



Champions' Annual Report

2018-19

Contents

Introduction	2
Business Champion - Councillor Wade	3
Commuters' Champion - Councillor Harrison	11
Older People's Champion - Councillor Thompson	13
Voluntary Sector Champion - Councillor Finnie	16

The purpose of this report is to appraise all Members of the work and progress undertaken by the Council's Champions during the year 2018-2019.

The report informs Members of activities and their outcomes and outlines proposed future activities.

Business Champion - Councillor Wade



1 The Business Environment

Quoting last year's report:

"The UK is set to leave the European Union at 11pm GMT on Friday 29 March, 2019. Leaving the EU will have an impact on every business in the UK and many further afield".

Sadly, the Brexit debate continues with no clear path ahead. It was never going to be easy, but the uncertainty on the economy can only be surmised. Already it is clear that growth investment and locality (UK or elsewhere) are significant challenges throughout the business world - particularly in retailing.

The traditional High Street is changing. Small retailers are facing increasing costs and the challenge of the internet. On top of this, the loss of banking and post office services, have added to their woes.

Whilst we understand there's no quick fix for the High Street, it's clear something needs to be done to lessen the pressure on small firms struggling to keep their heads above water.

The FSB suggests that the business rates regime needs overhauling to help high streets to flourish; particularly simplifying the appeal process.

In the meantime, small business owners are resilient and are always having to adapt, but they need encouragement to prosper.

Fortunately in Bracknell Forest, we have the benefit of The Lexicon development, which is proving to be extremely successful.

2 The Lexicon

The development of The Lexicon has already proved extremely successful with even better footfall than predicted (~16Million in the first year) and consistently good sales figures.

The Lexicon – Current Observations:

- The town is now ranked the 33rd best shopping destination in the UK, (an improvement of 223 places and is seeing new businesses opening up: Most recently TKMaxx, Matalan and Las Iguanas.
- Perceptions about the town have changed dramatically with many residents and visitors using The Lexicon as the first choice destination

- The generation of over 3,500 jobs
- New public realm installations have been added to the town with the performance space canopy over Bond Square and the Light Beacon in the High Street.
- More events and commercialisation activities are being added to the town centre programme, providing more opportunities for small businesses to grow.
- Following increased demand from customers, the weekly street market has now added a third day, having started trading on Tuesdays as well as Fridays and Saturdays.

Bracknell Town Centre and The Lexicon - Future:

The **Town Centre Vision for 2032** has been published, which assesses the future residential, commercial and retail opportunities in the town centre. The vision aims to connect the town centre to the train station and other gateways, creating a resilient and sustainable economy.

The refurbishment of Princess Square is the next planned phase of development, followed by the development of The Deck (the old Bentalls site area) - both amounting to a further £30M investment.



As can be seen nationally, the retail climate is tough and whilst The Lexicon is bucking the national trend, the council is keen to ensure that these two key redevelopment opportunities are promoted.

In the longer term, the Bracknell Town Centre vision and the Lexicon strategy aim to integrate the Peel Centre with the rest of the town centre.

The Council has submitted a bid to Central Government for funding to support the next phases of development. The bid is part of the Future High Streets Fund and a decision will be made later this year.

3 Easthampstead House

ProjeKt Ltd signed a “short term” lease from the Council to repurpose Easthampstead House under the ‘**Easthampstead Works**’ project, providing low-cost commercial/ studio space to help more than 35 creative start-up enterprises to grow. The scheme also includes café facilities and space for community



groups. It is intended that the unit will be open to businesses this spring.

Nick Hartwright, CEO of ProjeKt, is excited at this opportunity of working with and complementing, current business providers in Bracknell Forest.

The council originally intended to demolish Easthampstead House whilst exploring long-term options for the site.

4 **Bracknell Forest - Economic & Skills Development Partnership (ESDP)**



Bracknell Forest Economic & Skills Development Partnership (ESDP) facilitates and promotes the continued economic development of Bracknell Forest.

