

Bracknell Forest Economic & Skills Development Partnership (ESDP) 2-Year Action Plan: March 2017 to March 2019 'Building on Local Strengths'

1. Aim

The aim of this 2-year Action Plan is to ensure that the high level objectives adopted by Bracknell Forest's Economic & Skills Development Partnership (ESDP) match the future needs of local businesses. The Plan sets out how the ESDP will establish these objectives and how it will use them to inform its work-programmes. It also lists the Partnership's key actions for the next two years.

2. Business Needs in Bracknell

Bracknell Forest, along with the rest of the Berkshire and the wider Thames Valley, has one of the most dynamic economies in the UK. The Borough hosts many global-corporate businesses working in the knowledge and IT sectors, as well as many of the UK's nationally known organisations and a substantial number of local companies and support services, many of which are SMEs.

Bracknell Forest owes much of this success to its ability to retain the legacy of its new town 'identity'. Through this approach it has continued to provide the right environment for business; including value for money office and industrial space, a highly skilled workforce, good transport links, ample housing and leisure facilities and low crime rates all within a few miles of London and other prime locations within the Thames Valley area.

The business environment is, however, changing and Bracknell's business sector will be under pressure to respond to the shifting trading conditions that have been brought about by international issues such as BREXIT in the UK and uncertainties arising from the change in the US government.

Within the UK, government policies and initiatives aimed at growing the UK's economy will also have an impact on Bracknell-based businesses. These include policies to increase the UK's housing stock, to improve road and rail infrastructure and the proposal to expand Heathrow Airport. Most recently, there is the government's proposed industrial strategy¹, which includes pillars aimed at investing in science, research and innovation, developing skills and driving growth. There are also various references to building on national and local strengths, and this could impact on Bracknell businesses.

In response to this shifting business environment many locally based organisations will be looking at how they can:

- take advantage of the changes in international trading conditions;
- locate within a local business environment that provides the right support services and businesses networks;
- secure efficient access to the transport network at regional, national and international levels;
- attract staff with the right skills and provide the right training; and
- be sure that their staff can find housing that suits their needs and income levels.

¹ Building our Industrial Strategy: Green Paper, HM Government, January 2017

3. The ESDP's Role

The ESDP is a business-driven partnership, supported by Bracknell Forest Council and owned by its business membership. It is unique within the region, having represented businesses in Bracknell for many years. The purpose of the ESDP is to:

- facilitate and promote the continued economic development of Bracknell Forest;
- act as a voice for business, bringing together representatives from the private, public and education sectors;
- engage with other business bodies, including the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVBLEP), the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC), the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), the Institute of Directors (IoD) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

The ESDP must support Bracknell's businesses throughout these changing times, so that the local economy continues to grow.

4. Building on Local Strengths

Over recent years there has been substantial inward investment in Bracknell, including a major redevelopment of the town centre, several large-scale housing developments and the continued provision of high-class office and industrial space, much of which is located within large-scale business parks. Bracknell is well served in skills delivery via a number of independent training providers and Bracknell and Wokingham College. There are also proposed improvements to the local railway service, to the railway station itself and to the regional road network within the Borough.

Bracknell will, however, continue to face competition from neighbouring local authority areas and other parts of the country for the provision of office and industrial space that attracts the types of business that have been key to Bracknell's economic success.

To help business embrace the shifting economic environment, the ESDP needs to set high level objectives that will support local businesses through this period of change. These objectives should, in reflection of the government's proposed industrial strategy, 'build on local strengths'.

The ESDP's business objectives workshop held in March 2017, attended by senior representatives from across the business sector, identified Bracknell Forest's retention of its new town 'identity', and the policies that arise from this, as its core local strength. This has enabled Bracknell Forest's local authority to sustain a long-term approach to planning and economic growth through an 'open and fair' approach to working with business and in providing the right environment for them to thrive. It is this strength, therefore, that should form the basis for the ESDP's high level objectives.

5. ESDP Objectives

The ESDP has set itself high level objectives aimed at supporting, promoting and representing Bracknell's business over the next two years.

