

**TO: EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION AND ECONOMY
30.05.2019**

**CONSULTATION RESPONSE ON THE BERKSHIRE LOCAL INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY
FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT**

Director of Place, Planning and Regeneration

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Thames Valley Berkshire LEP (TVBLEP) published their Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy (BLIS) framework document in late April 2019, inviting local authorities, businesses and partners to respond to a series of consultation questions. The BLIS Framework Document is a working version of the strategy element of the BLIS. It will be supported by other documents (full evidence base; a spatial economic narrative; and a set of implementation plans as well as the LEP's extant Sector Propositions and Business in Berkshire publication of 2018).
- 1.2 This report sets out to respond to the consultation questions posed by the TVBLEP and provide overall feedback on the Framework document for the BLIS. The deadline for consultation submissions are 21st June 2019. The BLIS framework document and consultation questions can be found [here](#).¹

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **That the Executive Member agrees:**
- I. the Council's response to the consultation on the BLIS**
 - II. the Council's endorsement of the Framework Document**
 - III. to submit the consultation response to the TVBLEP by 21st June 2019**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The reason for this recommendation is that the Council, as a consultee, can make a response to the BLIS which will significantly shape the economic vision, strategy and priorities for the Berkshire area and Bracknell Forest. The TVBLEP specifically asks Local Authorities to respond to this consultation as key partners and local contributors to economic growth. Our input and endorsement will help them move forward and work with central government on finalising the BLIS.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The alternative option is for the Council not to respond to the consultation. This is not recommended, as it is the final opportunity for the Council to comment on the BLIS Framework.

5 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

¹ <http://www.thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk/news?id=110>

- 5.1 In November 2017 the government published the UK's Industrial Strategy White Paper with the objective "to improve living standards and economic growth by increasing productivity and driving growth across the whole country."²
- 5.2 The White Paper set out requirements for local areas to develop Local Industrial Strategies (LIS) structured around five "Foundations of Productivity" and four "Grand challenges" and the objective to improve the overall productivity performance of the UK and to make future economic growth more inclusive.
- 5.3 Local industrial strategies, led by Mayoral Combined Authorities or Local Enterprise Partnerships, will promote the coordination of local economic policy and national funding streams and establish new ways of working between national and local government, and the public and private sectors.
- 5.4 The Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (TVBLEP) has the responsibility to shape a Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy (BLIS) on behalf of the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities and local business and has begun work on research, engagement and consultation on the BLIS in early 2018.

6 BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL'S RESPONSE

Internal Consultation

- 6.1 Comments have been sought from officers in those service areas where the BLIS relates to their area of work and expertise. The service areas include Regeneration, Economy, Planning, Transport and Finance.

All comments made are aimed to support the TVBLEP in refining the document and are meant as suggestions and recommendations to enhance an otherwise well-rounded, comprehensive framework. The suggested response can be found in appendix A.

7 STATEMENT OF ENDORSEMENT

We support the approach taken in developing the Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy (BLIS) and hope to continue the good work achieved through the existing Strategic Economic Plan which has been instrumental in delivering high quality infrastructure projects, business support initiatives and skills projects funded through the Local Growth Fund.

These schemes have assisted in addressing skills gaps and barriers to growth as well as helped unlock housing development and infrastructure improvements within Bracknell Forest and enabled a strategic response to the challenges which a positive growth agenda can bring. The BLIS will support a continuation of this approach and provide the platform for delivering further coordinated infrastructure, business support and growth acceleration which delivers real economic benefits. We look forward to contributing to the final version of the detailed document through the dedicated task and finish group.

² https://beisgovuk.citizenspace.com/strategy/industrial-strategy/supporting_documents/buildingourindustrialstrategygreenpaper.pdf

8 **ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS**

Borough Solicitor

N/A

Director: Finance

With local authority funding directly linked to amounts collected from business rates, a successful local industrial strategy has the potential to secure additional resources to support front-line council services in the future.

Equalities Impact Assessment

N/A

Contact for further information

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Appendix A

Details of Response – the following are the suggested reposes form Bracknell Forest Council.

1. Chapter 2:

Page 4 makes comparisons with other places; perhaps adding more specific comparisons with exemplar locations to prove how strong TVB area is could strengthen this point.

Reference is made to the knowledge based economy / employment, it would be useful to define what this term means.

2. Page 5 (Imperatives)

2.5 Imperative 1: This section mentions additional bespoke growth / “growth should be of a form that simply would not happen anywhere else”. This would benefit from being more clearly illustrated and defined.

Regarding Smart growth that is focussing on quality rather than quantity some additional thought could be given the implications of this for housing requirements (quantity / mix / quality)

2.6 Imperative 2: Inclusive growth is very significant and addressing this will be crucial. However, care needs to be taken when addressing the current polarisation and what an increase in productivity could mean for the “middle level” we are trying to encourage to thrive more in Berkshire.

It would be helpful to understand the consequences of the fundamental shift in economic profiling of our workforce this section seems to suggest – both positive and negative – and whether there are examples of where this worked and how this could be achieved.

The conclusion mentions “ routes to progression” as the missing piece to inclusive growth for Berkshire. Can this be explained a bit more? How would this affect, for example, the rising need for “lower-grade” jobs within various services such as retail, construction, hospitality etc.?

What hasn't been mentioned in this section and what is known to be one of the major issues in Berkshire regarding attracting “the middle” is more affordable housing (as in housing that is more affordable) rather than everyone being able to progress to higher level employment.

