

# Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal Annual Report Year 1 - 2021-22

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August 2022

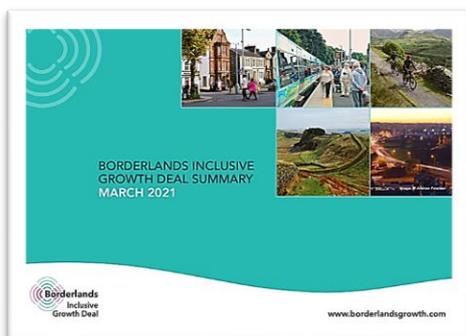


## Key Documents:



The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal can be downloaded here:

[Click here to download](#)



A summary of the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal can be downloaded here:

[Click here to download](#)



The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal Benefits Realisation Plan can be downloaded here:

[Click her to download](#)

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# Glossary

Definition of the key terms used in this Guidance Note, and specific to this context, are set out below.

Term	Description
<b>Accountable Body</b>	The administrative and financial lead with the ability to administer public funds and who is responsible for the satisfactory operation of the Deal. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In England this is Northumberland County Council.</li><li>• In Scotland this is Dumfries &amp; Galloway Council</li></ul>
<b>the Deal</b>	Refers to the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal
<b>PMO</b>	The Programme Management Office
<b>the Partnership</b>	The 5 local authorities consisting of Carlisle City Council, Cumbria County Council, Dumfries & Galloway Council, Northumberland County Council and Scottish Borders Council
<b>Programme</b>	A programme refers to an activity funded through the Deal which is composed of more than one discrete project with more than one project lead.
<b>Project</b>	A project refers to a single activity funded through the Deal which is distinct and contained in one grant agreement.

# 1. Executive Summary

## Introduction

- 1.1 The Borderlands has incredible potential to demonstrate the opportunities of delivering economic growth which is socially and environmentally sustainable. Sitting at the heart of the United Kingdom, between the major conurbations of the Scottish Central belt and Northern England we are home to two National Parks, miles of contrasting coastline and 2,241 km<sup>2</sup> of AONB and 9 SSSIs.
- 1.2 With the Borderlands towns and city of Carlisle offering greater concentrations of population and services, and major north south rail and road routes the Borderlands is not remote but it is heavily rural. This comes with challenges common with many other predominantly rural areas. The Partnership has come together to address these: lower levels of productivity, an ageing, and in some cases shrinking population, and poorer levels of connectivity which results in growth which is not being equally felt across the area.
- 1.3 Our Inclusive Growth Deal, signed in March 2021 is the first step in addressing these shared challenges and putting in place the building blocks to take advantage of our distinctive opportunities around energy generation and storage, making the most of and protecting our incredible natural capital, globally-recognised tourism offer, and diverse sectors including forestry, manufacturing, agriculture and aquaculture. The Deal brings together the local partners with UK Government and Scottish Government in a shared commitment to deliver this sizable investment.
- 1.4 This Annual Report sets out what we have done in our first year since signing the Deal. It has been a busy but productive year. We are particularly pleased to have moved into delivery so strongly with £133m of the Deal funding (out of £350m available) awarded to projects. At nearly 40% this is an outstanding first year and includes awards to two of the largest projects – Carlisle Citadels, which will delivery state of the art campus for the University of Cumbria in the heart of Carlisle revitalising the city centre and enhancing the education opportunities in the Borderlands, and the distinctive Place Programme which will see over £50m invested into towns and places across the Borderlands based on the needs and vision of individual places.
- 1.5 Out projects have also moved from design to construction with nearly £20m spent and claimed by projects by the end of March 2022. This again is a signal of the commitment and drive in the Borderlands that this progress was made during and despite the impact of the Covid-19 lockdowns. These has been visible on-site improvements at Ad Gefrin Distillery and Visitor attraction and Lilidorei at the

Alnwick Garden both of which are expected to open to the public over the next eighteen months and at Carlisle Station. Through the Borderlands Digital Voucher scheme 3,283 properties have received improved connectivity and the Energy Masterplan is the first in the UK to be preparing the evidence at such as geography and will provide the foundation for future investment through the Deal.

- 1.6 The Deal is a ten year period of investment with projects at different stages of development. We have continued to make strong progress on project business cases across the whole of the Borderlands with exciting proposals for the innovative Dairy Nexus project at SRUC, a new walking and cycling route along the River Tweed and the Mountain Bike Project at Innerleithen all reaching the final stage before approval and due to come forward in 2022/23. The Mountain Bike Project has also undertaken initial expenditure to secure the premises in advance of approval demonstrating a strong commitment to the project.
- 1.7 As the first year of delivery the Partnership has continued to develop and we have established the full governance structure for this next phase with the business-led Economic Forum and Place Programme Board established and the previous groups delivering on Energy and Digital thematic areas reviewed and established as Programme Boards.
- 1.8 Whilst very strong progress has been made the Annual Report also highlights areas of challenge in delivering the Deal. The period from the Heads of Terms in 2019 has been one of significant, global change. The impact of Covid-19, supply chain restrictions and most recently the conflict in the Ukraine has meant that delivery has faced and continues to face challenges in the timely availability and cost of materials and contracts and amore unpredictable market in which to operate post-delivery. This remains a key concern as is something that was productively discussed as part of our Annual Conversation.
- 1.9 This remains the first year of the Deal and as such we also continue to work across the Deal partners to ensure efficient and effective delivery of the funding and to discuss routes to improve this where issues are identified. In reviewing this strong performance for the first year of delivery the opportunities for further work are clear and the Partnership has identified and taken forward new opportunities for collaboration during the year enhancing the existing partnership. As a uniquely cross-border partnership this marks us out, the Partnership is continuing to invest in the capacity including growing the Programme Management Officer and wider partnership team to both deliver the existing Deal and continue to develop new areas of work. With £58m worth of projects due over the next eighteen month, our first projects due to complete and open to the public and the completion of innovative pieces of works such as the Energy Masterplan there will be much to report in our next report.

# Our Deal

## Our Objectives



Narrowing the productivity gap

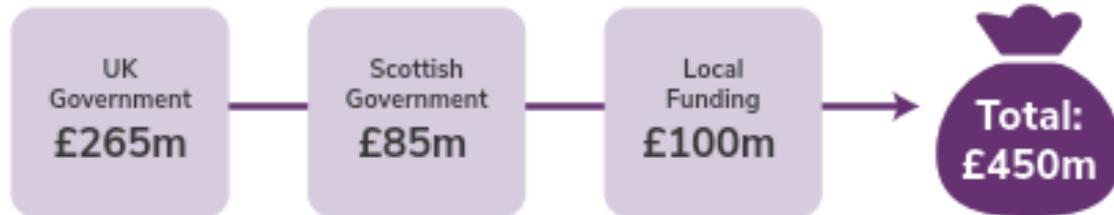


Increasing the working age population



Achieving inclusive growth

## Our Funding Partners



## Our Themes



### Improving Places

- Place Programme
- Hadrian's Wall and wider Roman Frontier
- See More Lake District
- Destination Tweed
- Stranraer Marina
- Lilidorei, Alnwick Garden
- 7Stanes
- Star of Caledonia
- Berwick Theatre



### Supporting business, innovation and skills

- Mountain Bike Project
- Business Infrastructure Programme
  - Ad Gefrin Visitor Centre and Distillery
- Rural Innovation and Skills



### Encouraging Green Growth

- Chapelcross Site Development
- Energy Masterplan and Investment
- Natural Capital



### Enabling Infrastructure

- Carlisle Station Gateway
- University of Cumbria Citadels Campus
- Digital Borderlands
- Borders Rail Feasibility Study

