

Broad horizons

How the Tees Valley is proving that working together on a collective vision can be a powerful force for economic change



Building on your strengths



The Tees Valley has had to be adaptable, innovative and resilient to deal with economic knocks along the way. Those attributes are at the heart of its local enterprise partnership's efforts to forge a prosperous future

Pore over the Tees Valley strategic economic plan and you will find one word crops up more than most: ambition.

The targets set out in that document spell out just how ambitious this corner of north-east England wants to be. Between now and 2025 its goal is to generate 25,000 new jobs, add £1bn to the economy, create 3,200 enterprises and transform the skills of its workforce by ensuring more people reach NVQ levels 3 and 4.

But this is an area that has more reason than most to look confidently to the future. Its five local authorities – Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton on Tees – were ahead of the game when they set up Tees Valley Unlimited (TVU) in 2011 as a vehicle to attract and guide strategic investment.

When it became the area's local enterprise partnership it was able to hit the ground running and in the last three years it has supported more than £1bn of investment and 4,000 jobs. With a private sector-led leadership board, TVU has

become an exemplar of how local authorities and business leaders can be a powerful combination – even in difficult times.

While heavy industries such as steel making and shipbuilding once formed the backbone of its economy; the Tees Valley has become synonymous with the process and chemical industries over the last 25 years. The challenge now for TVU and its partners is to nurture and adapt those sectors in the face of global competition and technological advances while diversifying to create a more balanced economy that maximises the opportunities for local people.

Progress is already evident across the area with growth areas including digital and creative industries, low carbon technology, logistics, advanced manufacturing and engineering.

Nowhere is TVU's rebalancing strategy more evident than in the Tees Valley Enterprise Zone. One of the first to be approved by the government, the EZ's multitude of sites across more than 420 hectares have attracted 13

companies and with them 700 jobs since 2012. The latest success story is award-winning C&A Pumps, which has been able to expand within the enterprise zone and created an extra 10 jobs by moving to Queens Meadow Business Park in Hartlepool, one of eight key sites identified within the Hartlepool Vision to drive regeneration in the town forward.

Others include US energy firm Air Products, which is just about to complete work on a £300m renewable energy facility and has already announced plans to invest a further £250m in a second plant.

For TVU's managing director, Stephen Catchpole, it reflects how the partnership is building on the area's strengths.

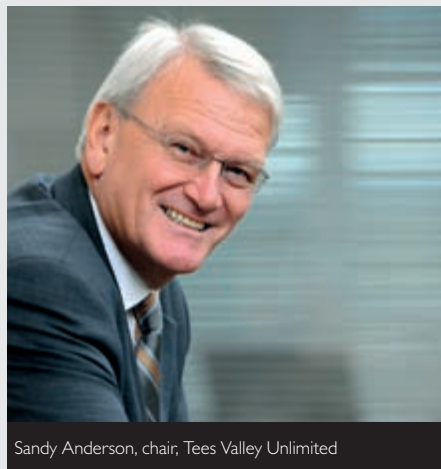
'Our economy has stood up remarkably well despite recession and we are seeing signs of real optimism in our traditional manufacturing base,' he says. 'It has enabled us to move into new areas, supported by our industrial heritage. It's a reinvention of what the area is good at in a modern context.'

When I first came to the Tees Valley to work for ICI in 1965, the area was dominated by large employers. As well as ICI there were the steel and shipbuilding industries that between them employed tens of thousands of workers and shaped the local landscape.

When things were going well it ensured full employment. The downside was when things weren't going well there were very few, if any, other employers capable of picking up the slack.

Today, heavy industries remain critical drivers of the Tees Valley economy and in recent years have attracted significant investment. Technological advances in areas such as manufacturing and engineering have made them much less labour intensive and so they provide far fewer jobs than in the past. So in many respects the key challenge remains the same – to ensure the Tees Valley has a diverse economy capable of withstanding shocks that come along the way.

As you will discover in this supplement, Tees Valley Unlimited has sought to do this by nurturing growth across a wide range of sectors and by addressing skills issues through our partners to ensure the local economy can attract and sustain high quality employers.



