

# BRACKNELL FOREST ECONOMIC STRATEGY

2024

2034



Summary draft  
October 2023

## Foreword



Since forming the new Labour administration in May we have been proactively developing an Economic Strategy for Bracknell Forest. This summary document brings together information from a whole series of detailed documents that provide the evidence base, strategy, literature review, technical annex and action plan that underpin this draft economic strategy for Bracknell Forest. To deliver this strategy the council will need to work closely with all our partners and in particular the businesses that are already located in the Borough. We are looking forward to hearing your views on our ambitious strategy and the actions we have identified.

### Councillor Paul Bidwell

*Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration – October 2023*

## 1. Introduction

Bracknell Forest is a premier business location due to its strategic position near London, accessibility between the M3 and M4, proximity to major airports, a widely skilled workforce, ample commercial space, business-friendly policies, and excellent connectivity. Major global

high-tech and Research & Development companies like Syngenta, 3M, Daler Rowney, Fujitsu, and Honda have headquarters here, fostering low unemployment and a robust local economy. The area's green spaces, comparatively affordable housing, good schools, nearby job opportunities, and strong communities make it appealing for young families and professionals alike. The recent development of The Lexicon reflects the forward-looking community spirit, enhancing



Bracknell Forest's allure as both a great business and residential destination.

## 2. Why an economic strategy?

Recent challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic, EU exit, and the Ukraine conflict, have affected both local and national economies. In the past three years, Bracknell Forest's local economy has demonstrated some resilience but has fallen behind in several important areas. It is now the opportune moment to leverage Bracknell Forest's strengths and advantages to shape a thriving economic future, driving

towards net zero. The Economic Strategy aims to achieve four primary goals.

1. Provide an understanding of current **economic performance**, the strengths and challenges facing the local economy and its relationship to the wider sub-regional economy.
2. Set the **future direction**; the industries, businesses, jobs, and skills on which to focus and what Bracknell Forest Council can do to foster and nurture them.
3. Communicate the **vision**: to potential investors and businesses, entrepreneurs, partners, and the wider community.
4. Provide the **evidence**: data and analysis to support the case for investment and action.



Figure 1: The four purposes of the Economic Strategy

### 3. The vision for our economy

**Our vision:** *By 2034, a growing and resilient economy that matches the best in Berkshire, supports, attracts, and retains high-quality businesses, promotes sustainable growth in clean and green, knowledge-based industries, and provides economic opportunity with good, secure jobs for our people who will have the skills to succeed.*



Figure 2: The vision for Bracknell Forest's economy

### 4. Economic context

UK's uncertainty. UK productivity remains below pre-2008 levels and has deteriorated further since the Covid-19 pandemic. Presently, high interest rates and inflation worsen the UK's current economic performance, while some economists believe that historic underlying issues have been exacerbated by policies, including austerity, quantitative easing, and most recently increases in interest rate aimed at controlling inflation.

### 5. The scope of this Economic Strategy

The focus is on economic and business performance, including the factors that enable businesses and the economy to succeed and grow and that can be influenced at the local level: access to skilled people, business support and the business environment as well as high quality infrastructure all contribute to this. However, this cannot be growth at any cost; the climate emergency means that sustainable development is no longer optional and supporting green and clean growth and a drive towards net zero will be vital for our economic future.

### 6. Timescale

The Economic Strategy covers the period 2024 to 2034. It is action orientated setting out priorities and actions for the first one and three years, after which evaluation and review will set the course for the next period.

### 7. The objectives of the Strategy

The main objectives under each theme are:

- 1. Economic performance:** Improve Bracknell Forest's economic performance, particularly declining productivity, and knowledge-intensity. Protect Bracknell Forest against losses of large, foreign owned businesses and improve FDI rates.
- 2. Business competitiveness:** Reverse the decline in the business stock, improve business competitiveness and resilience, including start-up and survival rates, conserve and grow the

knowledge economy e.g. Information & Communications (ICT) and specialisms such as Film & TV, support growth companies, the large employers of the future.

**3. People, work and wellbeing:** Address Bracknell Forest's poor skills profile through both supply and demand side measures (e.g. management and leadership to drive up skills demand in SMEs), enable local, well-paid, secure employment for local people.

