

# Bedford Town Investment Plan

## Section 1

Bedford Town Deal Board

Bedford Borough Council



**Prepared for:**

Bedford Town Deal Board & Bedford Borough Council

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## Executive Summary

Bedford is a town of rich history with a diverse population of many nationalities, located at the heart of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc (Ox-Cam Arc). Its opportunities and ambitions have shaped the vision for Bedford to become:

*“A thriving town which offers a high-quality experience for residents and visitors; celebrates heritage, culture, diversity and technology; and is a location of choice for entrepreneurs and businesses driving sustainable economic growth.”*

This vision is underpinned by five objectives which aim to address needs and capitalise on long term opportunities for the benefit of Bedford and its residents:

- 1 - Achieving a connected town centre which links existing assets while preserving heritage and uniqueness of Bedford, and provides a flow-through experience
- 2 - Diversifying the town centre experience by encouraging new uses, supporting the arts and culture offer to boost dwell time from residents and visitors
- 3 - Enhancing technology and digital connectivity by providing full fibre broadband
- 4 - Enhancing connectivity and accessibility aligned with clean growth
- 5 - Elevating skills to ensure residents benefit from opportunities

Three cross-cutting themes are at the core of the vision and objectives which will be vital to the success of the Town Investment Plan: partnership working to embrace opportunities, town centre resilience and recovery, and inclusive growth.

In order to deliver on this vision, we ask for £24.995m from the Towns Fund to deliver an ambitious package of investments which will support growth and resilience in Bedford, while positioning the town for significant future opportunities presented by the Ox-Cam Arc and East West Rail. The investment is sought for a package of seven projects:

**Station Quarter:** to redevelop and regenerate the area around Bedford Midland Station which seeks to capitalise on the arrival of East West Rail in Bedford, including delivery of new public spaces and community uses, as well as new station approaches designed to promote and prioritise sustainable travel modes, cycling and walking.

**Midland Road Regeneration:** to transform the key gateway from the railway station into the town centre and invest in shopfront improvements along the route to create a vibrant corridor.

**St Paul's Square Public Realm:** to increase vibrancy and help promote Bedford as a destination by improving public spaces in the town centre, enhancing visitor and shopper experience, while providing the infrastructure to support outdoor performances and the arts & culture sector.

**Transporting Bedford 2030:** to improve two key junctions in Bedford (John Bunyan Statue and Greyfriars junctions) ensuring greater accessibility and safer movements for cyclists and

pedestrians, accelerating a local development scheme, and relieving pinch points on the transport network.

**Pedestrian and Cycling Infrastructure:** deliver a package of walking and cycling network improvements, including further development of the 'Green Wheel' of routes around the town and cycle links to Bedford Midland Station.

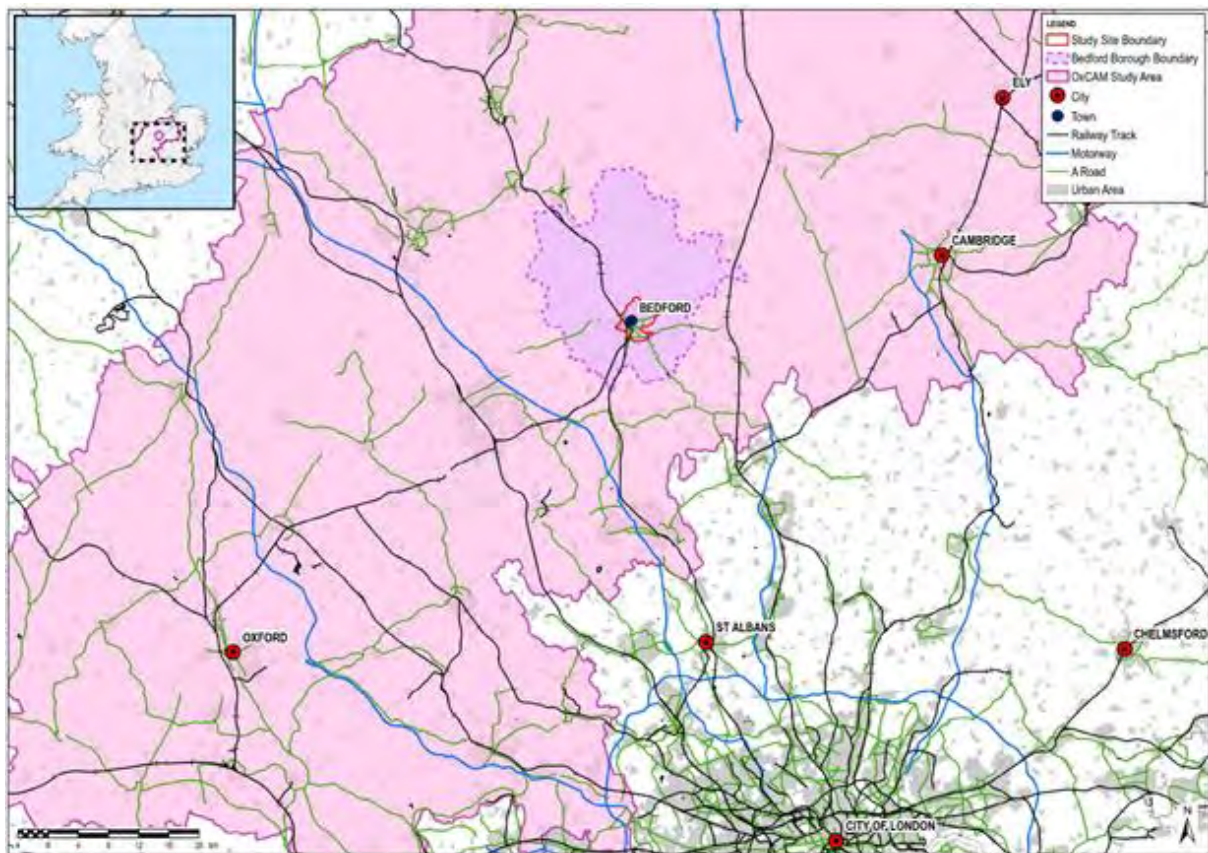
**Health Science and Digital Skills Centre:** to establish an advanced digital and scientific skills offer in Bedford, generating an additional 250 learners each year as well as benefitting existing students. The investment will enable the curriculum to be extended to degree, sub-degree and advanced levels, so that existing students can progress further and achieve higher levels of skill in areas where employers say there is a need.

**Bedford Full Fibre Broadband:** to facilitate full fibre infrastructure roll-out across the urban areas of Bedford by a private provider, leveraging in a significant amount of private sector investment. The Towns Fund revenue ask will accelerate the private investment through increasing delivery capacity at Bedford Borough Council.

# 1. The Bedford Context

Bedford is strategically located, well-connected both by road and rail with excellent access to the strategic road network and railway lines. Bedford is located at the heart of the Oxford to Cambridge Arc (Ox-Cam Arc), an area of significant economic potential to become “an economic asset of international standing”<sup>1</sup>. Bedford’s businesses benefit from the ability to access capabilities and services from a group of high-value research universities, including the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Cranfield. Several upcoming major infrastructure projects will further improve the town’s connectivity to these research centres such as East West Rail and the A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet scheme.

**Figure 1-1: Bedford’s strategic location**



## 1.1 Bedford Town Deal Area

The Bedford Town Deal Area (TDA) boundary is defined to address the existing challenges that may pose constraints on future growth and unlock economic potential within the town. Although the interventions in the Town Investment Plan will be within the identified TDA, the impacts of these interventions will aim to bring benefits across a wider area reflective of Bedford’s role as an employment and service centre for the borough and its surrounding areas. A map of the TDA is provided in Figure 1-2.

<sup>1</sup> MHCLG (2019) The Oxford-Cambridge Arc: Government ambition and joint declaration between Government and local partners

**Figure 1-2: Map of Bedford Town Deal Area**

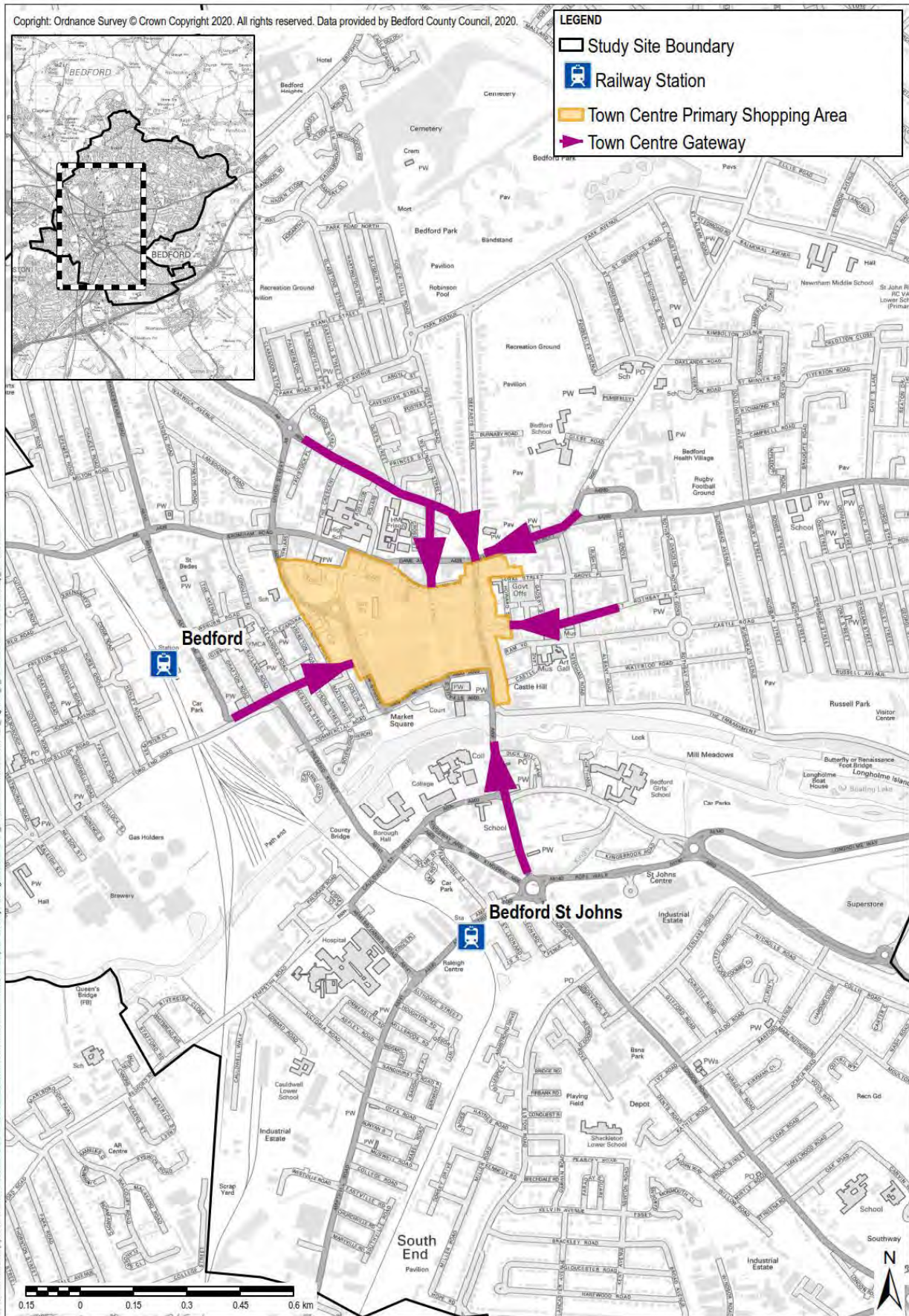
The TDA represents the Office for National Statistics' area boundary for Bedford with the exclusion of Biddenham. It has also been adjusted to incorporate Bedford Midland Station which is a key area of opportunity. The boundary borders the A421 to the south. The River Great Ouse bisects the town, with cultural facilities predominantly clustered within a Cultural Quarter close to the river on the north side. The town centre and its surroundings also contribute the majority of the town's retail and office space. Bedford Midland Station is located close to the western boundary of the TDA, while Bedford Hospital and Bedford College are located close to the river on the southern side.

The key town centre gateways in Bedford are presented in Figure 1-3 and include Mill Street, Harpur Street, The Broadway/ Tavistock Street, Midland Road, St. John's Street and St Peter's Street. These areas set out a potential direction for growth, due to being relatively underused, lower density or of lower quality than elsewhere in the town and are identified in the Local Plan<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Bedford Borough Council (2020); Bedford Local Plan 2030



Figure 1-3: Town Centre Gateways into Bedford



## 1.2 Challenges

Bedford faces familiar challenges with the downturn of traditional retail which is posing a threat to traditional town centres across the United Kingdom. Residents and visitors are increasingly seeking higher quality environments with a culture, leisure and public realm offer, however, poor physical connectivity between assets in Bedford means this is currently lacking. These issues have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis which has further exposed structural challenges within the local economy including prevalence of low skills and productivity.

### Poor synergy between Bedford's key assets

Bedford suffers from poor pedestrian linkages which restricts visitor movement between its key assets such as the town centre, the river, the railway station and Cultural Quarter. The gateways referred to earlier are of vital importance in stimulating the flow of people to and from the town centre. Some of the key gateways into the town centre suffer from issues such as crime, pollution and largely unattractive building structures compared to the rest of the town centre. Midland Road, Greyfriars and St Paul's Square are well used by pedestrians, but the narrow footways, lack of crossing points, high traffic flows and street clutter combine to create a poor quality pedestrian environment in which ease of movement for pedestrians is restricted. Areas of public realm in the town centre are also in need of improvement, with stakeholder engagement and public consultation consistently identifying some of these public spaces as being run down, dated and in need of modernisation. The poor condition of the gateways and public spaces in the town centre can be seen as a contributory factor in the decline in footfall seen on Bedford's streets in recent years: since 2017, town centre footfall has been declining, and as a result of COVID-19, footfall declined by 60% in June 2020 when compared to the year before<sup>3</sup>.

Although within a national context Bedford is able to benefit from its strategic location, at a local level Bedford suffers from congestion on the major approaches to the town centre, placing constraints on growth. Bedford Borough Council identified several pinch points which make vehicular travel across the town particularly difficult. This includes two five-arm mini roundabouts at the Midland Road/ Ford End Road/ Prebend Street junction and the St Johns Street/ Rope Walk/ London Road/ Ampthill Road/ Kingsway junction respectively. These pinch points as well as others located around the town also deter cyclists as they are often required to cycle on the road due to limited pavement or carriageway width. This raises concerns about safety of cycling in Bedford and ultimately encourages potential cyclists to drive, cyclically worsening congestion.

Within the town centre, some of Bedford's key cultural and heritage assets such as Riverside Bedford, the Corn Exchange and St Paul's Square are in close proximity to each other but lack the physical connections and supporting surrounding uses that would increase dwell time of the people who visit. The town centre's road network is heavily reliant on one-way streets which have been developed to maximise capacity. However, this has been at the expense of the quality of the public realm and the system discourages pedestrian movement around the town centre. This limits the spill-over and multiplier expenditure benefits that may have occurred if the flow of pedestrians was more fluid.

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<sup>3</sup> Bedford Borough Council (2020) Footfall report: Bedford Town Centre, June 2020 Data



**Figure 1-4: St Paul's Church**

### **Bedford's retailers are facing huge challenges**

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, footfall in Bedford Town Centre has been severely reduced, having a profound impact on the businesses that operate there. As experienced across the country, COVID-19 has accelerated changing retail patterns towards online shopping meaning that Bedford's numerous small and medium enterprises are having to continually adapt to remain competitive. The arts and culture offering in Bedford has been especially hard hit by the pandemic, with many local artists and performers being reliant on live audiences in order to generate income.

