

To: **Executive**  
**23rd January 2024**

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**Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy 2024-2034**  
**Executive Director of Place Planning & Regeneration**

**1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To present the Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy 2024-2034, vision, objectives, and the action plan.

**2 Recommendation(s)**

**2.1 Executive is asked to:**

**(i) to note the consultation responses and the suggested amendments to the strategy,**

**(ii) approve the Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy 2024-2034 and action plan,**

**(iii) endorse the repositioning of the Bracknell Forest Economic & Skills Development Partnership to the Bracknell Forest Economic Partnership as set out in paragraphs 5.12-5.15**

**3 Reasons for Recommendation(S)**

- 3.1 To establish an economic strategy and action plan to support a thriving and connected economy.

**4 Alternative Options Considered**

- 4.1 The alternative option is to rely entirely on external policies and strategies to help guide and shape the future support for our local economy. This approach would not focus specifically on the needs of Bracknell Forest's residents and businesses and may reduce the opportunities to achieve the council's objectives.

**5 Supporting Information**

- 5.1 The Council is committed to achieving growth and prosperity through a thriving and connected economy. The role the Council plays is both as an enabler and through direct delivery, working collaboratively with employers, business representatives, regional and national government, and residents. This strategy will be delivered in partnership with residents, employers, businesses, skills, and training providers, and through working with neighbouring local authorities/government agencies.
- 5.2 To date, the Council has drawn upon established mechanisms to support the local economy, including, local plan policies, partner organisations and business liaison. At a local level, the primary conduit to our business community is through the economic development service and the Bracknell Forest Economic & Skills Development Partnership (ESDP), an independently chaired forum established more than 15 years ago to promote dialogue between the council and the local employers and businesses.

- 5.3 In 2023, the Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership was appointed in a consultancy role to support the preparation of the new strategy and action plan. The initial stages included targeted engagement with key stakeholders involving business sectors, the Economic & Skills Development Partnership, Bracknell Business Improvement District, internal services and councillors through briefings and workshops.
- 5.4 The strategy looks ahead ten years with a focus on the next 1-5 years to respond to the consequences of the cost-of-living crisis, global events, changing working patterns post pandemic and the drive towards net zero. The objectives of the Economic Strategy are as follows:
- **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 foreign direct investment rates.
  - **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.
  - **People, work, and wellbeing:** Address Bracknell Forest’s poor skills profile through both supply and demand side measures, enable local, well-paid, secure employment for local people.
  - **Place, climate change, infrastructure, and connectivity:** Promote Bracknell Forest’s many advantages as a business and residential location. Ensure supply matches demand for employment space and housing, drive transition towards net zero, maintain good ICT connectivity and environmental sustainability.
- 5.5 To drive forward the economic strategy and to focus on the four themes, consideration will be given to:
- Reviewing the existing delivery structure including the scope and shape of the Economic & Skills Development Partnership and the regional economic development ecosystem.
  - Producing a Bracknell Forest promotional prospectus/collateral to capitalise on the Bracknell Forest brand.
  - Energise and deliver impactful business liaison and support.
  - Effectively monitor business performance and respond to outputs and wider economic determinants.
- 5.6 In October 2023, the Executive approved the draft economic strategy for public consultation. Through the online portal, targeted events and meetings with business groups, local communities, and residents, an extensive consultation has taken place building on the earlier input and technical evidence and analysis. The formal consultation has resulted in a further 25 responses and detailed comments. The consultation finished on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

*Consultation summary*

5.7 Attached as Appendix 1 is a summary of the responses received through the portal together with more detailed responses from the stakeholders, and business representative organisations: The response to the consultation questions are as follows:

- *By 2034, Bracknell Forest is a growing and resilient economy that matches the best in Berkshire. It 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 have the skills to succeed.*  
**89% Agree, 11% disagree or don't know.**
- The Economic Strategy has identified four main themes. These are:
  - *Economic performance:*
  - *Business competitiveness*
  - *People, work, and wellbeing*
  - *Place, climate change, infrastructure, and connectivity*

