



# **Champions' Annual Report**

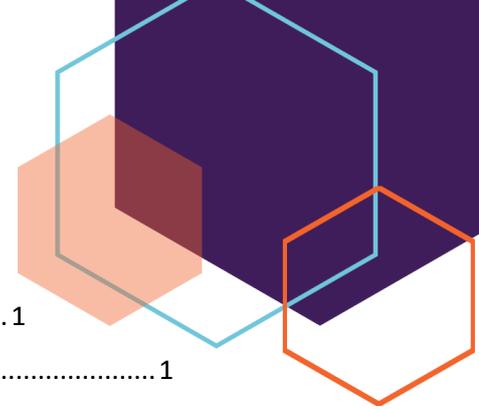
## **2021 – 2022**

The purpose of this report is to appraise all Members of the work and progress undertaken by the Council's Champions during the year 2021-2022.

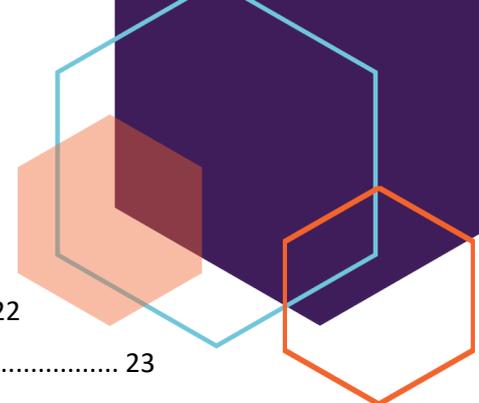
The report informs Members of activities and their outcomes and outlines proposed future activities.

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## Small Business Champion

### The Business Environment

It is forecasted that a typical household's income will fall by about £1,000 this year once the effect of inflation is accounted for, which would be the biggest real-terms fall in incomes since the mid-1970s.

Many are already expecting their monthly spend to go up when the energy price cap jumps in April (and again in October), and National Insurance contributions rise. Further, the war in Ukraine has pushed up energy prices and UK families are squeezed even more as the prices of fuel and other goods surged.

Inflation is forecast to peak in April at 8.3%, which is much higher than the Bank of England's forecast of 7.25% back in February; with an annual projection of 9%!

The UK's post-Covid economic recovery is well under way, but a deep living standards downturn is just getting started. Also, a warning that wages are not forecast to grow particularly fast. These factors will severely affect the fortunes of the SMEs.

### Welcome Back Funding (WBF)

WBF grants have been awarded to projects underway for Crowthorne, Bracknell and Sandhurst retail parades - new/replacement street furniture, social media support for businesses – it's all about getting people back out an about.

Funded by the WBF, Crowthorne High Street retail and environment regeneration includes hanging baskets installed in February. More 3 tier tower planters are proposed. BFC's WBF Officer has arranged for a photographer/press report on the market and various independent shops in Crowthorne to take promotional shots and conduct interviews. These can then be used by BFC and CPC for promotional purposes.

The WBF Officer is also looking to procure social media training for traders to enable them to better promote their goods and services on-line.

### The High Street

The situation on the High Street is still a concern with circa 20% shop closures. Notwithstanding the government support programmes, many High Street businesses have floundered. The shift from "product" to "services" outlets continues together with increased on-line activity. The hospitality businesses have been severely affected due to ever-increasing costs and lack of qualified staff. Some are now offering "special deals" to improve footfall.



**COUNCILLOR  
BOB WADE**



**Small Business Champion**

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High Streets must be changed into vibrant places to live, work and visit with streets cleaned up, and communities given the opportunity to have a stake in their local pubs, sports grounds and “corner” shops.



### *The Lexicon*

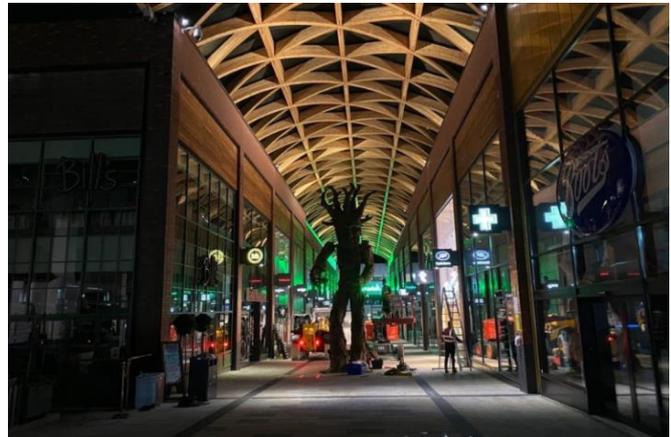
Town Centre activity has been encouraging with new stores reporting good trade and footfall at expected levels. The market location has moved to a more central position to encourage more stalls to attend.

The plan to move the library is now underway, as is the progress on the Deck.

The Town Centre Plan is now focusing on the “southern gateway” and the civic quarters.

### *The Forest Springs Event*

BFC has teamed up with The Lexicon with a spectacular ten-day “Forest Springs” event in April. The Lexicon will be transformed into a watery extravaganza - celebrating water and the important role it plays in everyone’s lives. This event is helping to secure The Lexicon’s position as a key regional shopping and leisure location. This follows the extremely successful *Forest Giants* event that took place in August to celebrate the borough’s forest. The centrepiece of the summer activity were 3 tree giants, the tallest of which, stood 6.5metres tall. Each Bracknell Forest Giant had a magical story to tell about the preservation and conservation of the amazing forests surrounding the town.



### *Nationwide*

A net figure of 10,059 stores exiting UK high streets, shopping centres and retail parks over the last year - a huge number, but 750 less than 2020.

The biggest change driving net closures has long been the decline in store openings. Also, many openings are natural churn or the re-siting of existing stores. It should be noted that these net closures impact the associated supply chains many of which are SMEs.

### *John Lewis Dilemma?*

John Lewis is making 18 (of 47) store closures after falling to its first ever annual loss in 175 years. They also plan to introduce JL-branded areas into their Waitrose supermarkets. Their on-line shopping now accounts for 75% of sales compared to 42% pre-pandemic.

### *Amazon closes their bookstores*

Amazon is getting out of the physical bookstore business. The retail giant is shutting 65 stores across the U.S. and U.K., including all of its Amazon Book locations, Pop Up shops and 4-star stores. Amazon's physical stores have lagged its overall retail business in recent years, logging lower sales in 2021 than in 2018.



## **Prompt Payments to SMCs**

The Prompt Payment Code is a national initiative to prevent businesses failing because of late invoice payments. It aims to pay suppliers on time, provide clear guidance to suppliers and encourage best practice.

BFC encourages all commercial suppliers to sign up to the terms and conditions of the HMG Prompt Payment Code, which includes:

- by paying 95% of invoices within the agreed payment terms and without attempting to change terms retrospectively.
- by paying 95% of all invoices within 60 days, and 95% of invoices from SMEs within 30 days.
- by acknowledging their right to use late payment legislation to invoice for late payment interest and charges, when appropriate.

All organisations should benefit from faster payments, particularly SMEs, further down the supply chain.

## **The Labour Market**

At the start of 2021 there were 5.5 million SMEs (1 to 49 staff) and they employed over 16 million people. This accounted for three fifths of all private sector jobs and around half of turnover at an estimated £2.3 trillion – a very significant SME contribution to the UK economy.

However, the total business population decreased 6.5% (between 2020 and 2021) and is considerably larger than the 0.5% decrease between 2017 and 2018.

There are significant staff shortages, especially in the hospitality sector. The projected cost of living increases further dampen the prospects for a quick return to “normality”.

*“Small businesses have been unable to plan, hire and grow amid political turmoil and a challenging economic landscape.*

*“The small business community must be kept front and centre when it comes to improving the state of the nation’s broadband, reforming business rates and our future trading relationship with the EU. It’s vital that we secure a pro-business trade deal which protects the three t’s: trade, talent and transition.*

*“Small firms are the backbone of the UK economy, and this is why it’s more important than ever that they are given the support needed to invest, grow and succeed.”*

FSB National Chair - Mike Cherry,

## **South Hill Park (SHP)**

South Hill Park hosts over 300 shows, events, films and exhibitions each year, alongside a busy programme of over 250 visual and performing arts courses. Also, it offers a stunning surrounding for any wedding, corporate, community or private event.

As a registered charity, SHP relies on public donations to deliver such a diverse range of events, alongside our extensive community work.

As an SME they provide a great environment for the social and mental well-being of all residents, but they totally rely on all our support.

### **BFC Support for the business sector**

Currently, BFC are providing the following support to the business sector:

- omicron hospitality and leisure grant.
- additional restrictions grant – omicron.
- recovery loan scheme.
- claim back statutory sick pay paid to employees.
- how to treat certain expenses and benefits provided to employees during coronavirus.

<https://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/news/2022/02/support-available-due-covid-19?medium=email&source=GovDelivery>

### **Economic & Skills Development Partnership**



#### *BFC / ESDP 2021 Business Survey:*

This was a telephone survey of 504 businesses in Bracknell Forest, aimed at understanding the views and experiences of local businesses, including on the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit, as well as issues such as recruitment, skills and retention, and views on infrastructure.