Although COVID-19 has been a major shock to the town's retail sector, decisions made prior to the pandemic by some nationally struggling retailers to leave Bedford demonstrate that the challenge is more deep-rooted and reflective of the structural shifts in the retail market. Marks & Spencer, Beales and River Island are among the recent closures in Bedford town centre, with other traditional retailers believed to be at risk within the next 18 months. This is compounded with the fact that a substantial decrease in the amount of office space in Bedford over recent years has given less reason for people to visit the town centre, further exacerbating the issue of declining footfall. The reduction in office space has been largely driven by conversions to residential properties through Permitted Development Rights (PDR). Between PDR's introduction in 2013 and 2017, 450,000 square feet of office space has been lost to residential space<sup>4</sup>. This has the double negative of providing fewer jobs and business space for enterprises in the town centre which subsequently impacts the daytime economy contributing towards reduced footfall and urban decline within the TDA.

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<sup>4</sup> CoStar (2020) Market Analytics Data

## Pockets of deprivation

Despite Bedford Borough having moderate levels of deprivation as a whole, parts of the TDA are ranked by the Index of Multiple Deprivation within the 10% most deprived areas in the country. This includes the area around the train station and Midland Road which ranks particularly low, reflective of the poor social and economic conditions in the area. A map of the neighbourhood rankings (as defined by lower super output areas) within the TDA can be seen in Figure 1-5. Bedford Borough's Community Safety Partnership<sup>5</sup> conducted a survey of Midland Road residents in 2019 which provides further insight into the challenges of the area. Residents indicated high levels of concern about crime (particularly drug dealing and alcohol) and concerns about safety, especially at night-time.

## Polarised labour market & lagging productivity

Although a high percentage of Bedford's population hold a university degree (43.9% in Bedford TDA compared to 37.8% in South East Midlands and 40.0% nationally<sup>6</sup>), there is also a high percentage of Bedford's population with no qualifications, particularly within the TDA (11.4% compared to 6.7% in the South East Midlands and 7.5% nationally). This polarisation is a likely contributory factor to the widening productivity gap in Bedford relative to that seen across the South East Midlands and the nation as a whole. According to most recent data, productivity as measured by Gross Value Added (GVA) per head in South East Midlands was around 13.6% higher in 2016 than Bedford Borough, while the national GVA per head was around 16.2% higher<sup>7</sup>. This compares to a gap of 12.2% and 14.6% respectively with South East Midlands and nationally in 2010.

Bedford has not been able to fully capitalise on its historic reputation for high performance in the science, engineering and technology sectors which have traditionally been highly productive. The Bedford Borough All Age Skills Plan 2019 - 2023<sup>8</sup> identifies three sectors with a particularly high number of vacancies:

- Science, Research, Engineering and Technology
- Teaching and Educational Professions
- Business, Media and Public services.

A recent SEMLEP business survey<sup>9</sup> found that around a third (29%) of overall vacancies in Bedford are considered by employers as hard to fill, with around 80% of these being down to skill shortages. This compares to 45% of vacancies which are considered hard to fill vacancies across SEMLEP, of which 44% are due to skills shortages.

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<sup>5</sup> Bedford Borough's Community Safety Partnership (2019) Community Consultation

<sup>6</sup> ONS (2020) Annual Population Survey 2020

<sup>7</sup> ONS (2018) Regional gross value added (balanced) by local authority and enterprise regions (Bedford Borough and South East Midlands). ONS (2019) Regional gross value added (balanced) per head and income (England)

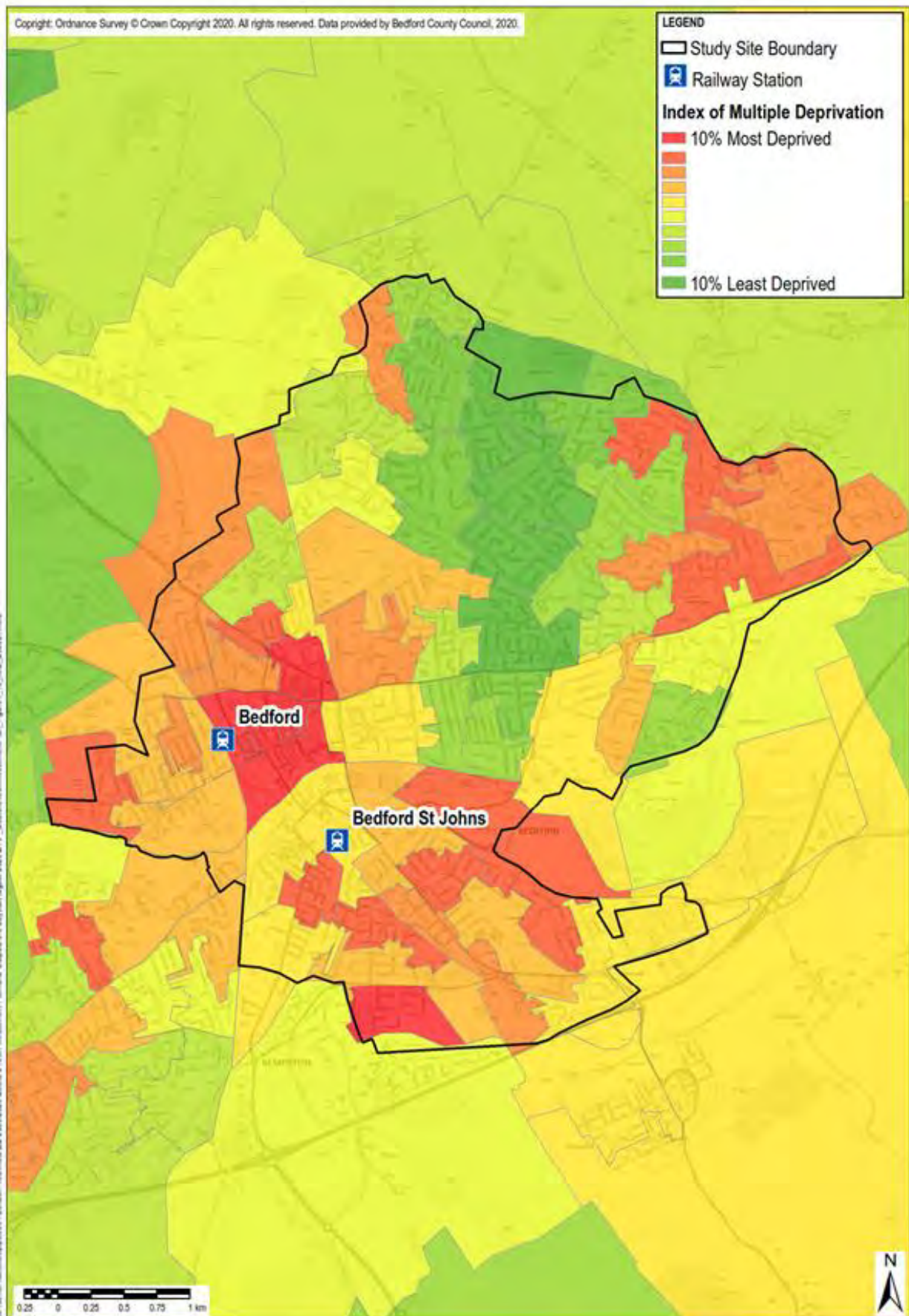
<sup>8</sup> Bedford Borough Council, (2020); Bedford Borough All Age Skills Plan 2019-2023. Available at:

<https://bbcdevwebfiles.blob.core.windows.net/webfiles/Council%20and%20Democracy/All%20Age%20Skills%20Plan.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> SEMLEP (2019) Business Survey 2019



Figure 1-5: Index of Multiple Deprivation in Bedford TDA



Source: MHCLG (2019) Index of Multiple Deprivation Bedford Borough Local Authority Profile

## 1.3 Investment needs

The challenges presented above give rise to a need for investment in Bedford. A lack of investment in stimulating footfall, developing skills and improving transport would perpetuate Bedford's key market failures at the risk of further contributing towards urban decline.

### Investment to stimulate footfall in the Bedford town centre

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the decline in footfall in the town centre, investment is needed to help reverse the perception of urban decline accentuated by a declining retail and commercial presence at key locations. Initial investment is required to improve the physical appearance and perception of key gateways to the town centre to support a safer and more welcoming environment which will attract visitors. This includes investment to improve public realm which would encourage dwell time. In the medium to longer term, further investment is required to reinvigorate and diversify the town centre offer through delivery of a mix of commercial, residential, cultural and leisure uses which will boost the local economy through increasing spend as well as promoting Bedford as a location to live and do business. This includes improvements to existing cultural assets such as the Corn Exchange which is a sizable building in the heart of the town centre but suffers from a poor layout and varied product offering. Redeveloping the Corn Exchange could provide a focal point in the town centre on which other cultural offerings can build.

### Tackling deprivation and developing skills

Investment is needed to help regenerate deprived areas within Bedford. Contributing towards regeneration by investing in areas such as Midland Road, which has a centring of residents from diverse backgrounds, will be essential to Bedford in encouraging inclusive growth. There is a need to ensure that local residents can take advantage of opportunities presented by future development by encouraging upskilling of local people. This will also help Bedford bridge the widening productivity gap experienced in comparison to neighbouring towns and cities, especially in the context of the Ox-Cam Arc and capitalising on the opportunities this presents.

The demand for skills in Bedford is set in the context of structural economic changes nationally, as growth of new technologies and science is changing the nature of employers' needs. Sub-regionally, SEMLEP recognises that one of the keys to local recovery lies in ensuring local people of all ages are able to attain higher levels of qualification and skills, particularly in the curriculum areas of digital technologies, information technology and science<sup>10</sup>. Investment to up-skill and re-skill is needed to keep pace with technological advancements and drive productivity growth in Bedford.

### Addressing Bedford's local connectivity issues

Investment is required to improve Bedford's local road infrastructure which currently restricts the ease of access in and out of the town and to surrounding areas. Transporting Bedford 2020<sup>11</sup> is a £22.5m project which is currently being delivered to tackle key congestion hotspots in Bedford. Further investment into measures such as junction improvements,

<sup>10</sup> SEMLEP (2017) SEMLEP Skills Plan & SEMLEP (2019) Local Industrial Strategy. Available at: [https://www.semlep.com/modules/downloads/download.php?file\\_name=744#:~:text=The%20SEMLEP%20Growing%20People%20plan,building%20a%20talent%20pipeline%20and](https://www.semlep.com/modules/downloads/download.php?file_name=744#:~:text=The%20SEMLEP%20Growing%20People%20plan,building%20a%20talent%20pipeline%20and) and [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818893/South\\_East\\_Midlands\\_SINGLE\\_PAGE.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818893/South_East_Midlands_SINGLE_PAGE.pdf);

<sup>11</sup> Bedford Borough Council (2020). Available at: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-travel/strategies-and-projects/transporting-bedford-2020/>

signalling and road widening is needed, however, to ease the demand on Bedford's pinch points.

There is also a need to improve Bedford's pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. New targeted investment in safe cycle and pedestrian routes will promote a healthier and more environmentally friendly mode of transport, as well as ease congestion and improve air quality in the town through reducing car use in the town centre. This, combined with public realm improvements, will also help to address the disconnect between key areas of the town and its assets (including the river, the railway station and the Cultural Quarter), encouraging users of the town centre to stay longer and spreading the benefits from footfall further around the TDA.

The need for investment in digital connectivity is also becoming increasingly important for Bedford to maintain and enhance its competitiveness as a business location and position the town for future growth and to support Bedford's leading independent businesses. This issue has been highlighted by COVID-19 which emphasised reliance on digital tools to continue business functions and remote working. Full fibre broadband delivery is progressing throughout the UK, with an estimated 7% of premises having full fibre access nationally<sup>12</sup>. Although this provision is relatively recent across the country, Bedford is already falling behind with approximately 4.8% of premises in the borough having access to the service.

## 1.4 Strengths & Assets

Notwithstanding Bedford's challenges and need for investment, the standard of living in Bedford is high and this has been an important factor in supporting population growth. Understanding what Bedford does well and what works best for local people has been critical in shaping the needs of the Town Investment Plan.

### **Bedford offers a high quality of life**

Bedford is home to a diverse population of many nationalities. It's rich history (it is the second oldest borough in England) and heritage is embedded throughout the town but particularly within the designated Heritage Action Zone (HAZ), along the High Street and close to St Paul's Church and the Swan Hotel. The culture offer within the town is propagated by Bedford's Charter Market and the Corn Exchange at the centre of the town which offers a mix of retail and entertainment services. Key facilities and assets are mapped in Figure 1-7.

The River Great Ouse offers a reminder of the town's heritage and a beautiful focal point for development. The backdrop provided by the river is well used by the town's numerous local independent retailers. Bedford's small independent retailers are a key feature of Bedford's identity and help to provide a unique selling point to potential visitors to the town. The renowned Bedford River Festival is the second largest free outdoor festival in the country which attracts up to 250,000 people over the weekend. The Festival celebrates local culture and heritage offering up music stages, boat shows, arts and crafts stalls, street food stands, and sport. The River Festival demonstrates the strong sense of community that arts and culture has helped to stimulate in the town.

Bedford Hospital helps to serve the town's medical needs whilst residents are also able to benefit from good public transport links (with two railway stations – Bedford Midland Station and Bedford St Johns - near the town centre and good north-south rail connectivity to airports, London and the wider UK rail network), supported bus infrastructure, parks (Russell Park,

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<sup>12</sup> Ofcom (2019) Connected Nations



Bedford Park, Jubilee Park, and Bedford Cemetery) and retail, including a strong offering from local independent businesses.

**Figure 1-6: Bedford Riverside**



### High quality education

Bedford's tertiary education institutions (the University of Bedfordshire and Bedford College), are amongst Bedford's largest assets. Bedford has a high percentage of its resident population educated to a degree level when compared to both the South East Midlands and the national average. Although the town has a relatively high percentage of its population with no qualifications, Bedford's unemployment rate remains fairly low (3.4% within the borough and 3.8% within the TDA pre COVID-19), implying there is a good supply of jobs within the town<sup>13</sup>.

Furthermore, Bedford is well placed at the centre of the Ox-Cam Arc and close proximity to London meaning it can benefit from the thriving research and technology sectors at the University of Oxford and University of Cambridge. These locational benefits will be further cemented following the completion of East West Rail.