Economic & Skills Development Partnership

The ESDP group, formed of local business and education people and BFC personnel, entertains many relevant speakers; thereby keeping the team well informed on business related challenges - this includes working with the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP.

The key ESDP business strands are managed through sub-groups:

ESDP Infrastructure Sub-Group: This Sub-Group is planning demonstration projects and case studies on how 'agile working' could reduce traffic congestion and improve wellbeing; on implementing more electric vehicle charging points in the Borough; and the development of 'outdoor offices' in public open space.

ESDP Employment and Skills Sub-Group: This Sub-Group is realigning their agenda. They have plenty of new ideas and there is a lot of enthusiasm within the membership to help address many of the issues currently faced by businesses and the education sector in Bracknell Forest, including Apprenticeships and Fitness for Work.

ESDP Business Improvement District (BID) Sub-Group:** At a Stakeholders' Seminar held late last year, business representatives in the Western and Southern Business Areas were informed about progress with developing the proposed BID and the results of the stakeholder surveys undertaken over the summer months.

A feasibility study for the BID has been undertaken and clearly showed a high interest in a BID for the Western and Southern business areas. Since then, the business group working on the project (Bracknell Investment Group; chaired by Fujitsu) has been ramping up their engagement with local businesses in early 2019 with one-to-one visits and a series of workshops to enable businesses to have a say over what improvements they would want from a BID and how they can benefit from it. More workshops and BID events are being planned for 2019.

31% of businesses in the area have already been consulted. 50% of them would vote yes, only 1% would vote no and the remaining businesses do not know yet. The main issues businesses have flagged so far are the need for a single point of contact for their area, a need to raise the profile of the area, traffic, and the need for businesses to come together to form a strong voice in order to influence strategic issues affecting them.

**** (BID)** is business led partnership, which is created through a ballot process to deliver additional services to local businesses; directly involving local businesses in local activities and allows the business community and local authorities to work together to improve the local trading environment.

The Smart City Cluster project delivered through the TV LEP aims to harness the power of the “internet of things” (a technical term actually relating to connecting devices via networks). With an allocation of £100,000 to invest in a Bracknell Forest based initiative, ideas are being sought from tech companies with a focus on tackling the social isolation caused by the lack of mobility and reliance upon dedicated transport services.

5 Thames Valley Berkshire Local Economic Partnership (TVB LEP)



Thames Valley Berkshire LEP has published the second edition of its **Business in Berkshire Report**. The Report is a comprehensive evidence base for Berkshire-based businesses, support organisations and those with an interest in the local economy.

Business in Berkshire - Key findings:

- The **number of registered businesses in Berkshire has plateaued**, following six years of growth.
- Berkshire continues to attract significant **Foreign Direct Investment**.
- The number of **Foreign-Owned Companies in Berkshire has topped 1,000** for the first time.
- **Recruitment of permanent staff has slowed** and use of temporary staff increased, possibly as a result of economic uncertainty during the Brexit process.
- **Extensive urban regeneration and the imminent arrival of the Elizabeth Line** are adding to Berkshire’s locational strengths.
- Recent announcements of **investment in Berkshire** by leading professional services firms such as Deloitte and KPMG, suggest **long-term optimism** for the performance of Berkshire’s businesses.

6 Retention of key business

Bracknell Forest is one of the best business locations in the country, at the heart of the Thames Valley – the UK’s ‘Silicon Valley’. We are proud of our strong and vibrant economy in the borough and can boast world-class companies including:

Dell, HP, 3M, GE, Hitachi, Fujitsu, Honeywell, Honda, Syngenta, Waitrose, Boehringer Ingelheim, AVIS, TRL, the Knowledge Academy etc.; and we have retained Panasonic, who sold their building but stayed in Bracknell and are very active in the business community.

Sadly, we have lost the Vodafone facility in Bracknell.