**4. Place, climate change, infrastructure, and connectivity:** promote Bracknell Forest's many advantages as a business and residential location. Champion green business development and initiatives to support the transition to net zero. Supply matches demand for employment space and housing, maintain good ICT connectivity and environmental sustainability.

### 8. Our approach

The Council has used a balanced scorecard approach to assessing the performance and resilience of the Bracknell Forest economy and for managing the delivery of the Economic Strategy 2024-34. A balanced scorecard is a useful quality management tool to improve performance across interacting factors.

The Economic Strategy 2024-34 is determined by three contributory factors: business competitiveness, people & skills, and climate change, infrastructure & connectivity. Together with economic performance, these contributory

factors make up the balanced scorecard for the Economic Strategy 2024-34 and action plan.

**Bracknell Forest  
Balanced scorecard assessment  
headline summary**

**Economic performance:** *“Competitiveness is reasonably good measured nationally, but locally there are areas of underperformance, productivity is weak and Bracknell Forest is heavily reliant on foreign-owned companies, increasing vulnerability to outward investment. The knowledge economy appears to be declining although there are some specialisms in Bracknell Forest on which to build”.*

**People, work and skills:** *“Low and worsening skills levels and weakening demand for higher level skills mean Bracknell Forest may be heading for a low skills equilibrium with lower value employment increasing and knowledge economy jobs declining”.*



**Business competitiveness:** *“Bracknell Forest’s business population shows a lack of resilience and dynamism compared to other nearby local economies and underperforms on business creation and survival, as well as decline in some key sectors such as Information & Communications”.*

**Place, climate change, infrastructure and connectivity:** *“Popular business location, strategic location, good transport connectivity, excellent ICT connectivity, green space and quality of life are strengths on which to capitalise. Strong competition as a business location from elsewhere means commercial space has to be top quality and of the right kind”.*

Figure 3: The balanced scorecard for the Economic Strategy

## APPENDIX 1

### 9. Bracknell Forest economic performance: scorecard summary

Indicator	Key metric	Summary of current state	Priorities for action
<b>E.P.1. Competitiveness</b>	Legatum Institute and UK Competitiveness Index annual rankings	Bracknell Forest benefits from its strategic location in the prosperous South East and as a popular business location at the heart of two important growth corridors with good international connectivity. However, Bracknell Forest does not perform as well on overall competitiveness as the other LAAs in the FEA. It rates less well on investment conditions and negatively on enterprise environment.	Investigate the underlying weaknesses in enterprise conditions and identify actions to address them e.g. targeted business support. (See business competitiveness)
<b>E.P.2. Productivity</b>	GVA per filled job	Bracknell Forest's weak productivity performance is a cause for concern. The analysis indicates that there is a lack of resilience to economic shocks such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the economy is not recovering as rapidly as neighbouring areas. This is despite the presence of large companies and high levels of internationalisation which would normally result in higher productivity. The causes are likely to include an over representation of less productive sectors as well as management and skills issues.	Carry out research into local business finance and investment readiness of SMEs. Invest in management and leadership skills as well as nurturing and providing the right conditions for more productive, knowledge economy businesses. (see business competitiveness & people, work and skills)
<b>E.P.3 knowledge economy and specialisation</b>	Percentage of knowledge economy businesses	Bracknell Forest's knowledge economy is smaller than that of the comparator areas and neighbouring local authorities and appears to be less resilient. There is some degree of specialisation which could indicate the presence of nascent clusters, e.g. Film and TV, Scientific R&D. These are not necessarily peculiar to Bracknell Forest and extend across neighbouring local authorities.	Build networks of knowledge in key knowledge economy sectors and clusters working with partners across the wider area.
<b>E.P.4. Internationalisation and FDI</b>	No. of foreign owned companies	Bracknell Forest's levels of internationalisation are high; it has the second highest level of companies in foreign ownership and the highest percentage of employment in foreign owned companies among the Berkshire LAAs. This puts Bracknell Forest at risk of outward migration of companies and jobs, should the benefits of staying in the UK not seem sufficiently attractive in future. Secondly, although foreign owned companies are more likely to trade and, hence, be more productive, the benefits do not appear to be feeding through to the local economy. Recently, FDI activity in Bracknell Forest has been low.	Monitor levels of foreign ownership and FDI. Focus on retention of large businesses, particularly foreign-owned businesses and ensure that they are made to feel valued and have the right conditions. Promote the benefits of locating in Bracknell Forest and work with Department for International Trade (DIT) to land more FDI projects in Bracknell Forest.

