

**EDAS**



Economic  
Development  
Association  
Scotland

# STRATEGY 2024 - 2027

# INTRODUCTION

## A MOVEMENT FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

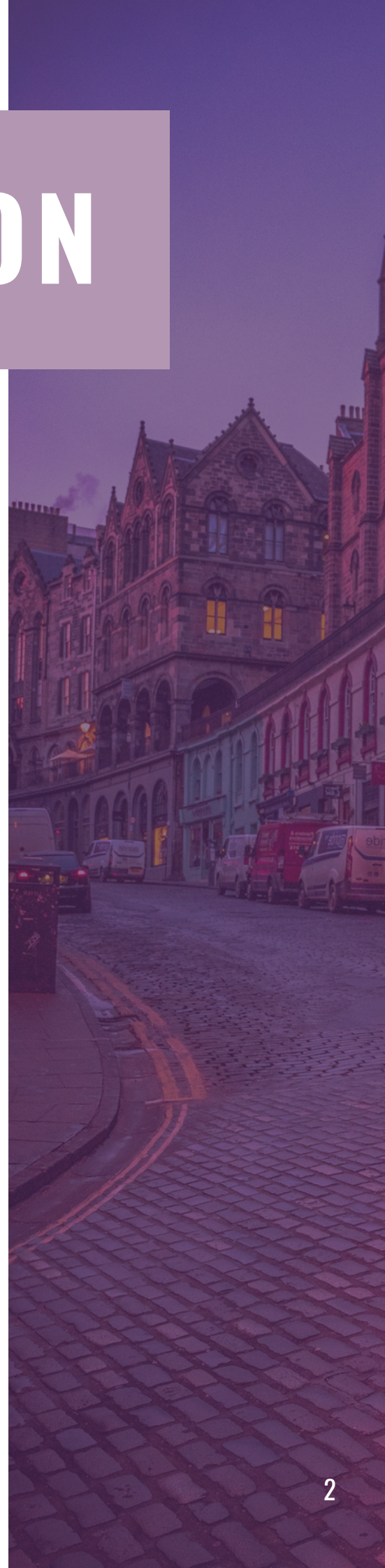
For over twenty-five years, EDAS has been the main membership body that supports those working in and contributing to economic development in Scotland. In that time, we have seen huge changes within the Scottish, UK, and global economies, and with the current climate crisis and ongoing economic challenges, our discipline and practice has never been more necessary or relevant.

### **The EDAS Vision**

That Scotland has an environmentally sustainable, prosperous, inclusive economy that works for all people, businesses, communities and places. And that all those working in economic development have the necessary new knowledge, understanding, skills and support to implement this vision.

### **Who is this Strategy for?**

Working on the frontline as agents of change, our members are learning and collaborating to deliver solutions for a more equitable, greener, and prosperous Scotland. Our new strategy outlines the general direction of change within economic development and how we at EDAS will work with our members to deliver that change throughout their practice of economic development.



## HOW EDAS WORKS

Whilst economic development can be technical and is a professional discipline, it's also critically important to everyday business, life, and work.

Economic development encompasses subjects spanning economics, planning, geography, sociology, and public policy. In many ways it's a core part of how our society functions and who it functions for; it's central to the lives we live, the jobs we do, the future of our local places, and Scotland as a nation.

EDAS is a bridge - between policy, practitioners, and activity on the ground. And with that we continually strive to make economic development practice more accessible and relevant. We believe that the right skills combined with a greater understanding and wider recognition of economic development, will take us closer to realising Scotland's goal of becoming an equitable, greener and prosperous economy.

Little stands still in economics and economic development. The economic development community must continue to evolve in response to dramatic contextual shifts, such as the climate emergency and growing inequality. Furthermore, we live in a world experiencing continuing advancements in digital communication, technology, energy production, and artificial intelligence. Whilst this may cause a degree of uncertainty, we also need to recognise the opportunities it presents in



Neil McInroy, EDAS Chair

terms of adopting new approaches to achieving growing economic prosperity and building community wealth.

As economic development practitioners, we operate within a range of national policies and legislative context, including the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET). Many of our public sector members are directly tasked and funded to help deliver NSET, and of course, many other private and social partners indirectly deliver on that strategy and its wider priorities.

Across all of those involved in economic development strategy, policy and practice, there remains a melting pot of opinions, perspectives, and viewpoints, as to how we practically deliver. At EDAS we recognise and encourage healthy and respectful debate, appreciating that different views are vitally important in responding to change, sharpening policy perspectives, calibrating, evaluating effective practice, and delivering smart actions.



## HOW EDAS WORKS CNTD.

Our members and wider network play an important role in shaping the future every day by developing economic development strategy, action plans, and delivering ‘on the ground’ through business support, skills development and project delivery. EDAS complements all the above by taking on various roles:



### **SUPPORTER**

Recognising best practice and showcasing good things that are happening in the economic development community.



### **CONVENER**

Bringing people and ideas together to amplify them across the membership and beyond.



### **CRITICAL FRIEND**

Advancing pioneering ideas and work.