Sandy Anderson, chair, Tees Valley Unlimited

But those long-standing industries remain at the heart of our strategy to attract and guide investment. They are hubs of innovation capable of taking cutting edge developments and delivering economic growth for the Tees Valley and beyond. It's all about recognising your strengths, building on them and using them to diversify.

Tees Valley: vital statistics
• Population of 664,000 across five council areas
• Its travel to work area covers 880,000 adults
• Tees Valley contributes over £10bn a year to the UK economy
• It has attracted £1.5bn in foreign investment in the last three years
• 70% of large companies are foreign owned
• More than half of workers are employed by a large company of over 1,000 staff
• There are over 13,500 SMEs in the Tees Valley and one year survival rates for start ups are above the national average

One of the Tees Valley's biggest success stories – and a beacon for its ambition to remain at the cutting edge – is the Centre for Process Innovation, which has bases in Darlington, Redcar and further afield in County Durham. Part of the government's High Value Manufacturing Catapult, it is developing the next generation of processes and products. In the summer it was announced that the Centre would be opening a new 'Biologics factory of the future' in 2017 where organisations can develop and test medicine manufacturing technologies.

Tees Valley generates
50% of the UK's
petrochemicals GDP



Half of the £20m investment in the facility has come via TVU's Local Growth Fund and its Growth Deal. This investment builds on the £38m investment by CPI into the

National Biologics Manufacturing Centre in Darlington. It demonstrates that the Tees Valley is an ideal location for a national centre for expertise and innovation that is pivotal

to the UK economy, says Mr Catchpole, and opens up the possibility of major growth in the supply chain.

Chris Dowle, director of biologics at the CPI, echoed his sentiments at the launch: 'If the UK is to lead and exploit the significant advances from the investment in biologics research made already, it will need to continue to develop its manufacturing processes.

'This will create value and bring long-term benefits to the Tees Valley through creating high value manufacturing jobs in a high growth industry.' The CPI's chief executive, Nigel Perry, is among 12 members of TVU's board, which includes representatives from the private sector and higher education as well as the leaders of all five local authorities.

Councillor Bill Dixon, leader of Darlington Council and vice chair of TVU, believes the board reflects the area's 'togetherness' and a collective vision to drive the Tees Valley economy forward.

'Being small and almost perfectly formed makes it easy for employers to work with Tees Valley,' he says. 'Investment has increased since the formation of TVU because it allows us to tailor inward investment and position it to our greatest advantage. I think the future for the Tees Valley looks incredibly bright.'

A winning combination

Devolution is in the air and Tees Valley recently became the latest area to throw its hat into the ring with what one business leader dubbed 'devo-Tees'.

Proposals for a combined authority, announced last month, would bring the five local councils together to focus on economic development, transport, infrastructure and skills. But what sets the Tees Valley Combined Authority apart are its plans to work in parallel with its local enterprise partnership.

If the proposals go ahead, it will not only hold joint meetings with Tees Valley Unlimited and business representatives but also share staff and resources. In many ways it is a natural step for an area that has a long history of joint working between the local authorities.

Councillor Christopher Akers-Belcher, leader of Hartlepool Council, describes the combined authority as 'an opportunity to cement the excellent partnership working arrangements that already exist between the five Tees Valley councils and businesses'. Middlesbrough mayor Ray Mallon believes the move could free the Tees Valley from Whitehall bureaucracy and give the area 'a strong

single voice to advance the Tees area agenda to national government on the big strategic issues such as transport, employment and in particular the skills agenda which is the prerequisite to economic growth for our area.'

From TVU's perspective it raises the prospect of working alongside a statutory body capable of securing devolution of power and resources that can be focused



on the area's strategic priorities over the long term. 'The combined strengths of the Tees Valley LEP and the new powers afforded by a Combined Authority will provide greater resources and a stronger voice for the area,' explains TVU chair Sandy Anderson.

The reaction from business leaders has been equally enthusiastic.

