easy-in-easy-out terms, is certainly a positive move, lowering the barriers to entry for new retail businesses by significantly reducing their risk. However, it will be important to retain quality control in the hope that these occupiers bring something new and more diverse to the town centre rather than simply compete with what is already there. The ambition should be to contribute significantly to the independent retail offer in Tamworth, such that more people are attracted into the town for its ability to offer something they cannot find anywhere else.

The market appears to be the source of a number of frustrations, with a widely held belief that it is of neither the scale nor the quality of markets in comparable towns across the Midlands, including those operated by the same company. At present, the operation of the market is affected by the FHSF works. When completed, these should offer stallholders and their customers a much improved environment, but that seems to not have been communicated/understood, breeding resentment amongst some stallholders who believe their businesses have been and will be impacted negatively.

The Tamworth Market Strategy and Action Plan, revealed the extent to which there remained a lot of goodwill towards the market, demonstrated in the extent to which market days remain popular, with the town centre said to be busier than usual on these days, benefiting other traders. The only disappointment, also expressed by consultees for this Strategy, was over the quality/limited range of the offer.

What it is thought would help are: improvements to the quality of stalls/displays; enhancements to the environment in which the market is based; stronger communal branding to give the market a greater sense of significance and cohesion; a communal seating area to create a community hub and facilitate purchases from food and drink vendors; signage/stall layout plan; better promotion of the market online (including via social media); occasional themed activities/events; clearer links to other town centre attractions; and a drive to increase the number and variety of stalls (including higher quality items and items that appeal to younger people and visitors).

It was also suggested that business support be put in place both to assist new traders establish themselves and help sustain their fledgling businesses and to encourage some traders to explore the potential to move into a permanent retail unit.

A Business Improvement District (BID) has been mooted previously but it is understood that the major retailers at Ventura vetoed the proposal. Without their financial contributions a BID would have little prospect of success.

In spite of investments in the pedestrian/cycle route between Ventura Park and the town centre, it remains woefully under-utilised (in spite of it only being a six minute walk from one to the other). It is unclear as to whether users of Ventura Park are unaware that the route exists, do not appreciate how short the walk into the town centre is or simply have no interest in venturing into the town centre. A simple survey of Ventura Park users might shed some light on this as well as being a means of promoting the route.



The Nighttime Economy

It seems as if perceptions of Tamworth's nighttime economy are rather more negative than the reality. The quality of a number of the pubs appears to be under-appreciated whilst the reputation for anti-social behaviour may be over-blown. Tamworth also has several good restaurants but suffers in comparison with Lichfield and its Michelin starred offerings. Indeed, the contrasts between Lichfield and Tamworth were a recurring theme.

As well as being important in and of itself, the nighttime economy can play a very important role in attracting and retaining residents, perhaps especially those with higher disposable incomes who are looking to live in places where they can enjoy a good quality of life in which culture and leisure play a key part. A more vibrant, diverse and attractive nighttime economy would help to attract and retain more people, who in turn would provide the demand to sustain a healthy nighttime economy. However, the creation of that virtuous circle often requires intervention, as discussed below.

The Visitor Economy

A common refrain from consultees was the importance of culture and heritage to Tamworth, combined with some frustration that this had never been fully exploited in the development of the visitor offer. Day visitors flock to Ventura and the Snow Dome as well as Drayton Manor Park and Zoo, which lies just outside the Borough boundaries but which has provided work for generations of the town's young people. However, the flow of those visitors into the town centre is believed to be all but non-existent. This is in spite of the presence of a castle, Grade I Listed Church and historic market hall, all within a few hundred metres of each other in the town centre. However, the absence of a dedicated museum or heritage centre of any significance (the Castle notwithstanding) is a crucial gap in the offer.

There is an events programme but it is acknowledged that staff capacity constraints limit the number of events that can be organised, whilst the events themselves do not appear to generate the economic values that have been reported in other places (especially in terms of a boost to the local hospitality sector). This suggests that there ought to be a fundamental review of the events programme to establish what audiences would be attracted to particular events (and in what numbers) and what linkages can be made to local accommodation providers and food and drink businesses. This may require the development of partnerships with specialist private sector event organisers.

