



Bob's Blog

Bracknell Forest's Economic Skills & Development Partnership (ESDP)

November 2023

Welcome to the November 2023 edition of Bob's Blog. My Blog is aimed at keeping ESDP Members up to date with what's happening in the Partnership. Please feel free to pass these Blogs on to your colleagues and contacts if they are interested in the work of the ESDP.

ESDP General Meeting and Event

On 17th October the ESDP combined its Autumn Event with its programmed General Meeting with an in-person meeting at **The Capitol Building** in Bracknell's Southern Business Area. The meeting was very well attended by ESDP members, guests and great speakers. The theme of the event was **Bracknell Forest: Growth & Prosperity** and covered the recently completed Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy, the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), the fast-emerging Berkshire Creative Industry and Royal Holloway University of London's new Social Impact Accelerator. **Cllr. Paul Bidwell**, Executive Member for Economic Development and Regeneration opened the meeting; welcoming the publication of the new Economic Strategy - the first for some time - and the positive impact that it is expected to have on the next 10 years of Bracknell Forest's economy. Paul, together with Domonique Unsworth, me, Anna Gratton, Simon Matthews, Paul Scott and Kristina Glushkova are shown above.



Simon Matthews followed Paul in summarising the work undertaken by the Berkshire Local Economic Partnership (LEP) in developing the strategy. The draft report is now available at the following link: [Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy 2024 to 2034 | Bracknell Forest Council \(bracknell-forest.gov.uk\)](#). Four strategic themes have been

identified; economic performance/business competitiveness/people, work and skills/place, climate change, infrastructure and connectivity. It is recognised that Bracknell Forest is a popular place to live, with high levels of well-being and relatively affordable homes, and it's well located, with strong broadband speeds and good levels of sustainability. **Vocational Skills** are a key challenge, with Bracknell Forest heading at the moment towards more lower value employment and a declining knowledge economy. Bracknell Forest has relatively fewer companies within the **knowledge economy** than its neighbours. Bracknell Forest scores lower than neighbours on **business creation and survival**; demonstrating a possible lack of entrepreneurial spirit. Added to this, a high proportion of Bracknell Forest's companies are international, making the need to assure their continued presence in Bracknell Forest extremely important. In addition, **commercial space** will need to be of top quality and of the right kind to address some of these issues.



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. Some of the key actions identified so far include monitoring and supporting the transition to a more knowledge-based economy, reviewing support for an environment for business creation, identifying high-growth businesses and targeting sectors with higher levels of productivity. Also, there is a need to track foreign-owned businesses, with a view to encouraging retention within the area. The strategy identifies the need to support the transition to net-zero and emerging green-tech sectors.



Anna Gration presented the work of the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce in developing the Berkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). Their report identifies the need to create **employer-focused solutions** to improving skill levels, including the development of long-term relationships between local business and training providers to co-develop solutions that positively impact on industry. These include providing a **forum and focus for employers** to gain insights into skills, and for providers to gain insights into priority sectors, and to generate resources and advice for signposting employers to skills. **Road Map Priorities** have been developed for various sectors, including for Health and Life Sciences and the Screen Industries. The next steps include; workforce development **partnership meetings**, producing a **guide on shaping the workforce** and cross-sector skills development. The Berkshire LSIP is available at the following link: [Berkshire Local Skills Improvement Plan \(berkshiresip.co.uk\)](http://berkshiresip.co.uk)



Domonique Unsworth, co-founder and CEO of Berkshire Film Office gave us an overview of the recent growth of the creative Industries in Berkshire. There are now film studios at Winnersh, Slough and Shinfield; with the latter next to the M4 already expanding rapidly. The expansion within Berkshire is creating new and exciting opportunities for local companies to supply services to the industry. Most local authorities in the UK support a local Film Office, and Berkshire's Film office, located in Slough, is supported by all of the six council's in Berkshire. The office has gained funding from sources such as the lottery, Arts Council England and the British Film Industry. It aims to enable social change through art and film, whilst diversifying within the creative industries. The office runs free events and training in Berkshire for all ages. For more information see: [Home - Berkshire Film Office](http://home-berkshirefilmoffice.co.uk) and screenberkshire.co.uk



Paul Scott, Enterprise Manager, and **Kristina Glushkova**, Knowledge Exchange Manager and Innovation Lead, presented Royal Holloway University of London's new **Social Science Impact Accelerator** which aims to build on social science research to create benefits for the region, the UK and internationally by developing strategic partnerships; leading to innovative ideas and skills development. The University is looking to **collaborate with business partners** by providing opportunities that include partner-hosting of an academic expert, sending a member of staff on residency to Royal Holloway and hosting a PhD placement. More information can be found at: [Social Science Impact Accelerator Programme \(royalholloway.ac.uk\)](http://socialscienceimpactacceleratorprogramme.royalholloway.ac.uk)

Thank you to The Capitol Building, Bracknell Forest Council's Economic Regeneration Team, and all who made it a great morning.

Employment & Skills Sub-Group

Dovetailing perfectly with the outcomes of the Economic Strategy and the LSIP, the Employment & Skills Sub-Group's flagship project is the development of a **Skills and Training Hub** for Bracknell Forest. The Hub, which has funding under Bracknell Forest's UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation, has identified the need for more employer-led vocational skills training and closer liaison with local education providers. The Sub-Group, led by **Nancy Lalor**, has provided much of the thinking behind the Hub and several of its members sit on the Steering Group for the project. To accelerate the development of the Hub, **Nikki Burns** has been tasked to undertake a short study into how the Hub would work and who would be involved, and will deliver her report around Christmas time.

Infrastructure Sub-Group

The Infrastructure Sub-Group continues to champion Bracknell Forest Council's **Climate Change Business Strategy** and is to double-up as the **Business Sector Working Group** for the consultation stage of strategy development. The Climate Change Council's Team wants to work with local businesses, particularly SMEs, to dispel the myth that bringing in measures to help mitigate climate changes will be costly. The Sub-Group will also be engaging with Bracknell Forest's **Local Transport Plan** consultation.

General Meetings: The next General meeting for ESDP members and interested businesses is scheduled to be held in **January 2024**.

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