In summary:

#### *The Impact of the Covid Pandemic:*

A third of businesses said their business turnover was substantially lower due the pandemic but over half expected business performance to improve over the next 12 months. Most businesses mentioned at least one negative impact of the pandemic, including loss of income and reduced profitability. Several larger businesses mentioned closing site premises.

#### *The Impact of Brexit:*

Half of businesses in Bracknell Forest said leaving the EU had no notable impact on their business. Among those who had experienced a negative impact were around importing from the EU, supply chain problems and the increased cost of business.

#### *Recruitment, Skills and Retention:*

Three-quarters of businesses did not feel that there are gaps in their skills base. This is lower than the figure seen in the 2020 Business Skills at 85%. Approaching two thirds of businesses have found at least one vacancy hard to fill. The main reason for difficulties finding recruits with the right skills, was a low number of applicants either with the required skills or with the required attitude. Half of businesses said they do not offer any of the types of training and development, although a quarter offered apprenticeships.

#### *Infrastructure and Support:*

There was a positive response for the provision of catering, greenspace, cycling/walking, education, and broadband in Bracknell Forest; with the road network, traffic, parking and reducing business rates considered key actions to improve infrastructure.

Bus services and the provision of electric vehicle charging points were rated lowest out of the categories listed.

*Broadband:*

Most businesses were not aware of Superfast Berkshire, as was the case in 2020. Above two fifths of businesses have access to superfast broadband with a similar proportion not having access. Three quarters of businesses were not aware of the Building Digital UK Gigabit project.

Two thirds of businesses said that having Gigabit capable broadband is important to their business.

*Green Agenda:*

Businesses were asked what actions they are taking to become net zero. Whilst half of businesses have the intention of being more environmentally friendly, few have a specific target or aim to achieve net-zero, and even less setting any deadline.

*The Employment and Skills Sub-Group:*

A Training and Education Symposium was held in March at Easthampstead Park. This was a face-to-face 'roundtable' discussion aimed at bringing together local training and education providers and local employers to identify clear and deliverable actions to support future training, education and reskilling in Bracknell Forest, including for small businesses.

The symposium identified the challenges facing different business sectors and employee groups, as well as the specialist training resources, and supporting information that businesses required. A report will be issued.

*The Infrastructure Sub-Group:*

This group focussed on how to increase the implementation of electric vehicle charging points in Bracknell Forest. This initiative will involve close liaison with BFC, the Bracknell BID and Bracknell's businesses; many of which, have already installed charging points.

*BID Update:*

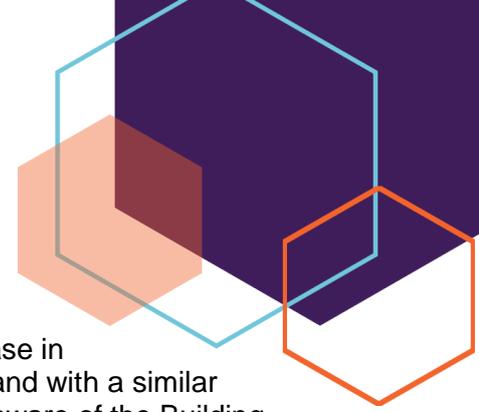
The Bracknell Forest BID has been successfully delivering a series of projects that will improve the attractiveness and safety of their business areas and provide new facilities for local employees. The BIDs will provide new direction signposts to improve navigation around the BID area for cyclists and pedestrians and help develop a sense of identity for the area. The 'pocket park' at Farley Lake will provide new seating and picnic facilities as well as outdoor gymnasium equipment, and the newly established 5K healthy run/walk route. The BID has also been holding 'Meet Your Neighbour' business breakfasts and is planning to hold a 'Know Your Neighbour' event in April.

## **Networking**

As reported in 2020, this past year's networking has essentially been through virtual meetings. Latterly, there has been a move to face-to-face meetings with great relief to all! SMEs generally remain optimistic but recognise the ever-increasing challenges.

## **Conclusion**

Notwithstanding an encouraging improvement in output by 0.8% in January, returning the UK to pre-pandemic levels, the confrontation in Ukraine coupled with the persistence of Omicron are creating significant economic uncertainty. It is thought that inflation is likely to rise to 9% this year – the worst level since the 1970s.



Businesses and households alike will be hoping for some much-needed relief, but sadly, they are likely to be disappointed. In April, energy bills are set to significantly increase together with a raft of other tax rises. These issues coupled with the continuing challenges within Europe do not give much hope for optimism. There is now a great deal of pressure on the government to reduce the fuel duty, since this impacts all sectors of society that rely on “getting about” to transact their daily lives.

One of the lasting legacies of the pandemic will be the ability to work in different ways, in different places, and more companies will have distributed workforces empowering their teams to work closer to or from home. On this basis, SMEs will be able to offset some of the challenges 2022 will present. Hopefully, this will auger well for SMEs.





## Commuter Champion

### Overview

Covid-19 has continued to have a significant impact on public transport services in Bracknell Forest over the last 12 months. The Government's 2021 message to avoid using public transport and use alternative means, has been lifted and both bus and train services are now seeing increases in patronage. However, current levels are still significantly below pre-pandemic levels. Post-lockdown hybrid working is likely to see a majority of commuters working two to three days in the office and the balance from home, and so the Government and transport operators are having to adjust to this 'new normal.'

### Trains

I reported last year that both of our train operating companies, Great Western Railway (GWR) and South Western Railway (SWR) had signed short term 'Emergency Measures Agreements' whereby the Government took on their franchise commercial risks. These agreements were replaced with 'Emergency Recovery Measures Agreements' and these in turn are now being replaced by 'National Rail Contracts' (NRC).

SWR's NRC commenced on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2021, with a two-year term and options to extend for two further years to May 2025, at the Department for Transport's (DfT) discretion. Train operating companies bear no revenue risk and very limited cost risks under these NRCs. These risks are now transferred to the DfT. SWR will be paid a fixed management fee and an additional performance fee, designed to incentivise train operating companies to achieve punctuality and operational targets to meet 'the highest level of performance for customers.' NRCs also place obligations on our local train companies to develop decarbonising policies and roadmaps towards achieving net zero carbon emissions.

GWR is now operating under similar arrangements, with their directly awarded contract running to 1 April 2023, with an extension option of up to one year.

Commenting on these NRCs, Matthew Gregory, First Group (the holding company for GWR and SWR) Chief Executive, said:

*"We welcome the announcement today by the Secretary of State of a plan for the future of the UK rail industry with the expertise, innovation and experience of private sector rail operators at the heart of the model. The National Rail Contracts leave us well-placed for lower risk, cash generative rail operations on those two networks. We have long called for this transition to a new contract structure with a far better balance of risk and reward, and which*

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**Commuter Champion**

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*benefits customers by a clearer focus on performance, including the introduction of a new set of passenger service metrics.*

*“As the country begins the process of ‘building back better’ the essential role of public transport has never been clearer and our leading position in the sector means that we have an important role. Our rail services have a vital part to play in driving economic growth, combating climate change and supporting the development of vibrant and sustainable communities.”*

What have Bracknell Forest residents using our train services actually experienced over the last 12 months, in the light of all of these franchise changes?

Service reliability has generally been good, and trains are still noticeably cleaner than pre-pandemic. The move towards electronic and mobile ticketing has continued, with increased use of smartcards and improved apps. The new Flexi Season tickets introduced last year in response to hybrid working (allowing any 8 days travel in 28 days), will benefit some commuters, but anyone commuting more than 2 days per week on average, is likely to find that an annual season ticket will still be the most cost-effective ticket type. Train service timetable frequencies, particularly in peak hours, have still not returned to pre-pandemic levels, which is having a significant impact on our residents who commute into London.

The train service from Bracknell and Martins Heron to London Waterloo continues to suffer from a lack of any significant investment and I am working with James Sunderland MP, to lobby Government for more infrastructure improvements.

You may have seen in the news last year that the Government intends to create a new public body ‘Great British Railways’ (GBR) to *‘integrate the railways and deliver passenger-focused travel with simpler modern fares and reliable services.’* This new public body will integrate the railways, owning the infrastructure, collecting fare revenue, running and planning the network, and setting most fares and timetables. The trains themselves will still be run by train operating companies such as GWR and SWR. A fundamental aim of GBR is to simplify the current mass of confusing tickets, but we will have to wait until 2023 to see any of these benefits, when GBR will commence operation.

I attended Network Rail’s Wessex Stakeholder Conference on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2021.

### **Buses**

Local bus operators have suffered similar Covid-19 problems as the train operating companies. Although patronage has slowly been increasing, towards the end of 2021 passenger levels were only at circa 70% of pre-Covid-19 levels on the best routes served.