As other places have demonstrated, the ability to come up with a regular programme of events, repeated on at least an annual basis can offer the hospitality sector encouragement that new investment is worthwhile, given the prospect of additional demand. By way of example, just over £300,000 of grant funding was accessed by organisers of 15 festivals across Tees Valley. The effect was to generate £2.8m in local GVA benefits, with 57 full time equivalent jobs supported. In other words, for every £1 invested, £9.00 of benefits was generated. Of course, this does not mean that any and every investment in festivals would reap a similar return, but does offer an indication of the level of contribution to a local economy that these sorts of activities can make and how cost-effective public sector investments in them can be.

Car Parking

Charges for car parking are reported to generate close to one million pounds of revenue each year for the Borough Council, which is a vital source of income that helps the local authority to provide a wide range of services. On the flip side, car parking charges are seen by many businesses (as well as some residents) as a barrier to people visiting the town centre/extending their dwell time. In contrast, Ventura Retail Park offers free parking (albeit now limited to three hours in some sections).

The reality is that there are no towns in the UK of any significant size that offer free car parking as the norm. More common are reduced rates or a suspension of charges at particular times or on particular days, often to tie in with wider initiatives (e.g. special events, promotion of the nighttime economy etc.).



Business Support

To date, the provision of grants has been the principal means of direct support for local businesses from Tamworth Borough Council (recognising all of the other work undertaken to create an infrastructure for business success in the town). However, grants can be a somewhat one-dimensional tool and there is no evidence (due to the unwillingness of grant recipients to provide monitoring information) that the grants provided have helped to safeguard/create jobs or sustain/grow local businesses.

It is apparent that the economic development team at Tamworth Borough Council has itself recognised that there would be more to be gained from a targeted/more discerning approach. Whilst the notion of 'picking winners' has long been derided as a fool's errand, there is scope to focus resources on the types of businesses that have proven to be more sustainable and/or which have the potential to generate relatively high added value, based on the sector in which they operate/types of jobs they support.

Furthermore, this is not just about grants (and may not be about grants at all). The ambition ought to be to create an environment and a reputation whereby businesses (and would-be businesses) associate Tamworth with being a town that welcomes and supports businesses. Anyone wishing to start, sustain, grow or relocate a business can readily address all of the information, advice and guidance they might need, either directly or by referral to another source of assistance. In so doing, the Council also has the opportunity to change negative perceptions and be seen as a 'can do' Council.

The relationship between Tamworth Borough Council and the local business community is poor to say the least. Indeed, it has deteriorated to the extent that the Council would struggle to convince local businesses that anything it planned to do – however beneficial – would have a positive impact on the business community. Nevertheless, it must try. This will require a significant overhaul of its approach which must be in the substance of what it does as well as in its public utterances. In this context, there is a case for considering whether it might be beneficial to create an arms-length body – Tamworth Development Agency – through which the Council can act but which operates in partnership with the business community. There are a number of different models that have operated across the country that might be worth investigating for their applicability to this situation. What is clear is that something has to change and that a radical change may be required in order to re-set the relationship between the Council and local businesses.

Staffordshire CC offers a number of support programmes to businesses in Tamworth:

- **Get started and grow** - offers funded packages of support in marketing, social media, HR, finance and legal advice for small businesses up to five years old.
- **Start-up loans** – interest free loans of £3,000 to £5,000 available for businesses up to five years old.
- **My own boss** - offers fully-funded business coaches who can offer support to those thinking of starting their own businesses but don't know where to start.
- **Staffordshire jobs and careers** - Offering a fully-funded, managed recruitment service for businesses of all sizes in Staffordshire.