## Our Impact



Deliver an additional 5,500 job opportunities



Attract more than four million extra tourists to the area



Improve mobile and digital connections

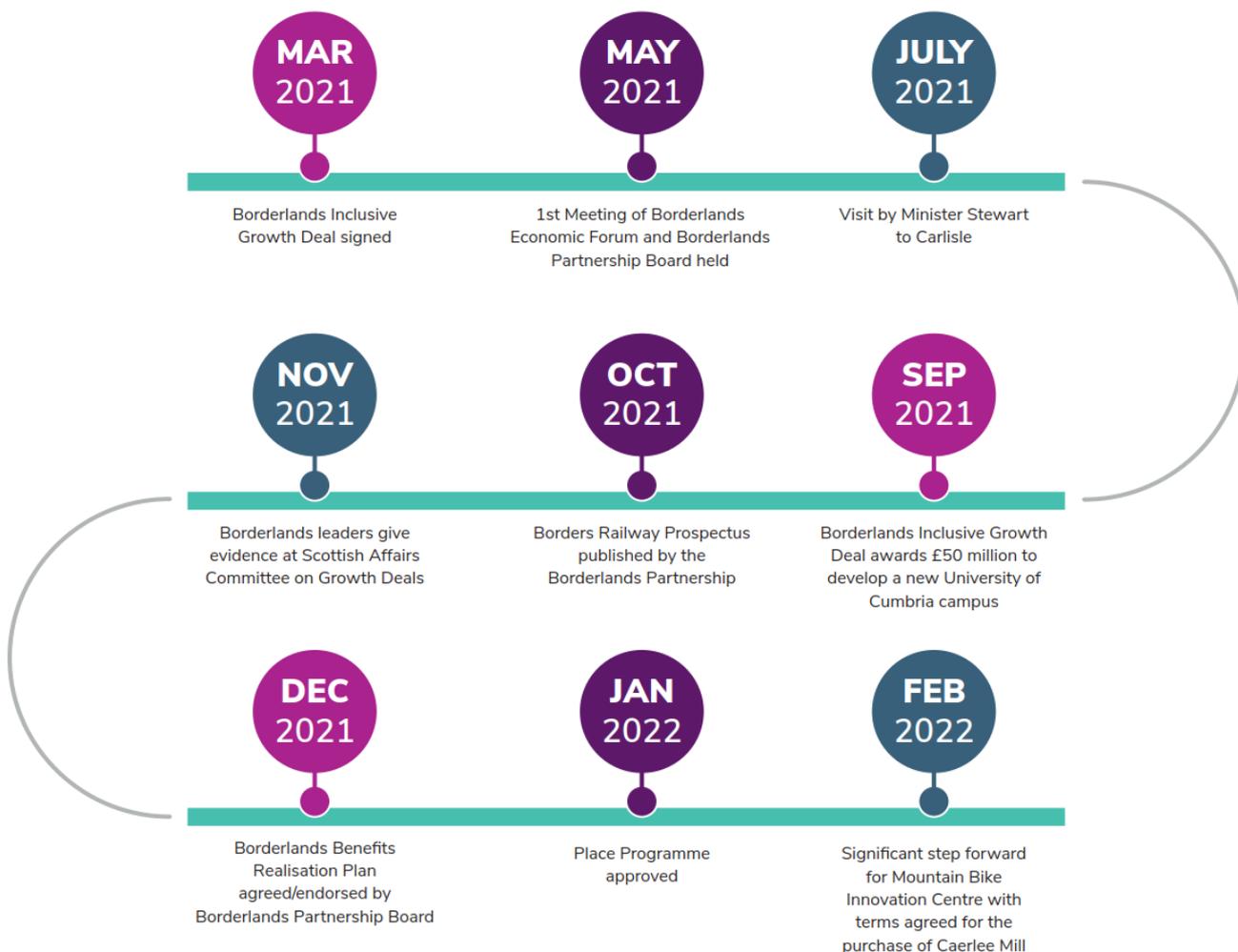


Unlock investment in towns across the area



Generate around £1.1 billion in additional GVA to the UK economy

## Our First Year 2021-22



## Our Year in Numbers – 2021-2022

Projects worth  
**£182m**  
total investment  
approved



**38%**  
of total Deal  
funding  
approved



**£133.1m**  
Deal funding approved

**3**

Programme Boards  
appointed covering  
Energy, Place and Digital



**£50m** for University  
of Cumbria Citadels Campus

**£50m**

agreed for the Borderlands  
Place Programme



**3,283**

properties  
better connected  
through Digital  
Voucher Scheme



**£19.8m**

Deal funding  
paid to projects  
in delivery



## 2. Forewords

### Partnership Board

We're delighted to introduce the first annual report for the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal.

Since signing the Deal in March 2021, we have made excellent progress across our projects and programmes. We had five projects which were in early delivery, demonstrating our commitment and readiness to deliver within our already well-established partnership and governance structure. Our Digital Borderlands voucher scheme has ensured that 3,283 properties are better connected. Good progress has been made on the Carlisle Station redevelopment, as well as the new Lilldorei play village at The Alnwick Garden, due to open in spring 2023 and the Ad Gefrin Visitor Experience and Distillery, due to open in late 2022. We have also developed our Borderlands Energy Masterplan, a vital step towards meeting our net zero goal. We continue to focus our attention on developing businesses cases for projects across the Borderlands area.

We have had the funding package approved for our flagship Place Programme, which will see up to £50m go to towns across our region to support their economic development, subject to the approval of Place Plans and Borderlands Town Investment Plans. And we have agreed the £50m funding from the Deal for the development of the new University of Cumbria Citadels campus.

As the first cross border Deal, covering the largest area of any of the growth deals agreed to date, we are proud to say our Deal is truly distinctive. It commits fresh investment into our region and is jointly funded by the Scottish Government (£85m) and the UK Government (up to £265m), to bring a total contribution of up to £350m which will be supported by at least £100m of local funding. The Deal will collectively support work to achieve future economic growth making the most of our outstanding natural environment to bring opportunities for our people and businesses and contribute to net zero carbon ambitions.

We signed the Deal amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and at a time of economic challenges. Our Deal responds to this and will contribute to our recovery efforts but is focused beyond these immediate challenges to make the longer-term changes we need to see. We look forward to more projects moving into delivery in this coming year, as well as the earlier projects completing, bringing real benefits to our residents, businesses and visitors to our region.

This Deal will help our region grow and fulfil our shared ambition. We want the Borderlands to reach its potential for everyone, delivering green growth and attracting new businesses and investment. We will improve our connectivity, deliver skills and

innovation, and improve our places to support their longer-term resilience. We will attract new residents and welcome more visitors to enjoy the beautiful natural environment of our vibrant, inclusive region.

## Economic Forum Chair

I am delighted to be working with the Borderlands Partnership, as the first Chair of the Borderlands Economic Forum. The Deal will enable the Borderlands area to create sustainable jobs, re-invigorate the economy, and build strategically for long term growth and prosperity. All the Forum members are excited to be involved in its delivery and in engaging the wider business community to ensure that we see the maximum return of investment, jobs and training opportunities for local people and inward investors.

The Economic Forum is a key part of delivering the Deal, bringing the business voice to the table and helping the Partnership to remain connected to the business community across the region.

The Forum is in place to support the Borderlands Partnership Board. With the ten private business representatives on the Economic Forum, we have brought commercial experience to complement the public sector stakeholders from South of Scotland Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, and the Cumbria and Northeast Local Enterprise Partnerships.

The Forum is looking forward to getting more involved as more projects and programmes move into delivery. We have heard directly from a number of projects and are planning to visit more projects across the region now that we are able to meet in person rather than remotely.



**Jack Stopforth**  
Economic Forum Chair

## 3. Borderlands Partnership

### Introduction

3.1 The Borderlands Partnership is made up of the five border councils, Carlisle City Council, Cumbria County Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, Northumberland County Council and Scottish Borders Council. It was formed to unlock the potential for sustainable and inclusive economic growth across the South of Scotland and North of England. The Partnership is working collaboratively with UK and Scottish Governments and other public and private sector partners to deliver the benefits of Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal and establish the foundations for sustainable and inclusive growth over the long term.

3.2 The Partnership has a shared ambition:

*“for the Borderlands to be a vibrant place, attracting, rewarding and retaining people to live, work, visit and invest here, by offering a high-quality experience in beautiful, well-connected surroundings.”*

3.3 By making the most of our shared opportunities and responding to our common challenges, we will support our business, communities and people to prosper. This underpins our Deal, focused on increasing productivity, attracting a larger working-age population and delivering a more inclusive economy.

3.4 This Annual Report sets out our progress in the first year of full operation since the signing in March 2021 and our plans for the future.

### Deal Overview

3.5 The Deal is unique, the only Deal that is cross border and provides a strategic approach to the challenges and opportunities of the region.

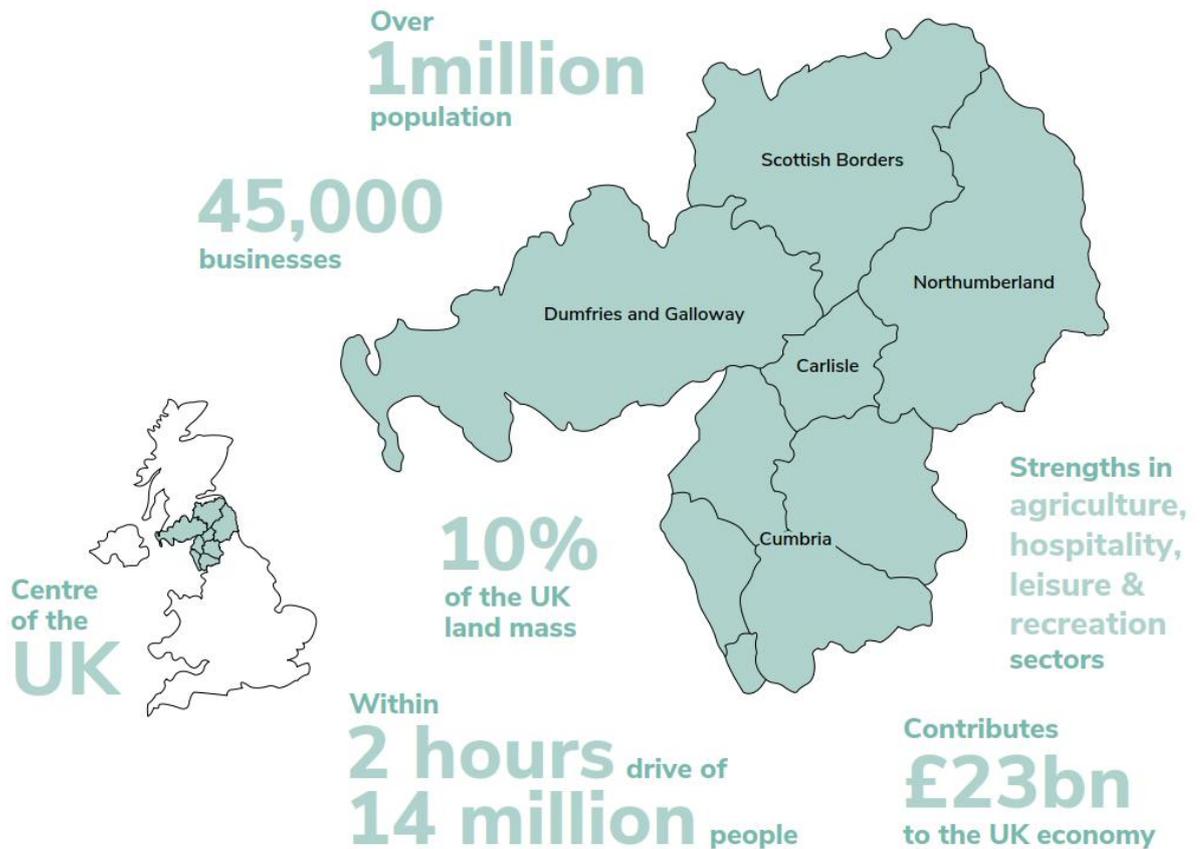
3.6 The signing of the Deal, with the UK Government and Scottish Government, took place on 18 March 2021. The Deal is made up of £265m from UK Government £85m from the Scottish Government and over £100m from local partners.

