



**Leicestershire
Business Voice**

REALISING OUR FULL POTENTIAL

Business Leaders' Perspectives on the Future of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland

DETAILED REPORT

Findings from the Leicestershire Business Voice Business Leaders Supper and
Ambassador Programme Launch

16 April 2026

Convened by Leicestershire Business Voice

The independent voice of business for Leicester and Leicestershire

Foreword from Sue Tilley, Chair of Leicestershire Business Voice

On 16 April 2026, Leicestershire Business Voice brought together business and university leaders, economic development partners and regional stakeholders for an evening with two connected purposes: to launch our Ambassador Programme and to hold an honest conversation about the future prosperity of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

The launch mattered. Our Ambassadors are not simply supporters of LBV. They extend our reach into different sectors and communities, bring intelligence from businesses and help turn discussion into influence and action. I was delighted that Dr Nik Kotecha OBE DL, our first Ambassador, generously hosted and sponsored the evening.

We began with a simple question: how do we realise our full potential? The discussion was direct, constructive and, at times, challenging. It confirmed that our region has exceptional assets, strong businesses, world-class universities and enormous potential. It also confirmed that fragmentation, lack of investment, a weak external identity and the absence of a current shared growth plan are holding us back.

Directors were right to ask for more than a high-level account of the evening. This fuller report therefore retains the richness of the round-table discussions. It captures not only the three central priorities but also the many practical suggestions made by participants. Those ideas should not be lost.

The purpose is not to allocate blame or suggest that LBV can deliver every action. Our role is independent and apolitical. We can convene, connect, champion, influence, collaborate and inform. Above all, we offer a legitimate voice with industry; at grassroots and with real, working insights. Lasting growth will come from mobilising and sustaining more from our businesses and our assets. Lasting progress will require business, local government, universities, MPs, representative bodies and national agencies to work with greater discipline around a small number of shared ambitions.

The context has moved on since April, including the Government's decision on Local Government Reorganisation. The central message, however, is unchanged. We cannot afford to wait for every structure to be settled before preparing projects, agreeing priorities and telling our story with confidence.

I hope this report provides both an honest record of what we heard and a practical basis for collective action.

Sue Tilley

Chair, Leicestershire Business Voice

About this report

This report reflects discussions held under the Chatham House Rule. Participants are not identified and quotations are anonymous. Short quotations have been selected to illustrate the strength and tone of the evidence

The discussion took place on 16 April 2026, before the Government announced its decision on Local Government Reorganisation in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. The subsequent decision changes an important part of the strategic landscape but does not diminish the relevance of the evidence or priority actions.

The evening and the Ambassador Programme launch

The Business Leaders Supper was a focused working event. It combined a short panel discussion with facilitated round tables designed to move from diagnosis to action. Participants considered what is holding the region back, what can be done now without waiting for structural change, what success should look like in three years, and how business leaders can work together more effectively.

The panel brought together Andy Reed OBE, Chair of the Leicester and Leicestershire Business and Skills Partnership; Dr Nik Kotecha OBE DL, LBV's first Ambassador and host and sponsor; Professor Daniel Ladley of the University of Leicester; Eileen Richards MBE; Scott Knowles, Chief Executive of East Midlands Chamber; and Sue Tilley, Chair of LBV. George Oliver of 1284 facilitated the evening.

The launch of the Ambassador Programme was central to this purpose. Ambassadors can help LBV reach beyond formal board structures, listen to a wider range of businesses, bring sector expertise into policy discussions, promote the region's strengths and support delivery of practical initiatives.

LBV

"We have got some great brains in the room. Let's put them to use."

Anonymous participant, Business Leaders Supper

The strategic context

The discussion began with the devolution and investment gap. Participants heard that areas with devolved governance have greater influence over funding, clearer routes into government and stronger capacity to assemble and deliver regional investment programmes. Leicester and Leicestershire, by contrast, has received materially less per-resident investment in key areas and has lacked an equivalent focal point since the closure of the Local Enterprise Partnership.

