

CASE-STUDY

# **Birmingham Innovation Precinct: A Case of University-led Transformation Through Place-based Innovation**

Executive Summary



Aston University



# WHAT IS THE BIRMINGHAM INNOVATION PRECINCT?

- A bold initiative to build a globally significant innovation ecosystem in Birmingham, strategically located next to Aston University.
- A collaborative effort involving university, government and business (Bruntwood SciTech, Woodbourne Group, Birmingham City Council) and other industry and community partners.
- A comprehensive set of activities and projects spanning academic research, business incubation and growth, and urban development.



## CORE AIMS:

Transform Birmingham into a global science and technology hub.

Accelerate inclusive socio-economic development with a focus on creating opportunities for all segments of the population and ensuring benefits beyond economic growth.

Support R&D commercialization and innovation-driven entrepreneurship.



# WHY BIRMINGHAM?

## OPPORTUNITIES IN THE UK'S SECOND-LARGEST CITY:

- One of the UK's most **diverse** and **multicultural** cities.
- Home to one of the **youngest populations in Europe**.

### Strong potential for:

- Innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Workforce development.
- Future-focused skills and industries.





# CHALLENGES FACING THE CITY

Despite economic growth, **unemployment rates remain high**, especially among young people, and employment rates lag behind other UK regions.

These issues highlight the need for inclusive innovation and job creation.

# BIRMINGHAM KEY DATA

The BIP is at the same time a prime opportunity and a compelling need for the city.

## **Opportunities:**

- 1.13 million residents, the second-largest city in England with one of Europe's youngest populations.
- Around 34% of Birmingham's population is aged between 24 and 49 years old.
- High density of global companies (e.g. HSBC UK, Goldman Sachs, Jaguar, Land Rover).
- Recognized as the UK's "most entrepreneurial city outside London" (StartUp Britain, 2017).



# BIRMINGHAM KEY DATA

## **Structural Challenges:**

- Youth unemployment rate: double the UK average.
  - Less than 30% of the population with degree-level education, vs 46.7% in London.
  - 1 in 4 jobs in Birmingham are "hard to fill" due to digital and technical skills gaps.
  - Considerable productivity losses due to preventable health conditions.
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# BIP STAKEHOLDER ECOSYSTEM

*Government bodies at both the local and regional levels have played crucial roles in enabling and supporting the development of the BIP alongside Aston University.*

**Aston University:** Academic anchor and visionary, driving the initiative. The BIP is closely aligned with Aston University's 2030 Strategy for socio-economic impact.