In last year’s report, I referred to a government announcement of £3bn ‘bus revolution’ investment across England, which will result in passengers benefiting from more frequent, reliable, easier to use and cheaper bus services. As part of the initial funding, Bracknell Forest Council received funding to pursue enhanced partnerships with local bus operators. More details on this government funding for bus operators are contained further down. I attended an online seminar on the Government’s National Bus Strategy on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2021.

## Great Western Railway (GWR)



The new trains for journeys through Crowthorne and Sandhurst stations that I mentioned in the last two year's reports have still not entered into service, although GWR has at least been running test trains on the North Downs Line. In Early October

2021, I asked Jane Jones, GWR's Head of Public Affairs for an update on the introduction of these tri-mode diesel electric trains, but she could not give a firm commitment on a date, citing Covid-19 and drivers having to work in 'Covid bubbles' which is impacting driver training, as the main reason for delay. I am more hopeful now though with the ending of lockdown, that Crowthorne and Sandhurst residents will benefit from these more sustainable trains in 2022, particularly as identical trains have completed testing and are operating passenger services in the Northern train franchise. I attended the GWR Annual Stakeholder Conference on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2021.



At Sandhurst Station, unfortunately, we have not made any further progress with GWR in identifying suitable areas for providing more cycle storage capacity. This station has limited parking facilities and so any increase in cycle storage would relieve pressure on commuter parking in local streets. Sandhurst station is not easy to find an affordable workable and secure solution, but we are continuing to investigate options.

## South Western Railway (SWR)



Two key issues have impacted Bracknell Forest residents using the Bracknell and Martins Heron to London Waterloo services in the last 12 months; reduced frequency timetables during lockdown and shortened train formations.

Whilst the pre-pandemic off-peak half hour service frequency has been maintained, peak hour services have been cut back from up to 4 trains per hour, to nearer 2 trains per hour, particularly on evening peak hour services from London Waterloo. This coupled with train lengths often being reduced from 10 to 5 carriages, made it impossible to maintain any form of social distancing in October/November 2021. Following my own commuter journey experiences and being contacted by local residents with similar concerns, I raised this issue with David Wilby, SWR's Regional Development Manager. I also raised this issue at the SWR Annual Stakeholder Conference on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2021.

This issue of short formation trains arose because SWR had transferred some existing trains to another train operator, on the expectation that its new Class 701 trains as I reported last year, would be in service in Summer 2021. However, these new trains have still not entered service yet (see below) and this led to the shortage of carriages. Following the Stakeholder Conference and as a response to me raising this issue, Steve Tyler, SWR's Performance and Planning Director, advised that SWR was investigating transferring some carriages from other lines to the London Waterloo to Reading line and by early December 2021, most of our train services had returned to the full 10 carriage length.

I will be continuing to monitor this situation in 2022 though, as SWR is planning to transfer the current trains on the London Waterloo to Reading line, to the London Waterloo to Portsmouth line, again on the expectation that the new Class 701 trains will be in service. Although train lengths do not seem to be affected at the moment, some of the current trains appear to have been sent for refurbishment, which is likely to put additional pressures on train availability. I have recently written to David Wilby at SWR to seek his assurance that

SWR will maintain full train lengths on the London Waterloo to Reading line until the new Class 701 trains are in operation.

It is now looking likely that these new Class 701 trains branded 'Arterio' by SWR, will not be introduced until the summer or autumn of this year. SWR has yet to formally accept any of these trains, despite over 450 of the 750 carriages having been built. The delays are in part due to software issues and the operator has stated that *'SWR is waiting for manufacturer Alstom to supply a train that performs to specification and will deliver consistently better journeys for customers and colleagues. When they do, SWR will begin its extensive programme of testing, training and business mobilisation.'* The train drivers' union ASLEF has also raised a number of issues with the train's cab layout which Alstom is working on resolving.



All 750 carriages of these Class 701 trains were supposed to have been in service by the end of 2021. I am hopeful that I will be able to report some better news on these trains towards the end of 2022.

Last year, Network Rail published its South West Main Line Strategic Study. Significant investment is planned for the mainline between London Waterloo and Southampton, in response to predicted traffic growth. Disappointingly, apart from the introduction of new trains, Network Rail and SWR do not have any plans to upgrade the infrastructure on the London Waterloo to Reading line. Although the new trains represent a significant investment, these will not deliver any significant reduction in journey times or eliminate journey delays resulting from London Waterloo to Reading line trains being held behind other slower services, due to an absence of any passing places.

In September 2021, Bracknell Forest Council submitted a joint Officer and Councillor response to SWR's Consultation on its proposed December 2022 timetable. Our response covered a wide range of issues generally specific to the London Waterloo to Reading line. These included concerns about reduced peak hour service frequencies, which have been justified by SWR on the basis that the new Class 701 trains will have greater capacity, poor current journey times between Bracknell and Martins Heron and London Waterloo, maintaining service frequencies at Martins Heron station and a request to introduce night-time train services.

### **Buses - £3bn 'bus revolution'**

BFC will be submitting a draft 'Bus Enhanced Partnership Plan' as part of a wider 'Bus Service Improvement Plan' (BSIP) to the DfT in April 2022, with the final version expected to be submitted to the DT later this year. This plan has been agreed with the local bus operators and aims to provide a focus and framework working with local operators to develop the bus network and improve performance both in terms of increasing the viability of commercial services and ensuring that those services supported financially by BFC, continue to effectively meet the need of the communities that they serve.

BFC's vision for its Bus Enhanced Partnership Plan is *'To develop a viable and stable bus network that supports the local economy, provides better choice and improves quality of life in a safe and healthy environment.'*



The Plan focuses on commercial services, as these already carry a large proportion of passengers and represent the best opportunity to attract more use through modest frequencies and other improvements. This in turn will increase revenues and allow operators to invest in further improvement, to try to establish a cycle of growth.

Four workstreams are envisaged to deliver the aspirations of the BSIP:

- **Building up the network** – enhancing and developing services.
- **Building efficiency** – by tackling delays and pinch points.
- **Building value** – through easier ticketing and fares discounts.
- **Building up confidence** – by improved information and passenger infrastructure.

BFC is bidding for Government funding over the next 3 years, with the aim of more buses running to more places at more times, with cheaper fares and quicker journey times. This will improve the image of buses and increase their contribution towards the better economic, social and environmental wellbeing of Bracknell Forest’s residents.

BFC’s BSIP is available to download [here](#)

BFC has continued to challenge local bus operators to provide low emission and electric buses. However, the operators have advised that they are waiting for the larger national bus operators to start placing volume orders, which will reduce prices and make these vehicles more affordable.

### Courtney Buses and White Bus



Rebranding of Courtney buses to Thames Valley Buses following the takeover by Reading Buses, has continued over the last 12 months. All Courtney and White Bus services are now operating to their normal timetables following Covid-19 timetable adjustments in 2020/2021.

**white bus** Following the withdrawal of some BFC financially supported bus routes last year, there have been no further withdrawal of services this year. It is hoped that the BSIP implementation will eventually drive passenger usage and help to make more existing supported bus routes commercially viable in Bracknell Forest.



### Berkshire Local Transport Body and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

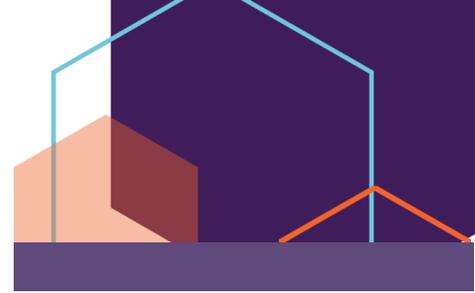
I am a nominated substitute on the Berkshire Local Transport Body and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and I attended meetings throughout 2021.

This body provides funding from a multi-million- pound devolved Government transport budget. Recent Bracknell Forest highway projects that have benefited from this funding have included improvements on the A322 Bagshot Road to improve capacity at the Sports Centre Roundabout.



I would like to take this opportunity to thank BFC Highways and Transport officers for their continued help, advice and support to me in the role of Commuter Champion over the last 12 months.





## Older People’s Champion

**COUNCILLOR  
MOIRA GAW**

### Overview

Over the past twelve months my priority has been to promote Older People in the Borough of Bracknell Forest, highlighting the opportunities and activities available for all our senior residents and assist where practical to promote available funding and signpost pathways to encourage engagement in health and wellbeing, through physical, practical, social, and holistic activities.

### Heathlands

In an exciting first for the Trust, a new therapy-led intermediate Care unit, with innovative and evolving roles throughout, is opening.

Heathlands is a purpose-built unit with 20 beds to support the people of Bracknell to receive their rehabilitation and treatment closer to home. It will be led by the therapy team, with a senior AHP running the unit, along with blended roles for HCA’s and Therapy Assistants so all care and treatment is rehab- focused. A rotation for Occupational Therapists between Bracknell Forest Council and Heathlands has been developed. This truly is a local service for residents, based in the heart of Bracknell



Older People’s Champion

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### Older Person’s Day

The Mayor of the Borough of Bracknell Forest, Councillor Ash Merry, stepped into the role of bingo caller for the day to celebrate Older Person’s Day at Bracknell Shopmobility. This free event was organised to celebrate the contribution Older People make to every aspect of life. The team at Bracknell Shopmobility hosted the event and prizes were donated by Waitrose, Hotel Chocolat, Whittards, Keep Mobile, Brown Bag, Marks and Spencer, The Old Manor, Coffee Barker, Kaspas and Tesco Martins Heron.