However, according to Staffordshire CC, Tamworth is the worst-performing part of the County when it comes to take up of various business support interventions, as detailed in the table below. For context, the population of Tamworth is around 9.0 per cent of the population of Staffordshire as a whole and yet the total participation of Tamworth businesses across all programmes is only 5.7 per cent of the total number of business interventions across Staffordshire'



District	Start-up prog.	No. of businesses created from start-up prog.	Start-up loan applications approved	Get Started & Grow applications approved 0-2 years	Get Started & Grow applications approved 2-5 Years	Growth Ladder applications approved	My Own Boss	Working for Yourself	Total
Stafford	211	94	16	51	17	2	100	N/A	491
Newcastle	141	54	2	34	8		36	N/A	275
East Staffs	101	47	5	40	6	2	35	40	276
Cannock	65	33	5	29	6		38	59	235
South Staffs	49	26	8	42	12	3	18	N/A	158
Staffs Moorlands	116	54	3	31	7	1	8	23	243
Lichfield	59	31	2	32	10		27	13	174
Tamworth	45	21	4	20	3		18	N/A	111
Out of Area	7	1	N/A	N/A	N/A		10	N/A	18
Not Specified	1	2	N/A	N/A	N/A		15	N/A	18
Total	795	363	45	279	69	8	305	135	1999

In addition, Staffordshire CC has an advisor focussed on Tamworth. One example of their work was a highly successful 'Meet the Buyer' event in Tamworth which attracted around 120 attendees. Activities to promote women in business were also said to have been a success.

Staffordshire Chambers, in conjunction with Tamworth Borough Council, has been operating the Ignite Start-up Programme, funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. It comprises a five-day course for people considering self-employment, covering issues such as marketing, finance etc. Budding entrepreneurs have been supported to develop the skills needed to start and grow a successful business, through a series of workshops delivered by South Staffordshire College at Tamworth Enterprise Centre and access to an online start-up portal. However, UKSPF funding for 2025/26 is due to be cut by half, with the impact on the Ignite Programme as yet unclear.

A replacement for UKSPF is scheduled to be in place for the start of the 2026/27 financial year, but its focus and the scale of its budget have yet to be determined. In the interim, start-up businesses in Tamworth could miss out on vital support. Findings from the survey of local businesses carried out for this exercise suggested that support for marketing/business development was the top priority amongst Tamworth businesses.



Business Accommodation

The success of Tamworth Enterprise Centre is evident and has encouraged the development of second Centre as part of the redevelopment of the former Co-op building that is being re-purposed for use by South Staffordshire College. Based on enquiries received, there is great confidence that this too will achieve high levels of occupancy.

Given the paucity of start-up accommodation across Tamworth Borough, the success/anticipated success of these developments comes as no surprise. However, they pose a number of questions: is there even more unsatisfied demand for managed workspace within the town centre; is there a need to develop start-up units for small businesses requiring manufacturing/warehouse space; is there a need to develop move-on accommodation for enterprise centre tenants and/or small businesses in industrial units?

Related to this is the commonly held view that the stock of industrial premises, especially that in Council ownership, has been deteriorating and is in need of significant new investment. Tamworth Borough Council is in the process of developing a new asset management strategy to cover the period through to 2029/30. This covers its own operational premises, leisure and heritage assets, its housing stock and commercial properties in which it has invested. This last group includes office, industrial and retail premises, comprising 122 properties with a total value of £22.7m and generating an annual income of £8.9m (which seems like a very high income to value ratio). There is a strong case for detailed consideration of the commercial land and property register and an audit of these assets to identify what investments need to be made (to replace/remodel/refurbish accommodation), the cost of works, how this might be funded, the future income this would generate and the economic values that would be generated. This may require the sale of some assets in order to raise the funds to invest in others. Whilst it is of course accepted that the Council cannot hope to satisfy the needs of every business, there is a danger that the lack of a strategic approach to asset management and a failure to invest adequately in its commercial stock could mean that the needs of many businesses that could be satisfied are not met and that occupancy levels reduce as occupiers find more suitable accommodation outside the Borough. Alongside this, there is a need for a closer relationship with private commercial property owners in order to ensure that in combination – and perhaps even in partnership – that the public and private sectors are able to offer new, growing and relocating businesses the sites and premises they need to safeguard and increase jobs in Tamworth.

It is interesting to note what South Staffordshire College has done at its Lichfield campus that could be replicated in Tamworth. Lichfield Business Village is a 50/50 joint venture with Staffordshire University comprising 20 business units, aimed largely at creative businesses. At any one time, only one or two units are said to be vacant. Given the success of the Tamworth campus, there might well be an opportunity to replicate this model in the Borough, albeit it may have a different thematic focus.