## 10. Bracknell Forest business competitiveness: scorecard summary

Indicator	Key metric	Summary of current state	Priorities for action
<b>B.C.1. Business growth</b>	Growth in number of registered businesses	A growing business population is an indicator of an area's attractiveness as a business location. The business population in Bracknell Forest has declined by 1.92% between 2018 and 2022. Weak growth before the pandemic was followed by losses during and since, indicating a lack of resilience.	Work with partners to target business support on those sectors are most important to retain and grow in Bracknell Forest e.g. <i>ICT, Professional, Scientific &amp; Technical, Arts Entertainment &amp; Recreation</i> .
<b>B.C.2. Business creation and survival</b>	Start up rates per 10,000 Working Age Population (WAP)	Bracknell Forest's rate of business creation per 10,000 WAP has been significantly lower than the comparator areas over time and has declined markedly since 2017. 4 and 5 year survival rates are also lower than in the comparator areas.	Increase business start-up support. Work with large companies and the Bracknell Business Improvement District BID to support new businesses in supply chains where there are local gaps.
<b>B.C.3. Business size structure</b>	No. and percentages of companies in the 250+ and 50-249 employees size brackets and £1m-£5m turnover	Bracknell Forest benefits from having higher percentages of medium and large companies who are major sources of local employment. However, this leaves Bracknell Forest open to large losses of local jobs if big companies downsize or relocate.	Continue to build relationships with large companies to understand any issues e.g. recruitment, planning, and make sure they are positive about Bracknell Forest. Nurture small companies in the £1m-£5m turnover bracket to develop the next generation of large employers.
<b>B.C.4. Key industries and sectoral shift</b>	Shift share by industrial sector	<i>Information &amp; Communications, Professional Scientific &amp; Technical, and Arts Entertainment &amp; Recreation</i> have all lost share while <i>Construction, Transport and Motor Trades</i> have all increased making the business structure less knowledge-intensive and less environmentally sustainable.	Develop a <b>local industrial strategy and action plan</b> to ensure Bracknell Forest retains its position as a location for knowledge-based businesses. This would include building on nascent clusters e.g. <i>Scientific R&amp;D and Film &amp; T.V. and Medical Devices</i> as well as local supply chain and local workforce development to ensure large companies are embedded.
<b>B.C.5. Information &amp; Communications</b>	Percentage of ICT businesses and digital creative subsectors	Bracknell Forest, known for being a location for ICT businesses seems to be losing share while others nearby are doing much better e.g. Wokingham. Bracknell Forest could exploit niches where it seems to have a strength.	Support <i>Publishing, Broadcasting and Film &amp; TV</i> sectors, working with other local authorities nearby in the digital creative industry locations.
<b>B.C.6. Tourism and Hospitality</b>		Bracknell Forest has mainly day visitor tourism and, for overnights stays, business tourism. Overnight tourism is predominantly the meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) sector which may be at risk if large companies downsize or relocate.	Work with tourism organisations to promote Bracknell Forest attractions and encourage more day visitors. Carry out risk analysis for MICE sector and work with accommodation providers to explore alternatives.



