

Bracknell Forest economic strategy 2024-2034 consultation schedule December 2023

Strategy theme/detail	Comment/issue	Response/changes
<p>Our vision</p> <p>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.</p> <p>26 responses received</p> <p>88.5% agree 11.5% disagree or don't know</p>	<p>1. High quality businesses? Should it not be a spectrum of businesses that support local, regional, and national needs? It seems like you are being a bit exclusive and Tory. Same on "secure jobs for those with skills to succeed". Don't we want secure jobs for our skilled and unskilled Labour force. The retail and leisure economy in Bracknell rely on our relatively unskilled workforce and our town centre needs them. The vision doesn't feel inclusive or representative of Bracknell.</p>	<p><i>The strategy and action plan acknowledge and encompass the full range of employ opportunities and skills needs within the Bracknell economy. The Action Plan, P.W.W.2 will be reworded to reflect the breath of skills and jobs underpinning Bracknell's economy.</i></p>
	<p>2. Bracknell Forest has gone from a town of light industry and IT (once being compared to Silicon Valley) to a town of service industries and outlets. This leaves it totally vulnerable to economic fluctuations. To be specific, main employers used to include Ferranti, Racal, Oracle, the Met Office, the RAF staff college and libraries. All have left Bracknell or are downsizing or using volunteers.</p>	<p><i>The Strategy recognises the continuous change in business types and sizes in response to the wider economic opportunities. The Southern and Western businesses areas are home to a significant range of companies.</i></p>
	<p>3. The direct link to London was meant to be a major attraction but has been beset by problems so that car traffic is increasing to that of a motorway along the Bagshot Road. Indeed, the phrase driving to net zero seems more appropriate than ever. Currently the station is flooded and coaches to London are infrequent often every 2 hours if there is a problem with the rail service. Businesses who need to use the post office often find it has closed early due to 'staff shortages'. When it moved to Smiths from a dedicated office, we were told it was going to be a much better service, but it is much worse. Not least because staff need to cash up before Smiths closes at 5.30pm.</p>	<p><i>The emerging Local Transport Plan 4 will assess the current and future transport and accessibility demands for the borough taking into account the wider economic factors.</i></p>

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	<p>4. There is a raft of closed outlets since the Pandemic including Whittards, Den of Bracca, EE, and the Cornish knitwear shop. One of the two cinemas came close to shutting There is a national component in some of these but it again underlines the danger of being over optimistic about prospects and retail saving the day.</p>	<p><i>The Lexicon continues to be a vibrant retail destination with very few vacant units. The council is bringing forward masterplans for two key areas in the town centre with the potential to expand the range of uses to meet future needs.</i></p>
<p>The Economic Strategy has identified four main themes.</p> <p>88% agree 8% disagree 4% no response</p>	<p>These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic performance: • Business competitiveness • People, work, and wellbeing • Place, climate change, infrastructure, and connectivity 	
<p>Economic performance actions</p> <p>81% agree 15% disagree (4 comments) 4% don't know</p>	<p>1. I don't see any mention of our much-needed trades. Our declining retail sector isn't mentioned. The town centre won't sustain itself through magic and needs to be fostered and nurtured to ensure the impact of the regeneration is not lost.</p>	<p><i>The full consultation draft – people, work and wellbeing explores the range of jobs in construction, manufacturing transport and agricultural sectors and the changing demands for jobs in these sectors. P.W.W.3.</i></p>
	<p>2. I agree with the statements, but they do not go far enough. Knowledge-based businesses need readily available skills and that's where you need to focus, on links with schools, colleges, universities.</p>	<p><i>Noted</i></p>
	<p>3. Bracknell looks dirty and uncared for. It needs a tidy up, rubbish removed from verges, pathways cut back and leaves swept up so you can walk on them. Why are we doing nothing about the rubbish being thrown everywhere, electric scooters being ridden at speed on paths and roads and people openly smoking drugs? It should be a nice place to live it seems to be on a very fast downward spiral which is a shame after all the investment in the new town centre.</p>	<p><i>Noted. Partnership across the private and public sector landlords and agencies including Thames Valley Police and Bracknell Regeneration Partnership and Bracknell Forest Council is working to manage the physical, and social fabric of the town centre.</i></p>