Everyone who came to the event joined in to make it the great success it was, and it was heartening that local businesses sponsored the event. It was a fun way to acknowledge and appreciate the contributions and achievements of older people in Bracknell Forest.



The MP for Bracknell Forest, James Sunderland also celebrated Older Person’s Day with a visit to Astbury Manor Care Home. The visit highlighted the contribution older

people make and provided an opportunity to thank them for the service they have given to the many different communities over the years. It was also an opportunity to thank the dedicated staff at Astbury Manor.

The Community Centre at Great Hollands was the venue for tea party with a difference on October 1<sup>st</sup>. This was a huge success with residents. The Mayor, Mayoress and Sixth Form pupils from Easthampstead Park School all joined the party. The sixth form pupils provided a variety of entertainment and a well-researched quiz for all those attending. Everyone concluded it was “good for both generations” and there are similarly intertwined celebrations to come next year.



### **Bracknell Forest Older People’s Consortium**

Many organisations across Bracknell Forest who offer direct delivery services to older residents have come together to develop the Bracknell Forest Older People’s Consortium. Representatives are from Age UK Berkshire, Sandhurst Day Centre, COATS Crowthorne, Age Concern Bracknell Forest, British Red Cross, The Ark Trust, Involve Community Services, Bracknell Forest Public Health and Bracknell Forest Council. The consortium has been funded by the NHS Charities Communities Partnerships Grants and is responsible for finding new and innovative ways of delivering both services and helping residents to reconnect with their support systems and communities. By working together, Bracknell Forests Older People’s Consortium will find more opportunities to deliver better outcomes for older people following the pandemic

**Bracknell Forest Older People’s Consortium** have been visible in the Lexicon sharing information on support services available to older residents and carers of older people in Bracknell Forest.



**Digital Inclusion** for Older People has been one of the key topics covered by the Bracknell Forest Older People’s Consortium, this has been supported by the Ark trust. A support service has been launched to ensure that older residents (over 60) in Bracknell Forest can stay digitally connected.

The Digital Inclusion Champions can offer free internet access, IT support and training and surveys have been in place to gauge the training and support required. The Digital inclusion survey involves making sure that residents have access to information and communication technologies. Over the last two years, access to these tools, and the knowledge of how to use them, has become more important than ever. Bracknell Forest Council are currently running a project to understand the level of digital inclusion in the borough, including the barriers people are facing to getting online and the support currently available from other organisations.



### **Older Drivers Awareness Week 2021/2022 Webinars**

Older Drivers Awareness Week took place virtually in September and covered topics such as risks faced by older drivers on the roads and safe driving tips to help them reduce risks, as well as advice for older drivers who are considering an electric vehicle.

Driving appraisals and assessment, should everyone have a dash cam? Understanding notifiable medical conditions and driving with dementia were popular topics. The week

culminated with eyesight, diabetes and understanding the effects on driving.

The Older Driver's Forum will be carrying out online webinars about the recent changes to the Highway Code during March 2022. There will be speakers from various agencies and PC Liz Johnson of the Road Safety Team will be on the panel to answer questions on the recent changes. This is a key service that offers practical knowledge, help and solutions to many of our older driver's questions.

### **Age Concern Bracknell Forest**

This well-run day centre provides a safe and secure environment for older people to be together, communicate and have fun. The Unit is fully dementia friendly, and the bespoke service really does take care of resident's individual needs in a vibrant community environment. The variety of activities is impressive with day visitors recreating master artists, preparing vegetable gardens, all manner of craft activities and an enviable treasure trove of puzzles. Dancing, singing and the in-house cinema complete the offer available to support older people. The staff work hard to make sure that care is a priority and fun is a regular daily activity.

### **Sandhurst Day Centre**

The Sandhurst Day centre continues to enable older people in the community to have access to a facility which provides for their social needs and wellbeing. A minibus service collects and returns members to and from the centre. Companionship, social activities, meals, and a range of care facilities are provided. The pandemic has curtailed activities over the past year, but it is now business as usual with former members returning and many new members joining. The centre is supported by the Sandhurst Day Centre shop which is now open six days a week and is always ready to accept donations that when sold, benefit the Sandhurst Day Centre residents.

### **Local Support Sessions for People with Dementia**



Age UK Berkshire has run various services for people with dementia. This includes the Maintenance Cognitive Stimulation Therapy Group. Attendees can take part in meaningful and stimulating activities, proven to help maintain memory and mental function. The groups provide a fun, supportive environment where people can build new relationships and take part in;

- ~ Discussions
- ~ Quizzes
- ~ Creative Arts
- ~ Word Games
- ~ Physical Activities
- ~ Musical Sessions

There are also various local Dementia Walks available, and sessions were run in Bracknell on the 16th September, 14th October, 11th November and 9th December. All proved to be well supported and very successful.

### **Organisations Supporting Older People with Funding**

I have been fortunate to be able to match organisations supporting older people with funding that is available which they have not been aware of. This has helped put in place additional resources where they are most needed.



*Funding For Wellbeing Activities Reducing Isolation.*

Funding is specifically for activities and projects that further the needs of the ageing adult population through wellbeing activities and programmes to prevent social isolation and loneliness. There are new guidelines for applications and criteria that must be fulfilled to be

eligible to apply. Funding is limited and so those applications that are championed by a local Home Instead Office will be prioritised.

### **Funding for Charities Working with Older People**



Grants of between £15,000 and £75,000 are available to charitable organisations which provide care and services for older people, particularly if they have a neurodegenerative condition or are isolated. The Wolfson Foundation will provide funding for new build, refurbishment or equipment projects which aim to provide increased access to services for new and existing users, improve the quality and range of services, and improve the financial stability of the organisation. Match funding is required for projects costing more than £50,000.

The **Hodge Foundation's** aim is to support projects that have effective solutions to helping those most in need. The funding is awarded around four main areas but the key area for older people is Welfare.



**Welfare** – the Foundation supports charities working with people who may be vulnerable or disadvantaged and who need assistance to improve their lives. This includes a variety of causes and groups including the elderly, homeless, disabled, special needs and those with mental health issues.

**The W.G Edwards Charitable Foundation** support a diverse range of charities supporting older people, from large institutions to small community-run organisations. Around 70 organisations each year are successful in obtaining grants, usually between £1,000 to £,3000. The average grant is £1,500. The Foundation was established to support capital projects and innovative projects but is unable to assist with running costs or salaries. The Foundation will consider a donation if around 80% are over the age of 65.

### **Organisations Supporting Older People**



This year a popular local *Facebook* page ran a community Secret Santa initiative for local elderly people, both private and care home residents who would usually perhaps not get anything at all for Christmas, with residents buying from a list of small gifts (scarves, candles, mugs etc.) that the residents themselves requested. The community group also asked for any additional nominees to be sent through and added them to the list. This was a very successful initiative and the partnerships developed between care homes, residents from all walks of life and a community spirited Facebook are to be applauded and will be further developed next year.

It is one of my priorities to help develop this initiative in Bracknell Forest in time for Christmas 2022. We have the means and desire to be able to reach out to older residents and support them over the Festive period.

Re3 have proved beyond doubt that they are committed to reaching those residents who have no PC or internet access and need to take rubbish items to the tip. They have provided a contact number to call which is manned Monday to Friday. Callers are given a slot time and order number so that they can take items for disposal. This service has been very well received by older people who do not have up to date technology available to them and has enabled them to access the tip at a day and time to suit them.

*U3A* I have been involved for some time now with this well supported charitable organisation, catering for people who are no longer in full time employment, and who come together to learn, laugh, and live. They share existing hobbies, explore new ones, and develop skills while making new friends. There are many different streams of opportunity from guest speakers to theatre trips, regular meet ups and coffee mornings. There is something for everyone to enjoy. Regular activities take place during the day Monday to Friday, so are aimed at the retired and those working part time prior to retirement. There is a modest annual membership fee and older people can access over 50 different interest groups including walking, trips out, languages, IT, book groups, music, arts, and dance.



This Christmas they also offered a Christmas day chat via Zoom for members who were spending the day on their own.

*Keep Mobile* continues to provide transport for the elderly and is committed to door-to-door pick up and drop off. As well as operating a “dial a ride scheme,” *Keep Mobile* also provides opportunities for group trips to the theatre and other events. They also cover a wide range of day excursions to the seaside and other interesting venues such as Cheltenham, Salisbury, and Hayling Island. The trips are available for older people and their carers, and all drivers are specially trained to transport older people.

During the pandemic, *Keep Mobile* operated a flexible programme helping older residents with shopping, collecting prescriptions, running trips to the hospital, and taking members safely to vaccination centres for their vaccines. The transport for vaccinations was free of charge to all and has helped many older residents in getting vaccinated.