3.7 The Deal Agreement states that the following are expected to be achieved over the 20 year benefits realisation period for the Deal, subject to full business cases:

- deliver an additional 5,500 job opportunities;
- attract more than four million extra tourists to the area;
- improve mobile and digital connections;
- unlock investment in towns across the area;

- generate around £1.1 billion in GVA for the Borderland's economy.

**Figure 1: Our Area**



3.8 The Deal aims to tackle our deep-rooted challenges by reducing the productivity gap, reversing the decline in the working age population and ensuring inclusive growth.

## Themes

3.9 The Deal continues to be taken forward in a spirit of co-development with officials from the UK Government and Scottish Government who continue to provide helpful advice and guidance as proposals develop. In reaching the end of the first full year of delivery there is an opportunity to learn from practical experience and collectively finesse our approach where challenges have been identified.

3.10 The Deal has been developed as a cohesive and integrated investment package to ensure there is a balance between high profile place-based projects together with Borderlands-wide investment programmes that respond to the rural nature of the region. This approach aligns with the 10 year timeframe for the Deal with a combination of strategic transformational projects together with a portfolio of

investment programmes that allow for flexibility to be responsive to new or emerging opportunities.

3.11 The delivery of the shared ambition for the Deal is focused on four strategic investment themes:

- Enabling Infrastructure
- Improving Places
- Supporting Business, Innovation and Skills
- Encouraging Green Growth

3.12 The strategy-led approach to the development of the Deal is reflected in the diagram below.

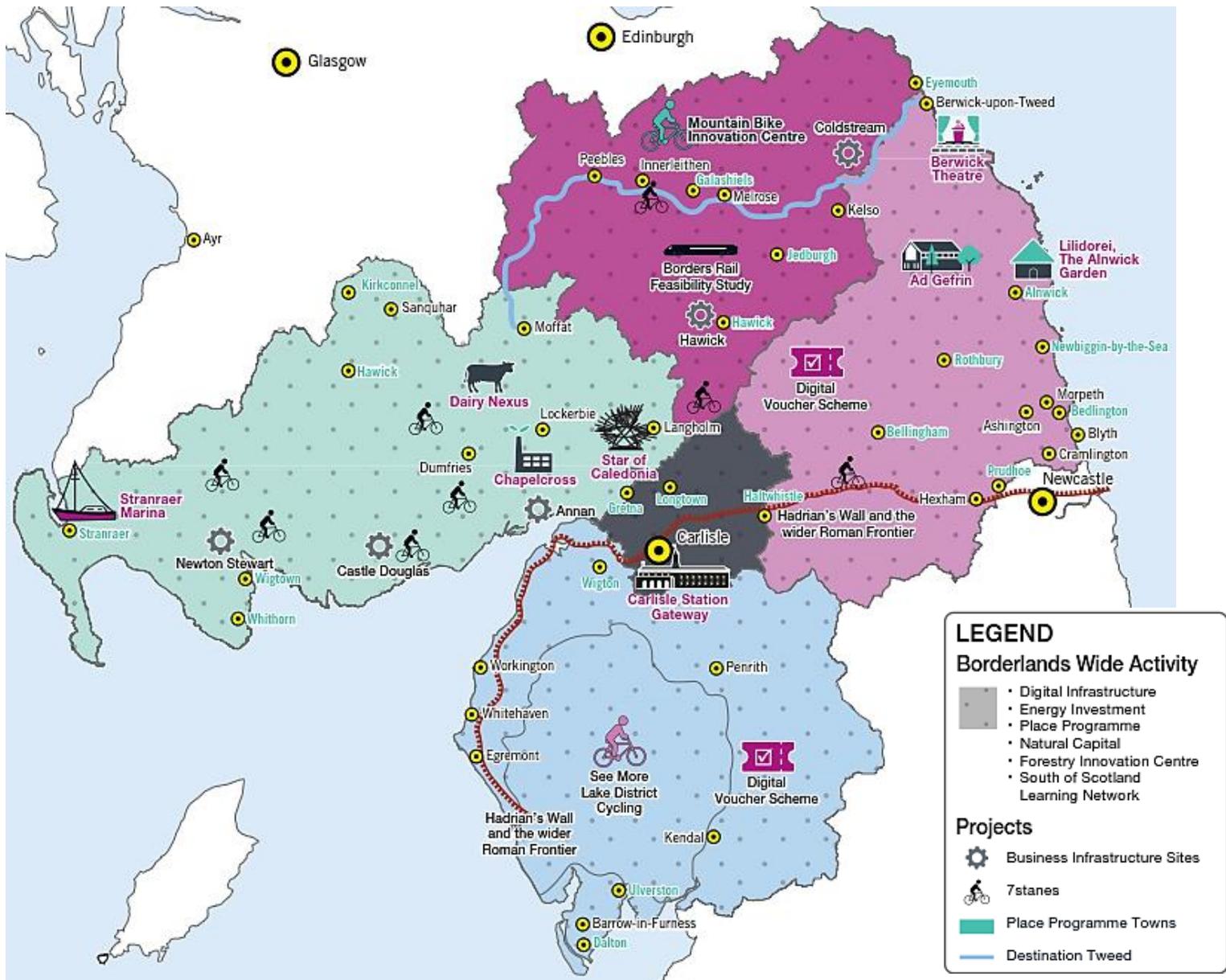
**Figure 2: Our Strategic Approach**



3.13 The strategic approach includes five high profile projects which anchor the Deal. These projects have been developed to have a transformational impact on their locality as well as the wider regional economy. Their strategic nature means they are cross-cutting in their impact and in many instances contribute to all four strategic themes. Equally important in this strategic approach are the seven Borderlands-wide investment programmes that are designed to ensure benefit can be realised across the whole of the Borderlands region.

3.14 Figure 3 (below) shows the spread of projects across the Borderlands region.

**Figure 3: Our Programmes and Projects**



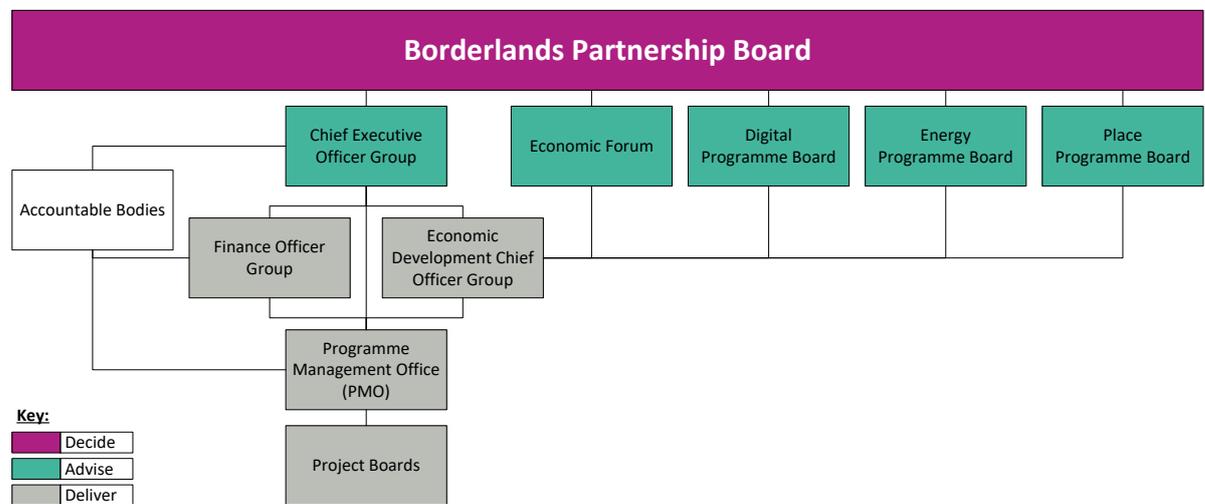
## Governance

3.15 The Partnership has established a Governance Plan which sets out the governance arrangements for the delivery of the Deal in accordance with the requirements of UK Government and Scottish Government. The Governance Plan summarises the arrangements of the legally binding Collaboration Agreement signed by the Partnership. The Collaboration Agreement sets out how the Partnership will work together to provide the oversight and delivery for the Deal.

### Partnership Board

3.16 Following the agreement of the Deal the Partnership moved from shadow arrangements to the full delivery Governance arrangement. The Chair of the newly established Economic Forum joined the five Council leaders as part of the establishment of the formal Partnership Board. The Partnership Board has continued to meet regularly throughout the year guided by updated and expanded Standing Orders which have refined our processes to ensure these remain fit for purpose in the new stage. The Board meetings have moved into public with papers published in advance of the meeting with a livestream of the full meeting available.

**Figure 4: Governance Arrangements**



### Economic Forum

3.17 The Borderlands Economic Forum is an important part of our Deal and has become more active throughout 2021/22 under its first Chair, Jack Stopforth. As the voice of business representatives and regional stakeholders the Forum has met regularly with the meetings available for the public to join. The Forum has discussed a wide range of issues in relation to the Deal providing valuable insight into areas such as

procurement and supply chain issues, communications and branding and inflationary pressures. A workshop with Forum members is being arranged to develop a clear focus and work plan for the next year.

## Programme & Project Boards

3.18 The Partnership have established and agreed the overarching governance of Programme Boards. These will be further developed in line with the relevant business cases. Their purpose is to develop and maintain oversight of the relevant projects and programmes in the Deal. The Boards are/will be formed of senior regional representatives from the public and private sectors with expertise in the thematic field.