2.7 Imperative 3: Flows of people / transience. Does this mean an increasingly transient workforce doesn't connect or invest in the “place” causing “places” to be downgraded? This would pose a significant risk affecting how we place-make, especially in the context of Brexit. Some clarity here would be beneficial.

This section is generally vaguely worded and jargon-heavy. The Investopedia definition of (economic) spillover is:

“Spillover effect refers to the impact that seemingly unrelated events in one nation can have on the economies of other nations. Although there are positive spillover effects, the

term is most commonly applied to the negative impact a domestic event has on other parts of the world.”³

Where the BLIS Framework says “In the language of economics, the issue is whether spill-over effects are being captured fully or whether there is so much transience that they are effectively dissipated and lost.” It is therefore very difficult to relate to a need for strengthened place making (which itself is quite a vague term for most people).

It might be better to say that the benefits of prosperity are presently unevenly distributed across the LEP area with some areas under-performing economically.

2.8 Imperatives in general: An overarching purpose could be more clearly spelt out at the outset. Perhaps it could be something along the lines of: “The purpose of the BLIS is to guide and support economic growth that is inclusive and appropriate to the LEP area, based on the best evidence, and to attract and guide investment to that end.”

3. Chapter 3:

The document refers to “London”. It would be helpful to define London (presumably this means Greater London). With reference to the London Plan, this is more than just about housing supply. The GLA is actively protecting the London economy whilst pushing the housing issue to surrounding counties. This is not sustainable, especially for places like Berkshire.

Page 9: BFC is not directly involved in the Grazeley major site as West Berkshire, Wokingham & Reading.

Page 10: the final masterplan for Bracknell is more recent than the 2002 version – perhaps this section could also make reference to the new Bracknell Vision which looks towards 2032 (<https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/bracknell-town-centre-2032-vision.pdf>)

Page 11 says “as the maps above illustrate”, which ones are these?

Pages 11-12: the term ‘spatial narrative’ is too vague; a definition would be useful here

4. Chapter 4:

4.1 Business environment:

It would be worthwhile using the information in the evidence base to illustrate how many genuinely new businesses have located into the BLIS area (businesses moving out of London or from other regions or countries), not just existing businesses expanding. Reference is made to FDI but is that mainly foreign investment in existing UK based businesses or new business? Some clarity here for the benefit of the reader would be useful.

Page 16: Syngenta are promoting a science **and innovation** park based around nationally significant Agro-tech.

4.2 People:

³ <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/spillover-effect.asp>

As mentioned above, it could be helpful to explain more clearly how those in the middle tier are being squeezed. Also acknowledging the tension between mobility and impact on the environment through road congestion. Consider links to transport provision, connectivity/ flexible working practices. This may be examined more closely in the evidence base, but perhaps some additional clarity in the Framework would be beneficial here.

Page 17: First bullet point; The use of percentages to say that the number of jobs has grown much more quickly than the number of working age people is potentially incorrect. The comparative figure will depend on the actual numbers to which the percentages apply. If there were far more working age people than jobs, even though the percentage increase is smaller, it could still be a higher actual number.

Page 18: A graph would be good to illustrate the change in mid-range jobs

Box 4 is very interesting and worthy of further research and analysis, if this has not already been done

4.3 Infrastructure:

Good points and narrative in the “Transport and congestion” section, it would be interesting to see more information on how this will be achieved.

This section has a fairly narrow definition of infrastructure with little mention of other types of infrastructure such as community facilities and health. We know from planning consultations that access to health is right up there with transport issues in people’s concerns around future growth.

5. **Chapter 5:**

There is no mention of air quality, environmental impact, or crime.

There are also other significant constraints affecting development, particularly the Thames Basin Heaths SPA and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Second bullet point: It is not clear what is meant by “hollowing out”

6. **Chapter 6:**

The Vision is broad and understandably rather generic with the consequence that it will require significant explanation to understand what it actually means (what is ‘growing with intent’? What do the end results for this look like?).

The point about “businesses, jobs and output that would simply not occur elsewhere” is very powerful, but what does this look like?

What is the intention behind not mentioning the vision until further on in the document? Might it be more prudent to present the vision as the strapline from which the direction of the document then follows. Makes sense to take the reader through the thought processes to arrive at the Vision but is helpful to reiterate the Vision throughout.

The wording of “The best of both global and local.” Within the vision is not quite clear. This could mean different things to different people.

Page 28: This says Berkshire lacks a dominant city (other than arguably London). Reading has a significantly higher population than the second largest town (Slough) and is also a major transport hub so this statement is a bit confusing and would benefit from clarification how this is meant

From a planning perspective Priority 4 is of particular significance and should focus around land / premises to support growth

7. Chapters 7 & 8:

Obviously this section is yet to be further developed but the challenge is to establish genuinely measurable commitments.

8. Additional Comments:

8.1 Spelling:

Page 5: Second paragraph refers to “*three*” have been formatively important, ought that be “*these*”?

8.2 General comments:

Overall the Framework is a good, comprehensive articulation of the issues, challenges and strengths of Berkshire. That said, they will be very similar to many areas in the south east and the uniqueness of Berkshire could perhaps be further emphasised.

The Framework feels in parts rather Reading centric, which understandably reflects the magnetic pull of the town’s economy but it could be a little more affirmative about Bracknell Forest and the other smaller locations. For example, in relation to rail connections (Chapter 2, page 4) it refers to GWR but we have South West trains running through several Berkshire authorities, including Bracknell Forest. Albeit a slow line it still provides a direct train from Reading through to London Waterloo.