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	<p>4. Not all of them we don't need more managers in businesses who do not look after people who work on the front line of the businesses. There needs to be more training and apprenticeships that are STEM related. Too many businesses are only taking on business administration apprentices. This will not grow the local economy and make it more productive. Do not waste money on glossy brochures and this just increases the carbon footprint. Include more businesses in the Bracknell Business Improvement District (BID). There are businesses just outside of this area that could take part and make a difference.</p>	<p><i>Noted. The strategy recognises the need to expand the skills within our resident community to match the employment opportunities now and over the life of the strategy. The strategy represents the whole of Bracknell Forest including Crowthorne, Sandhurst and the smaller commercial areas.</i></p>
<p>Business competitiveness actions 84.5% agree 11.5% disagree (3 comments) 4% don't know</p>	<p>1. Let's not jump of the film bandwagon! What do we have (it's our neighbouring authorities). Has the remainder of the Town centre regeneration been forgotten? The Bus station, The Deck, Fitzwilliam House.</p>	<p><i>The Strategy technical annex and full report identify the existence of businesses supporting the creative industries, post-production, construction and catering services. The objectives in the scorecard and action plan, B.C.4 and 5 build on the existing local business activity.</i></p>
	<p>2. Need to add more about skills.</p>	<p><i>Noted</i></p>
	<p>3. Until you get the basics right and encourage education, hard work, and aspiration you can't move on.</p>	<p><i>Noted</i></p>
<p>People, work and wellbeing actions 81% agree 15% disagree (4 comments) 4% don't know</p>	<p>1. I absolutely agree with all the actions, but you also need to target the development of skills before employment, in schools, colleges and universities</p>	<p><i>Noted. The strategy recognises the need to expand the skills within our resident community and the importance of engaging with local education providers.</i></p>
	<p>2. Although I agree with their principle, there will also be some residents who are hard workers but will never gain higher grades. We need for them inhouse training in the industries that are struggling. For example in the care industry as an overall agency and COS are the main fillers, whereas this could be done locally. Fifty per cent then continue onto nursing.</p>	<p><i>Noted. The importance of in work training is recognised in the strategy in helping improve the employment and wellbeing of all residents.</i></p>

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	<p>3. Greater engagement with the local schools to demonstrate the opportunities that are available locally to them and promote all routes to employment particularly through apprenticeships and the uptake of new technical vocational qualifications by the schools to encourage young people to stay and train and earn locally.</p>	<p><i>Noted. Greater engagement with education providers and local Bracknell Forest businesses to encourage residents to access local employment opportunities.</i></p>
	<p>4. Only STEM apprenticeships should be encouraged. Business administration should not need to be an apprenticeship. We are training people in the wrong skills. If we have a workforce in Bracknell with the demanded skills, businesses will want to move here. However, if people can't afford a home to live in, we will never keep these necessary skills. Most businesses are management heavy and when there is a financial strain it is usually the skilled people who are let go of and their work outsourced out of the area or abroad.</p>	<p><i>Noted.</i></p>
<p>Place, climate change, infrastructure, and connectivity actions</p> <p>77% agree 19% disagree (5 comments) 4% don't know</p>	<p>1. I agree with all points but more is needed on transport. Reliance on the car is much too high, and that is because there is little viable alternative.</p>	<p><i>Noted</i></p>
	<p>2. Nowhere near enough focus on renewables. Bracknell has many large commercial buildings on which solar PV could be installed. There are also an increasing number of data centres being built from which waste heat should be harvested.</p>	<p><i>The Council recognises the significant contribution to be made by employers and companies to support the transition towards net zero and is working closely with key stakeholders through the Climate Change Strategy <u>Climate change Bracknell Forest Council (bracknell-forest.gov.uk)</u> P.C.C.I.C.2 in the full stagy and action plan supports these objectives.</i></p>
	<p>3. Once again in principle, but from the start the planning officers should ensure that each development is as eco-friendly as it can be. Workers need to be able to get into Bracknell and sadly we have a very poor bus service, limited cycle lanes. At the moment people are buying here as it is cheaper than London and then work in the Capital as pay is too low, this is NHS as well Business support must be a priority to ensure growth. The growth hub has helped me significantly,</p>	<p><i>Noted</i></p>