There are two key specific opportunities: Ankerside Shopping Centre and Lower Gungate. Ankerside is now back in the ownership of the Borough Council and forms an important part of a new town centre regeneration strategy currently being prepared by Arcadis. A large part of Ankerside adjoining the Castle Park is now vacant with no immediate prospect of being let to the types of multiple retailers previously in situ.

Lower Gungate is Tamworth's premier brownfield site. By default, it has become an important car park in the town, in the process generating significant funds for the Council. However, the fact that such a prime site has been left undeveloped for decades is baffling. Furthermore, there are a number of vacant buildings around the periphery of the site – some of them about to be transferred from Staffordshire CC into the ownership of Tamworth BC – that are ripe for re-development. In addition, the former police station has been sold to a private developer whose intentions are not known and may indeed be determined by whatever development is taken forward on the adjacent site.



Consultations as part of this exercise did not produce a consensus as to what type of development ought to take place on the site (or even whether it should be developed at all, given the amenity value of the car park). Mention was made of leisure facilities, health services and housing. It is evident that there is now a need to draft a development brief in order to realise the benefits of this substantial asset which in turn could contribute significantly to the regeneration of the town centre by attracting more people into the centre of Tamworth and by having more people living in the centre of the town.

Connectivity

One of Tamworth's major strengths – on which all consultees were able to agree – is its excellent connectivity. The town not only benefits from its central location within England, but excellent rail and road links. This includes direct train services into Birmingham New Street in 18 minutes and into London Euston in as little as 1 hour 8 minutes. Similarly, its proximity to the A38, M42 and M6 provide ready access to the national road network.

These facts ought to feature prominently in the promotion of the town to investors. Evidently, it has a huge catchment area within a 30 minute travel time and can offer businesses based in the town easy access to key markets. It might well be the case that Tamworth's connectivity is under-appreciated by many people.

Such a location and good access to major roads would ordinarily suggest that Tamworth might promote itself as a base for logistics and distribution. However, there have already been major developments in neighbouring local authority areas in addition to which the scope for developments on this scale simply does not exist in Tamworth (without profound planning re-designations of greenfield land). Furthermore, job densities in such industries are relatively low and with a limited supply of land for employment uses, the Borough might well consider more intensive employment densities (especially manufacturing and services) a preferable option.

Learning and Skills

Whilst there is no evidence of significant skills gaps or shortages being experienced on any scale by Tamworth employers, it is apparent that this is a relatively low skill, low pay economy with better qualified residents commuting out to higher paid jobs. Clearly, the ambition ought to be to create more high value employment within the Borough.

In that context, the continued expansion and growing reputation of South Staffordshire College is a major asset for Tamworth and will become even more so once it completes its relocation into the town centre. Not only will this relocation bring additional footfall and vibrancy for the benefit of local businesses, but it will make the College more accessible to more learners, including adult learners, as well as significantly enhancing its offer through provision of state-of-the-art facilities. When the campus opens in September 2025 it will employ more than 100 staff, accommodate around 1,200 16-18 year olds and host several hundred adult learners.

Furthermore, it is apparent that the expansion headroom built into the original plans for the new accommodation has been already filled. This means any additional expansion will now need to take place off site. This represents a tremendous opportunity to re-purpose other vacant space in the town centre to accommodate provision. There is a specific opportunity in respect of high needs provision for which the College requires around 250-300 sq. m. of ground floor accommodation.

The College is now more focused on employer needs than ever before. Indeed it promotes itself to learners as offering career pathways rather than courses per se. At its Tamworth campus, provision to Level 4 (equivalent to higher education) is currently limited to accounting but there are aspirations to offer this level of provision in engineering. Clearly, higher levels of provision are to be encouraged across more areas of its curriculum.



At the other end of the spectrum, a new Connect to Work programme will be coming onstream from April 2025 (although it may take a little time to become operational). Connect to Work is a national programme designed to help disabled people, those with health conditions and people with complex barriers to employment, to find sustainable work.