- Identify Bracknell Forest's 'local strengths' as the basis for understanding Bracknell's collective business needs and lobbying on their behalf;

- Through the Partnership's work-programmes provide a co-ordinated voice and support for the local business community, building on Bracknell Forest's local strengths;
- Be the effective voice of local business in responding to government and local planning consultations. In collaboration with the local authority, aim to build on Bracknell Forest's strengths as a provider of the right environment for businesses to thrive;
- Support Bracknell Forest businesses in seeking funding from government and private sector initiatives in areas such as technology development and cyber security;
- Lobby on behalf of Bracknell Forest's businesses to seek funding for first-class communications and transport infrastructure, such as telecoms, road, rail, cycle and walk access;
- Steer and support the development of first-class programmes and initiatives (e.g. Elevate) for training, apprenticeships and skills development in Bracknell;
- Support plans for the provision of appropriate housing and leisure facilities for the business community's employees;
- Establish Bracknell's first Business Improvement District (BID) covering the Western and Southern Business Areas;
- Help establish a vibrant town centre through the promotion of business interest and employment programmes;
- Establish collaborative relationships with the LEP, Chamber of Commerce and other business organisations;
- Increase the membership of the ESDP, ensuring that Bracknell's businesses are appropriately represented.

6. Delivery

The ESDP will continue to operate and deliver its objectives under its existing Terms of Reference. Its structure will comprise:

- the ESDP Partnership Board – meeting six times a year to review progress and provide direction
- working Sub-Groups – meeting as required to deliver work-streams in the following topic areas:
 - Employment and Skills
 - Infrastructure
- the Western and Southern Area BID Steering Group (progress reporting to Infrastructure Sub-Group/Partnership Board)

The need to revise the remits of Working Groups, or form additional Working Groups to address arising issues, will be determined on the basis of workshops and consultation with businesses within the Borough.

It will be the responsibility of the Partnership Board and its Sub-Group chairs to ensure that an active and representative membership is sustained, and that there is continuity of the Chair and Vice Chair roles. The summit and the on-going BID process will provide the Partnership with the opportunity to enhance its membership.

7. Support Resources and Funding

Bracknell Forest Council will support the ESDP with administrative services, technical information and professional advice through the provision of expertise from its Regeneration and Economy Team and other officers. Other resources will be provided by the business membership through the provision of senior-level contributions to work-stream delivery, and through the provision of meeting locations.

Where agreed by the membership, funding to support specific business initiatives will be sought from government bodies and the membership itself, such as with the Western and Southern Business Areas BID. For the BID, the Council will provide programme management resource at least until the BID Company is established.

8. Business Engagement

The ESDP will look to establish new opportunities for cross-business engagement within and outside its membership, including the use of the findings of an early-stage business workshop to establish local business needs and strengths.

The ESDP will engage with the following key organisations to understand where collaborative working and information exchange can be helpful:

- the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP;
- the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce;
- Federation of Small Businesses; and
- the Institute of Directors (IoD); and
- the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

In addition, the ESDP will work closely with the Western and Southern Business Areas BID Steering Group and the other member businesses throughout the BID programme period, culminating in a fully functional and independent BID company.

9. Communications

Consideration needs to be given to how to best provide members and outside organisations with information about the Partnerships' activities. Options include the wider circulation of meeting minutes, the production of a regular e-Newsletter, use of the council's Website and the use of social media such as LinkedIn.

10. Action Plan Summary

- **Build on Local Strengths:** hold a business workshop to establish local strengths, business needs and expectations;
- **Set Objectives:** reflecting Bracknell's local strengths and the outcome of the workshop, establish a new set of high level objectives;
- **Deliver Work-streams:** making a positive impact on the local business environment;
- **Enhance Membership:** ensuring the Partnership Board and Sub-Group memberships remains representative of local business needs, and that there is continuity of Chair/Vice Chair;

- **Identify Funding Opportunities:** supporting the work of the ESDP and Bracknell's local businesses;
- **Provide Support to the BID:** programme managing to the early-stage development of the Western and Southern Areas BID;
- **Improve Engagement:** identify the potential for collaboration with the Berkshire Thames Valley LEP, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and other business organisations; and
- **Communicate:** talking to ESDP members and outside organisations to **build on Bracknell's local strengths.**