7 Retention of businesses

National Headlines:

- The High Street crisis as 23,000 shops and 175,000 more jobs expected to go in 2019. This is the predicted impact of organisations like Amazon and other online companies will have on the retail market - leading to potentially disastrous consequences. This gloomy forecast comes just days after HMV went into administration for the second time in six years.
- M&S to CLOSE 17 stores in UK.
- Thomas Cook has put more than 300 jobs at risk by announcing the closure of 21 stores as it grapples with the switch to online bookings.
- DEBENHAMS is closing a number of UK stores. According to latest news the department store chain might shut 20 stores this year.

Nationally, the situation over the past year has not been encouraging. The battle between online and retail ‘product’ outlets continues to be of great concern. Essentially ‘service providers’ manage to survive, but local shops selling “things” are finding life progressively more challenging. Those town centres which adapt and offer more choice and a strong sense of identity, are best placed to embrace these changes.

The loss of banks, Post Offices and petrol outlets (all service providers) is a further concern. Even these organisations are looking to streamline their businesses, but to the detriment of providing ‘convenience’ to hard pressed businesses and customers.

Added to all this, the “Brexit Effect” does not augur well for the next 12 months.

This type environment should continue to encourage the introduction and expansion of businesses in Bracknell Forest.

11 Networking



Business networking is essentially a socioeconomic activity by which groups of like-minded business people recognize, create, or act upon business opportunities.

As Business Champion, I participate in various networking groups, at which I get informed about the challenges of small businesses have to confront.

Using my knowledge of Council facilities and local organisations, I offer contacts to help resolve issues raised by enterprises at networking sessions. These concerns, for example, are around planning, business rates etc. Also, I take advantage of the knowledge obtained from being a member of the ESDP covering overarching issues around infrastructure, employment/skills and the BID. Further, I utilise close ties with the TVB LEP, Chamber of Commerce and FSB to help resolve challenges.

12 Conclusion

The slower than expected global economic growth projection has impacted UK growth, which is now projected to dip to 1.1% in 2019 (from 1.9% in 2018) and to strengthen only moderately, to 1.6% in 2020. Slow growth this year reflects the drag on business investment from the ongoing economic and political uncertainty relating to the outcome of Brexit.

Consumer spending has driven the economy recently and has itself been supported by increases in real income growth. But the housing market has cooled, and further rises in household borrowing may be hard to sustain due to the uncertainties regarding Brexit.

The service sector growth is predicted to remain modest but positive in 2019. However, manufacturing growth is likely to contract this year amid the Brexit uncertainty.

Construction sector output has been sluggish in the past 18 months owing to the weakness of commercial property investment and looks set to remain relatively weak in the short term. This has been seen in Bracknell Forest by the slowing down of house sales and completion of new properties.

Finally, in spite of the gloomy national forecasts overshadowed by Brexit, Bracknell Forest Council Officers, Executive and partners are taking an upbeat view of the future. We are heavily investing in our community to ensure that the successes, such as The Lexicon and Coral Reef, are not short lived.

Councillor Bob Wade

bob.wade@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Commuters' Champion - Councillor Harrison



1 Overview

Over the past year, Bracknell Forest's commuters have benefitted from the further rollout of ten car trains and more space due to the abolition of first class carriages

I would like to thank Officers and Members of the Council for their support in funding improvements to commuter services.

2 Activity

2.1 Rail Services

Bracknell Station Facilities

I have regularly visited Bracknell Railway Station and spent many hours experiencing the rail service first hand.



Delay Repay

The "Delay Repay" scheme where passengers whose journeys have been delayed by more than 15 minutes, can claim a refund into their bank accounts online, continues to provide prompt refunds.

Martins' Heron Service Maintained

Following proposals from Network Rail's review of railway timetables that would have resulted in the peak service at Martins Heron being reduced to two trains an hour, I contacted South Western Rail to highlight the importance of the service to residents in the area.

After a campaign with local ward members and the Executive member for Economic Development to encourage residents to make their views heard, the plan was shelved.