Although Tamworth does not have a major problem in terms of unemployment (albeit there is a belief that there is generational worklessness and a need to break that cycle) there are significant issues in respect of economic inactivity. With the biggest single cause of economic inactivity being long term sickness, the Connect to Work programme will have an important role to play.



6. Action Plan

It is evident that Tamworth needs to better define itself as a place, have a clearer sense of direction and have a coherent plan for getting to where it wants to be. The political alignment of a national government, local authority and Member of Parliament provides a sound platform, and having a relatively new executive and political leadership in the Council offers the prospect of much-needed momentum. There is also a timing imperative, with the likely transfer of Borough Council responsibilities and assets into a new combined authority within the next three years.

The actions below have been formulated on the basis of the evidence that underpins this Strategy and final discussions with members of various stakeholder groups to which the draft Strategy was presented. These actions are highlighted as priorities on the basis that they represent areas in respect of which there are significant prospective benefits and where Tamworth Borough Council is best placed to lead on these interventions.

1. Establish a collaborative vehicle

It is evident that the relationship between Tamworth Borough Council and large parts of the local business community has broken down, perhaps irretrievably so. The establishment of a stand-alone development agency, resourced by the Council but at arms length from it may be a way of bridging this divide. In the context of local government re-organisation there are prospective upsides and downsides: a positive would be the legacy of a Tamworth-specific body that could survive reorganisation and ensure that a focus on economic development in Tamworth is retained; a negative would be the time it might take to establish a new legal entity, especially in the context of the disruption caused by local government reorganisation.

Alternatively, the agency could be 'virtual', providing a brand and a mechanism for convening stakeholders. Indeed, given the potential complications of establishing a legal entity and a desire for swift action, this would seem to be the more advisable approach.

It is suggested that a Tamworth Town Board be established (possibly with a more marketable name, such as 'Totally Tamworth') on which the Council would be represented, either by the Leader or appropriate Portfolio Holder, as well as a Senior Officer. In addition, it is vital that other interests are appropriately and proportionately represented, including the business community, the third sector and the education sector. The Board would provide strategic oversight in relation to economic development initiatives, inform budget-setting and review the impact of economic development interventions, such as those funded under UK Shared Prosperity Fund, by putting in place appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes.

In order to push forward specific interventions, there would be merit in forming sub-groups focused on particular topics, with some board members joined by experts in the field. Some may be ongoing, others time-limited. The obvious early candidates would be a Future High Streets Fund sub-group and a visitor economy sub-group.

Overall, this should be a genuine attempt at positively engaging a wide range of stakeholders, giving them access to meaningful involvement in the delivery of the economic development strategy and ensuring that all parties are kept fully informed about specific actions being proposed, their rationale and their progress.



This idea can be taken forward by taking the following steps:

- Identify candidate member organisations from across the public, private and third sectors
- Invite candidates to an in-person meeting to discuss draft proposals about the make up and purpose of the Town Board and seek their involvement/support
- Draft terms of reference for the Town Board so that all stakeholders have clarity as to its remit
- Publicise a summary of terms of reference more widely to keep the general public informed
- Establish a series of sub-groups (as the Town Board sees fit) to develop ideas under specific themes
- Develop a clear, prioritised agenda, which might include some or all of the other suggestions in this Action Plan..

Subject to staff capacity, there is no reason why this process should not begin almost immediately with a view to a Town Board and associated sub-groups being up and running by Autumn 2025.

2. Boost the Visitor Economy

Create and Promote a Brand

It is perhaps indicative of the age in which we live that the single thing for which Tamworth is now best known is the social media exploits of a man who sells baked potatoes for a living. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of Spudman demonstrates just what can be achieved by creativity, flair and determination. Ideally, Spudman should be recruited as an ally, to front a campaign that aims to bring more visitors into Tamworth.

The biggest visitor attractions in and around Tamworth – Drayton Manor, Ventura Park and the Snow Dome – each operate in isolation, with no links to other attractions or the town centre. Presumably, they see no value in reciprocal relationships, nor any obligation to do anything that does not directly benefit their own interests.