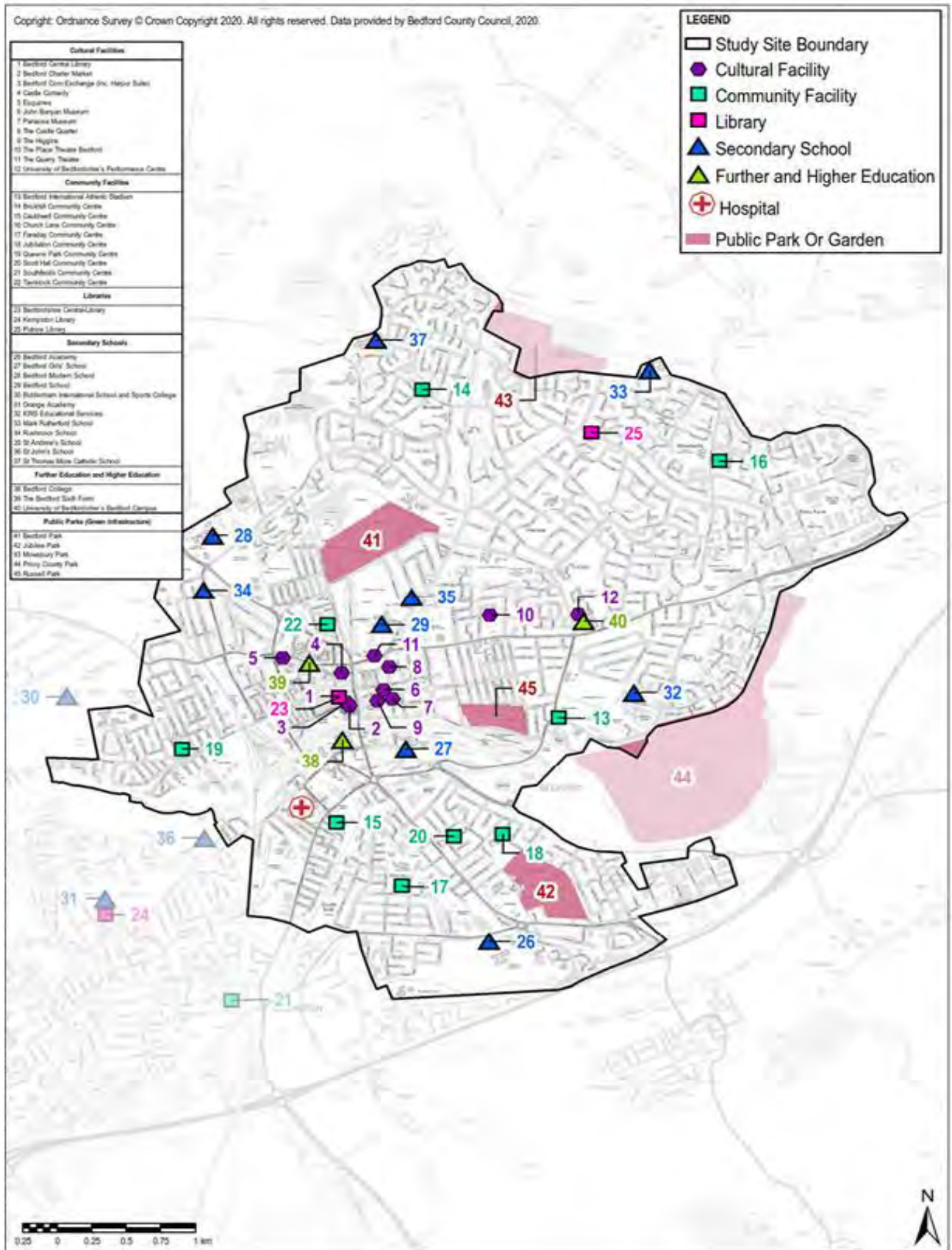
Bedford's stakeholders have emphasised the quality of its local schools whilst the Harpur Trust - a grant-making charity focused on improving the quality of education in Bedford - is another key local asset.

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<sup>13</sup> ONS (2020) Annual Population Survey



Figure 1-7: Key Infrastructure Assets in Bedford TDA



## Bedford's strategic location and role as a county town

Bedford is already well-connected both by road and rail due to its location at the centre of England's Economic Heartland area and the Oxford Cambridge Arc. Bedford's position as a crossroads between north south and east west travel mean that around 50% of the UK's population live within a two hour drive of Bedford<sup>14</sup>. This excellent strategic location has helped to stimulate an expanding transport and logistics sector along key transport routes on the edge of the town and close to the strategic road network.

More locally, Bedford's healthy supply of jobs (pre-COVID-19) provides for the borough's resident population, with 64% working in the borough<sup>15</sup>. Bedford's role as a county town means that it also provides employment for its surrounding areas. Just over a third (35%) of Bedford's workplace population live outside of the borough; with majority of these people living in more rural areas within Central Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire and East Northamptonshire<sup>16</sup>. This highlights the importance of Bedford's economy to its wider sub-regions.

## 1.5 Opportunities

### Capitalising on East West Rail and Ox-Cam Arc

Bedford is at the centre of one of the country's largest infrastructure projects: East West Rail<sup>17</sup>. The planned East West Railway will improve connectivity between Oxford, Cambridge and the intermediate towns along the route. Phase One, which links Oxford Station to Oxford Parkway and Bicester Village was completed in 2016. Among other linkages, Phase 2 which is underway will connect Oxford to Bedford and will provide hourly frequent, regular, reliable services via Bletchley. The final Bedford to Cambridge section of East West Rail is at the consultation stage and is expected to bring about the greatest benefits of the scheme. East West Rail presents an opportunity for Bedford's residents and businesses to benefit from the increased east-west movement of people and resources. The project will widen the sphere of influence of Bedford's companies, allowing them to compete in markets which are further afield whilst also allowing greater potential for knowledge spill-overs from other highly innovative and productive towns and cities, such as Milton Keynes, Oxford and Cambridge. The improved east-west transport movements generated by East West Rail will complement Bedford's already excellent north-south rail and road networks. The arrival of East West Rail in Bedford includes plans to redevelop Bedford Midland Station which will be required to accommodate the new lines, as well as redeveloping the station's surrounding area.

The Ox-Cam Arc will facilitate further growth in Bedford. The Bedford Borough Local Plan 2030 currently targets 14,550 new homes to be built within the borough between 2015 and 2030. To respond to growth requirements and particularly opportunities presented by the Ox-Cam Arc, a new Local Plan covering the next period is currently in preparation, with an "Issues and Options" consultation having taken place over the summer of this year. The new Local Plan is to be submitted for Examination by January 2023.

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<sup>14</sup> Bedford Borough Council, (2020); Bedford Local Plan 2030. Available at: <https://bbcdevwebfiles.blob.core.windows.net/webfiles/Planning%20and%20Building/local-plan-2030/Local%20Plan%202030%20ADOPTED%20VERSION.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> ONS (2012); Census location of usual residence and place of work

<sup>16</sup> ONS (2012) Census location of usual residence and place of work

<sup>17</sup> East West Rail Website, (Assessed June 2020); [www.eastwestrail.co.uk](http://www.eastwestrail.co.uk)



**Figure 1-8: Bedford Midland Station**

### Advancing skills for the future

The UK Industrial Strategy<sup>18</sup> outlines the requirement to improve digital skills across the nation as a grand challenge aimed at putting the UK at the forefront of the artificial intelligence (AI) and data revolution. SEMLEP's Local Industrial Strategy<sup>19</sup> was developed to match this ambition, with Bedford well-placed to deliver on these goals and capture the benefits which follow. Digital skills are fundamental to growing successful businesses and in sustaining current practices. In addition, the national and sub-regional industrial strategies highlight the need for greater scientific skills especially related to health and care sectors. Bedford's education assets have the capability to deliver on these opportunities, enhancing provision to meet the changing needs of the market. Bedford College Group has already developed a strong science and digital offer at its campus in Kettering, with the opportunity to bring this provision to Bedford.<sup>20</sup>

### Bedford's regeneration projects offer the opportunity for real change

The One Public Estate funded masterplans for the Town Centre and at Ford End Road present a key opportunity to kick start regeneration in some of Bedford's more deprived areas. The Bedford Town Centre Masterplan<sup>21</sup> looks to redevelop underutilised space within the town by

<sup>18</sup> HM Government (2017) UK Industrial Strategy. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/664563/industrial-strategy-white-paper-web-ready-version.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664563/industrial-strategy-white-paper-web-ready-version.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> SEMLEP (2019) Local Industrial Strategy. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818893/South\\_East\\_Midlands\\_SINGLE\\_PAGE.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818893/South_East_Midlands_SINGLE_PAGE.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Bedford College (September 2020). Bedford College Group encompasses Bedford College, Shuttleworth College, The Bedford Sixth Form, Tresham College and the National College for Motorsport.

<sup>21</sup> Bedford Borough Council (2018) Bedford Central Town Masterplan Report. Available at: <http://www.councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/documents/s43130/Item%20006%20Bedford%20Borough%20Masterplan%20Appendix%20B%20Central%20Bedford%20Masterplan.pdf>

investing in new connectivity improvements, beautification and renovation including two new mixed-use development clusters near the station to generate footfall and attract private sector investment. There is further opportunity to build on the regenerative work already being done in Bedford by incorporating the town's rich heritage and culture, as well as creative talent, within future regeneration projects.

The road, junction and signalling elements of the Bedford Town Centre Masterplan complement the key objectives of Transporting Bedford 2020 in reducing congestion, particularly at pinch points within the town centre. Through these types of improvements, there are opportunities to improve car journey times. The Borough Council also aims to improve cycling and pedestrian connectivity to reduce the strain on the town's roads in a healthy and environmentally friendly way.

### **Building on Bedford's heritage and culture to promote social cohesion**

Bedford also has the potential to draw on its heritage and cultural resources in order to stimulate footfall in the town. The success of award-winning independent venues such as Esquires, the residency of the Philharmonia Orchestra, as well as numerous community groups and the River Festival demonstrates that there is local talent in Bedford which can attract large audiences. Continued investment in the River Festival as well as other events and institutions which celebrate local talent will help to provide a new reason for visiting the town centre whilst simultaneously promoting social cohesion and the creative skills of local people.

### **Aligning with Towns Fund Accelerated Funding**

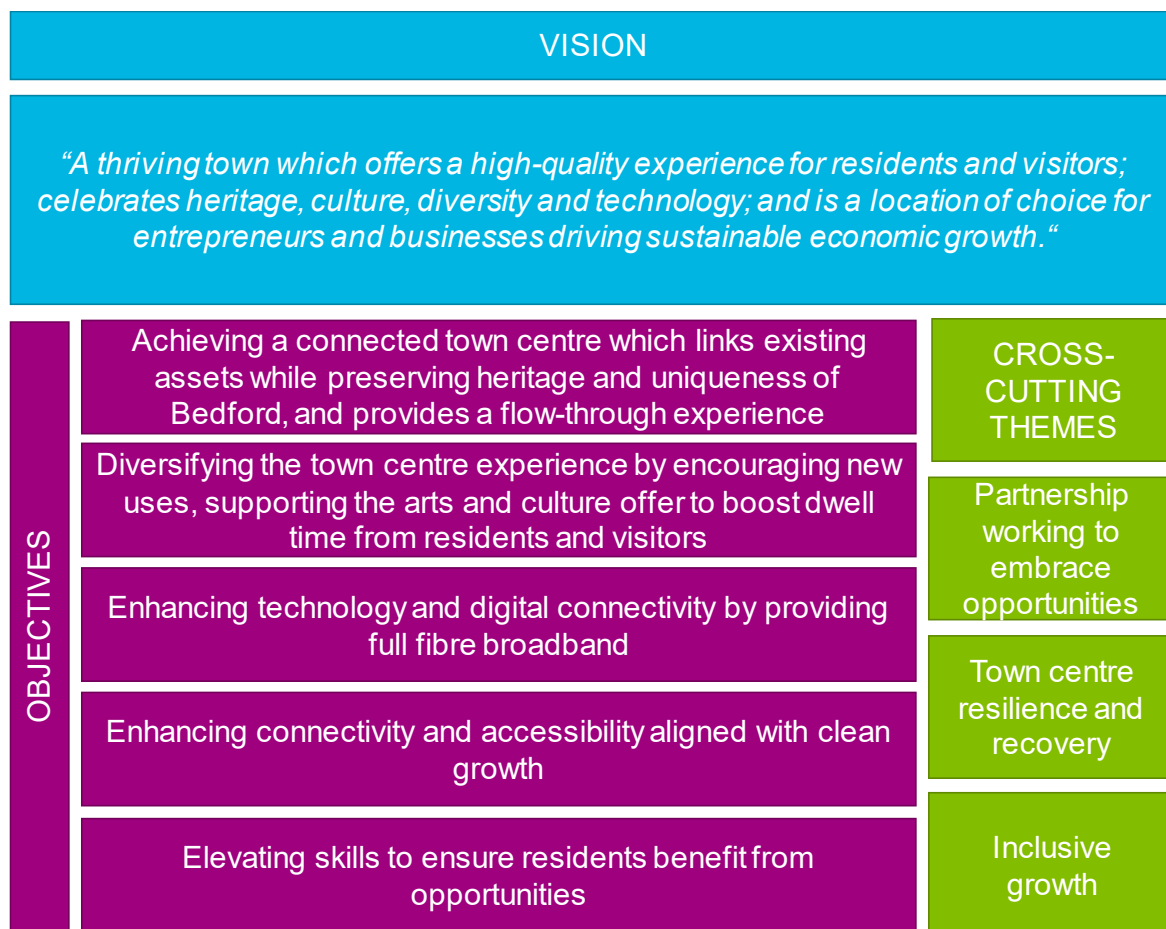
Bedford has been allocated £1m of Towns Fund Accelerated Funding to assist economic recovery of the local area. Five projects will be delivered from the Accelerated Funding which the Town Investment Plan will be complementing through the further interventions. These are:

- Silver Street Square: £500,000 public realm improvements
- Cycling enhancements: £380,000 to signpost 27 new cycling routes into the town centre and a circular route around the town
- Mill Meadow bandstand: £50,000 to upgrade the existing historic bandstand to create an improved open air performance area
- Harpur Square events infrastructure: £20,000 to install 63 amp sockets within the square to allow larger performances
- Increasing pedestrian mobility in the town centre: £50,000 to improve access to pedestrians who have limited mobility within the town centre by increasing the number of dropped kerbs.



## 2. Our Strategy

The strategy for Bedford has been developed to respond to its circumstances, including both the challenges it faces and the strengths and opportunities presented. Chapter 1 has highlighted the key priorities on which to build. The primary investment drivers in Bedford are the need for regeneration of town centre gateways and corridors; improvements of public spaces; the need to attract businesses and footfall into the town centre and supporting the growth of arts and culture. In addition to addressing local needs, the strategy aims to position Bedford for maximising opportunities from major strategic investments such as East-West Rail. This context has informed the vision and objectives for Bedford.



### 2.1 A Vision for Bedford

The vision for Bedford has been defined in consultation with key stakeholders and agreed by the Bedford Town Deal Board. The vision builds on existing ambitions for Bedford, aligning with the recently approved Town Centre Plan<sup>22</sup> and Bedford Central Town Masterplan<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> Bedford Borough Council, (2020); Town Centre Plan. Available at: <http://www.councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/documents/s50214/Item%2011%20Town%20Centre%20Plan%20Appendix%20A.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Bedford Borough Council (2018) Bedford Central Town Masterplan Report. Available at: <http://www.councillorsupport.bedford.gov.uk/documents/s43130/Item%2006%20Bedford%20Borough%20Masterplan%20Appendix%20B%20Central%20Bedford%20Masterplan.pdf>

## 2.1.1 Objectives

Bedford's vision is underpinned by a set of five strategic objectives and cross-cutting themes.

### **1. Achieving a connected town centre which links existing assets while preserving heritage and uniqueness of Bedford, and provides a flow-through experience**

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Improving the flow and pedestrian connectivity between Bedford's key assets – such as the train station, the historic town centre and the river – is a vital objective of the Town Investment Plan. It will ensure the key public realm areas and pedestrian routes in the town are welcoming, vibrant and attractive for residents, workers and visitors. By focusing on regenerating Bedford's gateways around the railway station and improving outdoor areas and pedestrian routes which are currently impacting on the perception of the town (such as Midland Road), the objective will be crucial in delivering the vision.