Graham Robb, chair of the Institute of Directors in the north east, said: 'We have heard about "devo-max" in Scotland, this proposal is "devo-Tees" and I am happy to welcome it because it promises business a role at the heart of decision making from the very start.

'The Tees Valley LEP, TVU, was one of the first LEPs and is one of the most successful. This proposal appears to take the best from its formula and apply it on a wider basis.'

James Ramsbotham, chief executive of North East Chamber of Commerce, said the combined authority 'builds on a strong history of local authorities in Tees Valley working together, which is what businesses want to see'. He added: 'This development would help bring more resources and flexibility into the area to deliver the economic growth of which we know Tees Valley is capable.'

TVU has so far secured £158m from the Regional Growth Fund aimed at generating £1.5bn of investment, creating more than 4,750 jobs and safeguarding a further 4,740

Maximising the impact of funding

The days of major government funding schemes may be over but TVU is proving that even a little financial help can go a long way

Private sector investment is crucial to the Tees Valley's success at a time when austerity measures have seen a dramatic fall in government funding. Since the recession the area has attracted somewhere in the region of £3bn, including £1bn into the enterprise zone alone.

But government and European funding still play a vital role in kick-starting growth across the Tees Valley and drawing in further investment. Last year projects and programmes in Tees Valley secured £53m from the Regional Growth Fund (RGF), Tees Valley Unlimited has £187m of EU funds to allocate over the next six years and earlier this year its City Deal drew in a further £12m.

TVU has sought to maximise the impact of these funds by pooling as many as possible into a single pot called the Tees Valley Investment Fund. It draws in money from a variety of sources including the Enterprise Zone, Local Growth Fund, returns from the Growing Places Fund and a number of EU streams. It also acts as a mechanism to reinvest returns on investment.

TVU is predominantly focusing those funds on creating the right environment for businesses to thrive and helping innovative firms with growth potential to develop and market their products.

So that means directing Local Growth Funding at The Materials Processing Institute, in Redcar, and Teesside

Advanced Manufacturing Park in Middlesbrough and Central Park in Darlington. The latter will be home to the National Horizons Centre, which will gear Tees Valley up for the growing subsea engineering and biopharmaceutical industries and other emerging sectors.

There are currently £175m worth of innovation projects in the pipeline, including £30m from the private sector.

But it's not just the 'big ticket' items that are being supported. During the last year TVU has secured £2.3m from the RGF for the Tees Valley Business Compass, a service to signpost SMEs to the business support offered by public and private sector organisations in the area.

Part of the funding is being used to offer a business growth investment scheme, providing grants to help small and medium sized enterprises create new, sustainable jobs.

'Our overall aim is to maximise the amount of investment in Tees Valley to achieve our ambitions and build on our strengths and opportunities to create jobs and success for the area,' says TVU chair Sandy Anderson. 'Attracting private investment is the key to sustainable growth and our investment plan identifies ways to maximise access to a range of funding to help businesses grow and ensure the maximum impact from our local investments in infrastructure. At the heart of our plan is promoting new innovative ways to deliver more.'

Funding focus:

Tees Components and Camerons Brewery



The most recent beneficiary of RGF support is Tees Components, a precision and heavy engineering firm in Saltburn-by-the-Sea in East Cleveland, which received £400,000 from the RGF through the Let's Grow programme. It will enable the company to target emerging markets in South America, south-east Asia and the Middle East.

'Geographically, we are right on the edge of the funding area, so the advice and support of Tees Valley Unlimited and Redcar and Cleveland Council's enterprise and business growth team has been crucial in steering us in the right direction,' says Sharon Lane, general manager at Tees Components.

She adds: 'With the jobs situation as it is at the moment, it is massively important that this investment has enabled us not only to safeguard and create skilled jobs, but also to continue and expand our engineering apprenticeship programme. More than a third of our workforce began their careers here as apprentices, so a "job for life" really does mean that here.'

It might sound like small beer but a £150,000 grant recently awarded to Camerons Brewery in Hartlepool could go some way to extending the firm's long history in the area.