There is a widespread belief that the history of Tamworth and the cultural assets it possesses are both widely under-appreciated. This suggests the need to create a brand that draws on the town's historical importance and to promote it effectively. Although the Visit Tamworth website provides some very good content on what is available locally, in terms of visitor attractions, accommodation etc., it relies on prospective visitors going to look for that information in the first place. Therefore, there is a need to generate much more interest that will drive traffic to the site.

This agenda could be taken forward by a sub-group of the Town Board focussed on the visitor economy. As such, it could follow the timelines outlined above.



Enhancing the Offer

Although Tamworth has a number of visitor attractions, they do not come together to promote a joint offer, do not co-ordinate events and do not signpost visitors to each other.

There also need to be more reasons to visit Tamworth, including more events/festivals, establishment of a heritage centre/museum, improved retail offer and improved hospitality offer. This will require a combination of direct actions and facilitating actions (with some of the former bleeding into the latter). For example, a comprehensive events programme will increase visitor numbers that will boost demand for the retail and hospitality sectors encouraging more service provision.

There ought to be a fundamental review of the events programme to establish what audiences would be attracted to particular events (and in what numbers) and what linkages can be made to local accommodation providers and food and drink businesses. This may require the development of partnerships with private sector event organisers with particular expertise/resources. As other places have demonstrated, the ability to come up with a regular programme of events, repeated on at least an annual basis can offer the hospitality sector encouragement that new investment is worthwhile, given the prospect of additional demand. By way of example, just over £300,000 of grant funding was accessed by organisers of 15 festivals across Tees Valley. The effect was to generate £2.8m in local GVA benefits, with 57 full time equivalent jobs supported. In other words, for every £1 invested, £9.00 of benefits was generated. Of course, this does not mean that any and every investment in festivals would reap a similar return, but does offer an indication of the level of contribution to a local economy that these sorts of activities can make and how cost-effective public sector investments in them can be.

The proposal to create small retail spaces for start-ups, available on easy-in-easy-out terms, is certainly a positive move, but it will be important to retain quality control in the hope that these occupiers bring something new and more diverse to the town centre rather than simply compete with what is already there. The ambition should be to contribute significantly to the independent retail offer in Tamworth, such that more people are attracted into the town for its ability to offer something they cannot find anywhere else.

This approach should also include the market – an important driver of town centre footfall: This might include: improvements to the quality of stalls/displays; enhancements to the environment in which the market is based; stronger communal branding to give the market a greater sense of significance and cohesion; a communal seating area to create a community hub and facilitate purchases from food and drink vendors; signage/stall layout plan; better promotion of the market online (including via social media); occasional themed activities/events; clearer links to other town centre attractions; and a drive to increase the number and variety of stalls (including higher quality items and items that appeal to younger people and visitors).

Again, this could be taken forward by a sub-group of the Town Board, but might also benefit from work by the Council in parallel to explore options for a festivals programme, the feasibility of developing a new visitor attraction in the town centre and enhancing the offer/functionality of the market. The amount of officer time required for each of these tasks ought not be under-estimated. In terms of timescales, working with the market operator and stallholders, a new plan for the market could be developed/implemented within six months of commencement. Putting in place a festivals programme might take a little longer to plan and would be unlikely to commence until Summer 2026 at the earliest. The potentially significant capital investment required for a new visitor attraction would likely make this a longer-term project, but exploring options and their feasibility could be done over the next 12 months or so.



3. Promote and Support Enterprise

The Council must re-set its relationships with the local business community and it is hoped that the establishment of a Town Board will help in that regard. Although there is no doubt that many of the criticisms of the Council are unfair/ill-informed, there is a need for conciliation not confrontation. Tamworth Council should adopt a much more business friendly stance and the town should be seen as a place for businesses to locate, thrive and grow.

There is a need for a comprehensive business support package that provides information, advice and guidance to businesses at each stage of their development (as well as to help them through difficult times). This should extend to market stallholders, to assist new traders establish themselves and help sustain their fledgling businesses and to encourage some traders to explore the potential to move into a permanent retail unit. Although 60 per cent of new business starts in Tamworth survive their first three years, this dips below 40 per cent after five years, suggesting an ongoing need for business support.

Tamworth has much going for it: great location, excellent connectivity, lower accommodation costs than nearby Birmingham and access to a sizeable potential workforce. These attributes ought to be much more effectively promoted.