*Everyone Active* are currently offering a bespoke senior membership package for those aged 66 and above. The aims are to ensure that all abilities can access exercise suitable to individual needs, promoting a healthier lifestyle. Additionally, senior swimming sessions are available for all those aged 50 and over helping to maintain a healthy weight, healthy heart, and lungs.

*Bracknell Forest Help Yourself* has a directory of different activities and interests for everyone as well as Older People in the Borough and residents can find interesting opportunities such as group exercise classes, walking clubs, cookery clubs, book clubs, art clubs, continuing education, jewellery making, pet therapy and music groups available for those with specific interests. Additionally, Parish and Town councils are also able to help with information in their local areas.

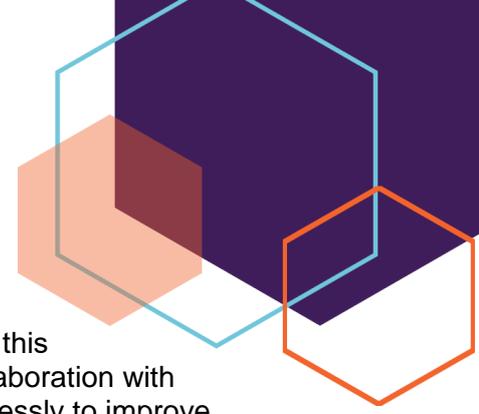
*Martins Heron, Monthly Community Party* I have been working with the Tesco Community Champion to develop the community party held monthly at Tesco Martins Heron. This outreach project provides togetherness for older residents on a regular basis and senior party goers can be heard singing along whilst enjoying food and drinks. It also provides companionship and a listening ear when required and has become a very popular event in the area. It would be lovely to replicate this generosity with regular community parties in other parts of the Borough.



“Re-engage” (previously known as Contact the Elderly), are currently searching for volunteers to be “tea party organisers” to assist in running tea parties, to act as social groups

for older people at a time in their lives when their social circles are diminishing. This will provide some of the life-enhancing social connections which are vital for health and wellbeing.

It has been a pleasure to work as the Older Peoples' Champion during this municipal year and I have been particularly proud of the increased collaboration with community partners, residents, charities, and individuals who work tirelessly to improve, enhance, and develop facilities for older residents living in Bracknell Forest. My thanks go to fellow councillors and officers who have assisted on this journey by giving their time, support, and resources.





## Large Business Champion

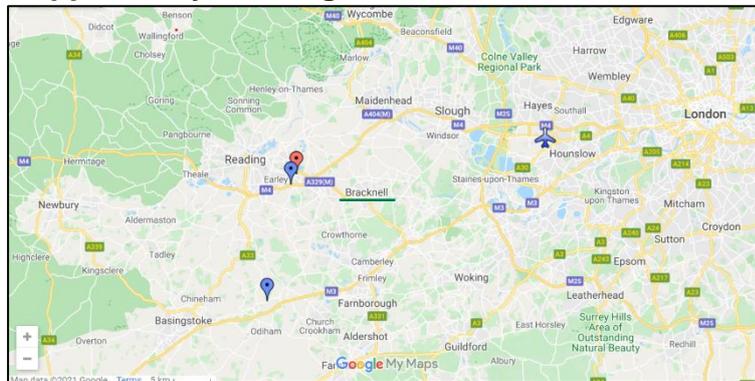
**COUNCILLOR  
ANKUR SHIV BHANDARI**

### Driving Large Business Forward

As a council we started focusing on large businesses separately during the current council term. As a recap, large businesses are the ones with more than 250 employees. Although the past few years have been challenging on many fronts for both small and large businesses, I am hopeful of a strong upward trajectory going forward. In my report, I will re-emphasise some of the positives we have in Bracknell which are conducive to large business growth and will introduce new points as have arisen in the past year and also those which are in focus for the future.

### Bracknell: An opportunity for Large Businesses

Bracknell offers distinct advantages for large businesses to prosper in the borough. Some of the key benefits are:



- a) Proximity to strong road network infrastructure with robust access to both M4 and M3 motorways.
- b) Proximity to Heathrow airport.
- c) Proximity to London and ease of access through road, rail and bus networks.
- d) Access to a strong talent pool due to its location.
- e) A preferred place to stay for employees supported by beautiful green parks and countryside, robust education provision for school children and a good IT infrastructure.
- f) 85.9% (68,200) of Bracknell Forest's working age population is economically active compared to an average of 82% of those in the Southeast and 79% in Great Britain.
- g) Bracknell Forest has a highly skilled work force with 42.7% of its' workforce being educated to NVQ level 4 (degree level) and above. This is marginally lower than the Southeast figure of 43.3% but higher than Great Britain's at 40.3%.
- h) Excellent infrastructure with a recently renovated town centre for which phase 2 was completed in 2017. When the Lexicon opened, the development included:
  - 1. 70 new retail and food and beverage outlets, including two 80,000 sq. ft stores housing Fenwick and Marks and Spencer, and a 12-screen cinema.



**Large Business Champion**

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2. 3,800 car spaces were provided in new or upgraded car parks.
  3. 8 core buildings and 6 place-making squares for events and activities.
  4. £6.5 million extra investment in the highway infrastructure from Bracknell Forest Council.
- i) Bracknell Forest also fares well in the latest iteration of the English Index of Multiple Deprivation (2019) where it ranks as the 284<sup>th</sup> least deprived area out of 317 local authorities.



## Journey so far



Bracknell has been home to many large businesses for several years including Panasonic, Waitrose, Fujitsu, Syngenta, Boehringer Ingelheim etc. However, we have also lost some big businesses or had their presence significantly curtailed, such as Vodafone, BMW, Dell, HP etc. This highlights the need for efforts to ensure both retention of existing large businesses and to

attract new ones. Business needs change and we as a council need to see how best we can continue to support these changing business needs of our large businesses. The renewed focus of Bracknell Forest Council to support large business will support this journey more strongly moving forward.



## Path post-Covid

Drawing on the most recent business survey, the local economy is now emerging from the pandemic with 51% of those surveyed, expecting to see an improvement in their performance. However, 35% said their business turnover was substantially lower than normal as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. 52% have changed the way their business works over the longer term as a result of Covid-19.

44% of businesses said the pandemic impacted on the wellbeing of staff and 23% said that their staff had suffered from increased stress levels as a result of Covid-19.

Recruitment remains an issue for businesses with potential employees now expecting to adopt hybrid working patterns and salaries to reflect increasing cost of living levels.

Supply chain reliability has also affected some sectors such as the construction industry and computer tech businesses. Changing requirements for commercial floorspace are not yet known as businesses review the need for bricks and mortar accommodation.

Promoting carbon-neutral programmes, health, and wellbeing. Increased awareness about the opportunities to invest in broadband through the Berkshire Digital Infrastructure Group, Bracknell BID/BEIS.

## **Economic Growth Review**

Inward investment has been relatively static over the last twelve months due to the uncertainties around the pandemic and the EU transition. Promising signs of increasing confidence with the purchase by a Singapore company, Keppel Capital of the Vodafone premises and the SEGRO site progressing with the final phase for a distribution business.

Focus is to promote electric vehicle charging infrastructure across business settings and to increase take-up of sustainable travel modes.

## **Levelling Up Impact**

With the publication of the Levelling Up White paper and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, further details of which are awaited, the Council will have the opportunity to identify potential investment and economic development projects to support local businesses.

## **Digital Infrastructure Review**

The delivery of full fibre across the borough continues as part of the Berkshire wide Digital Infrastructure Group. The DIG successfully bid for funding to work collectively to deliver and achieve improved digital connectivity across the Thames Valley Region. This will develop the digital asset platform, driving consistency in asset data standards and the importance of 5G connectivity engagement, collaboration with Estates, Legal, Highways and Planning teams. This will shape the way we look at local authority asset management and the approach to delivering 5G technology.

## **Skills Development**

The Bracknell Forest Economic and Skills Development Partnership has identified skills and training as a potential barrier to economic growth. Through the ESDP small, medium and larger businesses are being invited to contribute their insight and experiences which in turn will be used to shape future programmes and initiatives. The government's Levelling Up agenda is expected to involve businesses and employers in the delivery.

## **BFC/Dept for Works & Pensions (DWP) Partnership Agreement**

The Partnership Agreement entered into by the Council and DWP aims to work collaboratively to support our residents to gain employment. Through a detailed mapping process, we will identify actions to improve the gateways to employment for the individual and the employer. Businesses are being engaged to help shape the emerging workstreams.

