

Marches Forward Partnership

Vision and ways of working

August 2023



Summary

- We are a ground breaking Partnership covering English and Welsh neighbouring councils and based on shared interests and common issues that cross national boundaries.
- We will join forces to apply for funding from government on major projects to benefit the Marches region – the rural economy and green growth are top of this agenda.
- We will retain our own local authority identity and independence, continuing to deliver services to residents and businesses as we do now.
- We will work together, as the Marches Forward Partnership, where there is mutual benefit, however we will not be a legal entity and there are no regulatory frameworks.
- There is no cost implication and nothing stopping any of us working with other authorities or partners now or in the future.
- Our aim is to increase overall government investment into the Marches, unlocking millions of pounds for agreed initiatives.

Our Goals

A Marches Cross Border Strategic Partnership provides a flexible umbrella framework for joint working

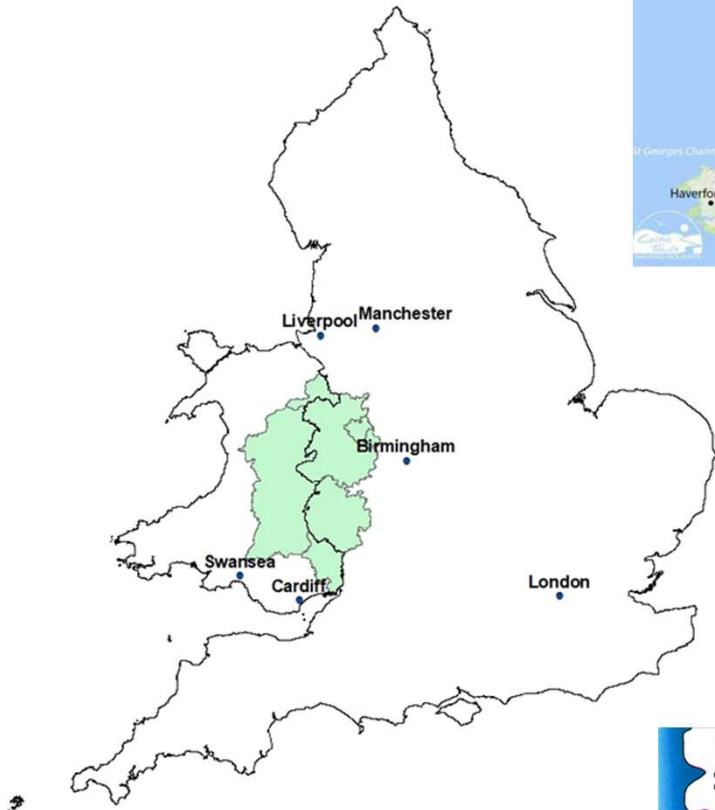
Such an approach supports us in driving the best deal for our geography

It helps us to deliver services that respond to how our area actually functions

It enables us to unlock additional value using our unique cross border location

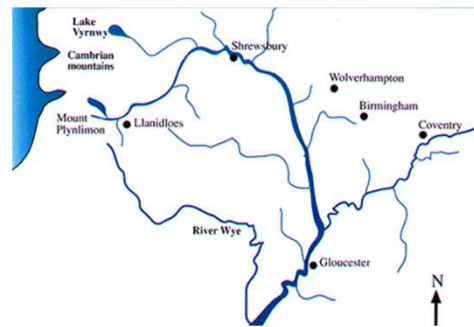
It provides an open basis for us to collaborate and push the boundaries on what is possible for the area to shape and deliver the best short, medium and long term future

Location of the Combined Area



Our geographical profile

- Local authority areas which are contiguous, straddling 80% of the English/Welsh border.
- Combined character which is predominantly rural in nature.
- Significant uniting assets eg Offas Dyke, the River Severn Basin (includes Wye) and the Shropshire Hills AONB.
- Shared transport routes eg M54/A5, A49 and Heart of Wales and Cambrian rail lines



Our functional profile

Travel to Work- commuting to the other local authorities within the area accounts for approaching half of all commuting in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Powys.