- The **Place Programme Board** was established in October 2021 bringing together a wealth of knowledge from a wide range of organisations. Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE (Director of Newcastle University Institute for Social Renewal) was appointed as the Chair of the Place Programme Board.
- The **Digital Programme Board** was established Pre-Deal and continues to meet on a regular basis. The interim Chair of the Digital Programme Board is Alison Hatcher, Cumbria County Council.
- The **Energy Programme Board** was established Pre-Deal and its main focus has been the production of the Energy Masterplan. The Chair of the Energy Programme Board is Professor Sara Walker (Professor of Energy at Newcastle University).
- The **Borders Rail Reference Group** was established in October 2021 bringing together local Partners, the Department for Transport, Transport Scotland and Deal officials from the UK Government and Scottish Government. The Chair of the Group is shared between Alison Hatcher (Cumbria County Council) and Fiona Brown (Transport Scotland).

3.19 Individual Project Boards have been established by the organisation leading the development of the projects. These are supported by officer input from the Borderlands PMO.

## Accountable Body

3.20 Dumfries and Galloway Council has the role of accountable body as regards both the Scottish Government funding and the UK Government funding in Scotland.

3.21 Northumberland County Council has the role of accountable body as regards the UK Government funding in England.

3.22 Both accountable bodies play a key role in providing the assurance to Government that the funding is being spent for its intended purpose. This is achieved through:

- effective contract management of the grant beneficiaries,
- ongoing monitoring and reporting of the Deal, and
- ensuring projects are delivering against agreed key milestones.

3.23 Reflecting the unique nature of our Deal, in light of bringing forward the first approvals and draw down for projects in England there is an opportunity to work with officials from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to review and refine the processes between the department and accountable body for project approval and draw-down to ensure a shared understanding and smooth process for projects. This has already started, and we look forward to a positive outcome of this process.

### **Programme Management Office**

3.24 The Programme Management Office (PMO) is leading on the delivery of the Deal. An experienced team is in place to oversee the development, delivery and effective day to day management of the Deal, working closely with the two Accountable Bodies and the five Partner authorities. The team procures specialist appraisal support where necessary to support its work.

3.25 The PMO has developed a Programme Handbook to support the development and delivery of the Deal and provide assurance to UK Government and Scottish Government, that the Borderlands Partnership has the policies and processes in place to manage delegated funding from central government budgets effectively and fully in line with both government's expectations. The systems and processes described within the Handbook complement the Benefits Realisation Plan to ensure maximum benefit to the Borderlands area.

3.26 The Programme Handbook provides delivery organisations with key documents and processes required to facilitate the approval and drawing down of Borderlands funding. Alongside the Handbook a full toolkit of programme management documentation has been put in place and continues to be refined through delivery particularly the overarching Programme Tracker.

## 4. Economic Snapshot

4.1 As part of the on-going monitoring of the socio-economic context in the Borderlands Hatch consulting has provided an updated picture for the Borderlands drawing on the latest available data.

4.2 Compared to the baseline set at the deal signing there has, as would be expected in a twelve month period, been relatively limited change in economic metric and similarly caution is required due to the time lag with some data availability. The full document is included as an appendix but key elements to note include:

- The population of the Borderlands now stands at 1.087m with a working-age population of 638,000. This represents 59% of residents which remains below the UK-level of 62%.
- 460,000 people are employed in the Borderlands in 46,000 businesses across a range of sectors with public administration, education, health, retail and manufacturing being the largest by employment.
- Agriculture and mining are the largest in terms of number of businesses reflecting the large number of micro and small businesses in this sector. Retail and wholesale, construction, professional, scientific and technical and accommodation and food services all have over 4,000 businesses listed.
- The rate of growth in employment has been lower than the UK average with a reduction of 1.3% over the last five years compared to reduction of 0.6% in Scotland and a 3% increase in England over the same period.
- GVA (2019 – latest available figures) show an increase of 26% over the previous decade reaching £23,381,000,000. This was a slower increase than Scotland (31%) or England (42%) over the same period.
- Productivity (GVA per FRE job filled – 2019 latest available figures) also shows a productivity gap between the Borderlands areas (£46,500) and both the Scottish (£52,300) and English (£53,800) figures.
- The qualifications profile remains more focused on levels 1 to 3 qualifications (45% to 40% for the UK) with a resulting lower proportion (36% to 43% for the UK) although the level of those with no qualifications is in line with the UK average of 7%.
- There is a smaller proportion of people in highly skilled jobs compared to the national average with 44% considered managers, professional or associate level in the Borderlands compared to 49% for the UK as a whole.
- Workplace earning remains significantly lower than the national average at £18,996 compared to £23,084 although these have been increasing at the same rate as the national picture.
- Whilst the gender pay gap is smaller than the national average (89p per £1 versus 84p per £1) the proportion earning less than the living wage remains higher at 26% versus 23% for the UK overall.

- Whilst the claimant count and unemployment increased due to Covid-19 and the resulting lockdowns the Borderlands area appears to have rebounded more quickly with latest figures showing a 3% claimant count below the national level which remains above 4%.

# 5. Deal Progress

## Introduction

5.1 The Partnership has continued to make good progress during its first year. Since the signing of the Deal in March 2021 the Partnership has:

- formally established the Borderlands Partnership Board (previously a Shadow Board)
- established the Economic Forum and appointed members of the Economic Forum to the Energy, Place and Digital Programme Boards
- published the Borders Rail Prospectus
- published the Borderlands Benefits Realisation Plan
- produced the Programme Handbook and a full toolkit of programme management documentation to support delivery of the Deal

## Pre-Deal Activity

5.2 Whilst this Annual Report primarily focuses on the first year of the Deal, it should also be recognised that a significant amount of investment was provided following Heads of Terms and before the Deal was signed in March 2021. UK Government made available £30m of funding for projects in England which had to be drawn down in 2020-21.

5.3 Extensive work was undertaken by the Partnership, Government and the project applicants to achieve the drawdown of funding. The initial £30m of funding was drawn down for the following projects:

- £16.9m for Carlisle Station Gateway, with £3.1m available in future years
- £5m for Alnwick Garden
- £4m allocated for the Borderlands Digital Voucher Scheme through Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS)
- £3m for Ad Gefrin Distillery
- £1.1m to develop the Borderlands Energy Masterplan

## Approved Projects

5.4 During the first year of the Deal the Partnership has approved £100m of funding to the following schemes:

- £50m for the Borderlands Place Programme, subject to the approval of Place Plans and Borderlands Town Investment Plans

- £50m for the University of Cumbria Citadels Campus

5.5 Significant resource from the Partnership, Government and project applicants has facilitated this achievement. This work has taken place alongside delivery of the schemes approved prior to Deal signing and whilst developing business cases for future projects.

5.6 Whilst good progress has been made on a number of fronts, we have identified a few areas for improvement in our collaborative working arrangements with project partners and with government officials to aid delivery of the Deal. In particular:

5.6.1 We have introduced a more extensive programme tracker during the year to help with workflow planning and accelerate project approval decisions and will continue to work with officials to ensure prompt turnaround of approvals in line with this and that projects timelines are not delayed unnecessarily through project approval.

5.6.2 Changes in project staff involved in the Deal means there is a risk of loss of knowledge and clarity of process and communication routes. To address this fuller guidance for projects has been produced setting out expectations around process, key areas of guidance including newly produced guidance from the UK Government and Scottish Government.

5.6.3 We will continue to work with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to review the approach to draw down payments and end of year process in England. This is with a view to make full use of the role of the accountable body to support project delivery and overcome the impact of current uncertainty.

5.6.4 The issue of inflationary pressures is a major risk for the Deal which requires solutions to be co-developed recognising the potential impact on the viability of elements of the Deal and delivery of previously expected outputs and deliverables. Further dialogue on this issue can be expected over the course of 2022/23.

5.6.5 Progress on projects within the Deal is summarised below.

## Lilidorei, Alnwick Garden

- 5.7 Lilidorei will be a spectacular, all-year, all-weather play facility for people of all ages and abilities, located within the grounds of the successful Alnwick Garden visitor destination, and adjacent to Alnwick Castle. Creating one of the world's largest play structures it will raise the profile of the area in national and international visitor markets, converting Alnwick and North Northumberland from a day trip to a multi-day destination, attracting more visitors year-round, and helping to reduce the productivity gap.
- 5.8 Set around three towers aligned to a mythical theme conceived as part of an Elf Kingdom, visitors will be able to explore adventure pathways, catwalks and tunnel slides and a range of roofed and elevated structures. This unique play structure will be complemented by nine settlements of earthy wooded houses located in clearings. This village, which will be in character with the existing treehouse and forest environment at The Garden, will have its own backstory, mythology and characters that will form the basis of a range of imagination-prompting activity
- 5.9 This incredible play area will be imaginative, complex and dynamic. It will challenge children and adults alike and inspire them as they explore and have fun.
- 5.10 **Progress during 2021/22:** the project is still on track to complete and open in Spring 2023. This is despite the initial delays with starting the building work due to Covid restrictions and some additional delays encountered when groundworks began. The main contractor began work on site in February 2022 and the main play structure is also underway; it is being constructed off site and is due to be installed in summer 2022. Lilidorei has experienced a significant pressure on the cost of materials for the project and the project sponsor is proactively investigating sources of additional funding to address this challenge.



## Ad Gefrin Distillery

- 5.11 The Ad Gefrin whisky distillery and visitor attraction is a major new, high value, business opportunity that will accelerate growth and boost productivity in an important part of North Northumberland's rural economy.
- 5.12 It will be a significant new export business for Northumberland, creating the first legal whisky distillery in the area for 200 years, reviving a long tradition of whisky making in Northumberland, and capitalising on the resurgence of the whisky market domestically and globally. This new manufacturing business will bring a prominent derelict strategic site, located at the gateway to the rural market town of Wooler, North Northumberland, back into productive economic use.
- 5.13 A new cultural centre will also be established as an integral part of the business, offering tours of the distillery, alongside exhibitions and displays showcasing the Anglo-Saxon golden age of Northumbrian heritage, and the best of local Northumbrian produce. It will provide a high-quality visitor experience in the heart of this rural community, capitalising on the growth of Northumberland's visitor economy.
- 5.14 **Progress during 2021/22:** the project has remained on track in delivering the significant construction works despite the challenges of the Covid pandemic and restriction. The new building topped-out in late 2021 and has continuing to the internal and fit out works during 2022. The large still was put in place in March 2022 marking a significant step forward. Alongside the physical works on the site a number of competitions and public events have been successfully run bringing local businesses and communities into the process including a competition to seek local stockists for the shop. Despite significant efforts to manage the supply chain and inflationary costs with advanced purchases and variations to the approach the project has faced a significant cost pressure with a Change Control currently in progress seeking an additional contribution to these cost pressures.