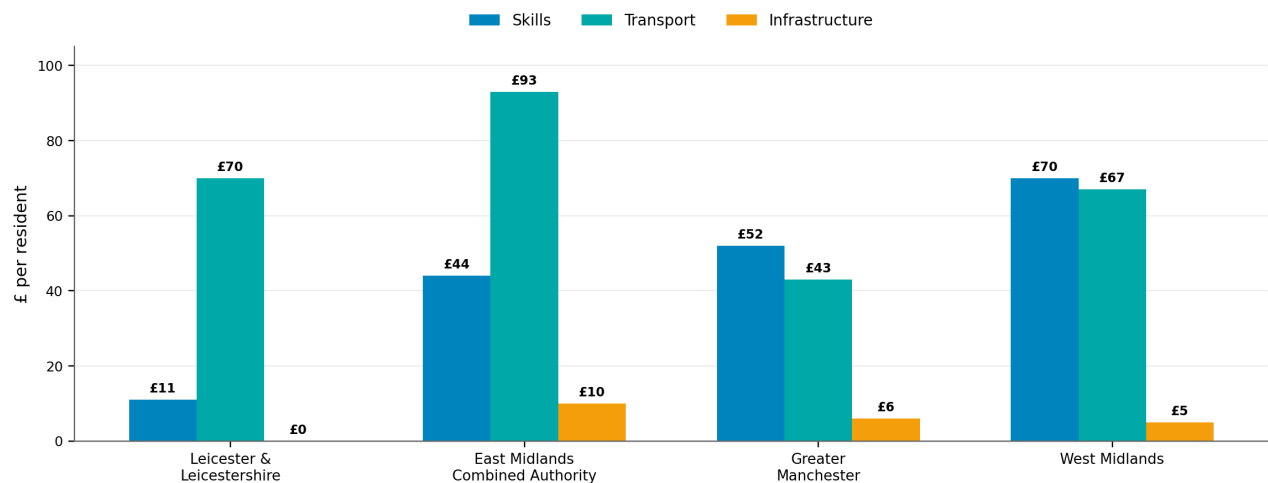


Figure 1. Comparative public investment per resident. Figures used in the event presentation; £ per head.

The figures matter because they translate into real constraints on business growth. Lower skills investment affects recruitment and workforce development. Infrastructure gaps weaken connectivity and development potential. The absence of locally directed innovation funding makes it harder to build a pipeline of growing companies and retain scale-up activity.

Participants were equally clear that funding is not the whole explanation. Regions that secure investment tend to have agreed priorities, credible delivery vehicles, political visibility and projects ready to proceed. The challenge is therefore both external and internal: to argue for fairer investment while improving our own alignment and readiness.

LBV

“If we wait, we *will* fall further behind.”

Anonymous participant, Business Leaders Supper

What we heard: nine connected findings

1. Fragmentation dilutes influence

The strongest and most consistent finding was that the regional ecosystem is fragmented. Many organisations are doing valuable work, but they often pursue related aims separately. This produces duplicated engagement, inconsistent messages and uncertainty for government, investors and businesses about where to turn. Participants did not call for another institution. They called for stronger coordination between existing organisations and a recognised focal point for collective business intelligence and advocacy.

LBV

“Until you have a unified voice, nobody is going to listen.”

Anonymous participant, Business Leaders Supper

2. The region lacks a clear, confident narrative

Participants felt that Leicester and Leicestershire is insufficiently visible nationally and does not explain its strengths consistently. Space, life sciences, advanced manufacturing, logistics, professional services, three universities, enterprise zones and a highly entrepreneurial business base were all cited. Yet these assets are too often described individually rather than as part of a compelling and integrated investment proposition. A stronger narrative must be evidence-based, aligned to national priorities and confident without becoming promotional.

LBV

“If we don’t know our strengths ourselves, we’ve got no chance of convincing anyone else.”