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### **2. Diversifying the town centre experience by encouraging new uses, supporting the arts and culture offer to boost dwell time from residents and visitors**

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The objective focuses on building resilience in Bedford town centre in light of structural shifts in the retail market and changing consumer expectations – factors which have both been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Diversifying the offer will help to draw people back into the town centre by taking advantage of the demand trends towards non-retail activities such as culture, entertainment and leisure. New and vibrant spaces which accommodate creative activity will help to promote dwell time. Opportunities to attract residential, commercial and cultural uses can further contribute to footfall and resilience in the town centre.

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### **3. Enhancing technology and digital connectivity by providing full fibre broadband**

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Facilitating entrepreneurship and promoting business growth relies on the provision of digital infrastructure which relieves business constraints, supports productivity growth and resilience of operations. In a world where remote working is becoming increasingly prominent and reliance on technology is growing, high quality digital provision is important to retain competitiveness and continue to stimulate business activity. Provision of full fibre broadband infrastructure in Bedford will help to support the growth of existing businesses in Bedford while also promoting the town as a location for new investment. Providing digital connectivity in public spaces (such as a free WiFi service) will make Bedford town centre more appealing to residents and visitors, while encouraging dwell time. Enhancements to Bedford's digital connectivity will contribute to achieving long term economic growth ambitions for the town, while also improving resilience and agility of local businesses to respond to challenges imposed by COVID-19 restrictions.

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## 4. Enhancing connectivity and accessibility aligned with clean growth

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A resilient transport infrastructure network will support the development potential in Bedford, relieve pinch points, enhance walking and cycling connectivity and safety, and facilitate sustainable growth. This includes provision of pedestrian and cycling networks which improve the flow and movement across the town and its connection with surrounding areas, encouraging the shift to active travel choices and supporting the health and wellbeing of local people. In addition, the arrival of East West Rail and the associated redevelopment of Bedford Midland Station present further opportunities for Bedford to enhance its transport connectivity across a range of modes.

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## 5. Elevating skills to ensure residents benefit from opportunities

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It is essential that opportunities in Bedford bring benefits to all, across all programmes and investments; principles that are enshrined in the approved All Age Skills Plan for Bedford. The key to this is ensuring skills and opportunities in Bedford are aligned. Improving access to employment and skills will help to build a productive workforce; part of this is allowing those whose employment prospects have been hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic to access new opportunities. Investment in digital and scientific skills will drive productivity growth in Bedford while helping to capture the spill-over benefits from the Ox-Cam Arc.

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### 2.1.2 Cross-cutting themes

Three common themes will be critical in the successful delivery of the vision across all objectives. These are:


- **Partnership working to embrace opportunities:** continuing the partnerships between Bedford Town Deal Board members, Bedford Borough Council and stakeholders in identifying, developing and delivering projects. The vision will not be delivered in isolation and requires ongoing collaboration between stakeholders to ensure opportunities for Bedford are effectively identified and realised, applying the knowledge and expertise of partners;
- **Town centre resilience and recovery:** the effects of COVID-19 have significantly affected the performance of Bedford town centre. Improved town centre resilience and opportunities to support economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic must be considered across all interventions;
- **Inclusive growth:** in delivering the vision, ensuring investments benefit Bedford across all demographics, targeting places of need which will help to promote economic growth and equality.

### 2.1.3 Prioritisation process & Towns Fund project identification

The development of the Town Investment Plan has followed a rigorous prioritisation process identifying short, medium and long term interventions required to deliver the vision and objectives for Bedford. The prioritisation framework was developed based on Towns Fund guidance and the appreciation of local needs, strengths and opportunities, with criteria summarised below.



**Table 2.1 Prioritisation criteria**

 <p><b>Strategic Fit</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Alignment with Vision and local strategy</li> <li>▪ Alignment with Towns Fund priorities, guidance and clean growth principle</li> <li>▪ Link to existing or planned projects – Towns Fund as a ‘wrapper for other investments’</li> <li>▪ Alignment with strategic &amp; national policy</li> <li>▪ Local support from stakeholders &amp; community</li> <li>▪ Market failure (i.e. why public sector funding is required)</li> <li>▪ Linkages/synergies with other projects in the Town Investment Plan</li> <li>▪ Ability to contribute to post-COVID recovery &amp; resilience</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Achievability &amp; Deliverability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evidence of market demand from users, operators, partners</li> <li>▪ Dependencies and risks (including planning)</li> <li>▪ Development timescales</li> <li>▪ Deliverability</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Affordability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ability to secure match-funding/co-funding</li> <li>▪ Overall cost</li> <li>▪ Long term financial sustainability</li> </ul>
 <p><b>Economic benefits &amp; value for money</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ability to deliver long term economic growth outcomes and value for money</li> </ul>

The project ideas put forward by the Bedford Town Deal Board, Town Centre Consultation responses and stakeholders have been assessed against the prioritisation framework.

A package of Towns Fund projects has been identified to kick-start the delivery of the vision for Bedford. The projects represent a first step in the delivery of a long-term ambition for the town, providing the foundations from which future investments can build on. The projects align and complement the interventions put forward as part of the £1m Towns Fund Accelerated Funding allocation for Bedford.

Table 2.2 below summarises the proposed Towns Fund interventions and the funding ask for each. The spatial distribution of interventions is presented in Figure 2-1.

**Table 2.2 Summary of Towns Fund Investment Projects**

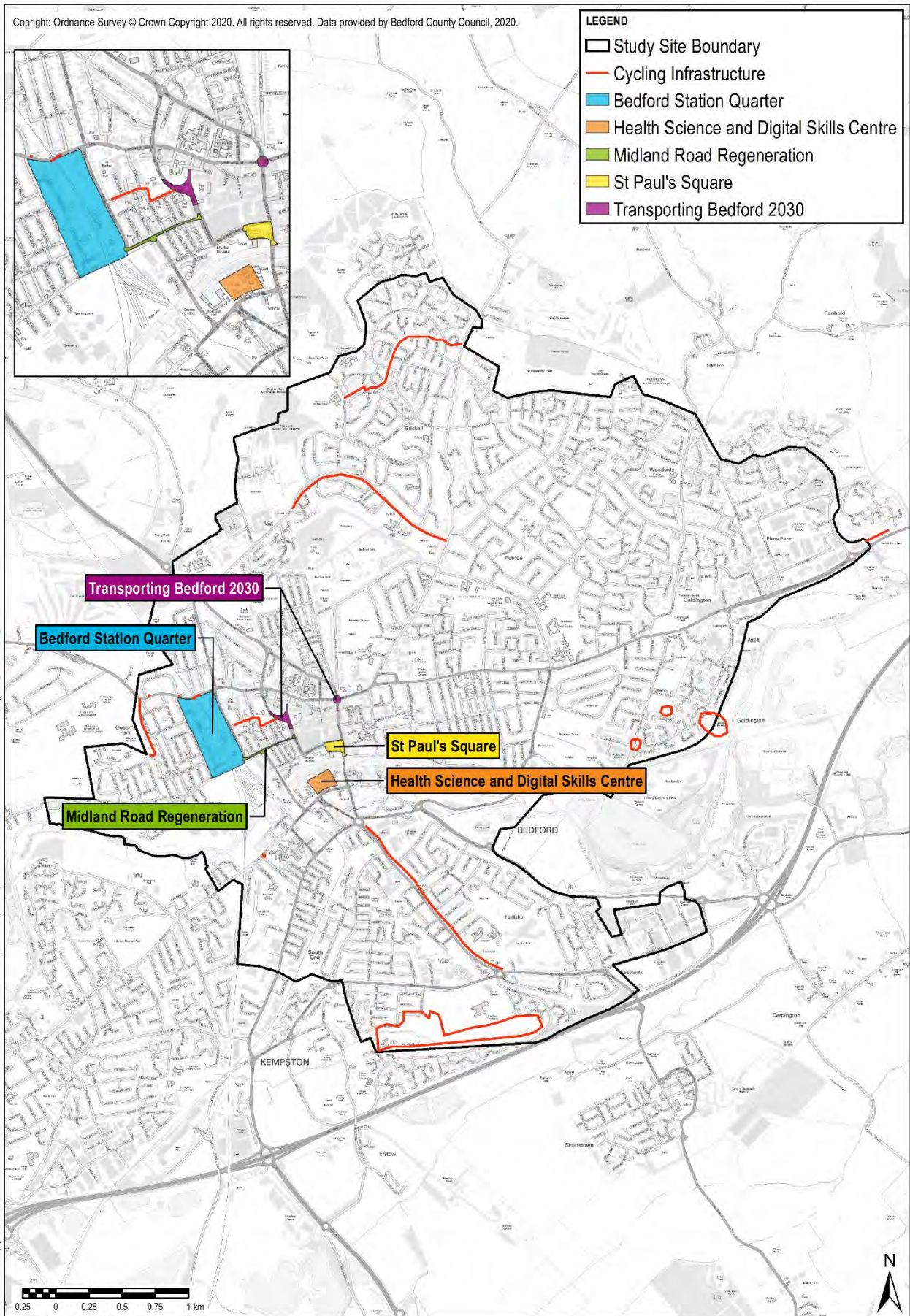
Title	Description	Towns Fund Ask
Station Quarter	The existing area around Bedford Midland Station does not provide a strong sense of welcome to visitors, this can leave visitors with a poor initial perception of Bedford. This is due to poor physical conditions and layout, uninspiring townscape and a lack of commercial investment. The proposal is a redevelopment of the area around the station which seeks to capitalise on the announcement of the East West Rail route enabling Bedford to realise benefits from its location at the heart of the Ox-Cam Arc. To accommodate the new lines delivered by East West Rail and improve the existing station facility, the Council has developed two options for redevelopment of the area, one to the east and one to the south of the existing station. Both options free-up a development site of approximately 4.5 hectares located between the redeveloped Bedford Midland Station and River Great Ouse, and at the centre of Bedford. Initial investment from the Towns Fund will regenerate the area around the station, including redevelopment of approaches designed to promote and prioritise sustainable travel modes, cycling and walking.	£6.25m
Midland Road regeneration	Midland Road is the main gateway from the Bedford Midland Station to the town centre, cultural quarter and the river. It is currently in poor physical condition, with unattractive buildings and narrow walkways creating a negative perception of the local environment. The project is a redevelopment of the Midland Road corridor from the railway station into the town centre. The scheme will create an attractive, vibrant corridor by reducing the carriageway width of Midland Road to improve the walking route and public realm. The second element of the project is a shopfront enhancement grant scheme for businesses on Midland Road, providing up to £1.6m of investment in the premises (up to £40k per business).	£7.125m <sup>24</sup>
St Paul's Square Public Realm	Investment in public realm at St Paul's Square to improve experience for visitors and shoppers, and allow for creative programming at Harpur Square (such as outdoor performances and exhibitions), increasing vibrancy and helping promote Bedford as a destination. The project will also deliver flexible walkways, resurfacing of public spaces and lighting projects. The project will introduce pedestrian linkages from St Paul's Square to the Cultural Quarter and to Riverside Bedford. The project complements the Towns Fund Accelerated Funding investment in Silver Street Square and Harpur Square event infrastructure to enhance the town centre environment.	£1.5m
Transporting Bedford 2030	The project will deliver improvements to the John Bunyan Statue and Greyfriars junctions ensuring greater accessibility and safer movements for cyclists and pedestrians, accelerating a local development scheme, and relieving pinch points on the transport network. The existing road system at these locations is not conducive to cycling or pedestrian access, whilst the layout at Greyfriars is limiting the size of a town centre development site that can be brought forward where redevelopment opportunities are limited. The investment will reduce congestion, ensure safe movements for cyclists and pedestrians, and accelerate and enable a development scheme.	£2.0m
Pedestrian and Cycling Infrastructure	The cycle network within Bedford is disjointed with many routes situated along main roads alongside traffic. The investment will deliver a package of pedestrian and cycling network improvements, including further development of the 'Green Wheel' of routes around the town and cycle links to Bedford Midland Station. This project complements the Towns Fund Accelerated Funding Cycling Enhancements project which will deliver signposting for cycling routes and secure cycle parking in central locations.	£5.0m

<sup>24</sup> The Midland Road Regeneration project funding ask includes £0.625m revenue funding towards delivery across all Bedford Towns Fund projects.

Title	Description	Towns Fund Ask
Health Science and Digital Skills Centre	Bedford College's 1960s Tower Block is a key town centre building on the south bank of the river. It is large and flexible in terms of potential uses but is only adequate for good quality provision to 16-18 year olds as the new curriculum and employers require higher specification computer labs. The building will be converted into a state-of-the-art science and technology building, and one with high levels of energy efficiency. A Towns Fund investment of £3m would enable the £6m remodelling of the building and subsequent upgrading of specific spaces (laboratories and IT suites). The project will generate an additional 250 FTE students each year, while also benefiting the existing 4,000 learners at the Bedford campus who will have a superior learning environment. The investment will enable the curriculum to be extended to degree, sub-degree and advanced levels, so that existing students can progress further and achieve higher levels of skill in areas where employers say there is a need.	£3.0m
Bedford Full Fibre Broadband	Fast and reliable digital connectivity is required in Bedford to maintain its competitiveness as a business location, responding to changing technological trends and increased reliance on digital tools further brought to light by COVID-19. The Towns Fund investment will leverage in a significant amount of private sector funding to roll-out full fibre infrastructure across the urban areas of Bedford by a private provider. The Towns Fund revenue funding ask will accelerate the infrastructure roll-out in Bedford by enabling the Council to increase its delivery capacity.	£0.120



**Figure 2-1: Spatial Distribution of Bedford Towns Fund Projects<sup>25</sup>**



## 2.2 Strategic Plan

The strategy to deliver the Town Investment Plan is based on a clear understanding of Bedford's challenges, needs, strengths and opportunities. The ambition for the Town Investment Plan is to create the conditions for sustainable long-term economic growth which respond to local development needs and deliver inclusive growth in Bedford. In doing so, the Investment Plan aims to position Bedford to take maximum advantage of the wider opportunities presented to it, including spill-over benefits from the Ox-Cam Arc.

Below we set out the rationale and need for intervention under each objective, with key priorities over the short, medium and long term and programmes which will enable this to be achieved.

**Objective 1. Achieving a connected town centre which links existing assets while preserving heritage and uniqueness of Bedford, and provides a flow-through experience**

### Rationale

The key town centre gateway around Bedford Midland Station is currently relatively underused, lower density and of lower quality than elsewhere in the town. Midland Road is the key route from the station to the town centre, however, it is perceived as a particularly problematic area: the buildings along the route are uninspiring and unappealing which attract lower-value businesses, whilst the area also suffers from high crime rates and deprivation.

This is affecting Bedford's economy, as visitors arriving by train are currently met with an image that provides an initial negative perception of the town. In addition, the main assets in the town centre such as Riverside Bedford, the Corn Exchange and St Paul's Square are close in proximity but lack the physical connections that would increase dwell time and create a hub of economic and cultural activity.

The rationale for investment becomes even greater once the long-term growth opportunities in Bedford are considered. In order for Bedford to capitalise on its location at the centre of Ox-Cam Arc, the town needs to embrace opportunities presented by the arrival of East West Rail. The scheme provides a major opportunity to support economic growth within Bedford, but it needs to be supported by ambitious developments and appealing gateways to achieve its full economic potential.

