

White Paper: Delivering Devolution for Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland

“On 10 September 2025, Leicestershire Business Voice (LBV) and East Midlands Chamber brought businesses and political leaders together at MIRA Tech Park to debate devolution - resulting in a united call to accelerate decisions to secure our region’s future.”

Executive Summary

Leicester and Leicestershire form the largest economy in the East Midlands; a powerhouse in advanced manufacturing, life sciences, space technology, logistics and financial services. Anchored by three world-class universities and globally recognised enterprise zones such as MIRA Technology Park, Space Park Leicester, Charnwood Campus and Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park (LUSEP), the region is talent-rich and globally connected.

At £24.5 billion GVA, it is already the largest economy in the East Midlands, with an ambition to reach £30.2 billion by 2030 (Leicestershire County Council Monitoring Report 2023–2024). Our region boasts many strengths: a vibrant and diverse population, affordable housing, and a decade of significant expansion in university and technology-based R&D and entrepreneurship, backed by the presence of major multinationals such as 3M, IBM and PepsiCo (LLEP The story of the LLEP 2011-24)). 98.4% of our businesses are SMEs. With the inclusion of Rutland, this economic base would be strengthened even further.

Yet this success story is not without challenges. Leicester and Leicestershire have some of the highest rates of poverty in the country, with levels of deprivation that place it in the top 5% on deprivation indexes and are too often visible nationally only when negative stories break. Fragmented governance, outdated strategies, and a lack of devolved powers and investment risk leaving our region behind. Leicestershire receives the lowest levels of Government funding in the UK and the East Midlands receives the lowest level of Government funding in the UK, per capita.

Devolution is not optional - it is essential, urgent and inevitable. Businesses, the backbone of our economy, must be fully embedded in shaping priorities. Local boundary reform must not delay progress. Devolution must proceed now.

Purpose of the Event

The LBV/East Midlands Chamber event brought together political leaders, business leaders, stakeholders and enterprise zone representatives to:

1. Explore practical steps to accelerate mayoral devolution.
2. Ensure the business community's voice is heard and informs decision-making.
3. Influence decision makers during the devolution process.
4. Identify strategic priorities for the region that could be delivered through a devolved authority.
5. Ensure questions from the business community are taken seriously by our political leaders when creating their plans.

Why Devolution Matters

- **Economic Scale:** Largest economy in the East Midlands, with nationally significant clusters in mobility, life sciences, logistics, space and agri-tech.
- **Competitiveness:** Without devolution, we are disadvantaged compared to neighbouring devolved regions such as the West Midlands, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.
- **Funding:** Devolved areas attract greater public investment – 'No Mayor, No Money' is already the experience elsewhere. Central Government communications, when speaking about the East Midlands, mean only Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, recognising the Strategic Mayoral Authority and nothing else. Devolved areas are already accessing skills budgets, transport settlements and UK Shared Prosperity Fund top-ups. Our region risks missing these benefits.
- **Skills & Talent:** Devolution must align universities, colleges and employers to secure a pipeline of skilled workers.
- **Infrastructure:** Investment in transport, energy, digital and flood resilience is critical to unlock growth.
- **Business Voice:** Business must be embedded in decision-making at all levels to ensure delivery is relevant and impactful.

Principles Agreed by Business & Political Leaders

The following principles set out the joint position of business and political leaders on the region's devolution deal. They reflect a shared commitment to securing powers and investment that will drive growth, competitiveness and sustainability in partnership with Government.

- **Devolution must happen at pace:** Delay will place the region at a lasting economic disadvantage and reduce its ability to compete for Government investment and growth opportunities.
- **Business must have a seat at the table and be central to decision making.** Leaders from across the private sector should shape priorities, influence governance and monitor delivery, ensuring local plans are aligned with national objectives on productivity, skills and innovation.