## **The support system and collaborations to support Large Business**

Bracknell Forest Council works with many different agencies to support businesses in our borough. Some of these are listed below:

*Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership* is a business-led, multi-sector partnership mandated by government to lead activities that drive local economic growth. To date, they have secured and allocated £182m of UK and European public funds to deliver a wide range of initiatives in the Thames Valley Berkshire area. Alongside London, the area is the UK's economic powerhouse contributing over £42.5bn in GVA



The LEP contributes to the sustainable economic growth of the Berkshire area through the implementation of a Strategic Economic Plan which has four programmes:

- a) Business Environment
- b) Skills, Education and Employment
- c) International
- d) Infrastructure



*The Thames Valley Berkshire Business Growth Hub ([berkshirebusinesshib.co.uk](http://berkshirebusinesshib.co.uk)) offers fully*



*funded, impartial support services and expert advice to entrepreneurs, start-ups and established businesses in Berkshire. The service includes free clinics and workshops on a range of business issues, alongside a special High Growth Programme to provide tailored support to small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) with high growth potential.*

*Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group is the voice of business in the Thames Valley. On behalf of micro to multinational organisations, they aim to drive better economic conditions and new opportunities for members and the wider community. Through their recognised centre of excellence for global trade and inward investment, they provide services that promote and create opportunities for the Thames Valley business community. They do this whilst protecting trade and the local/national economic environment. They offer local engagement, regional representation, and global opportunity.*

*Bracknell Business Improvement District A Business Improvement District (BID) is a defined geographical area within which, the businesses have voted to invest collectively to improve their trading environment. Businesses in the Southern and Western areas of Bracknell voted in favour of plans to set up a Business Improvement District (BID) to run from 1st April 2020 – 31st March 2025.*

The Bracknell BID area's vision is to be recognised as the place where businesses develop and grow through collaboration and investment. Bracknell BID has two objectives:

**1. Objective 1 Infrastructure**

Provide a great infrastructure and a smart working environment for businesses to operate and people and services to communicate, access and move around, safely and effectively.

**2. Objective 2 Business Growth & Investment**

Support businesses in Bracknell to grow, develop and invest by creating a great working environment to operate effectively and attract talent and investment.

**3. Collaboration between the Council & BID**

- Board representation and officer support.
- Public realm and environmental projects.
- Crime and public safety schemes.



- Skills and recruitment.
- Business specific information sharing.



*Economic and Skills Development Partnership (ESDP) The ESDP focuses on:*

- Providing a co-ordinated voice and support for the Bracknell Forest local business community;
- Developing and supporting programmes and initiatives for:
  - business recovery & renewal;
  - training and skills development;
  - infrastructure development;
- Representing the local business community in responding to central and local government consultations;
- Supporting Bracknell Forest businesses and the local authority in seeking funding from government and the private sector;
- Providing advice and support to Bracknell BID;
- Developing strong working relationships with the local authority, Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Thames Valley Growth Hub, Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and other business support organisations.

In the near future, the ESDP, through the sub-groups will champion the following:

- **Business Recovery & Renewal:** with the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, Bracknell BID, Growth Hub, LEP and the local authority;
- **Skills:** Undertake projects and initiatives with the Chamber of Commerce, higher education providers (including Active Learning), Bracknell BID and the local authority covering adult learning, CPD and skills development;
- **Infrastructure:** Undertake projects and initiatives in partnership with the local authority, Bracknell BID and LEP.

Importantly, The Bracknell BID has also identified the value of a coherent influencing voice for the business sectors and has asked Bob Collis as the chair of the ESDP, to lead a sub-group with input from the BID to develop key themes as above.

## **Potential impacts of the Russia-Ukraine War**

(provided by Thames Valley LEP)

### **1. The caveats within this note**

Whilst it has horrified us all, the crisis in Ukraine has been going for less than a month at the time of writing this paper. The outcome of the crisis is impossible to predict. We know that Russian expectations of a quick operation due to its overwhelming superiority in numbers, has not come to pass; we don't know the degree to which Russia will dig in or whether Putin, aware that he has overplayed his hand, will seek a face-saving exit. If Russia were to install a puppet government, non-compliance from the Ukrainian people, possibly with resistance type activities, could follow. Some argue that with the West's eyes on Russia, China might exploit the moment to stake its claim over Taiwan. The Director General of the CBI, Tony Danker, told the Treasury Select Committee last week: *"I do not think companies are trying to make long term calculations about when this war might end or otherwise"*.

This note is therefore written in the context of much uncertainty. The note also cannot hope to capture the myriad of possible effects of the war in Ukraine. Indeed, the day before this note was written, a seminar held by the Resolution Foundation at which guest speakers were Jared Bernstein of President Biden's Council of Economic Advisors, Rachel Reeves, the Shadow Chancellor, and John Van Reenan, Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics, covered practically nothing of Ukraine, the speakers evidently feeling

that they couldn't say very much about the economics of Ukraine with credibility at this stage. This note does, however, flesh out one or two key issues.

## 2. Economic Outlook

The Ukraine crisis comes just as business was hoping for better news after two years of Covid, and all that that implies for the economy. Since the Autumn, the UK has enjoyed the strongest peacetime growth in a century, with around 300,000 more people in employment.

The obvious area that the war in Ukraine could affect the UK, is in imports-exports to Russia and Ukraine and the effects of economic sanctions on Russia. It should be noted that the UK does not import or export massive amounts to Russia, so sanctions will affect us less directly than some. In Tony Danker's words, this will not be a "devastating hit", but Russia is a closed market for the medium to longer term.

Moreover, Russia has 90% share of the global market in neon (needed for semi-conductors) and over 50% in pig-iron (used to make steel), so sanctions against Russia will hit industries particularly reliant on those materials. Less tangibly, wars, quite simply, make people afraid. Fear and uncertainty could encourage firms to put off investment decisions. The conflict is likely to weaken GDP growth and increase the probability of a recession.

This comes at a time when, whilst the economic recovery is underway, the UK already faced a cost-of-living crisis. According to the Resolution Foundation, rising food and energy prices risk driving a second inflation spike this Autumn that could reach over 10 per cent for poorer households – significantly higher than the peak for richer households. This is because the poorest tenth of households spend twice the share of their family budgets on food and energy bills compared to the richest tenth of households. Professor Jagjit Chadha of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research told the Treasury Select Committee that he thinks growth will be somewhere in the region of 1 per cent lower this year and 0.5 per cent lower next year, on current forecasts.

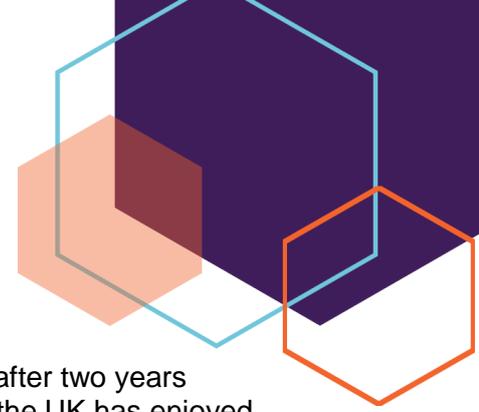
The Chancellor will present his Spring Statement to Parliament on 23 March. What had looked like a low-key event may now be more significant.

## 3. Oil, Gas and Diesel

The most obvious area for concern is the oil and gas imports that previously came from Russia. In the four quarters to the end of Q3 2021, the UK imported £558.7 million worth of gas from Russia, as well as £2.6 billion worth of refined oil and £1 billion worth of crude oil. Russia also supplies over a third of Europe's gas, according to Reuters, and economic difficulties on the continent could affect the UK economy as well, given our close trading ties.

This last point is important; despite the numbers above, the UK imports very little oil, although a third of UK diesel comes from Russia. Even gas is less than 4 per cent. The problem is that oil is a global market, with the price set by the marginal buyer. We do not have the spare capacity to compensate for Russian oil, even within OPEC. Oil was already heading to \$100 a barrel before the war; it recently peaked at \$140 a barrel, although the price subsequently fell back.

Apart from the effect on families, especially the low paid, many companies will struggle to cope in the next six months without help, whether energy intensive users, SMEs or others. We already know that the average energy bill will move up to £200 a month from April. According to Nathan Piper, Head of Oil and Gas Research at Investec, giving evidence to



the Treasury Select Committee, there will be a doubling in people's energy bills year on year. [Note, however, that not every industry pays the same price for energy.]

Petrol prices are rising and with diesel now hitting around £2 per litre, this will inevitably hit logistics and distribution companies. The majority of public transport is still diesel powered and suffering from post-Covid drop in passenger volumes. Diesel could be rationed in Germany, as soon as next month, with repercussions for the UK.

#### **4. Other Industrial Sectors**

Apart from oil, gas and diesel, the UK imports £1.3 billion of non-ferrous metals from Russia, while, again in the four quarters to Q3 2021, we exported £386 million worth of cars, £272.2 million of medical and pharmaceutical products, along with large amounts of specialised machinery, mechanical power generators and general industrial machinery. The exports of pharmaceutical products mentioned above may particularly impact Berkshire, given our strengths in life sciences.

UK trade with Ukraine is inevitably much smaller, but in the timeframe mentioned above, the UK exported £85.5 million of medicinal and pharmaceutical products, £83 million of cars and £45.7 million of 'other' chemicals. Again, Berkshire's life sciences sector may take a hit from this.

