



The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP  
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local  
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Dear Secretary of State

### A COUNTY DEAL FOR HERTFORDSHIRE – EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

I am writing to you as Leader of Hertfordshire County Council and Chair of the Hertfordshire Growth Board to express our interest in discussing the potential for a County Deal to partner with government in pursuing the levelling up goals that you and the Prime Minister have recently set out.

Hertfordshire is ideally placed to be an early adopter and a flagship area, demonstrating how devolution and levelling up can be pursued at pace in a shire county that demonstrates close collaboration across its two-tier local authority partners. Hertfordshire has a vibrant and growing economy and a clearly defined footprint that is perfectly aligned with its Local Enterprise Partnership.

We would like to discuss with you how a County Deal would help us work closely with you and your officials to create jobs, deliver sustainable, inclusive growth and improve public services across Hertfordshire.

### **About Hertfordshire**

Hertfordshire is a large county with a population of almost 1.2m people with a high degree of alignment around a clearly defined economic area with a strong sense of local identity at county, town and village levels. We have a long history of close and active collaboration between public service partners, voluntary and community service organisations and businesses. We drew extensively on these relationships and approaches to provide a strong and joined up response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

First impressions of Hertfordshire may be of a leafy, well-heeled home counties area, but it is a varied, polycentric county with a diverse combination of market towns, garden cities and post-war new towns, each with their own opportunities and

challenges. We have an enviable economy in many respects but also have inequalities in life expectancy, opportunity and attainment in communities across our county that we are determined to level up and address.

### **Strong leadership and collaborative ambition**

Our governance re-enforces our approach to collaborative working and strong, transparent local leadership. The Hertfordshire Growth Board has matured since its formation in 2018 and it became a statutory Joint Committee in January 2021. It brings together the Leaders of all eleven local authorities in Hertfordshire as well as the chairs of the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership and also our Integrated Care System.

The County Council, Growth Board and its partners have a clear understanding of the specific local problems we want to address and the ambitious long-term aspirations for the people of Hertfordshire. By working together, we will fix our broken housing market, improve health and wellbeing, secure infrastructure, lift up communities at risk of being left behind, support inward investment and deliver on our carbon and net zero commitments.

This common purpose has been a driver for our work, and we have a well-established pan-county programme of deliverable and innovative projects that support Hertfordshire's places and its people. This purpose is underpinned by the collaborative governance of the Hertfordshire Growth Board, which provides enhanced accountability, scrutiny and governance structures, with ongoing countywide support for its work and central co-ordinating role.

We are already delivering Levelling Up priorities across Hertfordshire through the convening effect on local government, further and higher education, health, business and the Local Enterprise Partnership and as evidenced during the pandemic. But we want to do more. Hertfordshire is united with a common purpose: to grow Hertfordshire and the United Kingdom out of this crisis and ensure that no community is left behind.

### **A strong track record of success and inward investment**

The strength of this collaboration has further boosted Hertfordshire's reputation as a great place to invest in. Our economy delivers **£41.57bn** for UK Plc annually<sup>1</sup>. We are home to several globally significant sectors including creative media, film and TV, cell and gene life sciences and advanced manufacturing. These sectors alone have attracted over £4.1bn of new private sector investment in the past 12 months, such as:

- **Hollywood's Sunset Studios** choosing to locate its new **£700m base in Broxbourne**, creating over 4,500 permanent jobs with an estimated contribution of £300m p/a to the local economy;
- **Comcast £3bn investment in Sky Studios Elstree**, creating over 2,000 jobs, while at **Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden**, three new sound stages are being built, providing 83,000 sq. ft. of additional production space;

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<sup>1</sup> (ONS May 2021)

- **GSK** to expand its Stevenage R&D site to create a **£400m campus**, one of Europe's largest life sciences clusters with up to 5,000 high value jobs; and
- **Airbus' £35m investment** in its new **UK space and defence HQ in Stevenage**.

This surge in investor confidence is helping to super-charge the UK's recovery and we intend to fully leverage the economic, social and environmental value from this activity, for Hertfordshire and beyond. We also have a strong local track record in delivering on the public sector support received in recent years, with over £460m <sup>(2)</sup> being invested locally to support Hertfordshire's sustainable growth priorities.