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	4. The current housing stock is not encouraging people to stay in Bracknell Forest.	<i>Increased supply of new homes will help to maintain and improve affordability. Local Plan allocations and opportunities to attract people to Bracknell town centre can help to counteract population ageing and sustain the town centre.</i>
	5. This sound great but until you get the basics right, starting with education, pride in yourself and your environment how is this going to be implemented?	<i>Noted</i>
Missing actions	Action to increase renewable energy installations on commercial buildings and reduce waste heat through re-use.	<i>Changes to national building regulations and the requirements of the EPC standards will drive waste reduction and greater energy management.</i>
	Business support must be a priority to ensure growth. The growth hub has helped me significantly,	<i>Noted. The Council through this strategy is supporting the Berkshire Growth Hub and the UK Shared prosperity Fund investment plan.</i>
	House builders need to provide housing for all to purchase. Many people cannot afford to get on the housing ladder, and I don't see anything in the plan to encourage that. If this was tackled, the skills gap would reduce as people would be encouraged to stay in Bracknell Forest	<i>Noted and referred to above</i>
	Education. Sense of pride. Work ethic. The basics seem to be missing and I don't know what plans are in place to address this. The town is declining year on year and the council and police don't seem to be addressing this.	<i>The economic strategy sits alongside the Bracknell Forest Council Plan 2024-2027, endorsing the vision for the borough where we put residents first, working together to grow sustainable, resilient, and inclusive communities.</i>
	More wind power farms & Utilisation of pumped hydro possibilities.	<i>Noted</i>
	There needs to be a lot more focus on renewables at commercial premises. There is a huge amount of commercial roof space in Bracknell on which solar panels should be installed to help Bracknell work towards net zero.	<i>Noted, see above</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is essential that engagement with local shops and businesses in all the retails areas of Crowthorne (High Street, Station Parade, Sandhurst Road, and Church Street) are factored into the strategy to ensure their viability. • Ensure that the engagement and strategy is not Bracknell Town/Lexicon centric. • Crowthorne Parish Council actively supports its twice weekly Market which again is supported not only by residents but provides a low-cost opportunity for local 'cottage/home' 	<p><i>Noted and reflected in the strategy and action plan P.W.W. 2 and the production of a local industrial strategy to encompass the smaller commercial locations.</i></p> <p><i>Continue to actively support local retail initiatives building on the programmes introduced during the Covid pandemic and through the UK Shared</i></p>