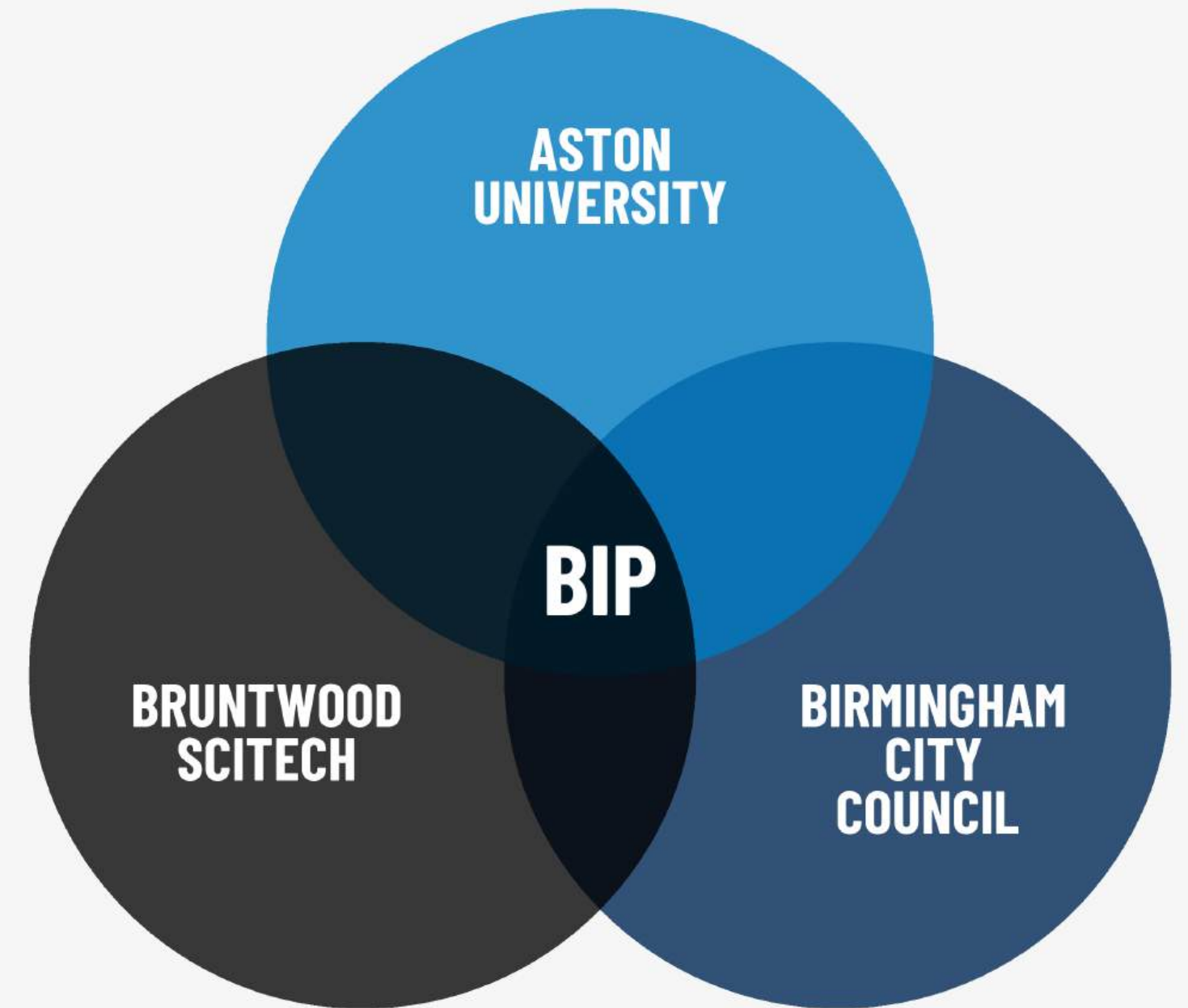
**Government & Public Sector:** Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Combined Authority provide planning support, infrastructure investment (£16M initial funding), and tax incentives for businesses.

**Industry & Business Partners:** Bruntwood SciTech and Woodbourne Group are private developers in the innovation ecosystem space.



## BIP STAKEHOLDER ECOSYSTEM

The BIP is, therefore, taking a pathway towards the **Quadruple Helix Model**: Recognizing the roles of *academia, government, industry, and the local community* in driving innovation and social impact.





# BIP ADVANCING UK'S INNOVATION

- The BIP is part of a broader UK national strategy aimed at fostering innovation and promoting regional economic growth across the island. It has been supported, incentivized, and co-financed by the UK government.
- The creation of the West Midlands Investment Zone (WMIZ) in November 2023 represents a key step towards advancing the national innovation strategy.
- The WMIZ was designed to stimulate economic activity and to provide target support and incentives for innovation hubs.
- The BIP is strategically located within the Birmingham node of this Investment Zone.



# ASTON UNIVERSITY'S LEADERSHIP ROLE IN TRANSFORMING BIRMINGHAM

Aston University envisions playing a transformational role in the region—serving as a catalyst for economic growth, fostering digital inclusion, bridging skills gaps, and developing a strong talent pipeline and job-ready workforce. This vision is laid out in Aston University's 2030 Strategy.

Upon his arrival as the new Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Aston University in August 2022, Professor Aleks Subic conceived the idea of developing an innovation district led by the university.

The BIP is strategically situated adjacent to the university's city-center campus, underscoring the close relationship and integration between the two.



# **ASTON UNIVERSITY: DRIVING INNOVATION, TALENT & RESEARCH**

- Educational Alignment with the BIP.
  - Strong focus on STEM education particularly in digital tech and life sciences.
  - Strategic plan to add 1,500+ students in innovation-linked courses by 2030.