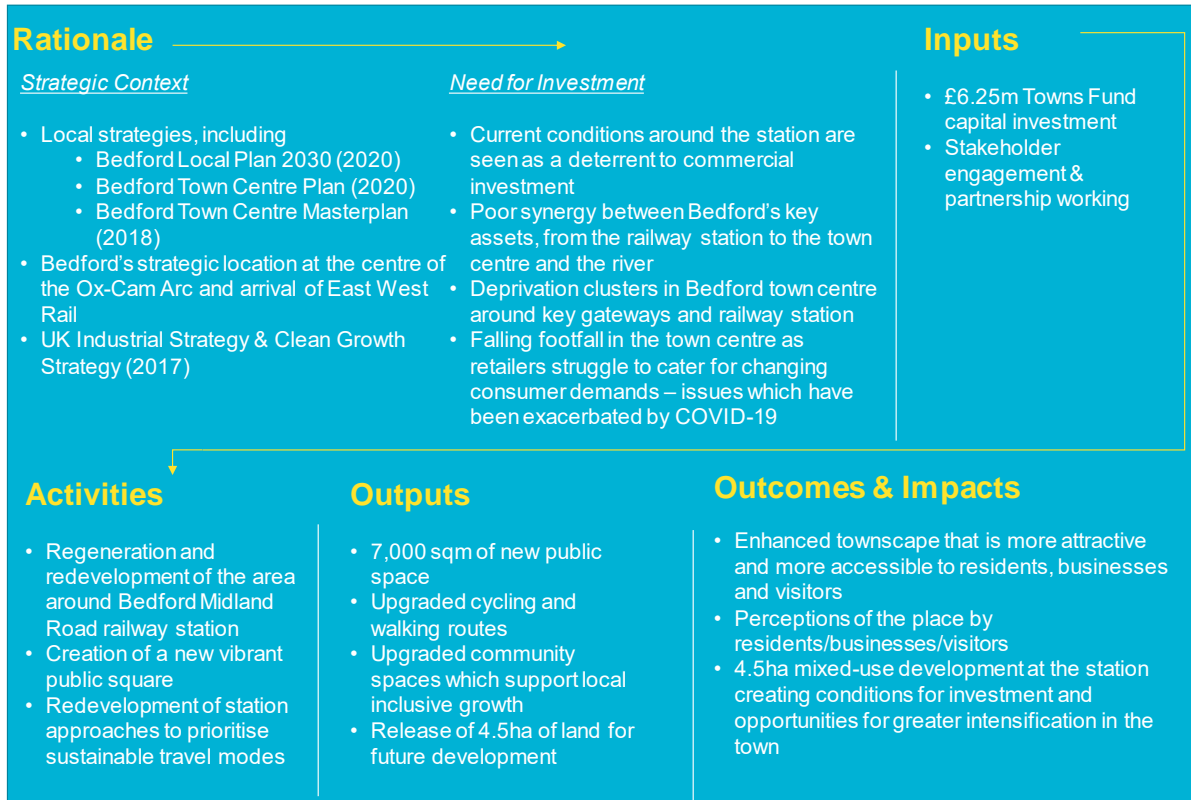
### Priorities for action

Redeveloping the area around the station (Station Quarter) and regenerating Midland Road are important priorities for Bedford and are identified as a short-term focus of the Town Investment Plan enabled by Towns Fund and Towns Fund Accelerated Funding. The investments will deliver a new station square with a new public space including community uses, new and upgraded cycle and walking routes, wider cycling infrastructure including cycle parking. The Midland Road corridor from the station to the town centre will provide an attractive connection by widening walkways, improving public realm and investing in the appearance of shopfronts along the route, providing a flow through experience. These schemes position Bedford to benefit from longer term opportunities presented by the arrival of East West Rail and its associated station works, which will provide significant development opportunities. The logic

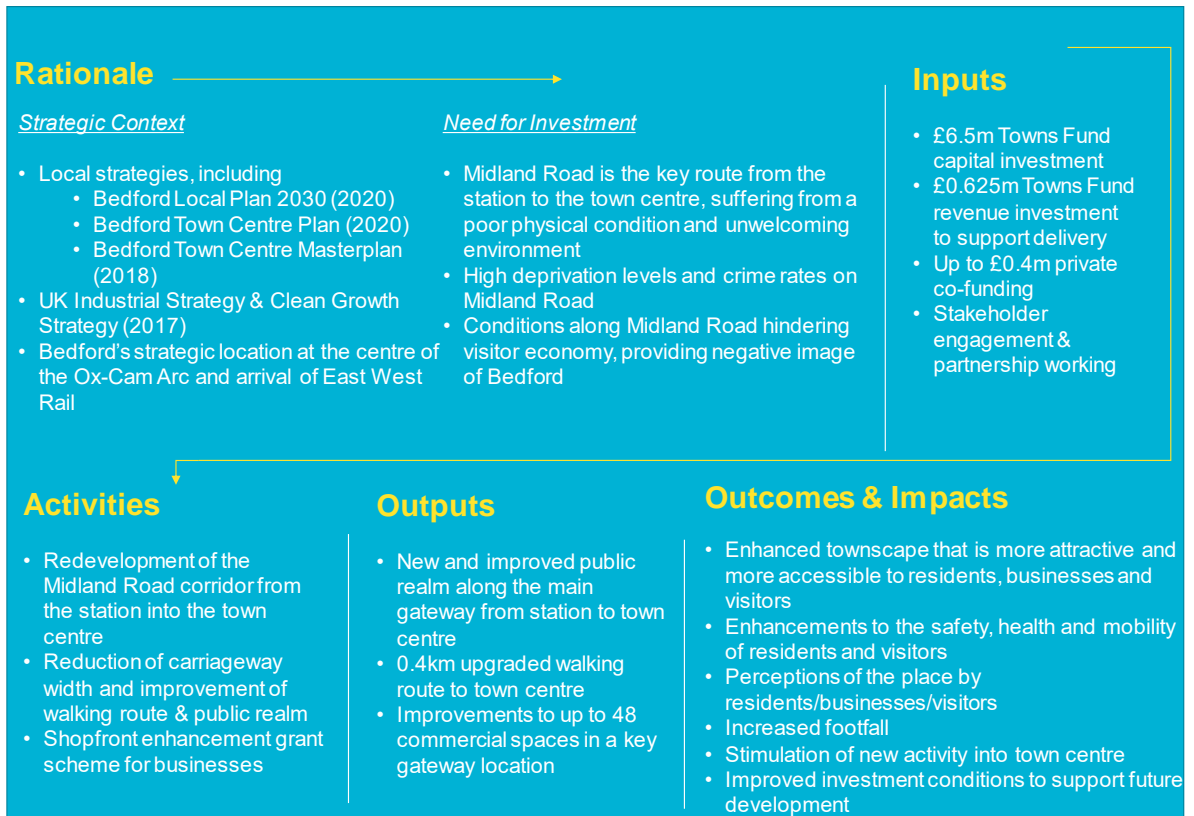
<sup>25</sup> Spatial distribution of Bedford Towns Fund projects in the context of other town centre investments is presented in Appendix A.

models for Station Quarter and Midland Road regeneration are presented in Figure 2-2 and Figure 2-3 respectively.

**Figure 2-2: Station Quarter Logic Model**






**Figure 2-3: Midland Road Regeneration Logic Model**





These interventions will provide the initial stimulus to help build resilience and support economic recovery in Bedford post COVID-19, as well as creating conditions to unlock growth and future development. The interventions will complement planned development in the area particularly at Greyfriars, with landowners having expressed strong support for redevelopment of the station area and Midland Road.

In the longer term, Station Quarter will provide opportunities for densification and accommodating mixed use development including the potential to attract academic uses to capitalise on the knowledge spill-overs from the Ox-Cam Arc.

Priority	Interventions	Alignment with strategies, programmes & partnerships
 <p><b>Short Term:</b> Investment to support town centre resilience and recovery by investing in town centre gateways, providing foundations and positioning for future development &amp; growth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Towns Fund - Midland Road regeneration</li> <li>• Towns Fund - Station Quarter redevelopment</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strategies:</i>                      Bedford Local Plan 2030 (2020)                      Bedford Town Centre Plan (2020)                      Bedford Town Centre Masterplan (2018)                      UK Industrial Strategy &amp; Clean Growth Strategy (2017)                      All Age Skills Plan 2020-23(2020)</p>
 <p><b>Medium Term:</b> Delivering strategic investments which capitalise on opportunities presented by Ox-Cam Arc &amp; East West Rail and bringing masterplan sites forward for investment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bedford Midland Station redevelopment (investment by East West Rail and Network Rail, co-ordinated by Bedford Council)</li> <li>• Development at Greyfriars (private investment)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Programmes:</i>                      Bedford High Street Heritage Action Zone                      Safer Streets Programme                      Ox-Cam Arc                      East West Rail</p>
 <p><b>Long Term:</b> Development at key sites and gateways in Bedford capitalising on strategic projects, attracting further investment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Station Quarter mixed use development to accommodate residential, commercial and academic uses, and development of high-tech industrial cluster (private investment)</li> <li>• Increase in Bedford's academic and skills assets to maximise spill-over benefits from Ox-Cam Arc (investment from academic partners)</li> </ul>	

**Objective 2. Diversifying the town centre experience by encouraging new uses, supporting the arts and culture offer to boost dwell time from residents and visitors**

**Figure 2-4: Bedford Town Centre**



**Rationale**

The decline of traditional retail including closure of major retailers in Bedford town centre such as M&S, Beales and River Island has meant that footfall has been declining in Bedford even before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This decline has been compounded by a significant loss of office space in Bedford town centre which has further affected the daytime economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges and created substantial uncertainties for businesses remaining in the town centre. There is a need to ensure Bedford's offering aligns with changing trends, embraces the diversity of the local community and encourages people back into the town centre to position the town as a place to live, work and visit. COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of quality outdoor spaces in helping to build resilient town centres, particularly during a time where indoor activities are restricted and social distancing is required. There has already been some strategic investment into public realm, for example, Bedford's High Street Heritage Action Zone secured £1.76m from Historic England to invest in pedestrian space and improvements to historic properties on the High Street. However, this investment alone cannot rejuvenate all areas of public realm in need of improvement, with further investment required to upgrade the quality of public spaces in Bedford.

Recent engagement with the arts and culture sector in Bedford has highlighted demand for outdoor performance space<sup>26</sup>. Provision of areas for outdoor performances and events

<sup>26</sup> 1Degree East (2020) Bedford Producer Hub & Culture Audit Initial Findings

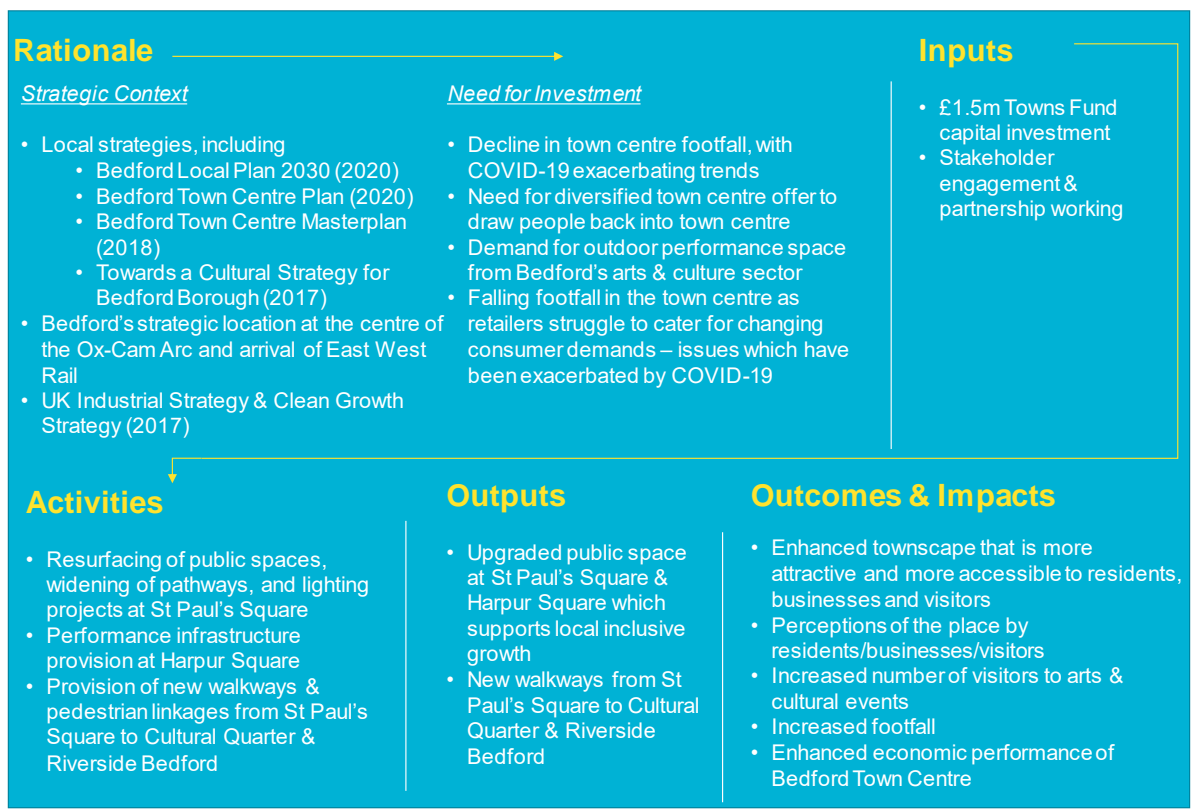
presents an opportunity to diversify the offering in the town by stimulating outdoor events and programmes to encourage visitors and dwell time.

The longer-term ambitions for Bedford will diversify the town centre offer enabling Bedford to become a multi-functional destination providing a mix of leisure, culture, retail, residential, employment, education and community uses. The reductions in office space in the town centre and closure of retailers leaving vacant buildings in prime locations creates a need and opportunity to repurpose buildings and deliver exciting mixed-use developments supporting sustainable growth in the town centre.

### Priorities for action

Bedford needs to build resilience to counter the decline in retail and to support recovery from the conditions arising from COVID-19. The immediate short-term priority for Bedford is to invest in public spaces to create a more attractive environment where people want to spend time. Public realm improvements combined with working with Bedford’s arts and culture sector will encourage and support new activity in the town centre which will help to enhance Bedford’s reputation as a place to visit. Investments are already committed through Towns Fund Accelerated Funding which will improve the public realm in Silver Street Square (as well as enabling space for performance activities), the refurbishment of Mill Meadows Bandstand to create an improved open air performance area, and installation of event infrastructure in Harpur Square to support larger performances. Towns Fund investment will support public realm improvements at St Paul’s Square and Harpur Square which will include reconfiguration of the square with resurfacing, improvements of pathways and sustainable lighting projects to create a more accessible open space with an ability to host a range of arts and cultural events and exhibitions, such as street performances, festivals and art showcasing. The logic model for Towns Fund investment in St Paul’s Square is presented in Figure 2-5.




**Figure 2-5: St Paul’s Square Public Realm Logic Model**





Bedford has medium and longer-term ambitions to diversify the town centre land uses. New office and creative space will grow the business presence in the town centre, support growth of key industries and the daytime economy. This will include establishing a cultural hub with the potential redevelopment of the Corn Exchange and provision of workspace for creative and knowledge-based industries. Residential development as part of mixed-use schemes will help support implementation and contribute to viability of new diversified uses.