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	<p>bakery, craft and traditional market type businesses to 'launch'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The location of the market, just off the main High Street, enables people to travel by foot, cycle or bus; ensuring it also serves the sustainability/environmental agenda as well as economic strategic objectives. • Local residents can shop at the market without travelling by car; therefore, proving the perfect climate friendly place for locals to buy locally produced foods and crafts. • Parking should be factored into the strategy. Crowthorne has free parking and therefore make the high street shops and market even more attractive. • Local knowledge especially as demonstrated by Crowthorne Parish Council is essential to build Bracknell Forest wide sustainability for businesses and shops and provide a wider strategic objective. Such knowledge should be tapped, and the Parish Council is willing to share experience. Crowthorne is the only High Street outside the Lexicon. 	<p><i>Prosperity Fund investment plan, Noted</i></p> <p><i>Noted</i></p> <p><i>Noted</i></p> <p><i>Create a pan Bracknell Economic Partnership with parish and town council representation to harness local knowledge and commitment.</i></p>
<p>Other comments</p>	<p>Promote the employment and training of local people. Many who work here especially in the public sector don't live in Bracknell. We need to understand why so many tech firms are relocating to places like Green Park on the other side of Reading. Yet Bracknell new town was originally built as a place where workers and their work were within walking distance as far back as the 50s.</p>	<p><i>Noted. Referenced above.</i></p> <p><i>Developing a broader understanding of the economic ecosystem sits within the strategy and Local Industrial Strategy.</i></p>
	<p>Find the businesses in the area that manage knowledge, such as member-based businesses as they are utilized by businesses all over the country and overseas. They will likely put Bracknell on the map to a greater extent.</p>	<p><i>This is identified as a Thematic Priority, place promotion and destination management.</i></p>
	<p>I would be interested to see the underpasses between the town centre and the southern business area made safer to encourage walking to and from work even in winter due to the regeneration of market street meaning an increase in domestic residential areas in the town centre and the likelihood of people living and working locally and reducing the need to drive such short distances.</p>	<p><i>Noted. This sits within the council accessibility objectives and the strategy action plan P.CC.I.C.4 and 5</i></p>
	<p>I would like to know what level of investment is required by the Council (+/- Central Government) to implement such a strategy and, running parallel to this, what is considered a success with regards to return on investment.</p>	<p><i>The Action Plan will be delivered by the council's economic development service in conjunction with public and private sector partners, the Bracknell Business Improvement District, business</i></p>

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	<p>It would be good to know what we feel success will look like with regards to a set of measurables not just RoI.</p>	<p><i>representative organisations and key employers. The strategy vision aims to place Bracknell's economy at the same or greater level of neighbouring economies based on Gross Domestic Product, employment, and skills attainment.</i></p>
	<p>I also feel that the strategy could capitalise more on the fact that we have very good schools in the area. I don't know the exact statistics or how this is measured nationally, but I get the impression we have students with better key stage 5 attainment than elsewhere, and these are students that we want to come back to Bracknell ideally after completing university, not when they are having children or retiring, when their net contribution to the economy will be less. I wonder if this is achieved through improving the cultural appeal of Bracknell?</p>	<p><i>The Berkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan endorses and aligns with the need to make the most of the attainment levels in Bracknell.</i></p> <p><i>The action plan identifies to connections with further and higher education providers.</i></p>
	<p>The economy strategy sounds positive but until you improve the basics, I can't see how it works. Walk around Bracknell, see the vandalism and rubbish. Jump at the cars driving way above the speed limit with blowing exhausts and dodge the electric scooters when you are on a narrow pathway. Smell the drugs as you are walking into town and then think if would invest your money here. It seems very sad that there would be a lower than average skills level in Bracknell and education needs to be looked at. There is no point running management training if the basic skills and desire to succeed are not already there. Hopefully good managers can visit schools and excite them about the opportunity to have a great career along the M4 corridor. We live in an area with exciting companies, British as well as global and we really need to build a desire to work for these companies and have a pride in what we do and where we live. We should be inundated with people and companies moving here as geographically it is a great location, with a lovely town centre so why has it been allowed to decline like this! My five-year plan is to move away from the area.</p>	<p><i>Noted</i></p> <p><i>Reference above</i></p> <p><i>Initiatives including Learning to Work, Adviza, Pathways and Ways into Work actively support training and employment opportunities.</i></p>
	<p>There needs to be more focus on training/retraining disabled and older people. Once they are out of the workforce, they have difficulty gaining employment even though they are highly skilled. There needs to be more made from a person's skillset and not just the ability to talk the talk. Too many people with great skills are left without work because the jobs go to the overly confident who often only know how to talk. We also need to encourage neurodiversity and make the most of the talents of neurodivergent people.</p>	<p><i>The Action Plan recognises the value of residents in all regards and promotes the Employment Forum and supported internships to assist younger people and adults with pathways to work.</i></p>

