

GOING FOR GROWTH

Our 2024 – 2026 Manifesto for Business Growth





ABOUT US

We are Shropshire’s largest member organisation representing businesses from a wide range of sectors. From SME’s to multinationals, we bring businesses together to influence decision makers at all levels of government.

- 700+ Direct Members
- 24 Patrons
- 60+ years, we’ve been helping businesses and individuals grow their network, knowledge, influence and reach

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce is a politically neutral membership organisation which lobbies on general issues facing multiple businesses across Shropshire, as well as providing local businesses with economic information gathered through research and from the wider Chambers of Commerce network.

Our membership and reach provide the opportunity for us to unite the business voice. A collective voice which promotes the local economy and champion the success of our businesses.

Our strength comes from being the leading business representation organisation in Shropshire, rooted by our rural history, and driven by a desire to help all businesses to thrive here.

OUR PATRONS





FOREWORD



Shropshire Chamber proudly and proactively represents hundreds of businesses from across the County. We also work closely with multiple stakeholders, from local authorities to educators. Working with many to ensure that we play a leading role in realising the vision for an economically thriving county that drives economic prosperity, international competitiveness, and inclusive growth that benefits everyone in Shropshire.

Businesses in Shropshire know that it is a great place to do business. The county's rural strengths, industrial heritage and excellent quality of life all combine to create an unparalleled business environment. Our members also recognise how much more Shropshire could achieve if the barriers to growth were removed.

The past few years have seen some of the greatest levels of political and economic uncertainty. These challenges to business have created unwavering levels of uncertainty and complexity, leaving little space for other business critical issues, and achieving business growth. We want to focus on fixing these issues over the next two years, capitalising on the economic potential, and going for growth.

We are passionate about the desire to create growth and achieving this through our five areas of focus;

1. Growth through strong local economies
2. Growth through people, education, skills, and employment
3. Growth through investment in infrastructure and connectivity
4. Growth through International trade
5. Sustainable growth

This document sets out our ambitions and a call to action for policy and decision makers to join us in championing growth and creating the economic conditions for businesses to thrive.

The Chamber is its members. When we speak it is the voice of Shropshire business and when we act, it is done with the strength of hundreds of businesses across the county.

The businesses here are a key part of what makes the county a great place to do business and I would like to personally thank the business community for their continued support and encourage every business in the county to join us in going for growth.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Ross'.

Ruth Ross
Chief Executive Officer



1. GROWTH THROUGH STRONG LOCAL ECONOMIES

The Shropshire economy thrives when business and decision-makers work in partnership. Shropshire has an unparalleled entrepreneurial spirit with a proven track record in start-up success.

This success depends on the growth ambitions of key decision-makers who have the potential to transform our local economy into a regional powerhouse. Businesses across all sectors have innumerable opportunities to help boost local growth and make their mark on the county.

Actions we're calling for:

1 Accelerate Planning Reform

- Develop a faster and simpler planning system that works alongside housing need and that supports businesses to create economic growth and employment land.
- Equip local planning departments with the resources needed to reduce delay, improve decision-making, and deliver better economic growth outcomes.

2 Adjust Business Rates to Encourage Economic Growth

- Reform the business rates system to include annual revaluations and create a system that incentivises growth.
- Create a supportive tax and legislative environment which promotes tax fairness, reducing the burden of future legislative and regulatory red tape.

3 Simplify Public Sector Procurement and Funding

- Publish clearer procurement pipelines and ensure that tenders are realistic to foster collaboration between businesses and local authorities.
- Ensure that funding opportunities, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, continue to support economic growth and are delivered by partners who are on the ground and ready to support businesses.

4 Support Shropshire's Rural Areas to Thrive

- Provide adequate and affordable rural housing stock, maintain vital public service provision in rural areas, and work with on the ground agents to ensure that skills training is accessible across the county.



2. GROWTH THROUGH PEOPLE, EDUCATION, SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT

Skills and labour shortages mean that employers are struggling to recruit. This lack of available talent is resulting in firms unable to fulfill their order books and turn work away.

To remain competitive, businesses need access to a wide range of skilled people and the ability to upskill and re-skill their existing workforce. Employers tell us that they need a skills and immigration system that works for business as well as education providers and that they need additional support in their efforts to recruit, train and retain talented staff at all levels.

Actions we're calling for:

1 Introduce Flexibility into Training

- Provide incentives and grants for businesses that invest in staff training.
- Bring forward the introduction of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement to support retraining and the retainment of an older workforce.
- Ensure that flexible training is suited to delivery across both rural and urban areas and introduce greater flexibility in how the Apprenticeship Levy can be spent.

2 Close Skills Gaps and Shortages by Linking Local Provision to Local Opportunities

- Work with education providers, local authorities, and the business community to identify and tackle skills gaps identified through Local Skills Improvement Plans.

3 Promote Better Support Systems and Networks to Support Individuals into the World of Work

- Place a greater emphasis on careers advice, job seeker support, rapid upskilling and returnships programmes to help employers access new sources of talent.
- Improve careers advice and help businesses to engage with education providers giving young people the right independent guidance on their career options.