### **CULTIVATOR**

Expanding the knowledge, skills, and networks of those involved in all aspects of economic development.



### **LIAISON**

Bringing together the public, private and third sectors to promote joined up learning, work, and delivery.

## HOW EDAS WORKS CNTD.

With over 3,250 members across the country, EDAS has a broad offering that best serves our community:

**Events** - Delivering high quality events and spaces for dialogue and debate which attract practitioners, academics, and expert speakers each year.

**Member relations** - Producing policy briefings, knowledge sharing and practitioner-led networks.

**Courses** - Offering university-level CPD courses and learning opportunities to support the needs of the economic development community.

**Partnerships** - Being the point of reference and advocate for all things relating to economic development and how it relates to other disciplines and practice.

**Future Leaders Network** - We support the newly formed EDAS Future Leaders Network, representing those who are in the early stages of their career in economic development as well as those thinking about a career in economic development.

We continue to grow and develop this offer, based on the feedback, wants, and needs of our membership and the wider economic development community. Through our work and collaboration with members and more broadly, we aim to achieve the following:

**Develop** a Scotland that is more sustainable, prosperous, and inclusive with economic, social, and environmental wellbeing for all of its people and communities.

**Provide** those who deliver economic development with the optimum skills and knowledge to implement this vision.

**Engage** related disciplines and sectors within economic development for mutual benefit.

**Ensure** that every person in Scotland has the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of economic development and how it positively impacts their life and work.

“ A Scotland that is more sustainable, prosperous, and inclusive for all of its people and communities. ”

# DIRECTION OF CHANGE

## **AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR PEOPLE, PLACE, PROSPERITY AND PLANET**

### **New spaces for dialogue**

Economic development involves problem solving and making the most of new opportunities. Currently, we are at the beginning of a new journey, transitioning from a now unsustainable, long-standing, fossil-fuelled economic growth model to an emerging newer, greener, and more universally generous, inclusive economy model.

In the next three years EDAS will open spaces for dialogue, debates, and knowledge sharing which help our members to navigate these new emerging challenges and opportunities.

### **Maintain cross-sector partnerships**

EDAS is committed to developing a stronger relationship with the Scottish Government's Economy Directorate and UK Government policy makers to help strengthen the links between policy and practice. In the next three years we will support partnerships and increase the recognition that economic development works at multiple scales be it global, international, national, regional, island or local, and across multiple sectors (for example, health, transport and digital).

# DIRECTION OF CHANGE CNTD.

## Supporting our members

Our core public sector members are local authorities and enterprise and skills agencies – all of whom are delivering against a backdrop of ever-changing priorities, agendas, and increasing budget pressures. Much of their everyday practice is focussed on supporting businesses, a task which will continue to evolve and be bolstered by new information and emerging agendas, policy, and new market opportunities.

EDAS over the next three years will continue to augment the work of our membership providing them with the knowledge, tools, training, and connections to assist them with their own delivery, outcomes, and impact.

Specifically for the period of 2024-2027, EDAS will work with members across four priority areas: people, place, prosperity and planet. The below table outlines example topics that sit within each area.

PEOPLE	PLACE	PROSPERITY	PLANET
Community wealth building	Regional economic partnerships and growth deals	Productivity	Net zero transition
Skills development	Shared prosperity funds	Innovative capacity	The circular economy
Poverty, inequality and increased opportunities for disadvantaged groups	Land and infrastructure	Internationalisation	Land reform
Inclusive business models	Towns, cities, and rural areas	Community wealth building	Just transition
Advancing fair and meaningful work, with greater in work progression	Innovation districts	Asset ownership	Climate adaptation
		Inclusive and democratic business models	Community ownership of renewables
			Natural capital



# PEOPLE

More than one million people still live in relative poverty in Scotland and just over 10% of workers in Scotland are paid below the real Living Wage – 72% of them being women<sup>1</sup>. Scotland continues to face demographic changes, including an ageing population, which will have major implications for our workforce and the development of certain economic sectors. There is therefore a continual need to up and re skill new and existing workers in the face of the shifting contexts.

Whilst awareness of these issues across our membership is high, there is an ever-pressing need for new focus, impetus and reset. The pace of change demands timely and strategic responses and economic development must ensure that no one person is left behind. We must redouble our efforts on sectors where low pay and recruitment remain an issue and become more confident in linking poverty and inequality to economic development strategies and action – all whilst focusing on Community Wealth Building and inclusive forms of ownership. We also need to aid the creation of an entrepreneurial culture. One that equips existing and new employees with the skills to contribute to,

and benefit from, a transforming, green, and wealth generating economy.

We believe everyone should have a genuine stake in the economy, and the economy must work for all. This includes ensuring that economic development, as a discipline, represents and acts for the diverse nation we are, being ever cognisant of how our practice intersects with race, gender, age, class, and religion.