Realising these ambitions will require private investment from landowners and developers to enable the mix of uses to come forward, particularly residential and commercial – an issue which is currently hindered by the uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Priority	Interventions	Alignment with strategies, programmes & partnerships
 <p><b>Short Term:</b> Investment to support town centre resilience and recovery by investing in outdoor spaces and supporting arts and culture offer, bringing people back into Bedford town centre.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Towns Fund - Accelerated Funding:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Silver Street Square public realm improvements;</li> <li>– Refurbishment of Mill Meadows bandstand</li> <li>– Event infrastructure enhancements in Harpur Square</li> <li>– Increasing Pedestrian Mobility in Town Centre</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Towns Fund - public realm improvements at St Paul's Square</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strategies:</i>                      Bedford Local Plan 2030 (2020)                      Bedford Town Centre Plan (2020)                      Bedford Town Centre Masterplan (2018)                      Towards a Cultural Strategy for Bedford Borough (2017)</p> <p><i>Programmes:</i>                      Bedford High Street Heritage Action Zone                      Transporting Bedford Arts &amp; Culture Projects and Events Pipeline                      Ox-Cam Arc</p>
 <p><b>Medium Term:</b> Growth and investment of Bedford's cultural offer. Diversification of town centre uses and bringing masterplan sites forward for investment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corn Exchange expansion &amp; redevelopment (Arts Council funding opportunities being explored)</li> <li>• Redevelopment of vacant town centre buildings into residential &amp; commercial uses (private investment)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Partnerships:</i>                      The Bedford Cultural Partnership                      The Bedford Arts &amp; Cultural Education Partnership</p>
 <p><b>Long Term:</b> Development at key sites and gateways in Bedford capitalising on strategic projects, attracting further investment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Station Quarter mixed use development to accommodate residential, commercial and academic uses, and development of high-tech industrial cluster (private investment)</li> <li>• Creation of Cultural Hub with redeveloped Corn Exchange as the anchor, enhanced space for creative programming complemented by flexible business space for creative uses (private investment).</li> </ul>	

### Objective 3. Enhancing technology and digital connectivity by providing full fibre broadband

#### Rationale

Fast and reliable digital connectivity is increasingly important for economic growth and is crucial for an area to maintain competitiveness as a business location. COVID-19 has potentially accelerated the trends of reliance on digital tools to continue business functions and remote working. Demands for broadband will continue to grow and it is essential Bedford keeps pace with this technology in becoming a location of choice for businesses and entrepreneurs.

The restrictions imposed by COVID-19 have exacerbated connectivity challenges in Bedford, particularly those faced by the prominent independent retail sector in the town. Business stakeholders are reporting challenges with broadband connectivity, *“with existing upload and download speeds averaging 0.4mps”*<sup>27</sup> which are hindering their ability to be agile in responding to restrictions. The lack of infrastructure in the local area means providers are unable to provide upgrades, with businesses reliant on existing basic broadband speeds.

Since 2015, Bedford Borough has been receiving government support through BDUK to roll out superfast broadband in the area, with the borough committed to reach 100% coverage. Full fibre broadband provision represents a step change in connectivity, enabling substantially increased broadband speeds, capacity and faster response times. Recent data from Ofcom shows that although full fibre provision has been introduced relatively recently across the country, Bedford is lagging behind in its role<sup>28</sup>. Improving digital connectivity is not only a priority for Bedford (as highlighted in its recent Town Centre Plan), but nationally the government’s ambition is to deliver nationwide gigabit broadband provision by 2033 to facilitate the UK becoming a world leader in 5G.<sup>29</sup>

Another aspect of digital connectivity is WiFi availability in public and open spaces. With the adoption of WiFi enabled mobile devices across the UK, demand for WiFi coverage is growing including in public areas where internet access can often be limited. WiFi is seen as an important aspect of a town’s infrastructure for a thriving town, and is one of the ambitions for Bedford as set out in the Bedford Town Centre Plan.

#### Priorities for action

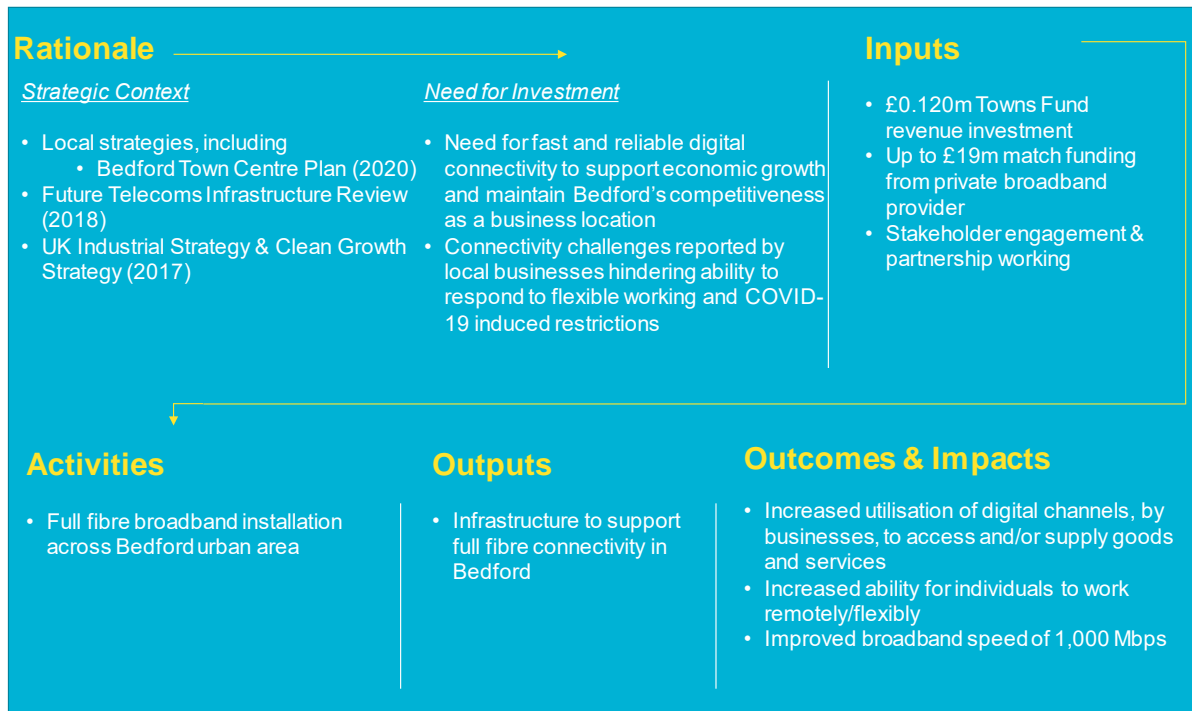
Bedford requires a full fibre broadband provider to roll out the service across the town and its surrounding areas. As part of this process, the Council is in discussions with a number of private providers to deliver the service. The majority of the investment will be delivered privately. A small amount of Towns Fund revenue funding is sought to accelerate full fibre roll-out and facilitate delivery. The logic model for the full fibre investment project is presented in Figure 2-6.

<sup>27</sup> Engagement with Bedford Business Improvement District Chair


<sup>28</sup> Ofcom (2019) Connected Nations. Available at: [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/186413/Connected-Nations-2019-UK-final.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/186413/Connected-Nations-2019-UK-final.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> DCMS (2018) Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/732496/Future\\_Telecoms\\_Infrastructure\\_Review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732496/Future_Telecoms_Infrastructure_Review.pdf)

**Figure 2-6: Bedford Full Fibre Broadband Logic Model**



WiFi provision in public spaces is another priority, with delivery routes with the private sector being explored to install WiFi infrastructure in public spaces throughout the town centre to enable free WiFi connectivity for residents and visitors.

Priority	Interventions	Alignment with strategies, programmes & partnerships
 <p><b>Short Term:</b> enhancing digital connectivity by delivering full fibre broadband &amp; free WiFi connectivity in public spaces</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Towns Fund - Full fibre broadband roll-out across Bedford (including private investment)</li> <li>Provision of free WiFi in public spaces in Bedford town centre (private investment)</li> </ul>	Bedford Town Centre Plan (2020) Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review (2018)



## Objective 4. Enhancing connectivity and accessibility aligned with clean growth

### Rationale

Bedford is already well-connected both by road and rail and is located at the centre of England's Economic Heartland area and the Oxford Cambridge Arc. East West Rail will provide a planned new railway service which will improve the connectivity between Oxford, Cambridge and intermediate towns along the route. As such, East West Rail and its associated station works present significant opportunities in supporting Bedford's transport network and playing a significant role in realising the town's full potential.

Locally, the £22.5m Transporting Bedford 2020 investment has kick-started connectivity improvements which can be built upon and complemented. This investment has included town centre public realm enhancements, congestion reduction measures, and traffic management tools. The investments package in pedestrian and cycling enhancements put forward as part of the Towns Fund Accelerated Funding provides a further opportunity.

While Bedford Council has a good track record of delivering major infrastructure projects, one of the key barriers to implementing further local improvements is a lack of funding. The context analysis has identified a number of issues which need addressing - from congestion on the major approaches to the town centre, to a disjointed cycling network also hindered by congestion creating unsafe conditions. Seven pinch-points have been identified in the town centre which would need to be addressed in advance of new development – these junction improvement schemes have been packaged as Transporting Bedford 2030.

Investment in active travel modes is an important priority for the town, with a vision to promote walking, cycling and public transport as set out in Bedford's Local Transport Plan 2011-2021. Bedford is also currently producing a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan to support this, setting out planned improvements for cyclists and pedestrians particularly in the urban parts of the town. Walking and cycling schemes can improve town centre appeal, present more appealing modes of travel to leisure or work and lessen traffic problems on the road.

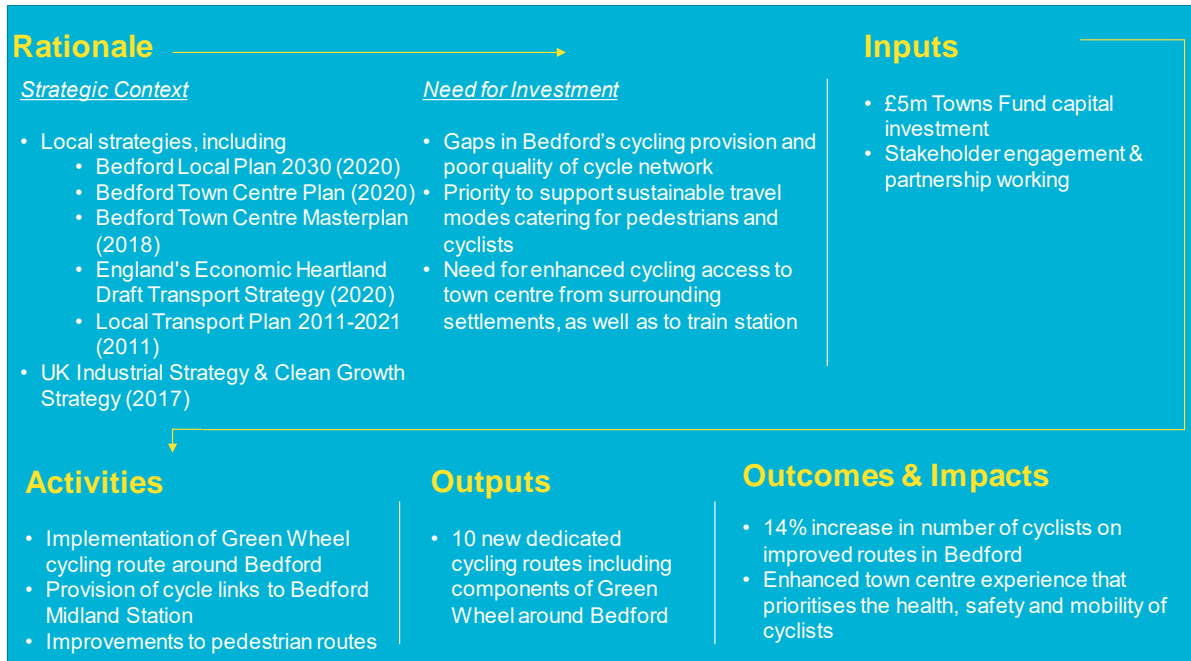
Finally, there is an opportunity for transport investment to maximise development opportunities within the town centre. Greyfriars is a key development site in the town centre, with several schemes planned or being developed. This includes the vacant Police Station site which has obtained planning permission to deliver 23 housing units, community and commercial space. However, the scale of development at the site could be much greater, reaching 105 residential units if Greyfriars junction was improved as the current layout is placing a constraint on development. This initial development is the precursor to a much more extensive development of the area which the junction improvement will unlock.

### Priorities for action

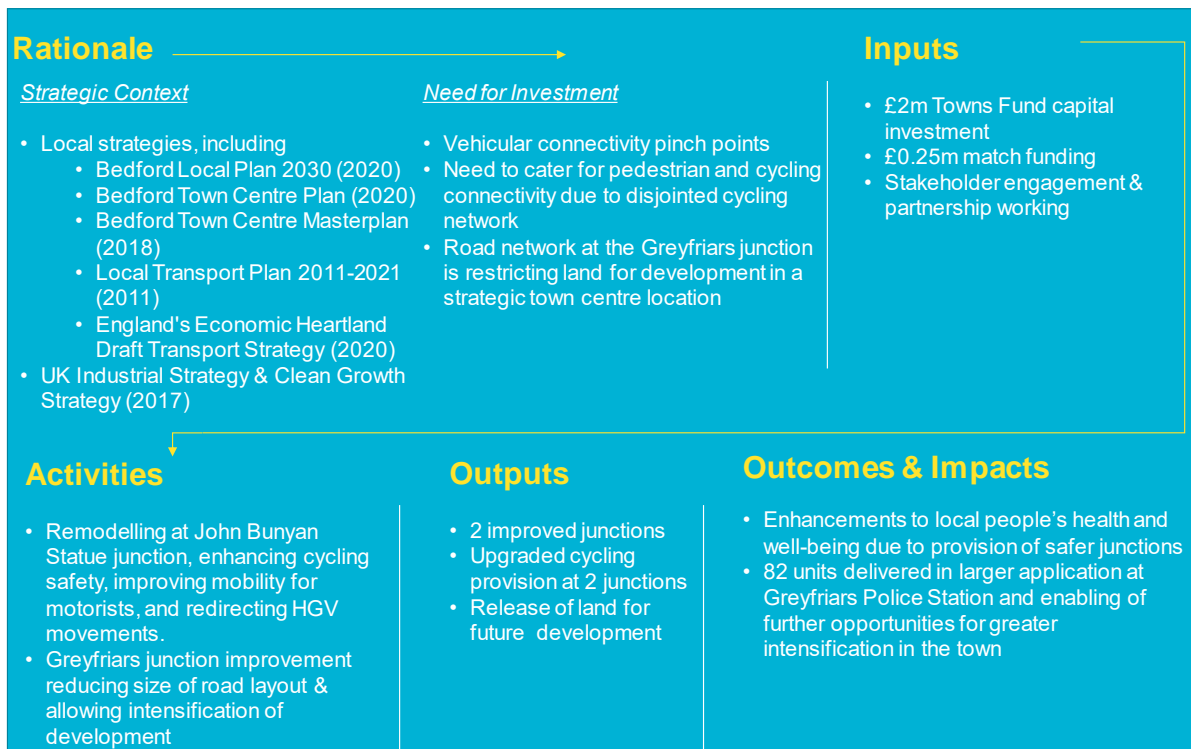
Unlocking development and supporting clean growth is a key priority for Bedford. The Towns Fund Accelerated Funding will signpost cycling routes around Bedford and increase pedestrian mobility which provides a starting point from which the Towns Fund schemes will build on. The short-term priorities are intended to deliver a comprehensive suite of cycling improvements across Bedford, including a new orbital cycling route (the Green Wheel) as well as providing safer cycling conditions at two priority junctions through signalling measures, and improved pedestrian routes. The junction improvement at Greyfriars in particular will unlock development, resulting in the ability to deliver increased density housing at the police station site. The logic models for the pedestrian and cycling infrastructure investment and junction

improvements as part of Transporting Bedford 2030 are presented in Figure 2-7 and Figure 2-8 respectively.