## 11. Bracknell Forest people, work, and wellbeing: scorecard summary





Indicator	Key metric	Summary of current state	Priorities for action
<b>P.W.W.1. Population change</b>	No. and percentages of people in 25-49 age group	Although Bracknell Forest has a slightly younger age profile than the comparators, this is forecast to change over the lifetime of the Economic Strategy and there may be a shortage of workers.	Work with nearby areas to monitor population changes and address any shortages arising e.g. through encouraging returners.
<b>P.W.W.2. Qualifications and skills</b>	Percentage of WAP qualified at NVQ4+ and NVQ3+	The skills of the Working Age Population are of particular concern in Bracknell Forest. They are not significantly lower at NVQL4+ and NVQL3+ than the comparator areas, but they seem to be declining further. Bracknell Forest is in danger of becoming a low skills, low value economy if this is not addressed urgently.	Work with employers, particularly large employers, the ESDP and education providers, to upgrade skills through apprenticeships, traineeships and other schemes. Work with SMEs to increase demand for higher level skills e.g. through management and leadership.
<b>P.W.W.3. Employment &amp; employment structure</b>	No.s and percentage in employment	Bracknell Forest has seen a larger loss of jobs than the comparator areas over the recent period and is showing less labour market resilience.	Monitor employment and work with large employers to minimise losses if possible.
	No.s and percentage in employment in knowledge economy and high skills specialisms	Bracknell Forest leads on knowledge economy employment at the main comparator level but is losing out to fast growth Reading and Wokingham at local level. ICT job losses are of particular concern. There are signs of other specialisms e.g. Film & TV, medical devices, scientific R&D but may not be embedded in the area.	Monitor employment in knowledge economy and knowledge economy sub sectors, work with large employers and SMEs to understand skills need and provide more business support to prevent further losses and embed nascent clusters. (see business competitiveness)
<b>P.W.W.4. Occupational structure</b>	No.s and percentage employed by occupational group	18% of Bracknell Forest residents work in the lowest occupational groups and are more likely to be in low paid and insecure employment. This is likely to be linked to low educational attainment and low skills.	See above on skills.
<b>P.W.W.5. Earnings</b>	Percentage difference between resident and workplace wages	Despite recent rapid growth, residents' earnings remain significantly below workplace wages, indicating that not all Bracknell Forest residents are able to access local well paid employment and that higher skilled workers are commuting in from elsewhere to better paid jobs.	This is also likely to be linked to educational attainment and skills. Encourage local employers to recruit locally and upskill.
<b>P.W.W.6. Wealth, health and wellbeing</b>	Basket of measures including, Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) employment rate, life expectancy, well-being	Bracknell Forest residents are less wealthy than in the local comparators, so although housing is relatively more affordable, they may not be better off as a result. Employment, historically high, has proved less resilient. Health is good but anxiety levels are higher than in other areas.	Monitor the basket of measures and evaluate success of Economic Strategy and other relevant policies in ensuring all are benefiting.

## 12. Place, Climate Change, infrastructure, and connectivity: scorecard summary

Indicator	Key metric	Summary of current state	Priorities for action
<b>P.CC.I.C.1. Employment space</b>	Average take up rate	Weaker demand for employment space seems likely to continue due to the adverse economic conditions and increase in home/hybrid working. Only category A space is easy to let and landlords need to refurbish. There may be unmet demand for light industrial units and small flexible maker spaces. Nascent high tech clusters would benefit from a technology park approach. There is probably sufficient retail space now due to The Lexicon and there may even be a surplus.	Engage with commercial agents to monitor demand. Support/allow further permitted development rights (PDR) if necessary. Engage with landlords to encourage refurbishment to higher standards Engage with developers to enable more provision of light industrial space & space suitable for high tech and creative digital businesses in the specialised sectors Promote Bracknell Forest as a business location Develop a Local Industrial Strategy (see Business Competitiveness)
<b>P.CC.I.C.2. Climate change</b>	Kt CO <sup>2</sup> e per Km <sup>2</sup>	Bracknell Forest's emissions are low but further decline of the knowledge economy may hinder future progress. Car dependency is high and public transport, cycling and walking rates are low.	Support the knowledge economy (see Business Competitiveness) Encourage modal shift e.g. through addressing safety concerns re cycle paths, working with large employers on cycle to work schemes, EV charging points.
<b>P.CC.I.C.3. Housing</b>	Affordability ratio	Although housing in Bracknell is relatively affordable it is still out of the reach of many on lower incomes. Increased supply of new homes will help to maintain and improve affordability. Bracknell Forest is not seen as an aspirational place to live for higher skilled individuals, although this is changing. Attracting young people to town centres can help to counteract population ageing and revitalise town centres.	Monitor employment and retail space availability as above and take a flexible approach to PDR, particularly in town centres, if surplus space is a persistent issue. Promote the benefits of Bracknell Forest as a place to live and work
<b>P.CC.I.C.4. Working patterns</b>	Home/hybrid working rates	Bracknell Forest residents have lower rates of working at or near home and higher rates of travel to work further away. Although this is typical of areas like Bracknell with high levels of skilled trades and construction employment, it may be that lower skilled Bracknell Forest residents are filling elementary jobs such as cleaning and care in other areas with higher skills profiles.	Promote local working and local recruitment, working with large employers so more Bracknell residents can benefit from working locally. Examine the need for local support services e.g. networks, flexible, rentable by the hour, office space, for those working from home.
<b>P.CC.I.C.5. ICT infrastructure</b>	Broadband availability	Currently, Bracknell Forest's performance on broadband and mobile availability is among the best.	Maintain and promote Bracknell Forest's record on ICT connectivity.