4 Extend the Investment in Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs)

- Commit to long term funding that allows education providers to respond to the priorities identified by the private sector properly and adequately.
- Support Employer Representative Bodies to engage businesses through additional marketing and funding investments.



3a. GROWTH THROUGH INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Businesses need a predictable, reliable, and affordable transport system that allows them to move their people, products, and services not just within the county but across the country with ease.

While Shropshire benefits from excellent existing road and rail links, and proximity to major urban areas such as Birmingham and Manchester, we need on-going investment, alongside the delivery of key transport infrastructure projects, to unlock future economic growth.

Actions we're calling for:

1 Continue to Supply Investment into the County's Strategic Roads

- Bring forward investment into the hardest to reach places and develop stronger cross border linkages into Wales including the M54, A5, A49, A41 and the rail network minimising the impact of congestion on business.

2 Increase the Levels of Funding, Investment and Research & Development into Sustainable Low Carbon Transport Solutions

- Support businesses to reduce their carbon footprint and reach net zero through sustainable transport and access to electric vehicle charging points.

3 Prioritise Improvements and Investment into Public Transport and Infrastructure

- Create solutions that work for Shropshire businesses and its population, connecting the hardest to reach areas and populations and ensuring that these solutions are reflective of changes to working patterns and social needs.



3b. GROWTH THROUGH INVESTMENT IN CONNECTIVITY

Digital is a transformative and disruptive force that is permeating through all aspects of business. It results in business ecosystems that produce new products, new services, and enhanced productivity and growth.

When operating in the context of a rapidly changing world, it is crucial that businesses in Shropshire are served by adequate connectivity to conduct their business. Gaps in broadband and mobile connectivity stifle business productivity and competitiveness.

Actions we're calling for:

1 Speed up the Roll-out of Full-Fibre Broadband and Digital Infrastructure

- Focus on the 20% of the country that will require public funding to benefit from full-fibre broadband and prioritise business parks and employment land in each new coverage area.

2 Tackle Poor Mobile Connectivity

- Work with network operators and decision makers to begin eradicating the 'not spots' across Shropshire that exist and speed up the roll out 5G technology across the county.

3 Network and Broadband Providers to Ensure that Shropshire's Rural Areas Receive a Parity of Service

- Ensure that no rural locality, and the businesses that operate there, have a lesser service when compared to urban areas in digital and mobile coverage.
- Create appropriate solutions for premises in rural and urban areas that cannot be supplied by full fibre/suitable 4G signal.



4. GROWTH THROUGH INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Shropshire is world renowned for its expertise in food and drink, agri-tech, and advanced manufacturing however the global landscape has become increasingly turbulent in recent years as businesses continue to navigate trade headwinds and supply chain disruptions.

Despite these turbulences, Shropshire businesses continue to thrive and explore trade avenues globally but more needs to be done to promote Shropshire and Shropshire made goods and services overseas.

Actions we're calling for:

1 Revitalise Trade Promotion Programmes

- Work with delivery partners in raising awareness of and promoting opportunities to trade internationally to Shropshire businesses.
- Work with businesses and local partners to grow the 'Made in Shropshire' brand internationally.

2 Ease and Mitigate the Barriers to Trading with the EU

- Strengthen relations and investment links across the globe, working in co-operation on regulatory and common policy challenges and raising bilateral investment levels.

3 Provide Economic Support to SME's

- Help SME's to capitalise on export opportunities in new and emerging markets working with policy makers to get Shropshire goods and services on the international market.



5. SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Shropshire's economic growth must be underpinned by sustainability.

Businesses are aware of their impact and have begun to factor sustainability and net zero targets into their growth plans.

Businesses across the county know that green innovation and the transition to net zero presents them with opportunities to grow and meet the demand for environmental products and services. They are also consciously aware that economic growth cannot come at the expense of Shropshire's natural capital or the climate.

Actions we're calling for:

1 Support for Businesses to Access Information, Resources and Support to Make Informed Decisions Around Net Zero

- Support businesses across the county to become more informed about how to achieve net zero and how to minimise and mitigate their impact on the environment.

2 Reduction in the Upfront Costs of Carbon Technology

- Provide funding, grants, and finance to encourage greater business investment in carbon reduction and mitigation technologies.
- Work with partners to reduce levels of match funding needed and working with businesses to understand investment and payback periods.

3 A Long-Term National Strategy on Energy Security and Clean Growth

- Work with the local and national partners to ensure that local manufacturing firms and energy intensive users have access to a reliable supply of energy, stable energy prices and a business-friendly tax regime.



NEXT STEPS

1

Shropshire Chamber will collaborate with partners to develop these policy ideas and build capacity for delivery.



2

The Chamber will launch specific campaigns and forums tasked with championing the calls to action within the manifesto, collating member feedback and providing opportunities for collaboration with key partners and decision makers.



3

The Manifesto will be presented to Government, the Opposition Parties, local, regional and national stakeholders as the undivided vision for how Shropshire's potential can be unleashed.



“
Supporting
Shropshire
businesses in
Going for
Growth.”

THANKS TO OUR PATRONS





To find out more about our policy work contact:
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