Retail- Shared retail centres and access to specialist services

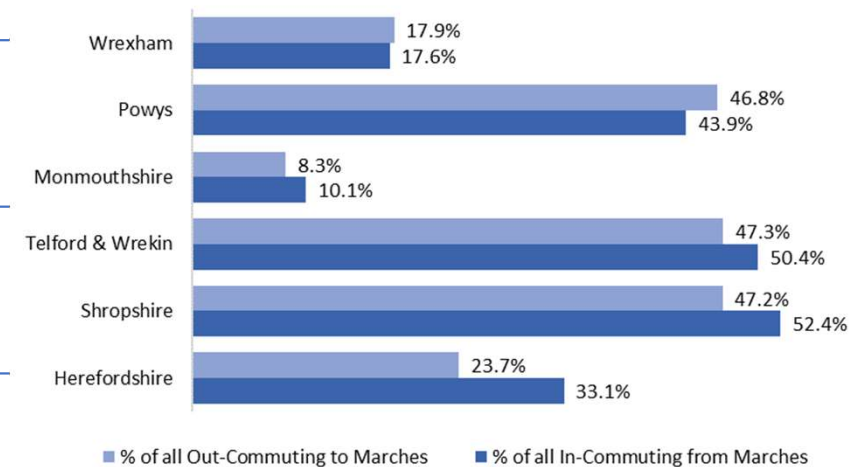
Education- significant cross border movement for education and skill development

Business Support- use of Marches Growth Hub for Mid Wales business support

Tourism & Leisure- important cross border nature based and place based tourism activity between England and Wales

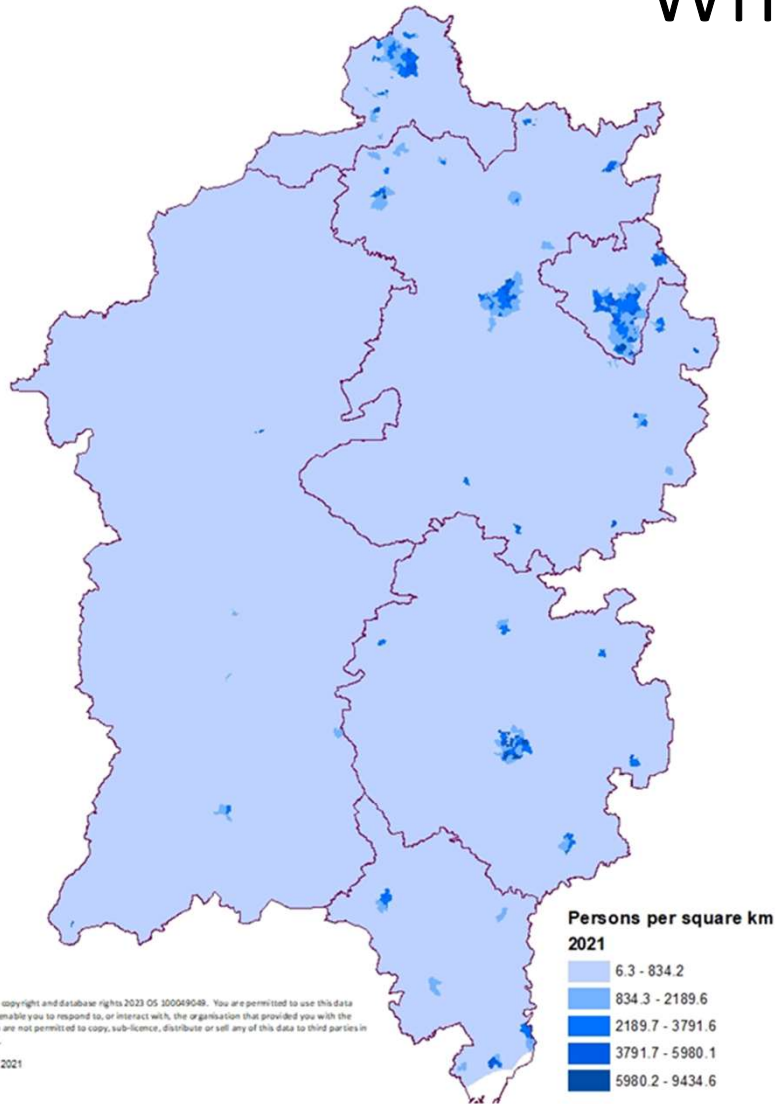
Healthcare pathways for patients – shared acute and specialist health infrastructure and a significant flow of patients to Shrewsbury, Gobowen, Telford and Hereford hospitals)

Proportion of Commuting to Combined Area



Population Density

What binds us with common purpose?



Rurality (population density 0.9 people per hectare)- **longer and more expensive access to services**

Ageing population (more than 30% of the population 65+ by 2043) – **changing service demands, especially the provision of adult social care, and a squeezing of the available labour force.**

Low levels of productivity (approx. 25% lower than UK average) - **impacted by older population, net out-commuting and the sector mix in the area**

Low employment growth (below national levels by 2031)- **growth is concentrated in a few urban areas but very muted in the more rural areas.**

Costly and challenging connectivity (fewer than 40% of premises in Shropshire, Monmouthshire and Powys can access Gigabit infrastructure) - **infrastructure is more costly and more challenging to deliver.**

What is our unique offer?