## Digital Borderlands Voucher Scheme

5.15 The £4m Digital Borderlands Voucher scheme (DBV) in Cumbria & Northumberland provides top up funding to communities, eligible for the Rural Gigabit Connectivity Voucher (RGCV) support. This additional funding allows communities in not-spot locations to access superfast, gigabit capable, connections and contributes to the UK Government targets for full fibre connectivity.

5.16 This programme is managed by DCMS on behalf of the Borderlands Partners to provide up to £1,500 for residential premises and £3,500 to business premises to provide gigabit capable connectivity to communities in the last 5% to 6% of superfast not-spots in Cumbria and Northumberland. This funding “tops-up” the RGCV scheme vouchers giving a combined funding of up to £3,500 for residential premises and £7,000 to business premises. Funding is allocated against voucher applications and suppliers are granted 12 months for delivery of the planned infrastructure and to claim funding.

5.17 **Progress during 2021/22:** during the year the digital voucher scheme supported 3,283 properties to enhance their digital connectivity with £2,063,319 worth of vouchers spent by the end of the March 2022 although £3,775,286 worth of vouchers had been awarded awaiting completion to enable the voucher to be used. This has represented a slightly slower pace of delivery than originally envisaged due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions in undertaking the work and the five month ‘pause’ in accepting new applications resulting from the national Project Gigabit pilot which the Borderlands scheme needed to respond to. At the end of 2021/22 £224,714 remained to be claimed due to projects not proceeding.

5.18 Ministerial approval was provided to extend the scheme to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023 to enable the vouchers to be spent with a short new window for applications to utilise the remaining £224,714.

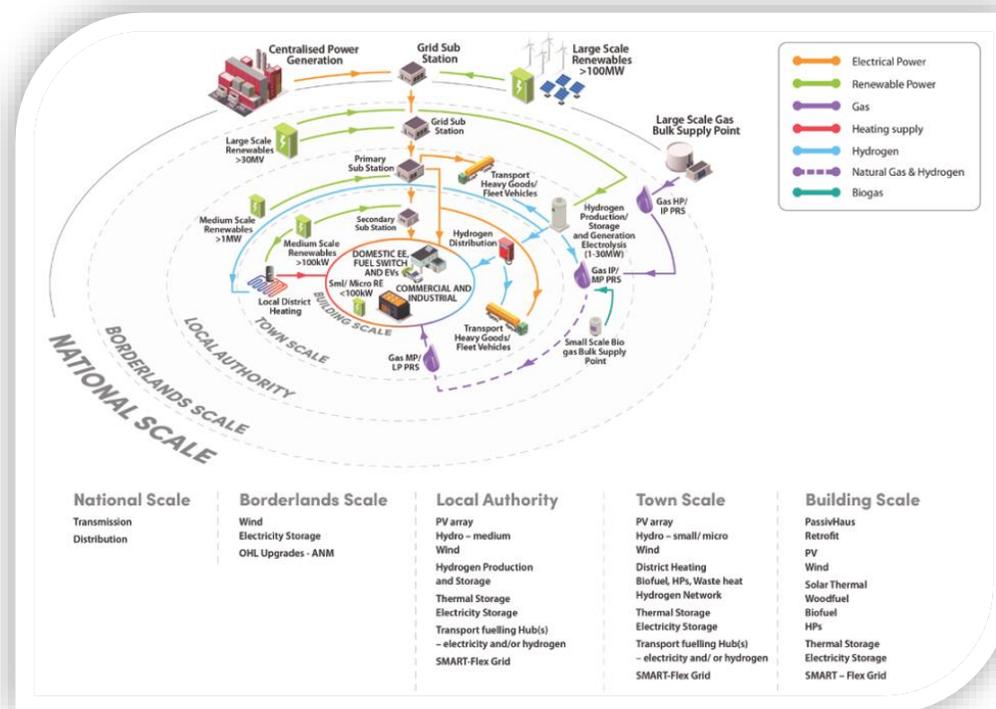
5.19 A case study from the Digital Borderlands Voucher scheme is included under Appendix A.



## Energy Masterplan

5.20 Supporting the transition to a low carbon economy and contributing to achieving the net zero targets set by the UK and Scottish Governments, the overarching Borderlands Energy Masterplan will be developed following an approach which delivers inclusive, economic, clean growth that can be sustained and will establish:

- The role of low carbon energy in delivering this growth through current, developing and new business opportunities and investment on a basis for future planning and strategic investment decisions along with the results of community, business engagement and social, environment and economic potential assessment.
- Identifying investment activity that needs to be taken forward at a Borderlands wide geographic area, and activity that needs to take place at a more local level
- Private sector investment appetite, feasibility of securing investment, and role of public funds in leveraging this investment, which will provide important direction in generating project ideas for the Board to assess



5.21 **Progress during 2021/22:** The Masterplan is an extensive evidence base setting out the challenges and opportunities across the Borderlands in driving growth from the transition to low carbon energy sources. Following appointment of Buro Happold and the Carbon Trust in 2020 to support the work and develop the initial evidence base, a sizable period of consultation and engagement was undertaken between April and November 2021 which involved a series of thematic workshops with wider stakeholders including private sector and community organisations. The draft Masterplan was prepared in early 2022 and is currently expected to be considered by the Borderlands Partnership Board in September 2022 following further engagement from UK and Scottish Government colleagues and the Energy Programme Board. The output from this first stage will inform the Phase 2 work to pilot local energy plans and prepare a full investment strategy which will guide the wider Energy investment to be undertaken through the Deal.

## Carlisle Station Gateway

5.22 The project will create a new high-profile gateway development for Carlisle centred around the Railway Station to improve connectivity and accessibility to and from Carlisle and the wider Borderlands region as well as contribute to decarbonisation by encouraging more journeys to be taken by rail.

5.23 The Carlisle Station Gateway project will deliver improvements to the station facilities and environment to transform Carlisle Station into an enabler for the future growth of the city. This investment will support the emergence of high-profile adjacent regeneration sites, act as a better national interchange for high-speed and local/regional rail services, make the station more accessible and encourage modal shift.

5.24 **Progress during 2021/22:** there has continued to be significant progress in developing the Carlisle Station Gateway project during 2021/22 with completion of a series of design consultations and award of the first phase design and build contract however during the year a number of significant challenges have been identified for the project and support from the Department for Transport is now being sought to help resolve the challenges. This includes reaching agreement with Avanti on land assembly and transfer of the station car parks, resolving access issues with Network Rail to enable the relocation of the bus replacement services from the north side to the south side of the station and facilitating alignment with HS2 investment to minimise disruption and any conflicting developments.



## University of Cumbria Citadels Campus

5.25 The Citadels project is for the comprehensive redevelopment of a 1.25hectare strategic gateway site in Carlisle city centre, re-using the iconic Citadels Grade 1 listed buildings, the former entrance to the ancient city of Carlisle. The project will create a new 12,600m<sup>2</sup> campus for the University of Cumbria with supporting car parking and, subject to funding, a 1,000m<sup>2</sup> business interaction centre. The project has been designed to future proof potential expansion in the future, either for additional education or commercial office/co-working space of up to 4,000 m<sup>2</sup>.



5.26 The project will create a new public space in the centre of Carlisle at the heart of the campus and also open up University of Cumbria cultural facilities, its new theatre, exhibitions space and performance studio, to wider public access enhancing the liveability of the city.

5.27 **Progress during 2021/22:** the project's full business case was submitted to the Partnership Board in September 2021 with Government approval confirmed in November 2021. Good progress has been made across the project with a number of milestones being achieved. The project's grant funding agreement was signed in February 2022. The planning application was submitted at the end of March 2022, following a positive public consultation in autumn 2021. The main contractor, Sir Robert McAlpine, has been appointed and work has continued with Carlisle City Council on the land assembly. Subject to approval of the planning application in the summer and progress on land assembly, the main construction work is expected to begin in Summer 2023. The project has continued to progress delivery despite the timescale for draw-down of funding leading to significant expenditure at risk in advance of Borderlands funding being available from UK Government.

## Place Programme

5.28 Our towns and their town centres are vital to the economic success, resilience and social sustainability of the Borderlands. Across the area, there are more than 100 towns with populations ranging from 1,000 to 46,000, including long-established market towns, former industrial towns, and seaside and coastal towns. Many serve substantial catchment areas of dispersed and sparsely populated rural communities and they are critically important centres of economic activity and employment, social, community and business services and facilities, and housing.

5.29 They also play a key role in attracting tourism visitors and spending to the Borderlands area. Our towns are a key part of what defines the Borderlands area and our appeal to the people and businesses who live, work, visit and invest in the area. Recognising the importance of our smaller rural market, industrial and coastal towns to the local economy, this programme will invest £50m to support the revitalisation of towns across the Borderlands region. The programme will add value to, and not duplicate, other place-based government investment programmes.

5.30 **Progress update during 2021/22:** The Place Programme is a long-term programme of investment across the Borderlands area which includes a multi-stage, community-led, development process. During the last year the Programme itself was approved by UK Government and Scottish Government resulting in the launch of the Place Programme Board. The approval process was slower than expected and resulted in some delays in being able to initiate work on place planning. However, five pilot plans for the Cumbrian towns of Dalton in Furness, Egremont, Penrith, Ulverston, and Wigton were endorsed by the Place Programme Board and the Partnership Board. Further places are programmed to come through during 2022 and 2023. Programme Guidance has been developed incorporating learning from this first phase to support future plans to come forward.