Service Reliability

I have written to the Secretary of State for Transport pressing for more innovation in signalling resilience which seems to be the main obstacle to providing a reliable and punctual service.

Crossrail

The Crossrail scheme, which was to provide rail services from Reading through Central London to Shenfield and Abbey Wood to the east of London by December 2019, is now severely delayed and over budget as a result of power and signalling problems. A London Assembly investigation due to be published soon is expected to raise concerns with London Mayor Sadiq Khan's oversight of the project.

2.2 Road Transport



I have participated in the Highways England Customer Forums to contribute feedback on the subject of the ongoing M3 Smart Motorway road works. This project continues and it aims to provide more reliable and safer journeys.

I am a nominated substitute on the Berkshire Local Transport Body and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). This body has an important role in prioritising the spending of a multi-million pound devolved transport budget and Bracknell Forest has been successful in gaining funding for infrastructure to keep traffic flowing in the Borough such as the Martins Heron junction, the Coral Reef junction and the Warfield Link Road.

Councillor John Harrison

john.harrison@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Older People's Champion - Councillor Thompson



1 Overview

For the year to the end of March 2019, the principal focus has been on continuing and embedding transformation within the Council due to the necessity to curtail expenditure so as to be able to meet commitments and maintain services. The move from the Council offices at Easthampstead House to Time Square was successfully completed.

2 Care Quality Commission

Last year I reported that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) had positively reviewed the provision of health and social care services in Bracknell Forest. No such inspection has taken place this year but the outcome gave a confident platform going forward.

3 Tackling Isolation and Loneliness

Furthering the use of technology as part of transformation, with a drive towards a paperless society, has also continued. Last year I said that was a challenge in the context of not excluding older people. I cannot report that there has been a final solution but as last year, the problem is recognised as evidenced by the work of the Customer Services Team as mentioned below. Once an older person makes contact by whatever means; phone, friend, carer, personal attendance or letter or making use of Befriending, their concerns can be addressed.



The Council's Public Health Team was awarded funding by LGA/NHS Digital to purchase four community kiosks. The kiosks are an integral part of the Council's Warm Welcome Programme. They provide an opportunity for people who either are not on the internet at home, or who are less confident in using it, to access information about a range of groups and activities in the community. For those who need more help, the kiosks provide the telephone number of the Council's social prescribers mentioned below who can help them.

I am sure any other ideas will be welcome to avoid any resident being excluded.

The spectre of loneliness and isolation can in part, be addressed by a friendly welcoming approach in the provision of services.

The Adult Social Care Health and Housing Department has continued with two community connectors, staff members, who will work with people to bring them back into the community and encourage those who are lonely to take up hobbies and make friends. In parallel, Public Health is continuing to provide two social prescribers to support any resident over the age of 18 including elderly, vulnerable and lonely people with the objective of

improving their health and wellbeing and reducing loneliness and social isolation. Referral can be self-referral or by the GP. Contact can also be made by telephoning 01344 352000 and asking for a call back from a social prescriber.



An innovation this year is Lexi, a trained dog with a friendly nature who visits selected clients on a regular basis and whose nature helps in bringing people back into the community. Initial reports are encouraging. One focus is persons with dementia.

The Bracknell Forest “Help Yourself” community web site, is designed to help connect people to information, activities and services to stay independent and well, is popular. The online community map provides details of 450+ community groups and activities: <http://health.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/>

The principal interface between the community and the Council is by way of the Customer Services Team. The team is conscious that older people can need more help and to this end, the following is a brief outline of provision available:

“The website is the easiest way to access our services – www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk We’ve created content that’s easy to find your way around, and helps you get quickly to the information and transactions you need.

If you set up an online account - <https://myaccount.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/> you can log enquiries, and track progress. You can also view your council tax account through here.

Our offices at Time Square are open Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm, and along with free to use computers, there are staff from the Customer Services Team on hand there to help you. Staff in our libraries will always be happy to help too.