# ASTON UNIVERSITY'S NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

- Ranked #2 in England for social mobility (4 years in a row).
- Triple Gold in Teaching Excellence Framework (2023).
- University of the Year for Student Success (Daily Mail, 2025)
- Runner-up for Graduate Employment (Times/Sunday Times, 2024).
- Athena Swan Gold award.
- Business School holds Triple Crown Accreditation.





# RESEARCH POWERHOUSE

## **Home to eight leading research institutes in:**

- Digital futures, life sciences, photonics, and sustainable energy.
  - Health & neurodevelopment, forensic linguistics, and entrepreneurship.
  - Focus on inclusive innovation via CREME (ethnic minority entrepreneurship).
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# TRANSFORMING KNOWLEDGE INTO INNOVATION AND ACCELERATING COMMERCIALIZATION

Aston University actively cultivates **entrepreneurial mindsets** and engages in numerous **partnerships with businesses and government bodies** to translate research into real-world impact across diverse sectors.



## Aston University Key Initiatives:

- **Midlands Innovation**- a strategic partnership across eight universities in the region to advance innovation, research and skills development.
- **Midlands Mindforge**- a capital investment company with the aim of raising £250m fund and scale projects in key sectors (Clean Technologies, AI & Computational Science, Life Sciences & Health Tech)
- **SPARK The Midlands**- a pre-clinical accelerator program focused on advancing health technology innovations.
- **Knowledge Transfer Partnerships**- Aston's university program to work in partnership with industry to enhance research applications and commercialization.



# BIP INFRASTRUCTURE AND SPACES

The BIP prioritizes a vibrant, mixed-use environment, a "city within a city", with diverse arts, retail, dining, and recreational amenities. The development plan includes:

- 1.35 million square feet of commercial and innovation space.
- 2,200 homes (with 15% designated as affordable housing).
- 400 hotel rooms equipped with state-of-the-art conference facilities.
- 15 hectares of public realm and open space.
- 500,000 square feet of cultural and community space.



# BIP'S FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES

Aston University will develop three flagship initiatives in partnership with Bruntwood SciTech at the BIP that will form the operational foundation of the precinct:

## **Aston Business Hub**

- Flexible and collaborative workspaces.
- House 100 startups.
- Mentoring opportunities.

## **Green Energy Centre**

- Research and education in sustainable technologies.
- Drive sustainable energy solutions for the precinct, aiming for net-zero emissions.

## **Aston Integrated Healthcare Hub**

- Offering preventative healthcare and wellbeing services.
- Showcasing cutting-edge medical advancements.



# THE IMPACT OF THE BIRMINGHAM INNOVATION PRECINCT

The Aston 2030 strategy outlines the projected impact of the Birmingham Innovation Precinct, acting as a catalyst to achieve 2030 Enterprise performance targets, including:

- Midlands Mindforge raising £250M, with Aston spinouts receiving over £30M in investment.
- 50 spinouts, with at least one reaching a valuation of over £100M.
- Average seed investment for spinouts exceeding £2.5M.
- 100 graduate start-ups successfully incubated.
- Hosting at least two globally recognized accelerators.
- A sector-leading portfolio of 50 KTP projects.
- Aston's economic impact reaching £2.37bn GVA by 2030.



# PROJECTED RETURNS ON INVESTMENT

According to Aston University's estimations, for every £1 million invested in R&D at BIP, the expected impact includes:

- £5 million in additional private investment
- £10 million in additional public R&D funding
- £13 million in additional capital investment





## **THE BIP STANDS AS A PROMISING INITIATIVE WITH THE POTENTIAL TO SIGNIFICANTLY RESHAPE THE ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE OF BIRMINGHAM AND THE WIDER WEST MIDLANDS REGION.**

Its key strengths lie in its close alignment with the research expertise and strategic vision of Aston University, its location within the government-backed West Midlands Investment Zone, and its ambitious plans for state-of-the-art infrastructure and a vibrant mixed-use environment.



Its focus on high-growth application areas and industry verticals such as health tech, digital innovation, and green energy, coupled with its commitment to fostering skills development and attracting talent, positions it well to capitalize on future economic trends.

**ULTIMATELY, ITS SUCCESS WILL HINGE ON ITS ABILITY TO  
DELIVER BOTH SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AND  
TANGIBLE SOCIAL BENEFITS TO THE LOCAL REGION.**



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