The company, which is approaching its 150th anniversary, received the RGF funding via the TVU-led Tees Valley Business Growth Investment Scheme to enable it to invest in a bottling facility, create 12 new jobs and protect a further three.

'Without the grant assistance through the business growth investment scheme, we would have been unable to finance the project and lost out on the opportunity to grow the business and help secure the long-term future of the brewery,' explains Chris Soley, director and general manager at Camerons.

'Camerons Brewery is now the only remaining major independent family brewer in the north east and, as it approaches its 150th anniversary, the addition of a bottling capability will allow the business to adapt to changing consumer trends and help cement the site's future long-term prosperity.'

The skills challenge

Tees Valley Unlimited is leading efforts to develop a more coordinated approach to skills to ensure the area is ready to seize the opportunities ahead

Like many other areas of the UK, the Tees Valley's industrial heritage brings with it a legacy of challenges around the skills base of its workforce.

The major employers of the past not only provided jobs on a huge scale, they also took care of training to ensure workers were equipped to deal with ever-changing demands.

One of the key roles that Tees Valley Unlimited now plays involves helping businesses, education and training providers and other partners work together to ensure the workforce has the skills needed to sustain and grow the local economy. The area has above average unemployment while the proportion of people with lower and higher skills and rate of business start-ups currently falls below the UK average.

TVU has set the Tees Valley a target of creating 25,000 new jobs by 2025 and to bring the skills of local people up to NVQ levels 3 and 4. These are ambitious goals but the foundations are already in place to build a more diverse, high value and inclusive economy. Teesside University and Durham University, which has a growing campus at Stockton, are integral to these objectives. The Tees Valley has a reputation for excellence across a multitude of disciplines; such as advanced manufacturing, engineering and the digital, chemicals, oil and gas industries and logistics. As well as supporting universities and colleges to work closely with major employers to equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills, TVU is also focusing its efforts on developing a 'Tees Valley curriculum' in schools to raise attainment. The overall intention is to



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More than 9,000 people are employed in the digital and creative industries in Tees Valley

create a continuous pathway of support for young people through a 'skills hub' approach that brings partners and resources together.

The key is to not only prepare the next generation of employees and entrepreneurs but also to 'upskill' the current workforce, explains TVU managing director Stephen Catchpole. 'Skills is always an issue but it's being tackled in a much more coordinated way than in the past.'

Ian Kinnery, chair of TVU's Employment, Learning and Skills Group and director of Stockton-based business coaching firm Team Massive Results, believes the Tees Valley has an 'excellent foundation to build on'.

'Only when our employers large and small, our education and training providers and our present and future workforce enjoy a coordinated and collaborative approach to the rapidly changing demands of the world of work in the Tees Valley can we hope to be able to be up to the exciting challenges ahead,' he says.

TVU has called on government to devolve a number of powers to the LEP and its partners, including greater control and influence over skills funding.

Mr Kinnery adds: 'We can no longer expect the experiences of earlier generations to adequately inform the workforce of the future. In the 21st century innovative world we are creating, high quality, independent and future focused advice is essential. That is why we ask government for more freedom and flexibility in this area.'

Skills focus:

Tees Valley Jobs & Skills Investment Scheme & Hartlepool Youth Investment Project

One of the ways in which TVU is helping businesses in key sectors to take on new recruits is via the Tees Valley Jobs and Skills Investment Scheme.

Supported by £7m from the Regional Growth Fund, it means employers receive up to 50% of the costs of taking on new staff – whether they are recent graduates or apprentices – for the first year.

The aim of the scheme is to create up to 700 jobs over the next year across chemical processing, digital and creative, energy and waste management, engineering, logistics, manufacturing and renewables. One early beneficiary is Returnable Packaging Services in Middlesbrough, which had seen an increase in trade and needed to expand quickly. The firm was impressed by TVU's quick decision making on its application to the scheme that saw it approved to support five new staff in just three weeks.

The scheme has so far approved almost 300

applications and is expected to create over 770 jobs.