## Future Activity

### Projects In Development

Project / Programme	Business Case Stage	Planned Submission to Government
Stranraer Marina	FBC in development	Spring 2023
Dairy Nexus	FBC in development	Autumn 2022
Mountain Bike Project	FBC in development	Summer 2022
Business Infrastructure – Scotland	FBC in development	Winter 2022
Berwick Theatre	FBC in development	Autumn 2022
Hadrian's Wall and the Wider Roman Frontier: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visitor Exploration – Cumbria</li> <li>Visitor Exploration – Northumberland</li> <li>Visitor Attractions</li> </ul>	OBC in development OBC in development Expression of Interest process in development	Autumn 2022 Autumn 2022 Spring 2023
See More Lake District Cycling	OBC in development	Summer 2022
Destination Tweed	Final OBC in review	Submitted to government for review May 2022
Natural Capital – Scotland	Programme OBC in development	Autumn 2022
Chapelcross	OBC in development	Spring 2024
Star of Caledonia	OBC in development	Summer 2022
7 Stanes – Facilities Improvements	OBC in development	Spring 2023
Digital Borderlands – Infrastructure	OBC paused	2023-24
Borders Railway Extension Feasibility Study	Governments to confirm process for accessing feasibility investment.	Sought confirmation from the UK Government and Scottish Government on the next steps.
Energy Investment Programme	Awaiting outcome of Energy Masterplan	2023-24
Natural Capital - England	Pre Outline Business Case	Autumn 2022
Business Infrastructure Programme – England:	Pre Outline Business Case	2025
South of Scotland Learning Network	Pre Outline Business Case	2025
Forestry Innovation Centre	Pre Outline Business Case	Spring 2023

## Key Deal Milestones for Year 2 (2022-23)

Milestone	Target Date
Complete the purchase of Caerlee Mill to enable the delivery of the Mountain Bike Project	May 2022
Borderlands Partnership Board meeting where the following items will be considered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Destination Tweed (OBC)</li> <li>• Star of Caledonia (OBC)</li> <li>• Ad Gefrin (Change control)</li> <li>• Destination Tweed/Berwick Theatre (Change control)</li> <li>• Deal Performance Update</li> <li>• Annual Conversation preparation</li> </ul>	June 2022
Borderlands Partnership Board meeting where the following items will be considered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hadrian's Wall (OBC)</li> <li>• See More Lake District (OBC)</li> <li>• Mountain Bike Project</li> <li>• Star of Caledonia (tbc)</li> <li>• Carlisle Station Gateway (Change control)</li> <li>• Deal Performance Update</li> <li>• Energy Masterplan</li> <li>• Deal financial profile update</li> <li>• Annual Report</li> </ul>	September 2022
Financial Profile Updated and submitted to UK and Scottish Government	September 2022
Borderlands Partnership Board meeting where the following items will be considered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural Capital Programme (OBC)</li> <li>• Destination Tweed</li> <li>• Dairy Nexus</li> <li>• Berwick Theatre (tbc)</li> <li>• Business Infrastructure Scotland (sites tbc)</li> <li>• Carlisle Citadels re-profiling</li> <li>• Deal Performance Update</li> <li>• Partnership financial plan</li> </ul>	December 2022
Borderlands Partnership Board meeting where the following items will be considered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deal Performance Update and financial profile</li> <li>• Annual Review</li> <li>• Nat Cap projects (pilots tbc)</li> <li>• 7Stanes (OBC)</li> </ul>	March 2023

## 6. Financial Statements

- 6.1 The Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal is a long-term, cross-border investment in the communities, places and businesses of five local authority areas (Carlisle City Council, Cumbria County Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council, Northumberland County Council and Scottish Borders Council). In total, the Deal will see £452.56m investment from a range of sources including:
- £265m from the UK Government (up to £200m for expenditure in England and £65m for expenditure in Scotland),
  - £85m from the Scottish Government,
  - £102.56m from local partners, comprising up to £44.5m from the five local authority partners and a further £58.06m from other local partners.
- 6.2 In the 2020 UK Government Comprehensive Spending Review confirmed that Deal funding from HM Treasury in Scotland will be over a 10 year period aligning with the Scottish Government investment. In England the lifetime of the deal is up to 15 years. We have taken then approach that the Deal has a lifetime of ten years starting from financial year 2021/2022 as Year 1.
- 6.3 In England there has been advanced funding of £30m to allow acceleration of delivery of a limited number of projects during 2019/20 and 2020/21.

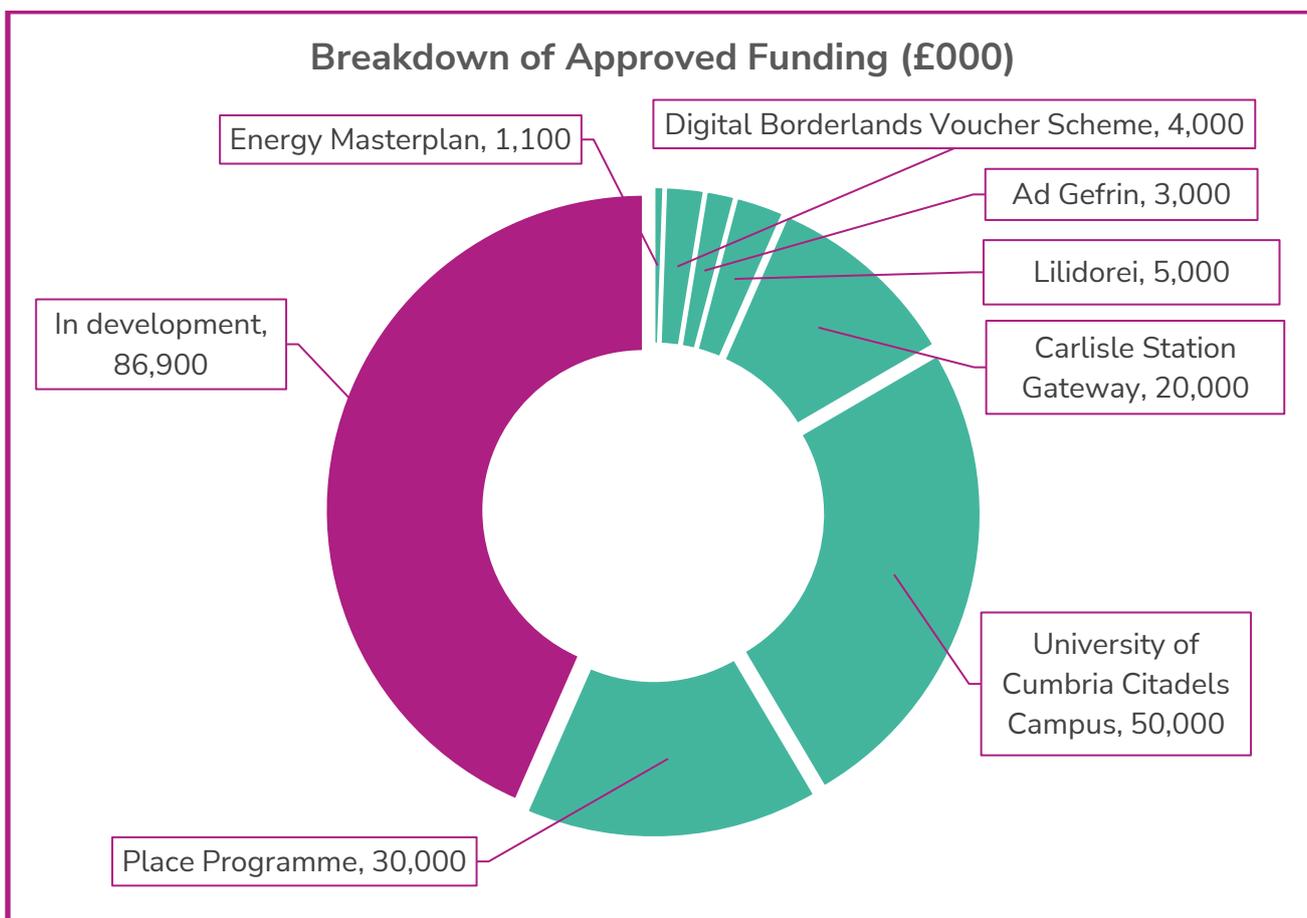
### Financial Summary - Scotland

- 6.4 Activities on specific projects has been taken forward at risk by the projects although this is not yet recorded in the Deal financial performance. This includes the purchase of the mill building for the Mountain Bike Project in 2022 and development of Place Plans across Dumfries and Galloway and Scottish Borders following the Programme-level approval having been achieved in 2021/22.
- 6.5 The current expenditure against the Energy Masterplan (£1.1m) which covers the full Borderlands area is recorded under expenditure in England as this is currently managed through Northumberland County Council on behalf of the Partnership drawing on UK Government funding.
- 6.6 Projects are forecast to be approved with resulting project expenditure in 2022/23. Draw down for projects in Scotland is based on project-level defrayal in agreement with Scottish Government and the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland. This is different to the approach for projects funded by the Department of Levelling-up, Housing and Communities and results in a different basis for the draw-down profile in Scotland.

## Financial Summary – England

6.7 The following table shows the total funding approvals at a project level along with the **funding drawn down** from UK Government as of 31 March 2022.

Project / Programme	Borderlands Funding	Other Investment	Total Project Costs	Drawn down from Govt. £'000
	£'000	£'000	£'000	
Energy Masterplan	1,100	-	<b>1,100</b>	1,100
Digital Borderlands Voucher Scheme	4,000	-	<b>4,000</b>	2,440 <sup>1</sup>
Ad Gefrin	3,000	7,504	<b>10,504</b>	3,000
Lilidorei	5,000	10,000	<b>15,000</b>	5,000
Carlisle Station Gateway	20,000	3,851	<b>23,851</b>	16,900
University of Cumbria Citadels Campus	50,000	25,000	<b>75,000</b>	-
Place Programme	30,000	-	<b>30,000</b>	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>113,100</b>	<b>46,355</b>	<b>159,455</b>	<b>28,440</b>



<sup>1</sup> Funding paid directly to DCMS by DLUHC

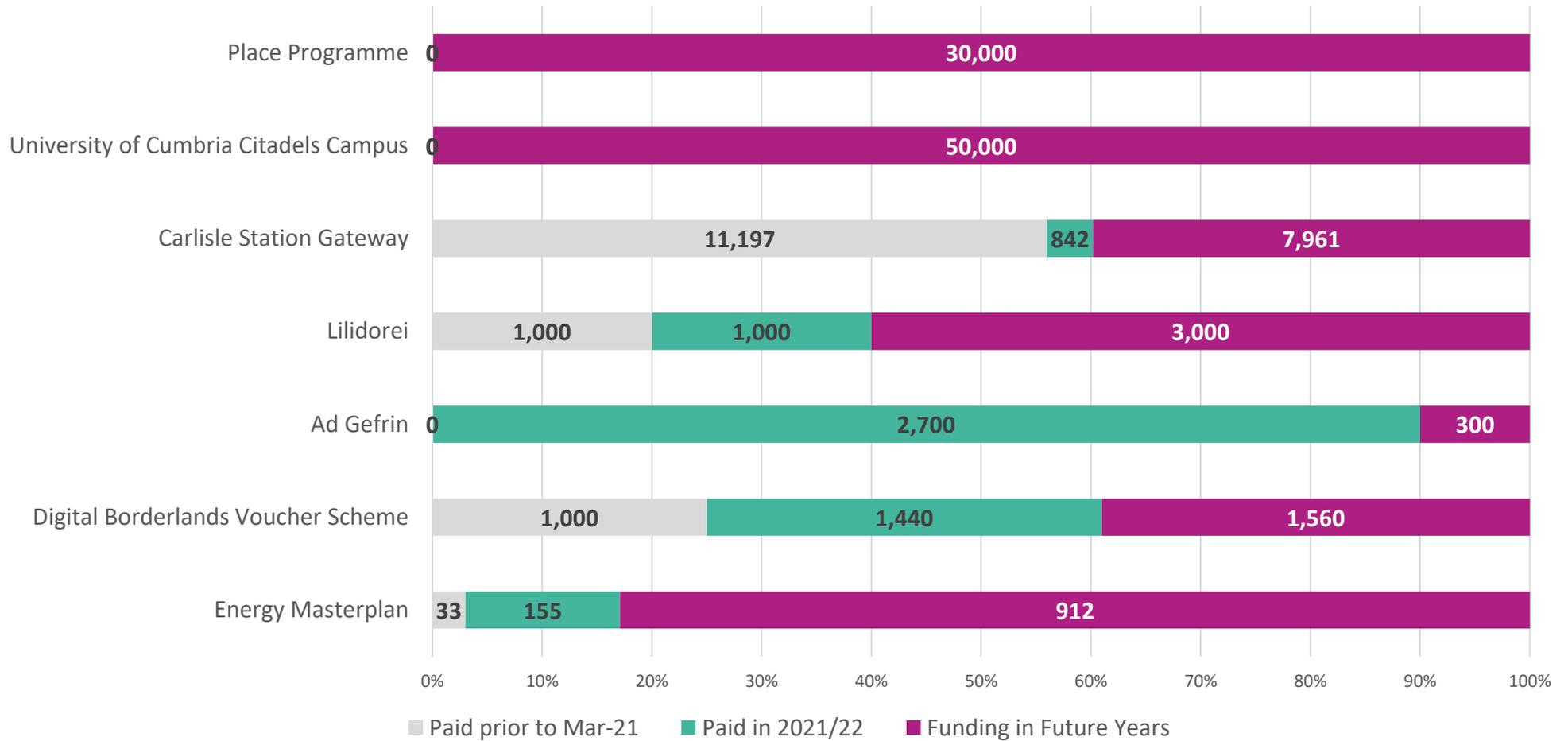
6.8 The following table shows the **total eligible spend** reported by each project.

Project / Programme	Spend prior to Mar 2021 £'000	Spend in 2021/22 £'000	Total Spend £'000	Spend in Future Years £'000
Energy Masterplan	33	155	<b>188</b>	912
Digital Borderlands Voucher Scheme	1,000	1,440	<b>2,440</b>	1,560
Ad Gefrin	1,082	3,724	<b>4,806</b>	5,698
Lilidorei	1,225	950	<b>2,175</b>	13,279
Carlisle Station Gateway	10,797	443	<b>11,240</b>	12,611
University of Cumbria Citadels Campus	-	1,466	<b>1,466</b>	76,032
Place Programme	-	-	-	30,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,137</b>	<b>8,178</b>	<b>22,315</b>	<b>140,092</b>

6.9 The following table summarises the amount of Borderlands **funding paid** to approved projects.

Project / Programme	Paid prior to Mar 2021 £'000	Paid in 2021/22 £'000	Total Paid £'000	Funding in Future Years £'000
Energy Masterplan	33	155	<b>188</b>	912
Digital Borderlands Voucher Scheme	1,000	1,440	<b>2,440</b>	1,560
Ad Gefrin	-	2,700	<b>2,700</b>	300
Lilidorei	1,000	1,000	<b>2,000</b>	3,000
Carlisle Station Gateway	11,197	842	<b>12,039</b>	7,961
University of Cumbria Citadels Campus	-	-	-	50,000
Place Programme	-	-	-	30,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,230</b>	<b>6,137</b>	<b>19,367</b>	<b>93,733</b>

### Funding Paid to Projects (£000)

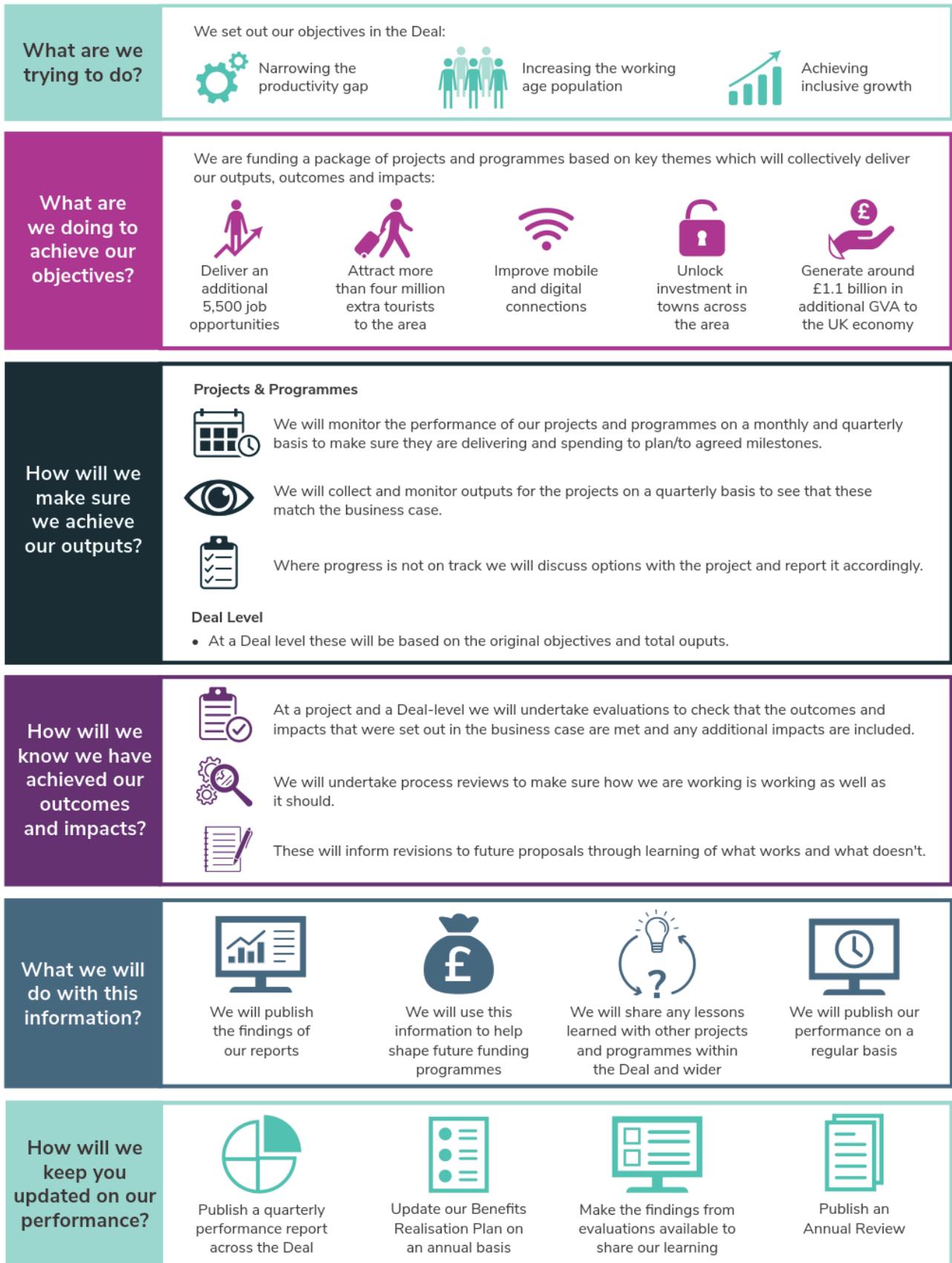


## 7. Benefits Realisation Plan

### Introduction

- 7.1 As a Partnership and Deal it is important that we are open about what we are aiming to achieve and how we are performing. Alongside the documents signed off during the agreement of the Deal we have developed and published our Benefits Realisation Plan. This sets out how we will monitor and respond to performance of projects in delivery and evaluate the long-term impact of the projects and programmes to understand if the Deal and the individual elements of the Deal achieved what we had intended. It also sets out how we will report and communicate how we are doing. In this first version we set out our baseline to measure performance against and our processes. We will update the Benefits Realisation Plan each year with an updated picture of our economy.
- 7.2 The finalisation of the Benefits Realisation Plan in 2021/22 as part of our first year set up activity is a key deliverable for the year providing a strong basis for the future delivery of the Deal. In future years this section will set out in more detail progress against our targets and deliverables.
- 7.3 The full Plan is available on our website with a summary below.

**Figure 5: Benefits Realisation Plan Summary**



## 8. Wider Partnership Activity and Focus for 2022-23

### 2021-22 Activity

- 8.1 The Borderlands Partnership came together due to an aspiration to work together on a wide range of shared economic opportunities and challenges. During 2021-22 this has focused on:
- 8.2 The Partnership supported the development of a Borderlands bid for the City of Culture competition with South of Scotland Enterprise. Although ultimately unsuccessful in the first instance this developed a renewed awareness and updated narrative around a shared cultural offer across Borderlands which underpins investment in destination assets through the Deal. Resulting from that investment and further opportunities for joint work will be identified.
- 8.3 Dumfries had made a bid for city status as part of the competition to mark the Platinum Jubilee with support from across the Borderlands Partnership for this.
- 8.4 The Partnership has also supported the submission of the Cumbria STEP (Spherical Tokamak for Energy Production) bid to host the facility in Cumbria. This provides an opportunity to build on the Borderlands specialism in energy and the existing infrastructure, with potential for related growth including on the key Chapelcross site as a result of investment across the Borderlands area.

### External Challenges & Opportunities

- 8.5 In preparing for the next year the Partnership is aware of a number of external challenges and opportunities which will impact on the next steps for the Partnership and delivery of the Deal:
- 8.6 Within the Borderlands area there are a number of elections in May 2022. With all seats up for election in both Dumfries and Galloway Council and Scottish Borders Council. In addition, the elections in Cumbria will see the establishment of two shadow authorities for the new Cumberland Council and Westmorland and Furness Council that will come into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023.
- 8.7 The outcome of the May 2022 elections are as follows:
  - Dumfries & Galloway Council: Cllr Stephen Thompson appointed Co-Leader
  - Scottish Borders Council: Cllr Euan Jardine appointed Leader

8.8 Local Government Reorganisation in Cumbria will impact on the Partnership. Once the two shadow authorities have been elected the Partnership will need to engage with these organisations to confirm their intentions towards membership of the Partnership and any impact this may have on projects set out in the Deal. The Collaboration Agreement will need to be re-signed and any changes to the membership approved by the Board by the end of the year although no changes will be required until the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 following vesting day for the two new authorities.

## Plans for 2022-23

8.9 2022-23 marks another key year in the delivery of the Deal with a number of projects scheduled for approval, most notably in Scotland, and key stages of investment to be met for projects currently in delivery. It is also expected that our first capital projects will complete during the next twelve months.

8.10 Achieving these approvals and completions is crucial to maintaining the progress made to date and catalysing the development of projects due later in the Deal as required to remain on track with the financial profiles. There are however risks and areas of concern around these which we intend to continue to work with government officials to address. Most notably these include:

- Responses to the significant and long-term impact of the inflationary pressure and cost increases for projects. These are currently identified to be around 20 to 25% for the majority of traditional capital projects which make up the bulk of the funding agreed through the Deal. To help manage this exceptional situation the Partnership is proposing to draw on a varied approach recognising the different nature and position of projects.
- To deliver this approach will require support and flexibilities from the UK Government and Scottish Government in relation to expectations around the Deal outputs and deliverables in light of the funding pressures.

8.11 During the first year of delivery opportunities to streamline and enhance the business case and financial draw-down approaches have been identified. Addressing these and making full use of the Accountable Body function is an essential element of meeting the timetable and profile set out in the Deal as delays in approval and draw down have led to specific issues for projects. Government officials and the Partnership have worked together to start to identify these and potential solutions which we expect to progress during 2022-23 to improve the experience of projects and improve the likelihood of remaining on track for approvals and defrayal.

- 8.12 There is a particular risk in delay to approvals due to the number of projects in Scotland which are profiled for spend in quarter four.
- 8.13 Similarly, there is a need to confirm draw-down arrangements for the Carlisle Citadels funding as this forms virtually all of the draw down due this year.
- 8.14 There are particular concerns and risk being raised over progress with unlocking the agreed funding to undertake the feasibility activity for the Borders Railway extension. The Partnership has sought as a matter of urgency clarity on the commitment to this project, outstanding issues around releasing the funding and the scope of the next stage of work.
- 8.15 In terms of projects in delivery there are concerns over the wider engagement for the Carlisle Station Gateway project where there is a need for Department for Transport input to assist in unblocking issues which have been raised with Avanti and Network Rail if the project is to progress as expected.
- 8.16 The Partnership will continue to seek and identify opportunities for further alignment and working together. The Economic Forum has identified a desire to undertake further work on the narrative and presentation of the Borderlands as a location for business activity and the recently announced UK Shared Prosperity Fund provides potential opportunities for aligned investment to enhance the outcomes through the Borderlands Deal. Partners will continue to investigate opportunities during the year.

## 9. Key Contacts & Further Information

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### Further Information

- Keep up to date with the latest news and join the Borderlands mailing list by [clicking here to register](#)
- The meeting papers for the Borderlands Partnership Board can be found here: <https://www.borderlandsgrowth.com/downloads>

## Appendix A – DBVS Case Study

### Digital Borderlands Voucher Scheme – Case Study: Troutbeck Camping Pods

After making the decision to diversify into luxury camping pods at Poole Bank Farm, whatever they did, Pip Simpson and his partner Hannah Towers knew that the broadband service they had would struggle to meet the connectivity requirements which have become an expectation in today's world.

At the time of making the decision, their agricultural business at Poole Bank Farm, situated in the centre of the Lake District National Park, was considered to be in one of the 'hard to reach' areas of Cumbria, and one of the hardest to reach areas in the UK, in terms of connectivity to superfast broadband.



Hannah told us “we had been talking to other property owners in the area who were experiencing the same issues with regard to their broadband service and with no known plans for any improvements, as a collective group, we decided to take the bull by the horns and approach the commercial market in seek of an alternative delivery of a network to provide an improved service. Our search led us to Kencomp who became the chosen supplier for our community scheme”.

Hannah took on the role of project lead on behalf of the community and as discussions continued with the community's chosen provider, she was made aware of the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme and Digital Borderlands Top Up Voucher which work together to provide support for community schemes of up to £3,000 for residential and £7,000 for business premises. A quote for delivery was provided for the provision of a gigabit capable service to their community; this quote, taking in to account the voucher value available, was deemed by their provider as being within scope of being financially viable for delivery. The community were delighted. Hannah noted “without the Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme and the Borderlands Top Up Voucher, our scheme would not have been possible. This additional pot of funding really made the difference in terms of our scheme being within reach of delivery’.

Hannah told us “Our provider was great and the service they provided was hugely professional. Our contact guided us through the process and managed the voucher application on behalf of our community. I wouldn't say that the process was particularly fast, there are a number of steps which have to be taken before you reach the point of

delivery, but our supplier definitely supported us in achieving the service we so desperately needed”.

‘Our community worked well together and as an improved service was our collective goal from the off, the community element was smooth and didn’t cause us any glitches. I think our community working so closely at a time when Covid-19 had the world in disarray really brought us together’.

Hannah said “I think many businesses like ours, particularly in the tourism industry, will agree that the provision of Wi-Fi services to customers has become an expectation; before our community scheme such provisions were not possible to offer but now we are stood in good stead alongside those who are also able to offer Wi-Fi services to customers. The recent national lockdowns have, I believe, further emphasised the need for a strong and stable broadband service be it for working away from the office or maintaining online communication – people want to be able to do the same as they can do from home from their holiday destination”.

“With our improved service we have been able to create and manage our website which offers prospective holiday makers the opportunity to check availability, prices and book their stay with us. We also receive a lot of enquiries via telephone, email and Facebook. We have recently added the WhatsApp business function button to our Facebook page which has proven to be an extremely popular way for prospective customers to contact us with questions or queries. Tourism, like many other business sectors, has to be open and available around the clock and accessible in the many different ways in which users wish to make contact; having the gigabit broadband service means we can be exactly that and manage the incoming contact on the laptop when we are at home or on our handheld devices when on the farm or offsite”.

In terms of publicity for the new camping pods, Hannah told us that having a social media presence is essential in working hand in hand with their website and word of mouth. Hannah went on “social media is such a powerful tool in terms of selling the service we provide, we can showcase our pods on here and hopefully as time goes by, our following will increase which will lead to more and more prospective customers hearing about us and seeing what we have to offer. The gigabit broadband connection enables us to keep our social media page updated and current and allows us to react to any comments and enquiries made on our page in real time and at the touch of a button”.

“The improved service has also brought benefits to our farming business; we can now work BACs with confidence and security and can notify BCMS (British Cattle Movement Service) of cattle movements and register new stock using an online cattle passport system. This has really helped us as previously our only option would have been to do such movements over the phone or travel to our nearest BCMS office which is quite some distance away. There are also a host of other administrative functions now available to us which just help make life a little easier. We can even keep up to date with the local

auction happenings via the livestream of sales, something which really came in to its own during lock down”.

Hannah went on “we have 2 children at home, the new and improved broadband service has been greatly welcomed by each of them. They use it for a range of activities including online learning, gaming, and entertainment. Our youngsters now need to have access to decent broadband provisions, without it, I believe, they are at a disadvantage to others”.

Hannah would encourage other businesses and residents with poor broadband to look at their options and consider a community broadband scheme. Hannah said, “the process may feel daunting at the beginning but once you begin you will find the providers to be extremely helpful, knowledgeable and very able to support you in reaching an improved broadband service. The benefits are huge; we certainly have no regrets in starting this process and are now able to run our businesses, fulfil online educational requirements for our children and access online entertainments from our own home. It has made such a difference to our lives”.