Calls for economic and social justice are longstanding. EDAS will therefore work with members and partners to understand and interpret what is happening for workforce, communities, and individuals “on the ground”. We will also support those of our members, working on poverty, employment and skills, and industrial restructuring. To support this theme, EDAS policy priorities will include:

- Community wealth building
- Skills development
- Poverty, inequality and increasing opportunities for disadvantaged groups
- Inclusive business models
- Advancing fair and meaningful work, with greater in work progression

1. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023). Poverty In Scotland 2023



# PLACE

Place is where we see economic, social and environmental policy and practice come together to deliver tangible actions and change.

The pandemic altered the landscape and footfall of our cities and towns. It presented new digital opportunities that have since broken down geographic barriers and increased levels of connectivity and digital inclusion across Scotland. Increasingly many businesses can now be run remotely, and this has provided growth opportunities for micro-businesses, social enterprises and unique collaborations. Ongoing support for startups, innovation districts, early stage growth and investment, entrepreneurship, and self-employment in places and localities across the nation will be important in this context as we move to the future.

Going forward, EDAS will examine how our geography and locations will be used; what our physical environment will look like; how we protect and nurture our considerable natural assets; how our communities adapt to a just transition and how major capital investment programmes related to modern transport infrastructure and business premises can promote long term economic prosperity and wellbeing. We see opportunities for our members to work with communities to build coherent responses, foster new relationships, and collaborate to mutual benefit under this theme.

Within place, EDAS policy priorities will include:

- Regional economic partnerships and growth deals
- Shared prosperity funds
- Innovation districts
- Land and infrastructure
- Towns, cities and rural areas



# PROSPERITY

Prosperity relates to collective national economic success, alongside prosperous businesses, places, communities and individuals. Today, in 2024, Scotland is pressured by declining standards of living and growing income inequalities. There is also weak national growth, weak global growth, and Scotland has too few high performing businesses, too few exporters, and not enough innovation. In relation to other countries, Scotland has never been overly entrepreneurial, and we need to continue to grow a vigorous enterprising culture, including support for entrepreneurs, businesses, and investors to unlock new solutions, employment and investment that benefit local areas and people.

Future prosperity is driven by having a more dynamic economy that generates wealth and wellbeing to help fund public service delivery and reduce demand on them. The National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET) is focused on addressing the key elements that will drive future prosperity and recent focus within national strategies has detailed new missions for change including innovation, productivity, export growth, and leveraging in public and capital investment from Scotland to maximise local economic gain. The NSET vision of creating a wellbeing economy, with the promise of new patterns of

wealth and inclusive business models will help. As well as tackling these new missions, we must also nurture the economy as it is, including a greater emphasis on existing patterns of wealth. This consideration of how the economy is configured will play a central role in ensuring that more people benefit from our economy as well-paid workers, as active stakeholders, and as owners of businesses and assets.

We see prosperity as a broad endeavour cutting across the three other priorities. Whilst traditionally associated with economic growth, we will work to extend the idea of prosperity to include the aims of wellbeing and community wealth building. In the next three years, EDAS will work with members and partners to frame issues and challenges, set tone to action, and help realise the change and opportunities arising from the required transition. To support this theme, EDAS policy priorities will include:

- Productivity
- Innovative capacity
- Internationalisation
- Community wealth building
- Asset ownership
- Inclusive and democratic business models



# PLANET

The climate and ecological crises represent the most pressing challenges for Scotland, and the world, in the years ahead. The future of our environment depends on the decisions made by current global, national, and local governments and the actions taken across the next two decades. Scotland has a climate change plan and a target of reducing emissions of greenhouse gases to net zero by 2045. There are also strong efforts to reduce pollution, advance the circular economy, and protect our biosphere and natural environment.

Scotland is advancing progressive land reform, improving natural assets and energy harnessing renewable energies alongside increased community and democratic ownership. Critically, the transition to net zero cannot be funded solely by the public sector. Economic Development practitioners will play a vital role in developing projects that will attract the sizeable levels of private investment required to finance the transition and ensure that those investments are made with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles in mind.

Tackling climate change represents an opportunity to debate the weaknesses in economic growth that are driven by fossil fuels, and consumption which is heavily dependent on unsustainable resources. We will showcase the unprecedented opportunity of new green industries and, the jobs therein, and the Just Transition of Scotland's economy. For example, the opportunity to establish new renewables industries in Scotland including offshore wind and green hydrogen; reducing the use of non-renewable natural resources; developing circular business models and supply chains; and helping businesses create the products and services that will support the zero-carbon transition in Scotland and further afield.

## PLANET CNTD.

Every community, public body, business, and organisation will need to adapt – potentially unlocking huge employment and business opportunities – with action taken during the current decade being critical in helping Scotland meet its climate goals.

We assert that an economy is a subset of the environment, and we must ensure that the economy works to avert further climate change and destruction of our biosphere. In the next three years, EDAS will support existing work while introducing new and differing perspectives through debate. We will work with members and partners to frame issues and challenges, set tone to action, and help realise the change and opportunities arising from the required transition. To support this theme, EDAS policy priorities will include:

- Net zero and zero carbon transition
- The circular economy
- Adaptation
- Land reform
- Just transition
- Community ownership of renewables
- Natural capital

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**The future of our environment depends on the decisions made by current global, national, and local governments and the actions taken across the next two decades.**

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