Hartlepool Youth Investment Project was launched in 2012, since when unemployment among young people has plummeted from 17% to 9%.

It brings together key agencies including Hartlepool Council, employers, schools and colleges, Teesside University and Jobcentre Plus. It is focused on those aged 14-24 and uses a range of approaches – such as mentoring, apprenticeships and work trials – to prepare people for the world of work. One strand is Youth Engagement and Support, which provides bespoke support for 14-19 year olds not in education, employment or training.

Among the success stories is James Fitzsimons from Seaton Carew, who is now working as an IT apprentice on placement with Hartlepool Council's tourism team.

'I left college in November 2012 and was unemployed until my apprenticeship started in May



2014,' he says. 'I now have a lot more direction and I am already thinking about what I want to do after my apprenticeship. My confidence has improved and I am a lot more positive.'

Stockton is in the top 10% of places in the UK to do business, according to a survey last year by The MJ and Local Futures Group



© Dave Charnley Photography 2012

Infinity Bridge in Stockton is a local landmark stretching over the River Tees

It has a major port, an international airport, high speed rail links and sits next to one of the UK's major motorways. It's hard to imagine a better-connected region – and yet the Tees Valley is often perceived to be on the peripheries.

The reality is somewhere in between. The area's connectivity from a business perspective, particularly in relation to freight, is second to none. Teesport handles 18% of England's total cargo and is the country's largest exporting port.

But road and rail connectivity need to improve and that is reflected in TVU's focus on creating a strategic vision for future development. With the East Coast mainline running through Darlington, the Tees Valley is well served in terms of north-south travel. London can be reached in under two and a half hours and Edinburgh is just two hours away. Journeying east to west, whether by road or rail, is more of an issue.

TVU is working on a vision for east-west connectivity that includes better road links with the A1M and an improved rail network both within the Tees Valley and between its towns and other major cities.

The Tees Valley Transport Infrastructure Group recently produced a briefing that outlines that vision and describes how TVU is using its influence to build a strong case for investment. For example, all but one of the 11 sectors identified by the government as vital for future economic growth are present along the A19 corridor – which runs through the heart of the Tees Valley.

'With the A19 and A1M providing the routeways to economies particularly in Scotland, the wider north east, Yorkshire and the north west, quick and easy access is needed to these networks from anywhere in Tees Valley,' it says. 'Tees Valley has vital oil and gas ties with Aberdeen, professional services and engineering connections to Leeds and Manchester, and major links to London.'

Indeed, the oil and gas industries in the Tees Valley are second only to Aberdeen in terms of scale

and engineering supply chain and are home to some of the largest firms in the world including BP and ConocoPhillips.

Good public transport links are vital to the Tees Valley, not least because levels of car ownership are below average – around 30% of people do not own

a car. The briefing describes how investment in rail will ensure it 'meets the needs of the modern day Tees Valley economy', whether it be to develop direct links to London from Middlesbrough or creating a more frequent and higher quality service within the region. It is estimated that the former would generate £47m a

Transport focus:

Influencing the East Coast mainline

TVU's efforts to influence the East Coast rail franchise are a prime example of how the LEP enables the Tees Valley to collaborate and speak with one voice for the greater good of the area.

The new franchise starts in March 2015 and has been seized as an opportunity to retain and enhance train services at Darlington and push for new routes between Middlesbrough and London. The Tees Valley's rail links via its gateway of Darlington are vitally important. They bring in 600,000 visitors a year and generate around £72m for the local economy – supporting 1,400 jobs in the process. With HS2 in the pipeline it's imperative the station is ready to capitalise on the benefits it could deliver.

TVU has been able to use its knowledge of the vast number of economic developments across the Tees Valley, and particularly around Darlington and Middlesbrough, to bolster wider efforts to ensure the area benefits from the new franchise. It is using this expertise to influence strategic lobbying vehicles, such as Rail North, the North East Business Unit and the East Coast Mainline Authorities Group.