**Figure 2-7: Pedestrian and Cycling Infrastructure Logic Model**



**Figure 2-8: Transporting Bedford 2030 Logic Model**



Over the longer term, a key priority will be to deliver the remaining five junction improvements as part of Transporting Bedford 2030 which will relieve congestion pinch points in the town centre and support new development in line with the Local Plan.

Priority	Interventions	Alignment with strategies, programmes & partnerships
 <p><b>Short Term:</b> Investment to support town centre resilience and recovery by investing in town centre gateways to improve pedestrian &amp; cycling connectivity and flow, bringing people back into Bedford town centre. Providing foundations and positioning for future development &amp; growth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Towns Fund - Accelerated Funding:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Increasing Pedestrian Mobility and Accessibility in Town Centre</li> <li>– Cycle enhancements in the town centre</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Towns Fund - Transporting Bedford 2030: priority improvements at John Bunyan Statue junction and Greyfriars junction</li> <li>• Towns Fund - new pedestrian and cycling infrastructure provision</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strategies:</i>                      Bedford Local Plan 2030 (2020)                      Bedford Town Centre Masterplan (2018)                      Local Transport Plan 2011-2021 (2011)                      England's Economic Heartland Draft Transport Strategy (2020)</p> <p><i>Programmes:</i>                      Transporting Bedford                      East West Rail                      Ox-Cam Arc</p>
 <p><b>Medium-Long Term:</b> delivering connectivity to support and unlock development potential</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transporting Bedford 2030: delivery of remaining five junction improvements to relieve further pinch points and enhance cycling &amp; vehicular connectivity (community infrastructure levy as potential funding; DfT)</li> <li>• Pedestrian and cycling network investments (potential to explore DfT's new £2bn walking and cycling package; SEMLEP future funding sources)</li> </ul>	

## Objective 5. Elevating skills to ensure residents benefit from opportunities

### Rationale

Although Bedford has a large proportion of residents educated to degree level, there is also a high proportion of Bedford's population with no qualifications, which is consistent with relatively low productivity in the borough. Businesses are reporting that around a third (31%) of overall vacancies in Bedford are considered hard to fill according to the 2019 SEMLEP Business Survey<sup>30</sup>. Skills shortages were identified as the largest cause of hard to fill vacancies with approximately 80% due at least in part to a low number of applicants having the required skills.

Investment in skills is needed in Bedford to meet employers' changing needs, especially in light of technological advancements – this will be vital in driving local productivity growth. The Ox-Cam Arc agenda presents a unique opportunity for Bedford to capitalise on its location and skills are an important element of this ambition. Providing the skills required for the industries in the corridor can help attract employers in key industrial clusters to Bedford.

Bedford Borough's All Age Skills Plan<sup>31</sup> sets out the key actions in order to ensure residents have the right skills set for the future, regardless of age or current skill levels. More widely, SEMLEP's Skills Plan<sup>32</sup> and Local Industrial Strategy<sup>33</sup> highlight the requirement for greater digital and scientific skills in order to meet the ambition for the area to become the Ox-Cam Arc's core provider of digital skills. The investments through the Towns Fund will help address these needs and priorities.

Bedford College and the University of Bedfordshire's Campus are the two major educational assets in the area and attract significant investment to support skills development which can benefit the current and future workforce. This includes the new Advanced Engineering Centre at Bedford College funded through SEMLEP's Local Growth Fund (LGF) which offers employers space for electrical and engineering training, aligning with the LEP's high-performance technology priority sector. Most recently the College has been allocated £440,000 for AI Maths and English skills development, and a further £2.9m to start teaching Modern Methods of Construction, funding a new curriculum and the redevelopment of the existing construction teaching facility through the Getting Building Fund.

The University of Bedfordshire has a Campus Centre with a strong arts offer. Recent investments include the £25m green technologies initiative in the Gateway Building of the campus to focus on the campus' sustainability, as well as sports science lab and a teacher education centre. The teacher education centre has successfully trained new teachers for the area – the demand for which has been rising since COVID, which is helping to reduce the number of vacancies in the teaching educational professions – an issue identified in the Bedford All Age Skills Plan.

<sup>30</sup> SEMLEP (2019) SEMLEP Business Survey 2019

<sup>31</sup> Bedford Borough Council, (2020); Bedford Borough All Age Skills Plan 2019-2023. Available at: <https://bbcdevwebfiles.blob.core.windows.net/webfiles/Council%20and%20Democracy/All%20Age%20Skills%20Plan.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> SEMLEP (2017) SEMLEP Skills Plan. Available at: [https://www.semlep.com/modules/downloads/download.php?file\\_name=744#:~:text=The%20SEMLEP%20Growing%20People%20plan,building%20a%20talent%20pipeline%20and](https://www.semlep.com/modules/downloads/download.php?file_name=744#:~:text=The%20SEMLEP%20Growing%20People%20plan,building%20a%20talent%20pipeline%20and)

<sup>33</sup> SEMLEP (2019) Local Industrial Strategy. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/818893/South\\_East\\_Midlands\\_SINGLE\\_PAGE.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818893/South_East_Midlands_SINGLE_PAGE.pdf)

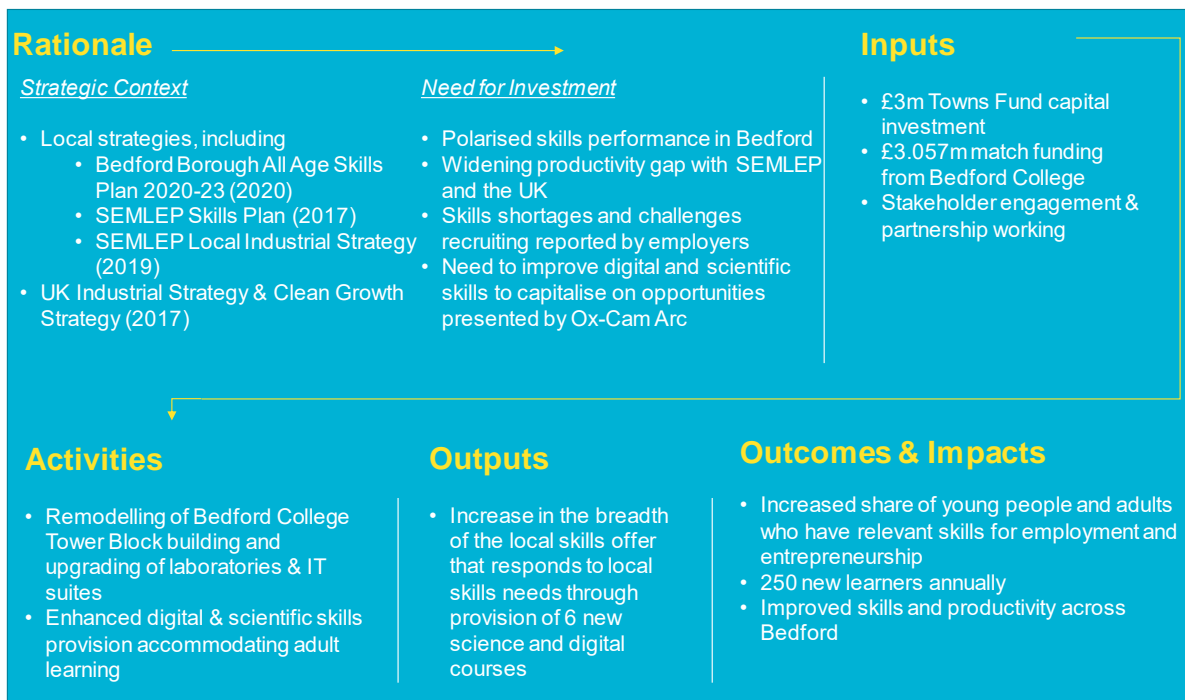


The above demonstrates the need to work with Bedford’s key education assets to maximise the benefits of the Town Investment Plan for local skills and employment opportunities. There is appetite from skills partners, including Bedford College and the University of Bedfordshire, to work together to ensure skills provision is aligned with needs, which will continue throughout the delivery of the Towns Deal projects.

**Priorities for action**

The need to provide residents with access to skills and employment is a key priority for Bedford. The delivery of the new Health Science and Digital Skills Centre at Bedford College is a short-term priority which will be implemented through the Towns Fund, which will widen the breadth of local skills offer and will be designed flexibly to encourage access to learning (such as accommodating working adults with a flexibility of choice across a variety of levels and specialisms). The expanded curriculum will include commercial qualifications such as CISCO and CompTIA, and work is ongoing with employers to provide a choice of tailored study options for their particular needs. The logic model for the Health Science and Digital Skills Centre is presented in Figure 2-9.



**Figure 2-9: Health Science and Digital Skills Centre Logic Model**



More widely, skills partners are keen to work together and with the Council to ensure benefits for local people are realised. This will include:

- Partnership working to ensure residents and learners have access to learning and employment opportunities provided during the construction of the Towns Fund projects in Bedford. The Council will work closely with skills providers to put measures in place during procurement to facilitate this, such as use of apprenticeships to encourage learning.
- The University of Bedfordshire will be undertaking an assessment of its course provision at the Bedford campus to ensure the provision aligns with needs – this will further enhance the learning offer in Bedford with the opportunity to deliver new courses in the area, improving access to learning.

In the medium to longer term, Bedford will take advantage of the delivery of mixed-use development at the Station Quarter and the town centre to attract labour and skills, while also ensuring access to new employment opportunities for residents and businesses located in the area. Additionally, the plan to redevelop the Station Quarter and the arrival of East-West Rail presents an opportunity to attract a major research-intensive institution to have a presence in Bedford in order to take advantage of its strategic location.

Priority	Interventions	Alignment with strategies, programmes & partnerships
 <p><b>Short Term:</b> Enhanced digital and scientific skills provision to meet employers' needs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Towns Fund - Enhanced digital and science skills provision for adults through delivery of Health Science and Digital Skills Centre at Bedford College</li> <li>• Partnership working to provide access to employment opportunities presented by Towns Fund investment, and alignment of skills programmes &amp; provision to local need</li> </ul>	<p><i>Strategies:</i>                      Bedford Borough All Age Skills Plan 2020-23 (2020)                      SEMLEP Skills Plan (2017)                      SEMLEP Local Industrial Strategy (2019)                      UK Industrial Strategy (2017)</p> <p><i>Programmes:</i></p>
 <p><b>Medium - Long Term:</b> Increase in Bedford's academic and skills assets to maximise the long term spill-over benefits from Ox-Cam Arc</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attracting labour and skills through delivery of mixed-use development in the town centre &amp; Station Quarter</li> <li>• Attracting an academic use to Station Quarter to capitalise on Bedford's position in the Ox-Cam Arc</li> </ul>	<p>Bedford College &amp; University of Bedfordshire Skills &amp; Capital Projects                      East West Rail                      Ox-Cam Arc</p> <p><i>Partnerships:</i>                      Bedford Skills Group</p>

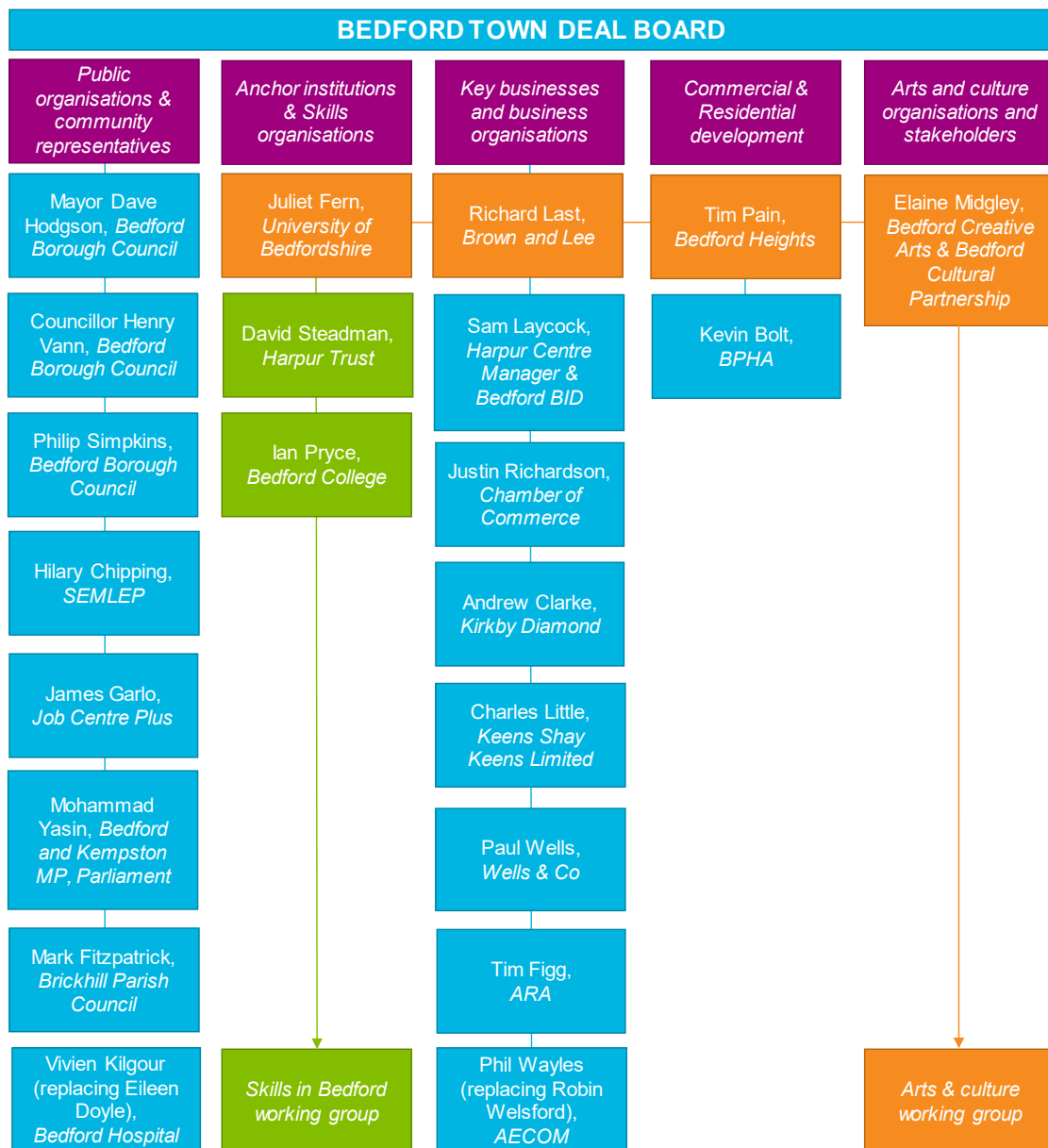
### 3. Engagement and Delivery

#### 3.1 Stakeholder & Community Engagement

##### 3.1.1 Bedford Town Deal Board

Bedford’s Town Investment Plan has been informed by extensive stakeholder engagement to date. Bedford Town Deal Board comprises of 22 members who represent the key organisations in Bedford across public, private, voluntary and education sectors all of whom have fed into the development of the Bedford Town Investment Plan<sup>34</sup>. Figure 3-1 presents the membership structure of the Town Deal Board across different organisations and working groups.

