Economic Well-being Sub-Committee
13th November 2026

TITLE: High Impact Expression of Interest - Utopia City Project

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1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1. The purpose of the report is to present the Utopia City Expression of Interest.

2. DECISION SOUGHT

2.1. That the Economic Well-being Sub-Committee accepts the Expression of Interest for the Utopia City project and formally invite the project to join the reserve list.

3. REASONS FOR THE DECISION

3.1. To seek Economic Well-being Sub-Committee endorsement of the Utopia City project to join the reserve list.

4. BACKGROUND AND RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

4.1. The North Wales Growth Deal is an agreement between the UK Government, Welsh Government and Ambition North Wales to deliver a transformational £1billion investment in the North Wales economy. The aim of the Growth Deal is to build a more vibrant, sustainable and resilient economy in North Wales, building on our strengths to boost productivity while tackling long-term challenges and economic barriers to delivering inclusive growth.

4.2. As per the Final Deal agreement, business cases are to be developed for each project within the Growth Deal in line with the 'Better Business Case' guidance developed by Welsh Government and HM Treasury. Each business case includes five cases which address key questions and should be supported by workshops. The guidance allows for single-stage Business Justification Cases to be used for projects of low-medium value and risk.

4.3. The Economic Well-being Sub-Committee (previously the role of the Economic Ambition Board) acts as the decision-making body for the North Wales Growth Deal. The Welsh Government and UK Government are funders of the Growth Deal, retaining a role in approving the assurance process each project has undertaken. The assurance process undertaken by projects will be included in all reports for consideration.

4.4. The Economic Well-being Sub-Committee approved the Strategy for Remaining Unallocated Funding in October 2026. The strategy included £8m of funding available to the Reserve List to support the delivery of high impact projects only. The high impact criteria specifies that 16 net jobs should be created per £1m Growth Deal invested or £4.5m match funding per £1m invested.

4.5. An open call via the six local authorities was opened for new Reserve List projects to be nominated using the previous Expression of Interest application forms where those projects meet the high impact criteria on jobs or investment.

4.6. One Expression of Interest has been received to date from Wrexham County Borough Council for the Utopia City project which has been reviewed by the Portfolio Management Office and is presented for consideration for inclusion on the reserve list in this report. The call for projects via the six local authorities remains open and will do so until all available Growth Deal funding has been allocated.

4.7. SUMMARY OF THE UTOPIA CITY PROJECT

4.7.1. Utopia City is a proposed phased employment campus north of Bryn Lane, adjoining Wrexham Industrial Estate, within the Flintshire and Wrexham Investment Zone. The first phase of the project seeks £5 million from the North Wales Growth Deal alongside £5 million from the Investment Zone, forming a capped £10 million public contribution towards utilities, drainage, site preparation and access infrastructure. These works would address infrastructure and viability constraints that would otherwise delay and limit development.

4.7.2. Alongside the public funding there is significant proposed private investment in the initial phase of the project that would unlock approximately 15 acres of serviced employment land and deliver 128,101 sq ft of modern industrial floorspace across Units 3–6, targeting advanced-manufacturing occupiers. (Full details of the project are included in annex 1 which is exempt)

4.7.3. The project has been assessed and meets the criteria for reserve list (that 16 net jobs should be created per £1m Growth Deal invested or £4.5m match funding per £1m invested):

- Creating 298 net jobs (direct and indirect) – this equates to 29.8 jobs per £1m of public funding, significantly higher than the high impact criteria.
- Total investment of £41.56 – this equates to £4.1m per £1m public funding invested, only slightly lower than the high impact criteria for investment.
- The full (hybrid) planning application has already been submitted (2023). Determination, with a resolution to grant, is targeted for December 2026, with the Section 106 agreement to be finalised in Q1 2027.

4.7.3. On the basis of the jobs per £1m metric, the project meets the high impact criteria and is being recommended for inclusion on the reserve list. Inviting the project to join the reserve list does not represent a decision to fund the project but provides the project sponsor the opportunity to present a business case for consideration by the Sub-Committee in the future in line with the usual assurance and approvals process.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1. The decisions in this report do not commit the Sub-Committee to spending any Growth Deal funding. Should the Sub-Committee approve the Expression of interest and invite the project to join the reserve list, any future release of funding would be subject to the approval of a business case by the Sub-committee in line with the agreed assurance and approvals process.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1. The proposed approach is in line with the strategy agreed by the Sub-Committee in October 2026, which is in line with the requirements of the Final Deal Agreement. All subsequent approvals will be subject to the usual assurance and approvals process for Growth Deal projects.

6.2. As with all Growth Deal projects, as part of the business case process the project would be required to demonstrate Subsidy Control compliance as part of their final business case.

7. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

7.1. An integrated impact assessment will be undertaken at Business Case stage to assess the impact of the project on the Welsh Language, equalities and against the Future Generations.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 Utopia City – Expression of Interest (Exempt)

STATUTORY OFFICERS RESPONSE:

i. Monitoring Officer:

"The proposed inclusion of this project onto the Reserve List is consistent with the strategy for remaining unallocated Growth Deal funding previously approved by the Sub-Committee. Inclusion will not constitute approval of funding or create any commitment to the project.

Any subsequent proposal to allocate funding will remain subject to the applicable business case, assurance and approval processes, including appropriate legal and due diligence requirements and compliance with subsidy control requirements."

ii. Statutory Finance Officer:

"As is explained in Part 5 above, adopting the decision sought does not commit the Growth Deal to expenditure at this stage. The EOI is a first step of many before the approval of a Final Business Case and the Finance Service will provide support and analysis as needed during this process should the project progress to the subsequent stages."