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	<p>The Action Plan lists over 20 'Priorities for action' against the four contributory factors. There is a need to move at pace with many of these actions, especially those that need additional investment in funding and personnel.</p> <p>Partnering with the BID, the ESDP and the Chamber of Commerce would increase the available resource and effort, as would taking full advantage of government funding aimed at achieving business growth, increasing skills and implementing climate change action.</p>	<p><i>Noted.</i></p> <p><i>The strategy action plan draws upon a close collaboration with key stakeholders and will form a central plank of the delivery programme</i></p>
	<p>The ESDP would welcome a 'prioritisation of the priorities', perhaps through the development of an Investment Plan linked to the strategy, such that local authority resource and funding can be used effectively; acknowledging that whilst there are pressures on local authorities to reduce costs, this is not an area where this should be done.</p>	<p><i>These headline thematic priorities will be relocated in the full strategy document</i></p>
	<p>Prioritisation should therefore be given to delivering on-going projects as well as those that will quickly stimulate business growth and investment. The ESDP suggests that the following actions be taken forward as a priority:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delivering the Bracknell Forest Skills and Training Hub which is currently an on-going UK Prosperity Fund project – addressing people, work, and wellbeing actions; • engaging with commercial agents, landlords and developers to promote Bracknell Forest – addressing climate change, infrastructure and connectivity needs; • targeting business support and company relationship building, nurturing of small companies and increasing business start-up support – increasing business competitiveness; and • commitment and support for the renewal of the BID – a Headline Thematic Priority. 	<p><i>Noted</i></p>
	<p>There is little mention of public transport provision, or transport in general, in the report and there is no mention of the local authority's existing or new Local Transport Plan in the list of other strategies and plans having a direct bearing on the economic strategy. The need for better bus provision and more frequent train services to and from Bracknell station are still important, despite the difficulties that local authorities and operators now face in achieving this. There either needs to be a specific priority action on public transport or an explanation as to why they are seen as not important to Bracknell Forest's future economic growth. This also applies to cycling and walking provision.</p>	<p><i>The strategy will reference the links to the emerging LTP and the regional transport provisions including the links to London, Reading and Heathrow.</i></p>

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	<p>SMEs are an extremely important part of Bracknell Forest's growth, especially if some of the large overseas corporates leave the area. Whilst SMEs are included in the Action Plan under the economic performance, and people, work, and wellbeing scorecard summaries, there needs to be a single stronger action for addressing the need to support SMEs, including making Bracknell Forest a 'home' for SMEs, including start-ups. The action should aim to allocate greater resources to the delivery of the needs of SMEs.</p>	<p><i>Noted and will be highlighted in the action plan</i></p>
	<p>It is recommended that monitoring be enhanced through the formation of Steering Group comprising representatives from the business community, the local authority, and other stakeholders, such as Chamber of commerce, ESDP, Education Providers, the BID, LSIP and transport operators.</p>	<p><i>Noted. To be aligned with the reshaping of the ESDP to provide oversight for the strategy action plan</i></p>
	<p>. The future direction for Bracknell Forest's economy on which business can focus needs, however, to be drawn from the Action Plan and channelled into a more succinct message that can easily be understood and communicated to stakeholders</p>	<p><i>This is reflected in the thematic priority, place promotion and destination management.</i></p>
	<p>We are pleased, therefore, to see that the BID is included as a priority in the Headline Thematic Priorities given in in Section 13 of the Summary Report, which states: 'the role and standing of the BID are recognised as critical to the future success of the local economy'. It is then stated that the 'strategy will actively support the BID to deliver its business plan and to secure another term'.</p>	<p><i>Noted</i></p>
	<p>The Economic Strategy forms an important way forward for ensuring Bracknell Forest's continued economic prosperity. The BID would be pleased to discuss how we can assist in delivering the strategy, both in terms of supporting the delivery of activities that form the Action Plan and in meeting the BID's own objectives.</p>	<p><i>Noted</i></p>
	<p>As part of the comments, there is a need, we believe, to highlight the importance that the delivery of the sustainable growth sought by the Economic Strategy is not stifled by restrictive planning policies. Such policies have the potential to dissuade investment, including by foreign owned companies who see the wider Berkshire area, because of its proximity to London Heathrow, as an attractive location. Investors welcome certainty, with clear long-term ambition, where planning regimes and the delivery of infrastructure support their ambitions. We must also encourage and ensure we are planning for economic development and have policies, that enable faster and more positive responses to changes</p>	<p><i>This will be added to the action plan B.C. 1-2</i></p>