Anonymous participant, Business Leaders Supper

3. There is a leadership and representation gap

Devolved regions benefit from highly visible leaders who can secure direct ministerial attention. Participants recognised that our constitutional position is different, but argued that this makes collective leadership more important, not less. There is a need for credible champions, better engagement with MPs and sustained relationships with government. Large employers and anchor institutions also need to be more visible in shaping and supporting the regional agenda.

4. The economic growth plan needs to be refreshed

Previous plans and strategies provide a strong foundation, but participants perceived a loss of ownership and momentum. They wanted a current plan that connects economic growth, innovation, skills, transport, housing, spatial development, regeneration, inclusion and net zero. The plan should identify a small number of transformational opportunities, backed by an investment pipeline and delivery responsibilities. The process must be collaborative; it is not a document for LBV to produce alone.

LBV

“Why are we waiting for government to ask us to do a growth plan? Why aren’t we just doing one?”

Anonymous participant, Business Leaders Supper

5. The region must sharpen its asks of Government

Participants repeatedly warned against approaching government with a long list. The region needs a small number of specific, costed and deliverable asks that can command visible political, business and academic support. Skills, infrastructure and transport, and innovation and business growth emerged as strong candidates, but the final asks require further evidence and collective agreement.

LBV

“There’s no point going with a list of 25 things. You come out with zero.”

Anonymous participant, Business Leaders Supper

6. Investment readiness is as important as advocacy

Successful places can act when funding becomes available. Participants called for a live pipeline of investable projects with clear sponsors, business cases, sites, delivery capacity and outcomes. Near-term opportunities should sit alongside larger strategic projects. The test is not whether a proposal is attractive in principle, but whether it can be funded and delivered.

7. Skills require earlier and more practical collaboration

Businesses described persistent recruitment difficulties and a lack of visibility among young people about local careers. The discussion covered technical, digital, leadership and social skills, graduate retention and better links between employers and education. SMEs need routes to participate that recognise their limited time. Universities and colleges are essential partners, but the offer must be easier for businesses to navigate.

8. Innovation assets need to work as a connected system

The area has distinctive assets, including Space Park Leicester, MIRA Technology Park, Charnwood Campus, enterprise zones and university research and facilities. Participants wanted these strengths mapped, connected and presented as an accessible ecosystem. The objective is to help businesses find support, strengthen collaboration across sites and build propositions capable of attracting national and private investment.

9. Business engagement must lead to visible outcomes

Participants were wary of consultation without follow-through. Businesses want practical value, a clear reason to contribute and evidence that their input changes decisions. This requires feedback, ownership, measures of progress and continued communication. The Ambassador model offers LBV a practical way to extend reach and sustain engagement.

Three priority actions emerging from the evening

The detailed suggestions converge around three central priorities. These are not intended to replace the wider action framework. They provide the organising structure through which the wider ideas can be taken forward.

1

Refresh the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Economic Growth Plan

Create a shared, current and investment-ready framework, built with business, local government, universities and economic partners.

2**Agree three clear Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland-wide asks of Government**

Focus the region's influence on a small number of evidence-based, fundable priorities with visible support across sectors.

3**Broker a stronger collective business voice across the region**

Create a practical mechanism for business organisations and leaders to align intelligence, messaging and advocacy.

Priority 1: Refresh the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Economic Growth Plan

The region needs one current framework that explains where growth will come from, connects policy areas and converts ambition into investable propositions. Existing evidence and previous strategies should be used, not discarded. The refresh should be led collaboratively and should establish clear ownership for implementation and review.

- Agree scope, sponsorship and governance across local government, business and universities.
- Refresh the evidence base and map assets, sector strengths, constraints and opportunities.
- Align the plan with the national Industrial Strategy and departmental priorities.
- Identify two or three transformational opportunities to act as a catalyst for change and a supporting pipeline of near-term projects.
- Set measurable outcomes for productivity, investment, jobs, skills, inclusion and place.
- Publish responsibilities, milestones and a regular progress report.