- **Collaboration is key:** City, county, districts and Rutland must act together to present a single, investable proposition in line with the Government's place-based growth agenda.
- **Boundary reform is a separate issue and must not hold back progress.** Devolution cannot be delayed by local government geography. The priority is to secure powers, resources and accountability without hesitation.
- **Economic leadership must be at the core.** Business and political leaders should jointly drive growth through job creation, investment, competitiveness, sustainability and innovation, aligned with the Government's Growth and Productivity Framework, Net Zero Strategy and priority sectors.

Strategic Priorities

Skills & Employment

- **Align education and training with industry needs** in line with the *Get Britain Working* policy, ensuring provision reflects current and future skills demand.
- **Expand apprenticeships, technical education, and lifelong learning** through targeted investment and stronger employer partnerships.
- **Recognise and embed the third sector as a priority partner** in the skills and employment ecosystem, valuing its reach into communities, ability to engage harder-to-reach groups, and role in delivering training, volunteering and pathways into work.
- **Reduce the number of young people in Leicester and Leicestershire not currently in education, employment, or training (NEETs)** by combining schools, FE/HE, employers, and third sector providers to create early intervention, mentoring and inclusive opportunities.
- **Tackle economic inactivity** by providing tailored support, employability programmes, and health and wellbeing interventions, working with employers, local authorities and voluntary/community organisations to help people re-enter and sustain employment.

Infrastructure & Connectivity

- Upgrade road, rail, EV charging and freight networks.
- Secure energy resilience and digital connectivity.

Access to Funding & Business Support

- Strengthen the business and innovation support offer by investing in the Business Gateway Growth Hub service, Innovation Board to ensure consistency of business support offer across city and county.
- Ringfence and simplify access to grants, investment and innovation funding.
- Launch a 'Business Nursery' model offering mentoring, planning and investment readiness.

Inward Investment & Global Competitiveness

- Promote and present Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland as a unified, investable location.
- Build on international successes from our enterprise zones and tech parks.

Sustainability & Net Zero

- Empower local solutions to climate change, flooding and green growth.
- Support SMEs to decarbonise and innovate.

Business Involvement

We recommend creating an advisory Business Board within the Combined Authority, with representation from SMEs, corporates and enterprise zones. This can help to adopt best practice and keep collaboration at the heart of all we do together. Its remit:

- Co-design devolution priorities.
- Monitor delivery.
- Act as a formal advisory body to the Mayor and Combined Authority.
- Business led central point of access for funding and investment into the business economy.
- Business leaders should have influence in the decision making, governance and investment in the local economy.

Questions from the Business Community

- How will Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland secure equal attention in Whitehall without a Combined Authority Mayor?
- How will the ringfenced £10 million of unspent growth/legacy funds be deployed for immediate impact?
- What unique strengths will we leverage to stand out nationally and internationally?
- What steps will embed businesses in shaping governance and delivery models?
- How will innovation anchors (Space Park, MIRA, Charnwood Campus, LUSEP) be maximised?

Regional Business Perspectives



“Devolution is a critical opportunity to strengthen Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland’s economic future. We support a deal that secures fair investment for our region, ensures a strong voice for local businesses in decision-making, and accelerates delivery on priorities such as skills, infrastructure, innovation, and inclusive growth. LBV is committed to working with political leaders, partners, and businesses of all sizes to shape a devolution settlement that is locally driven, commercially aware, and focused on long-term prosperity for our communities.” – Leicestershire Business Voice

**east midlands
chamber**

Derbyshire | Leicestershire | Nottinghamshire

“Devolution is vital for ensuring Leicester and Leicestershire remain competitive with neighbouring areas that already benefit from mayoral powers. Alongside this, strong business support and the ability to make decisions at a regional level are essential if we are to compete not only across the UK but also internationally. With the right tools and powers, our region can attract greater inward investment, create jobs, and unlock long-term growth opportunities.”

East Midlands Chamber

Endorsements

Political Leaders

We, the undersigned political leaders, commit to supporting the process of mayoral devolution for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, recognising its necessity for accelerating economic growth, investment and innovation. We pledge to work collaboratively, set aside narrow party interests and support a unified, business-led strategy.