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	in business circumstances and investment opportunities.	
	Contained in the draft Economic Strategy are references to, in the Introduction, a “business-friendly planning environment” and an “enterprise-friendly planning regime” at paragraph 7.1. Within the draft Action Plan there is a lack of clarity as to how these aspirations to establish a planning regime in Bracknell Forest to foster economic growth will be implemented. There needs to be clarity of the type which the TVCC is proposing through amendments to the Bracknell Forest Local Plan Main Modifications to create a more favourable planning policy context at the Jealott’s Hill International Research Centre as part of our response to the draft Economic Strategy.	<i>Noted and reflected within the emerging Local Plan</i>
	The draft Economic Strategy at E.P.3 references Bracknell Forest’s knowledge economy being smaller than that of the comparator areas and neighbouring local authorities and appears to be less resilient. There is some degree of specialisation mentioned indicating the presence of nascent clusters (e.g., High-end TV and Film, Scientific Research and Development (R&D) and health and life sciences). There is a recognition that these clusters are not necessarily peculiar to Bracknell Forest and extend across neighbouring local authorities across Berkshire and the Thames Valley and of course nationwide in the context of shaping the UK economy as a science and technology super power.	<i>Noted and highlighted in the action plan</i>
	Therefore, there needs to be greater clarity in the Economic Strategy as to how current or new planning policies will be used to provide the right conditions to encourage more productive, knowledge economy/high productivity businesses to either locate or stay in Bracknell Forest (E.P.2.3). In part, this can be achieved by engaging with companies, such as Syngenta, and developers to enable more provision of light industrial space and space suitable for high tech and creative digital businesses in the specialised sectors, such as the R&D opportunity at Jealott’s Hill. There is a clear link to having a Local Plan which takes a proactive approach to fostering investment in economic development and creating a positive planning policy context for Jealott’s Hill (P.CC.I.C.1.3). This is why TVCC is supportive of modifications to the emerging Local Plan in favour of greater flexibility to foster economic growth at Jealott’s Hill.	<i>Noted</i>
	We support the vision for the overall Economic Strategy, and the four main strategic themes (Economic Performance, Business Competitiveness, People, work and wellbeing, Place, Climate Change, Infrastructure and Connectivity) seek to deliver a balance between	<i>Noted</i>

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	<p>delivering the right strategic themes for Bracknell. The mix of housing in the appropriate locations and securing sustainable economic growth linked to ensure we have the resilient infrastructure (water, electricity, gas, telecommunications, road, rail, etc) in place to support the future needs of the resident and business community. For example, how are the local authority engaging, strategically, with the appropriate authorities to secure the required future power (esp. electricity) needs for its existing business community and to those sight that will attract new investors? This is not a unique issue, for Bracknell Forest, but one that needs addressing. TVCC has previously consulted on this and we refer you back to our previous response here: 12_09_2019_ Bracknell Forest Council Local Plan Consultation & Jealott's Hill (Section 6.5 and Policy LP 7)</p>	
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