### **Our Sustainable Growth Strategy**

Our growth strategy is bold and ambitious and centred around an innovative programme that will deliver high quality, healthy places that are properly connected and digitally enabled, providing everyone with the opportunity to prosper. Programmes that enable businesses to flourish, to improve health and well-being, for people to acquire skills for the future, and homes they can afford, have over the past three years, been brought together as a coherent whole and are delivering now.

We are already working systematically, and a County Deal would enable us to gear up the work already under way in our two ambitious growth corridors, on our housing delivery pipeline, in our high streets, post-war New Towns and new Garden Communities to deliver faster and with greater certainty.

Growth and delivering net zero has been a catalyst for enhanced joint working in Hertfordshire, but our ambitions do not end there. We are already working collaboratively on a range of local service areas from One Public Estate to shared Building Control, Legal and Audit services and on the delivery of our three Garden Towns, villages and Communities.

We also have key strategic alliances such as the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (focusing on four key climate themes of Carbon, Water, Transport and Biodiversity) and our work with NHS and other partners through our Integrated Care System. We can see huge opportunities for local communities through increased financial resilience in our local government system in Hertfordshire and we want to explore those opportunities further and together with Government.

### **In summary, Hertfordshire is ready to be a trusted partner with Government offering:**

- A compelling fit with the components of place set out by you and the Prime Minister, with clear size, scale, economic geography, history, identity and extensive public service coterminosity;

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<sup>2</sup> LEP – Local Growth Funding of £221m, Housing Infrastructure Grant £171m for Harlow Gilston Garden Town, £37.5m Town Deal for Stevenage, £10.6m Accelerated Housing at Welwyn Hatfield, £23.5m Salix Funding

- Strong local leadership exercised through transparent and politically mature governance structures operating with accountability and scrutiny that empowers local citizens in decision-making, chaired by the Leader of the County Council;
- Total clarity of ambition, purpose and focus around the specific problems we want to address, and an ambitious, innovative programme in place that is already bearing down on those problems;
- An economy that is fostering an eco-system of innovative entrepreneurs, high-growth SMEs and world-leading international corporates including a high proportion of businesses in the low carbon, digital, creative and knowledge-based industries on which the future economic success of the UK depends.

**Key elements of our proposed approach to a County Deal would include:**

- **Financial devolution and certainty**, including powers to retain and increase locally generated income to directly invest in infrastructure that supports our significant housing growth needs, employment connectivity and decarbonisation of new and existing homes and transport in Hertfordshire;
- **Placemaking and housing powers** to plan and deliver strategically our large-scale growth now and in the future and work across the County on super charging our housing delivery rates, delivering sustainable growth, fixing our broken housing market and improving health and well-being;
- **Local control over skills funding** – providing Hertfordshire with the flexibilities to help businesses thrive, offer residents re-skilling and up-skilling opportunities and support a culture of lifelong learning linked to the success of our key sectors. This would also help manage overheating risks in those sectors and build on longstanding strong working relationships between the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, the Department for Work and Pensions and the County Council; and
- **Business and inward investment support** – curating an enhanced ‘arms open’ response to investment and growth in our key sectors
- **Creation of a unified Transport body** – with a wide range of aligned functions, Transport for Hertfordshire will also lead the delivery of the Hertfordshire and Essex Rapid Transit system, a key infrastructure project that delivers economic and housing growth, connectivity, active travel and transport decarbonisation in our county.

A County Deal would provide an excellent opportunity to showcase the power of levelling up for Government and improve life chances for all Hertfordshire residents – many of whom have been badly impacted by the pandemic.

As an early deal area, we can immediately build from the mature, collaborative foundations we have in place and can take a fully integrated whole system approach to tackling the county’s and the country’s key challenges. We have worked closely with your officials and Homes England over the last three years and Hertfordshire’s ambition, potential and commitment are well understood. As you will see below, the ten other Hertfordshire Leaders and the chair of the Local Enterprise Partnership are fully behind this proposal.

I would be delighted to meet with you to set out our proposals in more detail. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

**Richard Roberts**  
**Leader of Hertfordshire County Council, Chair Hertfordshire Growth Board**

Broxbourne Borough Council  
Dacorum Borough Council  
East Herts District Council  
Hertsmere Borough Council  
North Hertfordshire District Council  
St Albans District Council  
Stevenage Borough Council  
Three Rivers District  
Council  
Watford Borough Council  
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council  
Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership