



Partneriaeth y  
Gororau Ymlaen  
Marches Forward  
Partnership



# Marches Forward Partnership

Cross Border Proposition

February 2025





## Foreword

We are delighted to present this proposition to government and the Senedd on behalf of The Marches Forward Partnership, a dynamic partnership of English and Welsh neighbouring councils. This submission demonstrates our collective vision, ambition and commitment to drive economic growth and prosperity across national boundaries.

Covering 80% of the geographic area of the England-Wales border, The Marches Forward Partnership provides a distinctive, cross border framework for union connectivity, offering a unique collaboration of local authorities, partners and stakeholders across Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Powys and Shropshire. Harnessing the opportunities presented by being the gateway between England and Wales, The Marches Forward Partnership offers strong growth potential for the region where 87% of travel to work trips are made by residents.

Our cross-border proposition sets out a clear and coherent strategy over the next 15 years, with immediate areas of focus to drive and deliver transformational change from the outset.

Our **High Productivity Rural, Small Town and City-based Economy** will leverage the unique character, connectivity, and attractiveness of our historic market towns and city to increase economic activity and investment. As a **Green Economy Trailblazer Region**, we will unlock significant private sector investment and utilise our high-quality natural environment and future management approach to land and climate resilience to become a national leader in green growth, with initiatives like the Marches Environmental Investment and Innovation Platform. Underpinned through **Healthy and Connected Places**, we will focus on population health holistically, to promote healthy ageing and preventatively reduce downstream costs of treatment with the support of the Marches Health Fund, as well as enable cross-border connectivity through an integrated approach to transport and digital innovation.

The Marches Forward Partnership provides the focus for a single conversation, delivering inter-government working, for both the UK and Welsh governments, through a range of programmes that create jobs, boost skills, improve infrastructure, accelerate the delivery of homes, enhance quality of life, and protect and enhance the environment. We estimate that a growth deal of £440m real terms revenue and capital investment over the next 15 years will generate over £3bn of additional gross value added (GVA), create 20,000 new jobs, and leverage £3bn of new investment for the region by 2040.







## Our proposition

The Marches Forward Partnership is an ambitious, mission-oriented, cross-border programme for Herefordshire, Monmouthshire, Powys and Shropshire. Our proposition is to become a trendsetter for a new growth model covering England and Wales. It identifies how targeted public interventions and new ways of working will leverage private investment, to drive greater productivity for businesses and prosperity for Marches residents over the next 15 years.

The Marches is a fantastic place to live and work, with incredible heritage, history and breathtaking landscape and environment. However, as a collective, we are lagging behind the England and Wales economic outcome averages. Closing this gap would be **worth over £3bn to the UK economy**, boosting living standards for 750,000 people in the Marches.

Over recent months a shared evidence base has been developed to underpin and identify ways that co-working and new interventions can accelerate growth.

Three cross-cutting themes for targeted new interventions have been identified:

- **A High Productivity Rural, Small Town and City-based Economy**
- **A Green Economy Trailblazer Region**
- **Healthy and Connected Places**

Within these themes, a range of programmes will drive change at pace, building on existing strengths and reducing weaknesses. The programmes include priority work areas in the immediate term, to showcase the scale of the Marches Forward opportunity, as well as ongoing project delivery to provide the full suite of long-term economic benefit for our region and communities.

Immediate priorities:

- **A High Productivity Rural, Small Town and City-based Economy**
  - **Marches Good Food Movement** – development of a regional model and innovative pilot linking together local food partnerships with the Marches reputation as a food and drink destination with good food culture.
- **A Green Economy Trailblazer Region**
  - **Marches Environmental Investment and Innovation Platform (MEIP)** – development of a pioneering place-based green finance scheme (both domestically and internationally), utilising our national award-winning River Severn Partnership to leverage public and private capital, respond to key environmental challenges such as water quality, flood risk and water resource management and unlock the Marches as a leader in green growth.





- **Healthy and Connected Places**

- **Marches Health Prevention Pilot** - piloting an early intervention and prevention health inequalities initiative, nationally and globally scalable, to help reverse the burden of chronic disease, working in collaboration with the Precision Health Initiative.
- **Marches Connects** – creation of an equitable and connected cross-border transport system that supports movement between the union and reforms services, providing a coherent and integrated transport approach.

Ongoing delivery:

- **A High Productivity Rural, Small Town and City-based Economy**

- **Marches Innovation and Knowledge Network** - development of a Marches hub and spoke model of innovation and technology skill centres, utilising existing further education (FE) expertise and sectoral strengths. The Marches model will reset skills for the future economy, growing the skills base and addressing low wages, by developing the region as a centre of excellence for climate adaptation and fairer pay.
- **Marches Affordable Market Towns** – establishing an evergreen investment housing loan fund to catalyse and scale up affordable housing opportunities. This will help us meet the government's new housing targets for our region, especially for key workers in growth sectors.

- **A Green Economy Trailblazer Region**

- **Marches Strategic Energy Plan** – working with Great British Energy on the development of a cross-border energy masterplan to drive resilient energy systems.
- **March The Marches** – Utilising Offa's Dyke as the cultural spine of the region, linking and building on the Marches market towns, historic assets, landscape, rivers and canals. This will ensure accessibility for all, creating a connected tourism offer to walk in the history and natural beauty of the Marches region.

With our focus on an evidenced programme, we can begin delivery immediately. For example, the initial design framework for the Marches Environmental Investment and Innovation Platform (MEIP) has already been aligned to existing proposals for an ambitious £500m programme of water management infrastructure across the Marches region (Severn Valley Water Management Scheme). This is being led by the Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales with Powys County Council and Shropshire Council. It will facilitate and develop joint work with existing and new private sector investors, enabling us to become a trailblazer model for green growth. Likewise, we are already working with the Precision Health Initiative and local health partners to explore the health prevention pilot as a forerunner for a Priority Health Outcomes Fund.

However, other steps will need support from the UK and Welsh governments, particularly for revenue and capital funding.





## Our ask

The Marches area has not always received a strategic and evenly appointed allocation of funding for boosting economic outcomes. Over the last 15 years, we estimate our proportion of “devolved” funding is short by around £150m for the size of our population, receiving 0.7% of total national economic development funding for 1.1% of the UK’s population.

To achieve our collective vision, ambition, and commitment to drive economic growth and prosperity across national boundaries, we are seeking a £440m real terms revenue and capital investment programme over the next 15 years, supported by £1.5m of capacity funding over the next three years, to set up Marches co-working, programme development and governance arrangements. This will enable us to move at pace and support government growth ambitions, by making collective and effective spending decisions that align with clearly evidenced priorities.

## Our evidence

As shown in Annex 1, our evidence base demonstrates the Marches has a significantly different economic structure to the average economy for England and Wales. It is a unique economic region that has the opportunity to harness comparative strengths in food and drink, agri-environment and tourism. It is one of only three areas to have multiple areas of outstanding natural beauty, a national park, a UNESCO Global Geopark and the UK’s longest river network. The rivers Severn, Wye and Usk don’t respect administrative boundaries, but they do provide water supply and wider climate resilience far beyond our boundaries and offer a unique opportunity to address water management, including water quality, as a key focus.

Examples of our unique economic structure include:

- Over seven times the jobs in agriculture and nearly twice the number of jobs in manufacturing than the England and Wales average with agricultural CO2 emissions accounting for 47% of total CO2 emissions in the Marches, compared to around 10% for England and Wales.
- Low levels of productivity with Powys experiencing the second lowest level of GVA per job filled in the UK and Herefordshire the 26th lowest out of 360 unitary authorities.
- Median house price to median income ratios growing faster than both Wales and West Midlands, rising from 6.9 times the average salary in 2009 to 8.3 in 2023.

Our challenges cannot practically be solved by trying to append the Marches economic geography to other areas or other UK regional centres.

Solutions to delivering economic prosperity and growing productivity in our area need to be developed strategically within the Marches.

It is why we have come together as the Marches Forward Partnership to kickstart a new approach.