**Figure 3-1: Bedford Town Deal Board**



<sup>34</sup> Bedford Town Deal Board members and biographies are presented at: <https://www.bedford.gov.uk/business/invest-in-bedford/projects-infrastructure/the-towns-fund/>

### 3.1.2 Engagement to inform development of Town Investment Plan



#### 1 – Anchor institutions, businesses, public and voluntary agencies

Several of the key organisations in this group are represented on the Bedford Town Deal Board. Stakeholders have been engaged individually by our consultants throughout development of the Town Investment Plan, as well as being part of thematic group discussions. The engagement focused on:

- Informing development of the evidence base to understand challenges, needs, opportunities and interventions required;
- Informing vision, key themes and interventions;
- Testing and prioritising project ideas, ensuring alignment with local needs and understanding of interventions required which could unlock development;
- Establishing buy-in from stakeholders for the proposed interventions.

Engagement has been undertaken with the following organisations:

- Public organisations such as Bedford Borough Council (including elected members), South East Midlands LEP, Bedford Hospital, East West Rail, Brickhill Parish Council, Job Centre Plus;
- Key businesses and business organisations such as Kirkby Diamond, ARA, Keens Shay Keens Limited, Wells & Co, AECOM, Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce, Bedford Business Improvement District, and Harpur Centre;
- Anchor institutions and skills organisations including University of Bedfordshire, Bedford College, and Harpur Trust;
- Arts and culture organisations and stakeholders including Bedford Creative Arts, Bedford Cultural Partnership, Brown & Lee, and officers from Bedford Borough Council.



#### 2 - Local community

Bedford has recently undertaken a consultation exercise in 2019 to inform the Bedford Town Centre Plan which sought views from the local community and residents on the strengths, weaknesses and investment needs in Bedford.

The consultation received 2,161 responses, followed up by further consultation with key stakeholders in April 2020 including key businesses, Business Improvement District and other stakeholders to inform the final Town Centre Plan. This evidence was an important aspect of identifying and prioritising investments for inclusion in the Town Investment Plan. The consultation highlighted support for enhancing the leisure and entertainment offer in the town centre and need for more social spaces in order to draw people in. The responses revealed the need for improvement of public spaces in the town due to their current poor condition, as well as a need for connectivity improvements.

This was further supplemented by analysis of the Towns Fund's MyTown campaign responses for Bedford (83 responses) which further reiterated key issues and investment needs in Bedford. The responses had been analysed and grouped into key themes which fed into the prioritisation process of Towns Fund investments. The feedback demonstrated support for key investment proposals including pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, Midland Road and station area regeneration, diversification of the town centre offer, full fibre broadband provision, and employability and skills.



The Town Investment Plan has also sought to align with additional engagement activities delivered by partners to ensure a wide range of inputs is captured. This included a survey<sup>35</sup> of the arts & cultural sector commissioned by Bedford Cultural Partnership which gauged demand for relevant intervention types within the Town Investment Plan. Over 40 organisations (including artists, agencies, media and educational organisations) responded to the survey which informed alignment of Town Investment Plan with demands for performance infrastructure and types of support required for the sector.

Additionally, development of the Town Investment Plan has been informed by responses as part of an extensive public consultation process conducted in 2017 to inform the Masterplan for Bedford Town Centre. This revealed widespread support for improving Midland Road and the Station Quarter.

<i>Bedford Town Centre Plan Consultation</i>	<i>MyTown Campaign</i>	<i>Arts &amp; Culture Sector Survey</i>	<i>Bedford Town Centre Masterplan Consultation</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducted in 2019</li> <li>• 2,161 responses</li> <li>• Follow-up interviews in April 2020</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducted in 2019-2020</li> <li>• 83 responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducted June-August 2020</li> <li>• Over 40 responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducted April-June 2017</li> <li>• 1,800 responses</li> </ul>

### 3 – Landowners, agents and investors



One-to-one consultations and group interviews have been held with key representatives from BPHA (a housing association); Bedford Heights (a successful commercial development in Bedford); CastleCap (a landowner) and Harnan Real Estate (an agent). Engagement has focused on understanding the

challenges, needs and opportunities in Bedford, as well as interventions which could unlock development and investment.

Additionally, Bedford Council continues to engage with commercial agents, landowners, investors and other key stakeholders to identify potential development opportunities in Bedford town centre. The Bedford Commercial Agents Breakfast network is an established group which the Council co-ordinates and meets with quarterly to discuss market trends and which enables the Council to react accordingly and in a timely manner. The activities also include detailed discussions with a major developer and a Bedford-based housing association, both of whom are planning investment in the regeneration of the Greyfriars area of the town. The Council are about to enter into a joint venture with the developer, bringing assets it owns into the regeneration footprint.

The Council has been proactive in fostering relations and engaging with the new freehold owner of a large former department store in the town centre to understand plans and support actions to bring the building back into use.

#### 3.1.3 Future Engagement Activities

Ongoing and future engagement to support delivery of Bedford's Towns Fund projects will be managed through a Consultation and Communication Plan which will be developed for each project based on the outcome of the Town Deal agreement. The Plan will take into account the

<sup>35</sup> 1Degree East (2020) Bedford Producer Hub & Culture Audit Initial Findings June- August 2020

level of involvement across groups to date, appropriate engagement methods and any changes in social circumstances to ensure compliance with any future restrictions and guidance.

The Bedford Town Deal delivery team will work with local community partnerships to maximise engagement on Towns Fund projects within the area to introduce community engagement activities. The team will work closely with Council departments including the Community Engagement Team to ensure best practice is reflected and participation maximised. At this stage we anticipate holding events (online due to COVID-19 restrictions) in Bedford to raise awareness of the program and invite the community to participate in focussed project consultations.

In addition, invitations to join focus groups will be sent to a range of specialist stakeholders including:

- Midland Road Area Residents Association
- Cycling and bike user groups
- Bedford Commuters Association
- Train and public transport user groups
- Road user groups
- Creative sector / Arts incl. Digital / Media

Skills are a key element of the Town Investment Plan ambitions and we will engage with partners including Bedford College and the University of Bedfordshire to identify skills opportunities across all projects including the investment in the Health Science and Digital Skills Centre at Bedford College.

Impact of engagement activities will be monitored and assessed, and a monitoring and evaluating plan will be produced as part of the business case.

Further detail on planned engagement and actions is provided in Appendix B.

## **3.2 Private investment ambitions**

The ambition is for Bedford's Town Investment Plan to create conditions which attract and encourage private sector investment. This can be categorised by three specific elements:

### [Direct co-funding of shopfront improvements](#)

As part of the Midland Road regeneration project, the scheme will seek a 20% match from businesses to co-fund the shopfront improvements along the corridor. The co-investment is estimated to amount to up to £400k which is based on 48 businesses participating. This element of the scheme builds on the successful delivery of Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) along the High Street which resulted in improvements to 16 premises. The delivery team will implement lessons learnt from THI and the current HAZ to maximise participation of businesses in the scheme. One example of this is a higher intervention rate which will offer an 80% grant for the improvements, as well as early engagement with eligible businesses. Work is ongoing to engage with business owners on Midland Road to obtain commitment to the co-investment.

### [Investment in digital connectivity](#)

A key ambition of Bedford's Town Investment Plan is to significantly enhance digital connectivity through provision of full fibre broadband. Discussions have taken place with two full fibre broadband providers on investing in Bedford. These discussions are ongoing, and Bedford Council has made provisions to facilitate and accelerate full fibre roll out across the town. Agreement is expected to be reached in the next few months, ahead of the Heads of Terms being agreed. Securing the agreement will result in a significant private investment in Bedford of up to £19m.

### [Positioning for future investment](#)

The early projects within the Town Investment Plan will help enable and facilitate private sector development and investment. Discussions with landowners and developers have taken place to understand interventions required to unlock investment, including opportunities for mixed-use provision at the vacant sites in the town centre. Ongoing engagement with landowners at Greyfriars has emphasised the importance of regenerating the Station Quarter and Midland Road areas to act as a catalyst for future growth.

## **3.3 Business Case Process**

A set of Green Book-compliant business cases will be developed for each project. The business cases will set out:

- The Strategic Case including demonstration of need and market failure, and alignment with Towns Fund objectives
- The Economic Case demonstrating impacts of the scheme and value for money
- The Financial Case demonstrating affordability
- The Commercial Case demonstrating deliverability
- The Management Case outlining capability and management arrangements

Business case development is expected to commence upon agreement of headline terms (est. January 2021) with support from external consultants as required. In parallel, activities to refine design and options for projects will continue as will further community and stakeholder engagement on the proposals and options. Delivery and management arrangements will be firmed up, including plans for ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

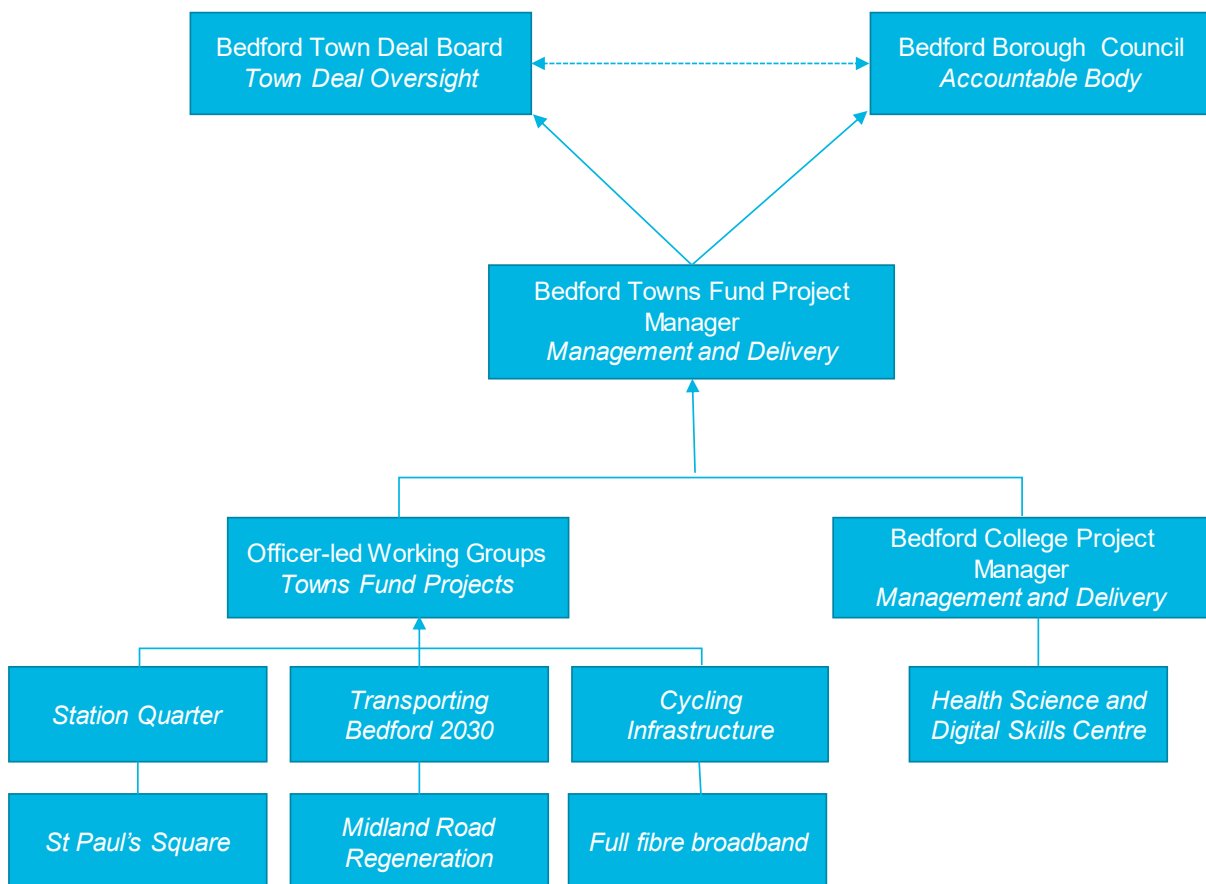
The business cases will be assured using Bedford Borough Council's assurance processes (with Bedford Borough Council as the Accountable Body).

## **3.4 Delivery**

### **3.4.1 Overall approach to delivery**

Bedford Borough Council will be responsible for leading on the delivery of Towns Fund investments with the exception of the Health Science and Digital Skills Centre which will be delivered by Bedford College. The diagram below demonstrates the outline governance and delivery processes for Bedford Towns Fund investments.

**Figure 3-2: Bedford Towns Fund Governance & Delivery Structure**



The Council delivery team has significant experience in implementing capital projects of this nature, most recently implementing the £22.5m Transporting Bedford 2020 investment in Bedford Town Centre which is currently ongoing.

As part of the Towns Fund funding ask, Bedford is seeking funding to support project delivery which will include a dedicated project manager and an officer within the Council who will oversee the process and deliver the shop front improvement scheme. The delivery plans for the package of investments will utilise the experience and well-tested governance arrangements within Bedford Borough Council, this will include utilising similar procurement and management arrangements that were used for the delivery of Transporting Bedford 2020 schemes. Whilst the specific arrangements will be determined in due course, delivery options will include extension of the existing contract with the Transporting Bedford 2020 delivery team which is expected to conclude in March 2022.

The delivery of the Health Science and Digital Skills Centre will be led by an experienced team at Bedford College. The College has recently completed similar projects including a brand new Advanced Engineering building (Buchanan Building)<sup>36</sup> and the first ever BREEAM excellent retro-fit in the country (Brundtland Building)<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.bedford.ac.uk/about/news/2018/october/official-opening-of-buchanan-centre>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.bedford.ac.uk/about/news/2014/march/breem-award-first-for-bedford-college>



### 3.4.2 Key timescales and milestones

Outline delivery timescales for the projects selected for Towns Fund investment are summarised in the table below. The milestones demonstrate that the projects will be delivered in line with Towns Fund requirements to complete projects by 2025/26 financial year.

**Table 3.1 Delivery Timescales**

<b>Project</b>	<b>Agree Heads of Terms with MHCLG</b>	<b>Business case development (including Design development; Stakeholder engagement; Options Appraisal)</b>	<b>Assumed funding release from MHCLG</b>	<b>Planning</b>	<b>Start construction</b>	<b>Completion</b>
Station Quarter	Dec 2020	Jan – Dec 2021	Jan 2022	n/a	Spring 2025	Winter/ spring 2025/26
Midland Road Regeneration	Dec 2020	Jan – Dec 2021	Jan 2022	n/a	Spring 2022 (shopfront improvement) Spring 2024 (public realm)	Winter 2024 (public realm) Winter 2025 (shopfront improvement)
Transporting Bedford 2030	Dec 2020	Jan – Dec 2021	Jan 2022	n/a	Jan 2023	December 2023
St Paul's Public Realm	Dec 2020	Jan – Dec 2021	Jan 2022	Early 2022 (if required)	Autumn 2022	Spring-summer 2023
Pedestrian and Cycling infrastructure	Dec 2020	Jan – Dec 2021	Jan 2022	n/a	Spring 2022	Winter 2025
Health Science and Digital Skills Centre	Dec 2020	Jan – Dec 2021	Jan 2022	March-May 2021	July 2021	May 2022
Bedford Full Fibre Broadband	Dec 2020	Jan – Dec 2021	Jan 2022	n/a	Jan 2023	Jan 2025