You can use Facebook or Twitter to get in touch with us – just go to www.facebook.com/bracknellforestcouncil or www.twitter.com/bracknellforest and tell us what you need to know. But make sure you don’t put any personal information on there.

Ultimately there is the fall back of the telephone by calling 01644 35200. The lines are open Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm, and you can log an issue, and get a reference so you can follow it up. And of course you can always refer anything to a ward councillor or Champion.”

The principal is a service is available, whichever way you choose to access it.

4 Adult Health & Social Care

The use of personal care budgets has continued to increase.

A focus this year has been the provision of intermediate care, a principal aim of which is to enable people to stay in their own homes. This is available for people coming out of hospital, to avoid people going into hospital and to address end of life care. The service is supported by nurses and physiotherapists.

With a growing elderly population this is assuming greater importance.

The Council has secured more care home provision for residents. It also regularly inspects care homes in the Borough. There are plans to provide a facility for elderly infirm care at the Heathlands site.

Apart from Adult Health and Social Care matters generally, Bracknell Forest is a place in which the elderly can feel comfortable. Involve, the local voluntary sector lead, can provide information on volunteering and services. U3A flourishes as does the Open Learning Centre and a major centre is Bracknell & Wokingham College. There are parks and open spaces and an improving leisure centre.

The Public Health Team provides very popular "Fit for All" classes, ideally suited to people who are either new to exercise or lack confidence in joining in. Over 80% of members are older people. Classes are located across the Borough and new ones are being added in response to demand.

The Lexicon, providing the new shopping centre, is a place to go to shop, relax and have a cup of coffee or other refreshment in a safe environment. The cinema offers good value. When the proposed further development is complete, the town centre will offer an even better go-to place. Signposting is good. "AccessAble" helps identify access to premises. <https://www.accessable.co.uk/organisations/bracknell-forest-council>

Shopmobility provides a mobile scooter service for those with limited mobility.

I have continued as Chairman of the Access Group which provides a positive channel for residents and interest groups to address their concerns.

Heatherwood Hospital is the subject of improvement works to include a planned care centre. This can be seen in the context of partnerships to assimilate the NHS working with social care and the voluntary sector. Something to keep a close eye on in 2019.

Councillor Clifton Thompson
cliff.thompson@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Voluntary Sector Champion - Councillor Finnie



As I have said in the past, we are very fortunate in this community to have such an active and wonderful voluntary sector. This will be the last voluntary sector report that I will write as I have decided not to stand for re-election in May.

I would like to start by thanking the residents for the support they have given me over the last forty plus years, for whom I have had the privilege to represent them on the Bracknell Forest Council (and its predecessor) and Crowthorne Parish Council. As a councillor I was very conscious of the excellent service that volunteers contribute to our community.

Throughout all our lives, from childhood to adulthood, we rely on the voluntary sector. Many youth clubs are run by volunteers such as the Girl Guides, Scouts etc., giving us early training for our later life. Most of our clubs are largely run by volunteers whether they be in a supporting or social capacity; all with wonderful volunteers.

I am grateful to all volunteers and I ask those who do not volunteer to find some time to do something to help others.

I have recently had personal experience of the voluntary sector after a fire in my house. I am very grateful to the many neighbours, friends etc., who voluntarily helped me with the fire brigade, ambulance etc. It was a terrible experience but made me realise the importance of the invaluable support of volunteers of which, I am very appreciative.

Raising funds for voluntary groups has always been a challenge. And now with the Bracknell Forest Lottery which has been introduced, the profits will go to the voluntary sector so I encourage all to subscribe to this worthy cause.

I close by thanking all volunteers and voluntary groups for the excellent service which they give to the benefit of all our residents. I am very grateful for the work they do. I would particularly like to thank Involve for the work they do and co-ordinating voluntary services.

Councillor James G. Finnie

jim.finnie@bracknell-forest.gov.uk