Again, this agenda could be taken forward by a sub-group of the Town Board, but will need to be driven by the Town Council given the experience of its economic development team, its relationship with Staffordshire County Council and its ability to access external funding. Although the replacement for UK Shared Prosperity Fund has not yet been determined, some scoping work could be done to see what types of business support might best be put forward for whatever replaces UKSPF so that when the time comes, the programme is already under-development. The overriding theme ought to be that whether you are starting up, expanding or relocating, Tamworth is the place in which to do it. However, it is also of critical importance that there is something to sell, as per the action point below.

4. Improve the Business Accommodation Offer

The success of Tamworth Enterprise Centre and the high level of interest in the new Centre tell their own story. It was also apparent from the business survey and other consultations that the availability of good quality accommodation at an affordable cost would be enormously helpful in promoting an enterprise culture, assisting business starts and enabling businesses to grow. This applies to industrial and retail accommodation as well as offices. Furthermore, good quality accommodation is likely to appeal to a wider catchment beyond the Borough's boundaries, given Tamworth's accessibility.

There is an urgent need to complete a qualitative assessment of all council-owned stock in order to determine the nature and extent of works required to bring it up to standard and/or reconfigure/redevelop it to better suit market demand. This includes Ankerside Shopping Centre. The Council should also look to work alongside private landlords to the same end and in the hope of helping to unlock any public funding that might contribute to the costs of reconfiguration/redevelopment. This might also extend to South Staffordshire College to explore the feasibility of replicating Lichfield Business Village in Tamworth. If this can be done during 2025, it could form part of the investment prospectus to be put to the replacement for UKSPF funding in 2026/27.



5. Address Economic Inactivity

Amongst Tamworth residents who are economically inactive, more than one third are long-term sick, a significantly higher proportion than is the case nationally. There is a similar pattern in respect of those who are economically inactive due to looking after their family or home. In the context of the push by national government to get more people into work, it is evident that these issues merit further consideration, perhaps in particular in view of the new Connect to Work programme.

Although Tamworth does not have a major problem in terms of unemployment (albeit there is a belief that there is generational worklessness and a need to break that cycle) there are significant issues in respect of economic inactivity. With the biggest single cause of economic inactivity being long term sickness, the Connect to Work programme will have an important role to play as will a forthcoming UKSPF project being led by South Staffordshire College. It is also interesting to note that the latter will also cover readiness for work, addressing a key requirement of local employers.

There will be a need for the Council/Town Board to ensure that it/they are linked into and supportive of these initiatives, albeit it is unlikely to be directly involved. It is also important to note that addressing issues pertaining to long-term sickness requires patience and consistent investment before significant results are achieved.

6. Develop Lower Gungate

Lower Gungate is Tamworth's premier brownfield site and yet has been left undeveloped for decades. It is surrounded by a number of vacant buildings, all ripe for re-development. There has long been talk of developing a masterplan for the area but this has not yet been progressed, albeit this may have been awaiting completion of the transfer of three buildings from Staffordshire CC into the ownership of Tamworth BC. There now appears to be no reason to wait any longer.

There is now a need to draft a development brief in order to realise the benefits of this substantial asset which in turn could contribute significantly to the regeneration of the town centre by attracting more people into the centre of Tamworth and by having more people living in the centre of the town. It is acknowledged that, depending on what is built, the capital costs could easily be around the £100 million mark. Nevertheless, this is a huge opportunity to undertake what could be truly transformative development.

7. Invest in the Economic Development Team

The existing economic development team and associated colleagues within the Borough Council have many skills and much experience to offer and are clearly committed to their roles and responsibilities. However, there is a need for more resource and greater clarification as to where their priorities ought to lie. More investment in economic development will see a bigger and quicker return on that investment, with the prospect of more initiatives, more ambitious initiatives and more impactful initiatives. Continuing to try to push forward a big agenda with a small team will inevitably mean slow progress. Acknowledging that economic development is not a statutory function and the wider budgetary pressures it faces, the Council should look to invest to achieve by dedicating more resources to its economic development team, establish its priorities and set targets that it can reasonably be expected to meet.