**88% agree, 12% disagree or no response.**

### **Strategy actions**

- Economic performance actions; **81% agree, 19% disagree or don't know.**
- Business competitiveness actions; **85% agree, 15% disagree or don't know.**
- People, work, and wellbeing actions; **81% agree, 19% disagree or don't know.**
- Place, climate change, infrastructure, and connectivity actions; **77% agree, 23% disagree or don't know.**

### **Proposed changes to the Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy 2024-2034. Appendices 2,3,4**

5.8 Reflecting upon the responses and comments received, the following changes have been made to the strategy and action plan:

- Lobbying for enhanced rail and public transport services to support inward investment and accessibility.
- Stronger emphasis for small and medium sized enterprises to access business support.
- Reflect the breadth of business types and sectors and associated skills in line with the local attainment levels.
- Highlight the specialist research and development clusters present in the borough.
- Prioritise the thematic priorities in the full strategy document.

### **Strategy delivery and monitoring**

5.9 Currently the established mechanisms in place to deliver economic development across the borough and the region, are through the ESDP, the Bracknell Business Improvement District and the principal business organisations including Bracknell Regeneration Partnership (The Lexicon) Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Business and other public sector agencies.

- 5.10 The adoption of the Economic Strategy represents a step change in the commitment towards a thriving and connected economy and the opportunity to shape the existing arrangements. The council through its economic development service will coordinate and lead significant elements of the thematic priorities and actions. Equally, where appropriate other partners such as the BID, Thames Valley Chamber and sector leads will be better placed to deliver the actions.
- 5.11 Attached as appendix 5 is an action plan delivery programme to be prioritised in the first twelve months based on the challenges and opportunities presently identified.

#### *Bracknell Forest Economic Partnership (BFEP)*

- 5.12 Currently, the Bracknell Forest Economic & Skills Development Partnership has provided the voice for business to engage with and through the council and has successfully supported key outcomes such as the creation of the Bracknell BID, business surveys and employer engagement. The proposal is to reconfigure the ESDP to become an entity with a role to provide oversight for the strategy and the action plan delivery. The BFEB would review and promote the strategy actions and build consensus and support. Act as an advocate for Bracknell Forest's economy.
- 5.13 The composition of the BFEP would include:
- key business/employer representatives reflecting the composition of businesses in the borough. Large (250+ employees), medium (50-249 employees) and small (up to 49 employees) business reps
  - Skills and training providers at school and further/higher education level
  - Resident representation through elected members (Bracknell Forest member for economic development and regeneration, Member of Parliament, Parish/Town councils)
  - Bracknell Business Improvement District
  - BRP/The Lexicon
  - Business representative organisations- Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Business, others
  - Public sector/government departments
- 5.14 The BFEP would be independently co-chaired by a business representative and a skills sector representative receiving quarterly progress reports. In parallel, the economic development team will prepare service plan performance updates to feed into the departmental service plans and the council plan. An annual review and forward look will be prepared for consideration by the council and the BFEP.
- 5.15 Subject to the Executive's agreement to this approach it is intended to establish the BFEP in the first quarter 2024/25.

## **6 Consultation and Other Considerations**

### Legal Advice

- 6.1 That there no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

### Financial Advice

- 6.2 Whilst there are no direct additional financial implications arising from this report, a strong economy delivered through this strategy and action plan will encourage

businesses to thrive and in turn contribute towards a positive business rates position supporting council services.

#### Other Consultation Responses

6.3 As set out in the report.

#### Equalities Impact Assessment

6.4 An Equalities Impact assessment screening has been undertaken.

#### Strategic Risk Management Issues

6.5 There are no strategic risk management issues to address currently.

#### Climate Change Implications

6.6 The Strategy will contribute towards a reduction in emissions of CO2 by supporting the positive transition to net zero. The Action Plan priorities will drive behavioural change, increasing opportunities for greener business practices and more sustainable use of buildings and resources.

#### Health & Wellbeing Considerations

6.7 The responses to the economic strategy consultation have been assessed in relation to health and wellbeing considerations.

#### Background Papers

Appendix 1 Consultation responses

Appendix 2 Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy 2024-2034 Summary

Appendix 3 Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy Action Plan

Appendix 4 Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy 2024-2034

Appendix 5 Action plan delivery programme

#### Contact for further information

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