- **‘The Gateway’ between England and Wales** providing a distinctive cross border framework for Union Connectivity.
- A significant rural economy and **crucial food production region for UK plc**, providing security and diversity for UK food sovereignty .
- The **‘green lung’ providing mobility between major UK conurbations**: Birmingham (UKs second largest city) and Cardiff (capital and largest city of Wales).
- **A growth region, providing positive potential** following the effects of Covid19 and for the UKs transition into recovery.
- A strong rural region providing **a platform for ‘green growth’** with national and international trading potential .

What we see as the benefits

Economic Uncertainty and Untapped Potential

As a collective we:

- Focus on our geography and maximising our potential
- Provide ourselves with the right tools for effective service delivery within each local authority
- Understand and work together to attract the right investment eg for critical infrastructure

A flexible Strategic Partnership

As a collective we:

- Understand and innovate to address the needs of our rural communities
- Harness the value of our shared rural assets
- Align policy and investment drivers to obtain the best from cross border ambitions

Focus on innovation and resilience

As a collective we:

- Understand future trends and service demands across our functional area
- Focus on where collaboration adds the greatest value
- Share learning and best practice

Cabinet Agreements Sept 23- Memorandum of Understanding

- Representing spirit of co-operation and joint working between the local authorities
- Basis for operating as a collective
 - maximise efficient service delivery
 - attract investment
 - positively impact the area and benefit local communities
- Not constraining individual activities or constituent partnerships
- Not legally binding or involve any formalised governing structure
- Overseen by Strategic Board comprising all Leaders, with rotating Chair
- 18 month review with aim to evolve through implementation and learning

Anticipated signing of MOU - November 2023

Out joint management structure



Our joint delivery structure



Our initial areas of focus

- **Data, Evidence and Research:** Leveraging joint intelligence and research expertise to improve the quality of life for our rural, cross border communities through sharing information and carrying out research.
- **Nature, Energy and Climate Adaptation:** Working together to identify and collaborate on strategic scale opportunities based around our high quality natural environment, addressing current and future resilience challenges in relation to climate change and nature recovery.
- **Transport and Digital Transformation:** Working together to improve rural connectivity, to level up access to jobs, education and opportunity and bring mutual benefits for our neighbouring areas.
- **Sustainable Communities:** Working together on the development of sustainable communities, creating a social infrastructure offer which realises the growth and sustainability of the rural economy and supports our residents, employers and users of our geography.
- **Food, Rural Development and Visitor Economy:** Working together to identify opportunities for closer collaboration which encourages the economic growth of our rural economy, developing and promoting our unique offer.
- **Government and Strategic Relations:** Working together on strategic communications to raise the regional, national and international profile of our area.

What we think this could mean

1. Nature, Energy and Climate Adaptation

Joint work to:

- align climate change, nature recovery and green infrastructure plans across England and Wales into a single strategic framework for rural growth and environmental investment.
- develop a cross border energy masterplan, exploring cross border EV hubs and nodes, hydrogen production and carbon removal

2. Transport and Digital Transformation

Joint work to:

- improve cross border movements to reduce congestion and improve traffic flows
- improve active travel and deliver bus service improvement plans

3. Health, Housing and Skills

Joint work to:

- develop a cross border skills offer, including green skills and a Centre of Excellence for Climate Adaptation
- expand the existing Marches Growth Hub model across borders to extend the reach of business support

4. Food, Rural Development and Visitor Economy

Joint work to:

- develop joint approaches to tourism product development and destination management.
- explore and support local food supply chains, including identifying opportunities to support innovation and clustering in the food sector.

What we expect from each other

- Combining skills, roles and responsibilities to share evidence of:
 - local needs and future projected needs
 - strategies and targets
 - current and future projects
 - investment pipelines and plans.
- Developing a shared understanding of common areas of interest and opportunities for joint working
- Identifying short term 'no regrets' actions that add value through our cross border collaboration.
- Acting innovatively to develop medium to longer term opportunities for joint working that unlock investment into the area and deliver greater benefits across the Marches.
- Working as a collective to support identified infrastructure projects and to accelerate or enhance delivery, wherever possible.
- Sharing best practice and learning across our work.
- Piloting and developing new ways of joint working that optimises benefits for our local communities.