### 13. Headline Thematic Priorities

Economic and Skills Development Partnership (ESDP)	
	<p>The ESDP, founded in 2010, aims to develop and maintain a dialogue with business, educational and skills providers around common interests to make Bracknell Forest a better place in which to do business and to maximise the number of local people in employment. Utilising the full strategy datasets, technical annex, and action plans to refocus ESDP activities around the four key areas identified within the economic strategy. Potentially form four working groups within ESDP to take each of the themes and respective action plan to drive forward progress, working with Bracknell Forest officers and councillors and key partners and stakeholders.</p>
Bracknell Business Improvement District (BID)	
	<p>In 2020, businesses in the Southern and Western Business Areas of Bracknell voted in favour of plans to set up a Business Improvement District (BID), to run from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. A Business Improvement District is a defined geographical area within which the businesses have voted to invest collectively to improve their trading environment. The lifetime of the BID is covered by Regulations and is set at no more than 5 years. A not-for-profit company is set up and run by the businesses in the area and is responsible for ensuring that the aims and objectives of the BID Proposal are delivered. The role and standing of the BID are critical to the future success of the local economy. The strategy will actively support the BID to deliver its business plan and to secure another term.</p>
Business Liaison and Account Management	
	<p>Meaningful engagement with businesses within Bracknell Forest will form a key component of delivering successful outputs and outcomes from the economic strategy. Whether as part of a wider inward investment aspiration, through retaining businesses within the area, to better understanding the challenges and support requirements of our wider business community. Some account management will be directly with the businesses, other engagement will be through our partners such as the Business Improvement District, the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, the LEP Growth Hub and other umbrella organisations.</p>
Place Promotion and Destination Management	
	<p>The strengths of Bracknell Forest as a business location and as a day visitor destination were confirmed by the economic strategy research. These strengths along with the comparatively affordable housing need to be effectively captured and promoted to encourage new businesses to locate here and to help retain businesses within the area. Whether through promotional material, websites, social media and attendance at key events, we want to see Bracknell Forest's profile as a business destination improved. Although not a traditional 'tourist' destination, the area is a popular day visitor destination for both shopping and leisure activities, this consumer focus is complemented by a strong business tourism sector servicing meetings, conferences, and events. These tourism opportunities can be further developed from their current baseline.</p>

### Climate Change and Drive to Net Zero



In July 2019 Bracknell Forest Council agreed a climate change motion. We have committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2050 and have published a Climate Change Strategy. Our climate change action plan has two main strands 1. To reduce carbon emissions under the Council's control and 2. To Influence and lead community action against climate change. This economic strategy includes actions where we can influence and lead our business community to become aware of climate change the drive to achieve net-zero. There are also significant economic opportunities emerging through the green technology sectors that Bracknell Forest is well-placed to take advantage of. We through this strategy will encourage and support the move to net-zero and local growth of the green-tech sectors.

## 14. Delivery Mechanisms

### Delivery Mechanisms



The primary delivery mechanism for this strategy will be through the Place, Planning & Regeneration Directorate and officers within the Council. However, for such cross-cutting strategies many other departments within the Council will all contribute to the successful delivery of the strategy, its actions, outputs and ultimately outcomes. In addition to the Council, many other key partners, and stakeholders both within Bracknell Forest and wider pan-Berkshire organisations will also contribute to the successful delivery of the strategy. These have been identified within the accompanying action plan see Appendix.

## 15. Monitoring and Reporting

### Monitoring and Reporting Outputs and Outcomes



The detailed action plan has identified over twenty actions across the four headline economic strategy themes that could be taken forward by the Council and its partners and stakeholders. These actions where possible have been linked to indicators that will help measure success in delivering the economic strategy outputs and ultimately outcomes. These will be monitored at least annually and reported back to both stakeholders, ESDP and the appropriate Council committee for review.

## Appendix – Action Plan