#### **5. Net Zero**

The UK and, indeed, wider Europe will need to find ways to plug the gaps in their energy consumption if sanctions prevent access to Russian gas. Speaking at the Resolution Foundation, Rachel Reeves argued that this meant we must go further and faster on green energy in the UK. She wondered if the government would instead focus on sourcing more domestic oil and gas in the short-medium term, thereby compromising our net zero target, as well as reintroducing fracking. Reeves wondered if a divergence would open up between government and opposition on this issue.

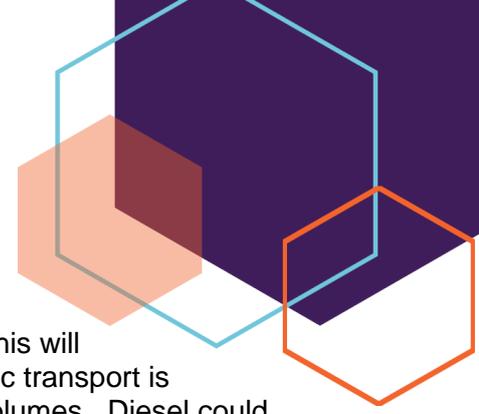
Tony Danker of the CBI has spoken of more oil and gas sourced from the UK but has opposed fracking. Danker told the Treasury Select Committee that we need to double down on renewable and clean energy solutions. Amrita Sen, Director of Research at Energy Aspects, told the Treasury Select Committee that, in the small print, Germany has said it will no longer retire coal by 2030. In order to avoid turning off the lights, it may end up using hydrocarbons rather than a renewables only strategy.

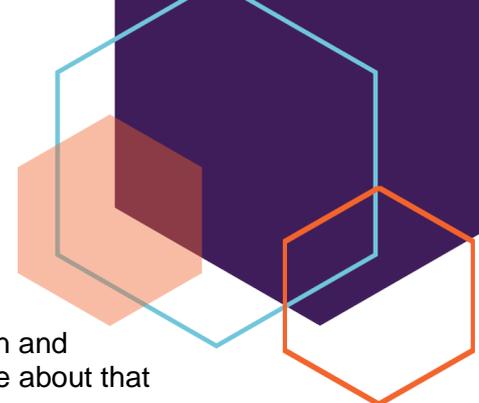
#### **6. Charitable giving**

Finally, there may be some impact on charitable giving to UK based charities as the horror and vacuum of a European war sucks in the available charitable cash to a big high profile 'good' cause. Donated goods may go to the Ukrainian relief effort rather than UK charity shops and outlets. Many UK-based charities reported financial difficulties after losing two years of fundraising events etc. through Covid, so a new charitable 'whale' event could be the final push to those hoping that 2022 would restart the flow of donations back to the UK charitable sector.

### **Looking Forward**

As we move forward into 2022 and beyond, there are certain important factors that will play a strong part in how the landscape for large businesses evolves in the Brough of Bracknell Forest. Some of the key ones are highlighted below:

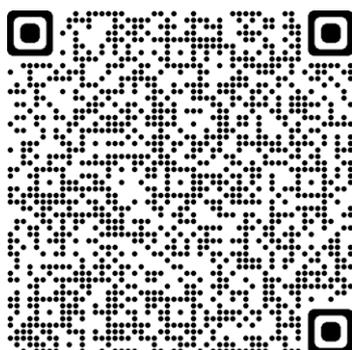




## 1. Post Covid Growth

How we ensure growth coming out of the pandemic will be key. At a council level, we will continue to work on a development plan and in addition, we will leverage the support of our partner agencies. The Local Enterprise Partnership has launched a recovery and renewal plan and we will be leveraging key aspects from that as well. You can view more about that plan from here:

<http://www.thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk/getfile/Thames%20Valley%20Berkshire%20LEP%20Recovery%20and%20Renewal%20Plan-compressed.pdf> or through scanning the QR code below:



## 2. Increasing non-retail share of business.

Although retail as a sector continues to be a very important sector for Bracknell, to ensure further resilience to economic forces, it is important that we try to develop the presence of non-retail businesses in the borough as well. The below snapshot provides a view of our recent status in terms of businesses from various sectors.

GVA										
Industry	Agriculture, mining, electricity, gas, water and waste	Manufacturing	Construction	Distribution	I&C	Finance	Real estate	Prof	Public services	Other services
Local Authority										
Bracknell Forest	£34m (1%)	£127m (3%)	£175m (4.5%)	£912m (23%)	£884m (22%)	£99m (2.5%)	£553m (13.5%)	£639m (16%)	£412m (10%)	£178m (4.5%)
Slough	£286m (4%)	£952m (14%)	£193m (3%)	£1.475bn (21.5%)	£1.699bn (25%)	£84m (1%)	£490m (7%)	£961m (14%)	£531m (7.5%)	£187m (3%)
Reading	£622m (8.5%)	£175m (2%)	£261m (4%)	£1.288bn (18%)	£1.594bn (22%)	£453m (6%)	£654m (9%)	£1.126bn (15.5%)	£834m (12%)	£216m (3%)
Wokingham	£410m (7%)	£268m (4%)	£263m (4%)	£814m (13%)	£1.836bn (29%)	£95m (2%)	£924m (15%)	£819m (13%)	£660m (10%)	£205m (3%)
Windsor and Maidenhead	£108m (1.8%)	£258m (4.4%)	£388m (6.6%)	£1.220bn (20.7%)	£1.028bn (17.5%)	£156m (2.7%)	£1.093bn (18.6%)	£740m (12.6%)	£561m (9.5%)	£332m (5.6%)
West Berkshire	£314m (4%)	£904m (12.5%)	£467m (6.5%)	£1.136bn (16%)	£1.537bn (21.5%)	£214m (3%)	£821m (11.5%)	£785m (11%)	£691m (9%)	£331m (5%)

Source: ONS, 2017

You can see that the manufacturing industry percentage in Bracknell is one of the lowest amongst other neighbouring boroughs. We should be trying to redress this imbalance.



### 3. Increasing collaboration with partner agencies

As we move forward from the past year of uncertainty, it is critical that Bracknell Forest Council leverages all the potential support available through partner agencies to assist large businesses in the borough.

### 4. Carbon reduction

The council has committed to aggressive carbon reduction targets by 2050. Large businesses have an important role to play in this. Below are some of the measures planned in collaboration with partner agencies to achieve that objective.

#### 1. Initiatives in partnership with Bracknell BID (Business Improvement District)

- a) The BID has several projects planned or ongoing that will contribute to the reduction of the carbon footprint.
- b) The BID is actively working with the council on improving cycle/walkways around the BID area through improving navigation signage, white lining and vegetation overgrowth clearance and management. They are also looking at making these routes more attractive and safer to users, by increasing lighting and installing CCTV.
- c) BID are looking at improving connectivity throughout the BID area by looking at potential problem areas which have been highlighted where pedestrians may have difficulty crossing roads. It is hoped that by delivering these projects it will increase the use of sustainable means of travel, such as walking and cycling, and reduce emissions.
- d) The BID is working on improving outdoor amenities throughout the BID area such as pocket parks and a healthy walking route. It is hoped this should lead workers to spend some time outside of the office and thus reduce lighting, heating etc.
- e) The BID has promoted 'Low Carbon Workspaces Grant' to BID businesses, in its e-bulletin, website and social media channels. The BID has also encouraged suppliers to offer discounts to those who avail of this grant.
- f) The BID is looking at electric vehicle charging points throughout the BID area, with the aim of these being installed sometime in the future.

#### 2. Initiatives in collaboration with Thames Valley Berkshire- Local Enterprise Partnership

- a) **Low Carbon Workspaces** <https://www.lowcarbonworkspaces.co.uk/> ERDF funded scheme offering Berkshire SMEs grants of between £1,000 to £5,000 to cover up a third of the cost of making energy.
- b) **TVB Smart City Project** – More details can be viewed from the link: <http://www.thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk/tvbsmartcity.htm>
- c) **Lora WAN network** (Internet of Things/IoT network) is currently being built out across Berkshire – target completion Summer 2021 – will give 98% coverage of Berkshire and will allow public services/LAs (as well as the private sector) to utilise the platform to help save money and improve services.
- d) **Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum** – This continues to look at strategic transport options focused on reducing the carbon footprint.
- e) **M4 LEP Corridor hydrogen infrastructure project** – This is in early stages but work is ongoing with LEPs along the M4 corridor (Swindon and Wilts LEP leading) to review if an infrastructure intervention is required to facilitate hydrogen fuel infrastructure installations on the corridor. <https://static.swlep.co.uk/swlep/docs/default-source/news-events/business->



[growth-summit-2018/our-place-in-hydrogen-technology.pdf?sfvrsn=d29c3143\\_2](https://www.thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk/growth-summit-2018/our-place-in-hydrogen-technology.pdf?sfvrsn=d29c3143_2)

- f) **The LEP** have also undertaken a Net Zero Carbon research to identify gaps or focus areas required towards moving to Net Zero. The report can be accessed here: [Berkshire Net Zero Research Gap Analysis and Recommendations.pdf](https://www.thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk/Berkshire%20Net%20Zero%20Research%20Gap%20Analysis%20and%20Recommendations.pdf) ([thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk](https://www.thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk))

#### **5. Alignment on KPIs to measure progress**

As we focus on further supporting large businesses, it is essential that we measure progress of the same to ensure momentum. For this, Key Performance Indicators (**KPIs**), not more than 5, will be aligned with key stakeholders and measured at agreed intervals.