It is also part of the Task Force for Rail Electrification that is pushing the case for the Middlesbrough/Teesport to Northallerton section of the line to be completed – a vital area of investment that will

ensure Tees Valley maintains vital trading routes to Leeds and Manchester.

TVU's managing director, Stephen Catchpole, argues areas like the Tees Valley have to work harder than most to ensure their voices are heard in discussions about infrastructure investment that are dominated by London, the south east and other major cities.

But with an integrated strategy and investment he believes the Tees Valley 'can stand at the heart of the country's connectivity rather than be a peripheral area.'



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With an expanding population and growing economy the demands on transport infrastructure across the Tees Valley are increasing – and so is the case for road and rail investment

Making the connection



year if one or two train services an hour were added.

Investment in Darlington station is crucial given it is both the gateway into the Tees Valley, is situated on the East Coast Mainline and has considerable investment in development around it that will boost rail demand further over the next few years. (see box, left)

‘It is because of the importance that our economies place upon business connectivity to vital trading markets and international gateways that investment in infrastructure is essential,’ explains Linda Edworthy, TVU’s director of strategy and policy. ‘Essential not only to the sustainable economic growth of places like Tees Valley and other city regions across the north, but also to UK Plc as a whole.’

And the case for investment becomes even stronger when plans for new housing throughout the Tees Valley are taken into account.

Meeting Tees Valley’s housing needs

Like many other parts of the country, the Tees Valley is catering for a growing population. Across its five

council areas almost 6,000 homes have been built in the last five years and many more are planned over the coming years..

One of the major tasks is to improve the range and quality of housing available to ensure it complements the growth in high value jobs expected during the next decade. For example, in Middlesbrough some 87% of homes fall within the three lowest council tax bands compared with two-thirds nationally.

The town has actually suffered a decline in population – with people often migrating to surrounding local authority areas – due to its shortage of higher value family and executive housing. But over the last four years Middlesbrough Council has developed a strategy to improve its housing offer by creating new neighbourhoods and by kick-starting regeneration schemes that had stalled during the recession. Its local plan includes proposals for 7,000 homes over the next 15 years – the biggest house building programme that the town has seen in 40 years.

According to the council the aim is to ‘stabilise

the population and rebalance the housing market providing family and executive housing’.

The strategy is already bearing fruit and by the end of this year it is expected to deliver 700 homes, seven times more than were built in 2004 during the national housing boom. But the ultimate sign of progress is the fact that executive homes on one development, Grey Towers Farm, were selling for more than £500,000 before a single brick had been laid.

Similar success can be found in the towns of Yarm and Wynyard in Stockton on Tees.

Transport focus:

James Cook Station

One of the Tees Valley’s biggest transport success stories came to fruition earlier this year with the opening of a new train station.

James Cook Station in Middlesbrough serves one of the area’s busiest hospitals and had long been campaigned for as a way to relieve local congestion and improve access for staff and visitors.

TVU secured investment from the Department for Transport and worked with Northern Rail, Network Rail, Middlesbrough Council and South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust on the station, which opened in May.

Steve Payne, strategic transport manager at TVU describes the project as ‘an important milestone in the drive to improve transport infrastructure across the Tees Valley’.

Speaking at its launch, Middlesbrough Council’s executive member for environment, Councillor Tracy Harvey, said the station would be ‘filling a critical gap in the rail network’ and its benefits would be felt far beyond James Cook Hospital.

Last year Teesport handled 19% of England's total cargo and is the country's largest exporting port

An area full of surprises

Tees Valley is using its natural assets & growing reputation to attract more people to choose it as a place to live, work & visit

The image that the Tees Valley often conjures up for those who have never visited tends to involve vast swathes of industry. How do you overcome those perceptions? 'Bring them here,' says Sandy Anderson, Tees Valley Unlimited's chair.

He fell for the area's charms back in the 1960s when he arrived to work for ICI and although he's worked all over the country since, he always returns.

TVU's managing director Stephen Catchpole says that when delegations are brought up from London they are surprised by the physical beauty and uniqueness of the area. 'The countryside, the coast – cheek by jowl with industrial activity. Within 10-15 minutes you can be into spectacular countryside.'