Priority 2: Agree three clear LLR-wide asks of Government

Three asks will only be influential if they are precise. Each should describe the problem, the intervention required, the investment or policy change sought, the delivery mechanism and the benefit to government as well as to the region. The asks should be tested with businesses and delivery bodies before political engagement begins.

- Use the evidence from the refreshed growth plan and funding disparity analysis.
- Test the emerging focus on skills, infrastructure and transport, and innovation and business growth.
- Ensure each ask is specific, fundable and supported across city, county and districts.
- Prepare a common briefing for MPs, ministers, civil servants and regional partners.
- Run a sustained campaign rather than a single meeting or letter.

Priority 3: Broker a stronger collective business voice

LBV's independence and apolitical position give it a useful convening role. The objective is not to subsume other organisations or claim sole representation. It is to create a disciplined way for business bodies, sector leaders and anchor employers to share intelligence, identify common ground and speak together when it matters.

- Convene representative organisations around a simple memorandum of cooperation.
- Use LBV Ambassadors to extend sector reach and gather current business intelligence.
- Agree when organisations speak collectively and when they retain their own voice.
- Create a shared evidence bank, message set and calendar of government engagement.
- Include SMEs, major employers, universities and the voluntary and community sector where relevant.
- Report back to participating businesses on progress and outcomes.

From discussion to action

A tangible outcome already underway

The evening has already influenced practical activity. Work to build the wider case for devolution and fair investment is under way, and East Midlands Chamber has begun engagement with local MPs, including meetings led by Scott Knowles. Partners are therefore already building understanding, aligning messages and strengthening the region's case. Further news and updates will be shared as this work progresses.

The role of LBV and its Ambassadors

LBV should be ambitious about the contribution it can make while remaining realistic about its remit and resources. We can convene, connect, champion, influence, collaborate and inform. We should not imply that we own the region's growth plan, control public investment or speak for every organisation.

- Convene business organisations and leaders around shared priorities.
- Gather current intelligence through members, Ambassadors and focused round tables.
- Provide an independent business perspective to civic and national decision-makers.
- Champion regional assets, successful businesses and investable opportunities.
- Support partners to develop shared evidence and communications.
- Track commitments arising from this report and maintain momentum.

Detailed action framework

The following framework retains the range of practical suggestions made during the evening. It is deliberately broader than the three headline priorities. Potential leadership is indicative and will require discussion and agreement. The timing reflects urgency, not a commitment made on behalf of any organisation.