#### **6. Raising awareness of the support available to Large businesses from the council**

In some initial meetings I have had with the leaders of large businesses in our area, I was surprised to find that they had limited knowledge of the scope of support that was available from the council. Moving forward, ensuring this awareness would be important.

**7. Review and update** information provided through BFC website, social media, and external networks to provide emerging advice and guidance. Join up the Public Health agenda with local businesses through the ESDP.

**8. Promote skills & employment partnership** with key stakeholders to identify needs and delivery – building on the newly established working arrangements with DWP

**9. Promote electric vehicle charging infrastructure** across business settings. Increase take-up of sustainable travel modes. Increase awareness about the opportunities to invest in broadband through the Berkshire Digital Infrastructure Group, Bracknell BID/BEIS.

**10. Marketing campaign to increase knowledge** of suitable alternatives and finance, initiatives, or grants, directly involving the BID and ESDP.

#### **What can Large Businesses expect from the Council?**

Bracknell Forest Council wishes to ensure the prosperity and health of the large businesses in our borough. Below are some support options that are available for large businesses and any bespoke support can always be discussed:

- Information support on regulations governing Business operations.
- Capability development support options for their employees.
- Provision of infrastructure and services support to launch/expand/relocate any large business.
- Long-term strategic planning to ensure the long-term interests of the large business and Bracknell Forest council are aligned.
- Access to various business support bodies to provide bespoke assistance as required.

Above all, we wish to play any role we can to support the growth of large businesses in the borough. Business leaders should feel comfortable discussing any challenges or growth options.

## **Synergies between Large and Small Businesses**

There will be important synergies between large and small businesses in the borough and they need to be leveraged wherever possible. The best scenario for Bracknell is where both large and small businesses exist in a resourceful and profitable ecosystem for all. Local supply chains between businesses can bring more growth and prosperity to all businesses and the borough. I will continue to work with Councillor Bob Wade in his role as a small business champion to realise these synergies wherever possible.

## **My continued personal focus on supporting Large Business Growth**

I am passionate about the growth of business and businesses in our borough and will prioritise my focus over the next year in the following areas:

- Ensuring key contact points between large businesses and the council are connected.
- Raising awareness of the support available to large businesses from the council.
- Exploring options to further grow the share of non-retail businesses in the borough.
- Leveraging the support available from our partner agencies to assist large business growth.
- Exploring options to build the non-retail share of business in the borough.
- Looking at opportunities to further build the capability of the employees of large businesses.
- Working with our partner agencies to continue to reduce the carbon footprint in the borough.

## **Conclusion**

Challenges still remain with rising costs of energy, geo-political conflicts impacting the country and the aftereffects of Covid. However, there is hope on the horizon as the world and Bracknell emerge from the pandemic. There is a buzz of activity in the business world, and we will use this to generate and maintain momentum where we can. Our focus continues to further support the growth of existing large businesses, attract new businesses and hopefully support the realisation of these opportunities.

## Voluntary Sector Champion

### Introduction

With this report, I had wanted to concentrate on the wonderful staff who have helped the volunteering process over the Covid period. However, the recent events in Ukraine are at the front of my mind and my thoughts are with everyone who is affected by the conflict.



At the time of writing, Putin has recently invaded Ukraine. As you read this a month on, it's difficult to know what the situation will be. I can only hope that it is improving, and that diplomatic resolution is more of a possibility.

The conflict in Ukraine has, sadly, brought another huge and devastating requirement for volunteering. Bracknell Residents have once again done whatever they can, with many people offering a variety of support.

A reminder that the best way to support those affected is by donations to official aid agencies, who are best placed to get supplies to those affected quickly and efficiently. Residents may wish to make financial contributions to aid agencies, such as:

[Disasters Emergency Committee – Ukraine humanitarian appeal](#)  
[UNICEF – Ukraine crisis: donate now to protect children](#)  
[British Red Cross – Ukraine Appeal](#)

There is something about great adversity that brings out great kindness and strength in people. I regularly hear, and say myself, 'what can you do?'. Then I remember that volunteering is about doing what you can, whatever the size of the challenge. Despite recent worldwide events, we should remember it's not only large, catastrophic events that depend on and motivate volunteers. There are hundreds of volunteers making a difference to people in Bracknell Forest every day.

### Infrastructure

Volunteering is not a nine to five job. Even for employed staff, the past few years have seen them go above and beyond their job descriptions and 'paid hours'. I want to recognise how council and partner employees have exceeded the expectations of their 'normal' roles to put in place the right infrastructures to support people in situations we have never experienced before. It has taken effort and dedication from volunteers and staff alike to put effective frameworks



**COUNCILLOR  
MIKE GIBSON**



**Voluntary Sector Champion**

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in place, making sure we have been able to look after vulnerable residents during this period. Thank you to everyone who has played a part in this.

### Community Response Service

The Bracknell Community Response Service was developed as a partnership between Bracknell Forest Council and The Ark Trust CIO. Throughout the pandemic, the service has worked with partners across the public and voluntary and community sector to support people who are clinically extremely vulnerable, shielding or self-isolating.

The Ark Trust CIO has provided a community response helpline and a borough-wide network of more than 500 volunteers. Volunteers have provided advice, dealt with referrals, collected shopping and prescriptions, distributed emergency food, carried out welfare checks and many other tasks that those shielding without support, have been unable to do.

Here is an overview of their activities:

- **560** partnership volunteers.
- **9160** tasks completed to July 2021. (shopping/other tasks).
- **4009** deliveries on behalf of pharmacies.
- **280** Pulse Oximeters delivered for Covid+ residents from Berkshire Primary Care.
- **5224** 3-hour shifts completed at the Waitrose vaccine hub since December 2021.
- Over **10,000** welfare check phone calls made by Bracknell Forest Council customer services to clinically extremely vulnerable people shielding.



I am amazed at the number of people and the number of ways that help has been provided by this service, and I thank all the volunteers and staff who have made it possible.

With the easing of lockdown restrictions, the service is evolving to continue to provide effective support to those who may still need it. The Ark Trust CIO has received additional funding to:

- a) use community response volunteers to provide a new community car scheme for older and disabled residents across the whole of the Bracknell Forest local authority area.
- b) to make contact with clinically extremely vulnerable residents who frequently used the community response hub during lock down restrictions to check on their health and wellbeing (physical, mental, emotional and financial) and signpost to other services if necessary.

The results of the council's Covid-19 impact survey in May 2021 showed that 86% of respondents who had volunteered intended to keep on volunteering in the local community. The pandemic created huge challenges and sadness for many of us, but I take some comfort in this legacy of volunteering and innovative services that is left behind.

## **Voluntary and Community Sector Covid Recovery Fund**

In November 2021, Bracknell Forest launched the Voluntary and Community Sector Covid Recovery Fund. This grant scheme is intended to financially support any registered charity, community group or social enterprise assisting borough residents, which has been economically impacted by the pandemic. With £250,000 available, the panel has already received in excess of 30 applications. 60% have been successfully awarded funds to a maximum value of £20,000. In some cases, this financial aid has been an absolute lifeline to their delivery and sustainability.

Unsuccessful applicants have also been supported with clear advice on the reasons for this. In all cases where an award could not be made, this was because essential criteria were not met. In such circumstances, Involve Community Services has offered a hand of friendship, providing bespoke funding advice and grant writing services as appropriate.

## **Partners**

As the council representative to Citizens Advice, I have attended their meetings and kept up with their activities this year. This is the first year of operations since Bracknell & District merged with Maidenhead & Windsor to create Citizens Advice East Berkshire. The new arrangements are bedding in, and the service continues to support local people through staff and volunteers in the local community.

Partners like Citizens Advice are so valuable, providing skills and services that are complementary to council activities. Partners provide a level of independence which increases the support options for our residents.

The council recognises that the voluntary sector is uniquely placed to provide this independence and intimacy that many of our residents need. I would like to thank Involve Community Services for their vital role in providing the voluntary sector infrastructure, enabling many organisations to seek funding, work effectively and develop their skills to support others.

## **Mental Health**

I came across a wide variety of voluntary organisations through the mental health review carried out by the Health and Care Overview and Scrutiny Panel. We heard from social prescribers how the voluntary sector provides a wide range of options for referrals. I have seen how voluntary organisations act within the overall system of support, fulfilling a vital role in partnership with local government.

The last time I wrote this report, we were hopeful that Covid was subsiding. Perhaps this time it will actually be the case. There will certainly be changes as we all get used to living with Covid, and this is equally true for the voluntary sector. Next year, I hope to be able to return to the more formal side of being a champion, and I intend to focus on how the voluntary sector is recovering from the pandemic.