Leicestershire County Council

Councillor Dan Harrison
Leader of Leicestershire County Council



Borough and District Councils

Councillor Pip Allnatt
Leader of Melton Borough Council, on behalf of the Borough and District Councils of
Leicestershire



Universities

We, the undersigned University representatives and innovation leaders, commit to aligning with the strategic objectives of a devolved authority and collaborating with the business community to ensure Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland fulfil their economic potential.

De Montfort University

Professor Katie Normington
Vice Chancellor
De Montfort University



Loughborough University

Professor Nick Jennings CB FREng FRS
Vice Chancellor and President
Loughborough University



Loughborough
University

Nick Jennings

University of Leicester

Professor Nishan Canagarajah
President and Vice Chancellor
University of Leicester



Nishan Canagarajah

Enterprise Zones and Innovation Hubs

We, the undersigned enterprise zone representatives and innovation leaders, commit to aligning with the strategic objectives of a devolved authority and collaborating with the business community to ensure Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland fulfil their economic potential.

MIRA Technology Park

Tim Nathan
Managing Director
MIRA Tech Park

MIRATechPark

Tim Nathan

Space Park Leicester

William Wells
Chief Executive Officer
Space Park Leicester

WA Wells



Charnwood Campus

Gosia (Malgorzata) Khrais
Commercial and Marketing Director
Charnwood Campus Science Innovation
and Technology Park

Malgorzata Khrais



Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Partnership

Sally Wilson
Commercial Director
Loughborough University Science
and Enterprise Park

Sally Wilson



Business Support Organisations

We, the undersigned business support organisations, commit to supporting SMEs and the wider business community through coordinated, professional, and non-partisan advice, mentoring and investment readiness programmes.

Leicestershire Business Voice (LBV)

Sue Tilley
Chair
Leicestershire Business Voice

Sue Tilley



East Midlands Chamber

Scott Knowles,
Chief Executive
East Midlands Chamber

Scott Knowles



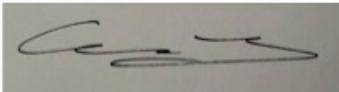
Confederation of British Industry (CBI)

Danielle Gillett
Chair of the East Midlands
CBI Regional Council



Institute of Directors (IoD)

Craig Bentley
Branch Chair
IoD Leicestershire & South East Midlands



Conclusion and Call to Action

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland have the infrastructure, talent and innovation assets to be a leading economic region in the UK. Mayoral devolution provides an opportunity to accelerate growth, strengthen the SME ecosystem and attract investment. Coordinated political leadership, enterprise zones and business support organisations must work together to remove fragmentation, support SMEs and ensure the region is not left behind other East Midlands areas.

Immediate next steps include:

- Development of a strategic pathway and joint submission for government consideration to achieve devolution by 2028.
- All political leaders to attend the Business Board to develop a united voice on the levers needed for economic growth.
- Strengthening business support frameworks.
- Embedding strategic priorities for infrastructure, skills and innovation into the devolved authority framework.
- Ongoing dialogue between political leaders, business stakeholders and enterprise zones to monitor progress and adjust strategy.
- Speaking with one united, loud voice for devolution.
- Engaging constructively with the government to secure a deal as soon as possible.
- Embedding business at the heart of decision-making.
- Working across political and geographic boundaries to put our economy first.

Devolution must happen now. It is not about lines on maps, it is about jobs, investment, competitiveness, and securing a sustainable future for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland within the East Midlands and UK economy.

**Annex A:
Key Milestones for Devolution Recommendations and Local Government
Re-organisation Timeline**

| Date | Milestone |
|------------------------------|---|
| Mid-October 2025 | Close of consultation period |
| Early November 2025 | Finalisation of Combined Authority proposal |
| End of November 2025 | Formal submission to Government |
| December 2025 – January 2026 | Anticipated Government response |

[LLEP Economic Growth Summary Document](#)