Theme	Suggested action	Potential leadership	Timing
Collective voice	Convene LBV, East Midlands Chamber, Federation of Small Businesses, Institute of Directors and other representative bodies around shared intelligence and agreed messages.	LBV to broker; partners to co-design	Immediate
Collective voice	Create a regular mechanism for businesses of different sizes and sectors to identify common priorities, rather than relying on one-off consultation.	LBV Directors and Ambassadors	0-6 months
Influence Dialogue	Agree a sustained engagement plan for MPs, ministers and senior civil servants, supported by consistent evidence and messages.	Business and civic partners	0-6 months
Influence	Identify credible regional champions and equip them with a short, common briefing.	Coalition partners	0-6 months
Government asks	Select three specific and fundable asks, with clear outcomes, costs, delivery routes and evidence of regional support.	Business, civic and university leaders	0-9 months
Government asks	Test the asks against national Industrial Strategy, spending and departmental priorities before launch.	Policy and economic partners	0-9 months
Growth plan	Refresh the economic growth plan using existing evidence rather than starting again, and establish clear ownership for maintaining it.	Local government with business and universities	0-12 months
Growth plan	Integrate innovation, skills, transport, housing, land, regeneration, inclusive growth and net zero into one coherent framework.	Growth plan partnership	0-12 months
Growth plan	Identify two or three transformational opportunities alongside near-term, deliverable projects.	Growth plan partnership	0-12 months
Investment readiness	Build and maintain a prioritised pipeline of investment-ready projects, including sponsors, business cases, delivery capacity and match funding.	Local authorities and delivery partners	0-12 months
Pre Investment mobilisation	Map where the region can act now without waiting for devolution or structural change.	LLBSP and partners	Immediate
Baseline Innovation	Map and connect the region's innovation assets, facilities, expertise and business support so that companies can navigate them more easily.	Universities, enterprise zones and business partners	0-9 months
Innovation Investment	Develop propositions around recognised strengths including life sciences, space, advanced manufacturing, logistics and professional services.	Sector and place partners	0-12 months
Skills	Create stronger routes between employers, schools, colleges and universities, including earlier exposure to local careers.	Education and business partners	0-12 months
Skills	Improve visibility of local vacancies, placements, graduate opportunities and pathways into priority sectors.	Employers and education partners	0-12 months
Skills	Ensure future skills planning addresses leadership, digital and social skills as well as technical shortages.	Skills partnership	0-12 months
Identity	Develop a confident regional narrative that explains the area's distinctive strengths and future ambition in plain language.	Communications coalition	0-6 months
Identity	Create a coordinated programme of success stories, business case studies and investable opportunities for national audiences.	LBV Ambassadors and partners	Ongoing
Identity	Use the neutral, white-label devolution campaign platform as a shared vehicle for evidence and advocacy.	East Midlands Chamber and campaign partners	Immediate

Theme	Suggested action	Potential leadership	Timing
Business participation	Engage more major employers and anchor institutions while ensuring SMEs have practical routes to contribute.	LBV, Chamber and partners	Ongoing
Business participation	Use LBV Ambassadors to extend reach, gather intelligence and convene sector or issue-based discussions.	LBV	Immediate
Local economy	Encourage local procurement, supply-chain visibility and stronger business-to-business connections.	Anchor institutions and business bodies	0-12 months
Regeneration	Explore flexible uses for vacant premises, incentives for independent businesses and learning from successful city-centre interventions elsewhere.	Local authorities and property partners	0-18 months
Delivery	Publish a small shared scorecard covering investment secured, projects advanced, engagement, skills outcomes and business participation.	Coalition partners	Within 6 months
Delivery	Review progress regularly and communicate what has changed as a result of collective action.	LBV and partners	Quarterly

What success could look like in three years

- A refreshed and actively used economic growth plan with clear ownership and an investable project pipeline.
- Three agreed regional asks receiving coordinated support from MPs, business, universities and local government.
- A functioning collective business mechanism that can respond quickly and credibly to policy and investment opportunities.
- Greater national recognition of the region's strengths in life sciences, space, advanced manufacturing, logistics and professional services.
- Improved access to skills, infrastructure and innovation investment, with transparent monitoring of progress.
- Stronger employer engagement with schools, colleges and universities and clearer career pathways for local people.
- More visible participation from major employers, SMEs and anchor institutions.
- Regular public evidence that collaboration has led to decisions, funding or projects that would not otherwise have happened.

Conclusion

The evening was not a negative reaction. It was a clear-eyed assessment of a region with considerable strengths that is not yet converting them into sufficient influence, investment or shared confidence.

The three priority actions provide focus. The detailed action framework preserves the richness of the discussion and shows that progress can begin now. Some actions require government decisions, but many depend on choices within our own control: to align, prepare, engage, communicate and follow through.

The challenge is to move from fragmented activity to purposeful collaboration, from long lists to clear priorities, and from discussion to visible delivery. Leicestershire Business Voice is ready to play its part.

Acknowledgements

Leicestershire Business Voice thanks every business and university leader, Director, Ambassador and regional stakeholder who contributed openly and constructively. We are particularly grateful to Dr Nik Kotecha OBE DL, LBV's first Ambassador, for hosting and sponsoring the evening; to the panel members for setting the context; and to George Oliver of 1284 for facilitating the discussion.