

MIDLANDS MATTERS ISSUE 28



MIDLANDS ENGINE
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The map shows the Midlands region with various cities and transport routes. Key locations include Stoke-on-Trent, Derby, Nottingham, Lincoln, Leicester, Coventry, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Worcester, Hereford, and Nottingham. Transport routes include H2, Motorways, and A Roads. A key identifies symbols for University, Airport, H2, Motorways, and A Roads.



A message from our Chairman, Sir John Peace

Reflecting on 2022 as it draws to a close is a task that requires perhaps more fortitude this year than anticipated. The cost-of-living crisis is impacting all our communities and hitting our most vulnerable the hardest. Rising energy costs are cause for major concern for businesses large and small. And we're still feeling the effects of the pandemic – in the health of our people and our economy, and in the development of our young people and securing their futures.

2022 has also been marked by the passing of Queen Elizabeth II, with reflection on her remarkable life and reign bringing with it sadness but also great pride, both in Her Majesty and the whole country.

It is understandable that the challenges this year has brought are weighing heavily on people's shoulders. But our partners have been instrumental in many high-profile events – including the Commonwealth Games and the continuation of Coventry UK City of Culture – that have lifted us up by celebrating and showcasing the strengths of our region alongside investing in a long-term legacy.

Over the course of the last 12 months, I have had the great pleasure of meeting and speaking with many business owners, local authority leaders, community champions, partners and MPs putting their all into our region. Witnessing the continued commitment to our shared priorities and enthusiasm for what we can achieve together in partnership, next year and into the future, has filled me with a great deal of optimism.

The Midlands has long been a region that seizes the opportunities of each new age with ingenuity and enterprise – and this spirit is still as strong here as ever. This year, there are many successes to be proud of as a partnership, as well as exciting new developments and insights that are helping to sharpen our focus on recovery and growth.

Launched as the keystone of our partnership's involvement at the UK Real Estate Infrastructure Investment Forum (UKREiIF) in May, the Midlands Investment Portfolio is a vital tool in our collaborative efforts to drive inward investment. Taken together, it is estimated the current opportunities could support or create a staggering 220,000 jobs and deliver more than £33bn in Gross Development Value. And this is just the starting point for a resource that will be continually updated as new opportunities come to light.

Alongside communicating our whole spectrum of strengths, this year has highlighted the need to enable the public sector to create the right environments for the private sector to invest, at pace. The momentous agreement to devolve power to the UK's first Mayoral Combined County Authority in the East Midlands is a huge step towards this goal and the Midlands Engine partnership stands ready to assist the new authority with the task of levelling up by continuing to foster true pan-regional collaboration.

Another transformative advancement for our region this year has been signalled by the decision to locate the world-leading STEP prototype fusion energy plant in West Burton in Nottinghamshire. More than 200 regional partners have shown their commitment to green energy in the Midlands Engine Ten Point Plan for Green Growth and West Burton will be a flagship project showcasing the region's innovation on a national and international scale. It will also play a crucial role in boosting local and regional economic activity, high-quality job creation and productivity in an area that has long suffered from underinvestment.

A further boost to the region's green energy ecosystem is the success of Transport for West Midlands' bid to the government's Zero-emission Buses Regional Area (ZEBRA) fund. Adding to the 20 hydrogen double deckers already operating in Birmingham, the 124 new buses enabled by the £30m grant will mean the region is home to the largest hydrogen bus fleet in the UK. Add to that the positive ripple effects feeding into the development of hydrogen technologies, supply chains, and skills across the whole Midlands and the acceleration towards the achievement of the region's strategic aims around hydrogen is hugely significant.

One of our partnership's core messages this year has been that levelling up needs to happen across sectors and industries. Linking up geographies, skills and technologies requires investment in physical and digital infrastructure, because better connectivity means more jobs, real competitive advantage for our

region on the world stage and accelerated growth. And so this year, despite the challenges of changes in Cabinet, we have been able to deepen our relationships with MPs, Ministers and Shadow Ministers, and we are undertaking an exercise in collaboration with partners to understand now we can work with government to create the right policy environment for pan-regional economic growth.

The Midlands Engine partnership is also acutely aware of the inextricable link between economic prosperity and the health and wellbeing of the population. If our region's growth is to be truly inclusive, with opportunities not undermined by poor health outcomes, then levelling up must mean tackling the health inequalities which are so persistent in the Midlands. Our advocacy work in partnership continues to make the case for investment in our region across this and other sectors, and this year has contributed towards securing £4m for the extension of the ground-breaking Mental Health and Productivity Pilot, a collaboration of Midlands universities, local authorities and experts from Mind - plus a further £2m from the ESRC awarded to Warwick University for ongoing research in this area.

The average healthy life expectancy for both men and women in the Midlands is an average of two years shorter than the national average and 1 in 13 adults in our region has received a diagnosis of diabetes – the highest of any region in England. Alongside suggested policy interventions, the Diabetes Blueprint – published in April of this year in collaboration with our partnership – showcases some of the innovative work already underway in our region as a globally leading centre for health, MedTech and life sciences to improve outcomes for people living with health inequalities and how this can support economic productivity and improved quality of life for communities.

The Midlands has the ability to be a powerful force – a shining example for the rest of England and the whole of the UK. Not least when it comes to achieving economic growth and prosperity for our communities through truly collaborative partnership. It is the hard work, innovation, determination and ingenuity of our partners that make the Midlands Engine what is it and we will continue harnessing that phenomenal, combined energy to accelerate growth in our region into 2022 and beyond.

Season's greeting and wishing you a prosperous and healthy new year.



Sir John Peace
Chairman, Midlands Engine



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