Then there's the lower cost of living, high performing schools and the variety offered by the Tees Valley towns and villages, and the richness of its cultural offer. Attractions like the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Preston Hall – a former Georgian residence that sits alongside the River Tees – Hartlepool Marina and the town's Maritime Experience, Redcar Racecourse and the Civic Theatre in Darlington.

Lonely Planet labelled Tees Valley the 'most exciting, beautiful and friendly region in England' while boutique shopping in Yarm (pictured below) led to it being voted

the UK's best high street by the BBC. One of TVU's key priorities in its strategic economic plan (SEP) is to create and retain wealth by establishing the Tees Valley as 'a preferred location to live in, work and visit'. Part of the way in which the local offer will be improved is by creating more high value jobs which in turn will generate greater demand.

The area lost 3,000 jobs between 2010 and 2012, mostly in retail, reflecting the changing shopping habits that are affecting high streets across the UK. However, town centre regeneration led by local authorities across the Tees Valley has seen greater investment in cultural and leisure facilities in recent years to cater for these changes. Examples include improvements to Redcar Seafront, scene of this year's Redcar Triathlon (above), and Pedestrian Heart in Darlington, a £9.2m scheme to transform the town centre's public realm.

'For the Tees Valley to be successful, we must attract more people, more visitors, more learners, more businesses and more investors to the area,' says Alison Thain, who sits on TVU's leadership board and is chief executive of housing provider Thirteen.

She says the key to success is collaborative working between all partners to promote the area and encourage investment.

'Generating jobs is essential to increasing wealth and our SEP reflects this.'

Only by focusing on jobs, alongside improving our housing offer, adapting our town centres, maximising our cultural assets and boosting the competitiveness of our rural SMEs, can we reduce our high levels of disadvantage and enhance the lives of our residents.'



Stephen Catchpole, MD, Tees Valley Unlimited

I believe that the Tees Valley can look towards the future with real optimism. This belief is based on the sub-region having a clear and shared vision of what that future should be and perhaps more importantly realistic plans on how to get there.

Underpinning this drive for growth and greater prosperity for all the residents of the sub-region is the strength that comes from being a part of the north east that has real partnership working not only between the local authorities but also between the public and private sectors. With a capacity for innovation and reinvention using traditional engineering skills as the backbone of the economy, Tees Valley is on the threshold of again leading the UK's competitiveness in new fields such as green technology, biologics, unconventional energy, materials and advanced manufacturing including subsea.

Complementing this revival of manufacturing activities are strong and growing service and digital sectors. The digital cluster based around Digital City and Teesside University is recognised as one of the strongest in the country and reflects the strong partnership working across the Tees Valley.

Finally mention must be made of the excellent quality of life that the area offers including ready access to stunning coast or countryside, very reasonable living costs and a wide range of cultural facilities.

All in all Tees Valley is a great place to live and work and start and grow businesses.

Town centre focus:

Stockton on Tees

By the time the regeneration of Stockton town centre is completed next spring, it will have undergone something of a transformation. No wonder then that the slogan attached to the project is Rediscover Stockton.

The leadership and financial commitment of Stockton Council has helped to attract major private investment, for example from US investors in the town's Castlegate shopping centre, and further afield with St Modwen's purchase of Billingham town centre.

As well as a raft of public realm improvements, one of the major focuses has been to reconnect the town with its riverside.

A historic quarter exploits the town's heritage, a new events space will play host to the Stockton International Riverside Festival ('pictured on the cover') described by Arts Council England chief executive Alan Davey as 'the world's best international festival of outdoor art'.

Public transport and road links have been reworked to improve the town's accessibility.

The improvements are already paying off with

more than 40 businesses either opening, expanding or relocating to the town centre this year.

'Not only is the town centre physically changing the atmosphere is too,' says Councillor Mike Smith, cabinet member for regeneration and transport. 'It is becoming much more vibrant, enticing and welcoming.'



He adds: 'Confidence in the town centre is continuing to grow.'