

# Economic Development Strategy

2020- 2023

# DRAFT



West Berkshire  
COUNCIL







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# Foreword



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West Berkshire has a strong, diverse and resilient economy. It forms part of the Thames Valley, the most productive regional economy outside London and effectively blends the economic strengths of the South East with a wide range of environmental assets often more associated with the South-West. Information Communications, Technology and Logistics are key sectors and reflect in part the district's excellent physical and digital connectivity. However, West Berkshire also supports many different businesses of varying sizes along with a significant self-employed workforce.

The Centre for Cities' report 'Talk of the Town' singles out Newbury, West Berkshire's biggest town, as a rare example of a town with a strong and self-sufficient economy which does not rely on links to a neighbouring larger town. Newbury has also been recognised by the Financial Times as a European city of the future as well as the most business friendly small town in the UK. We want to make sure West Berkshire's new and existing businesses have the opportunity to build on this. Factors such as emerging technology, including 5G connectivity, green initiatives, electric and autonomous vehicles and the Internet of Things, will play a major part in this and we plan to facilitate delivery of the infrastructure to support this. Similarly, through our work on the education and training agenda we will work to give the next generation the skills they need to thrive whilst ensuring they have a great environment in which to live.

The West Berkshire Health and Wellbeing Board published its 2036 Vision for the district in 2020 and outlined one of the key themes as 'welcoming business and enterprise'. In the council's own Strategy for 2020-2023 which was published shortly afterwards, the theme of 'open for business' was cited as an underpinning principle for the council's work over the coming 4 years. Both ambitions are reflected in this Economic Development Strategy which is built around the four themes of People, Places, Infrastructure and Business Environment.

This new strategy reflects a refreshed commitment to supporting the economy of West Berkshire. Whilst the area has many strengths we recognise that there is still more to do. This Strategy seeks to focus on these issues and, in particular, those challenges where we feel we can make a real contribution.

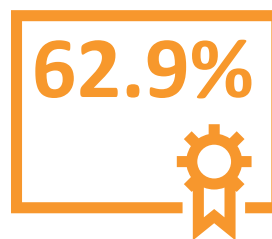
Our commitment is matched with new resources. We will deploy these resources, not only to strengthen our own staffing, but also to support work with our partners. We recognise that we can only remain 'open for business' if we all work together in a coordinated way and what follows is clarity on what we intend to focus on as well as how we will seek to deliver.



# West Berkshire in numbers



Population of  
**157,900**<sup>2</sup>



qualified to  
NVQ3 and  
above<sup>3</sup>



Working age Population<sup>4</sup>

**97,600**

**85.3%**

of the 16-64  
population

economically active<sup>5</sup>



Almost  
**9,000**  
businesses

**74%** Area of  
Outstanding  
Natural Beauty



Unemployment  
**2.7%** (full employment)<sup>6</sup>



Average pay  
**£32,884**  
Per annum<sup>10</sup>

**5,700**



properties  
registered for  
business use.  
More than  
ever before<sup>8</sup>

Healthy life  
expectancy<sup>7</sup>



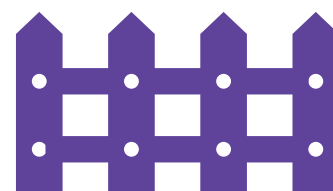
for women for men  
**70.1 66.4**

House prices  
v income ratio<sup>11</sup>

**10.65**



In **bottom half**  
of authorities for  
barriers to services<sup>9</sup>





# A new Economic Development Strategy for West Berkshire

West Berkshire's economy is very much a success story. Continued growth over many years has meant West Berkshire now has one of the strongest economies in the country sitting within the most successful economic region outside London.

The district's connectivity has always been one of its assets. Within easy reach of London and Bristol by the M4, it has also recently seen the railway lines through the district electrified, meaning that London can now be reached in 45 minutes by train. The A34 provides a fast link between the south coast ports and the Midlands, and the Newbury bypass and the new A34/M4 junction are further examples of infrastructure improvements which have made West Berkshire accessible from many parts of the UK.

Digital connectivity has advanced at a similar pace. Virtually all of West Berkshire is now connected to Superfast Broadband and 5G connectivity is also being established across the district, having gone live in Newbury in 2020.

The working and living environment in West Berkshire is also a major attraction to business. Whilst enjoying many of the economic benefits of the Thames Valley, much of the district is designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Good quality schools are available and a University Centre is in the process of being established.

In the context of such success, the council's approach to economic development in the past has been focused on providing the right conditions to sustain relative prosperity. The emphasis has been on the provision of infrastructure and on 'place shaping', most notably around town centres but also on supporting the development of locally based community plans.

Looking ahead, West Berkshire is likely to see much of its recent relative economic success continue. However, this will not come without its challenges, notably;

- a projected reduced rate of population growth – around half that seen over the last 30-40 years;
- a projected reduction in the size of the resident working population as an increasing number of residents retire;
- a growing number of jobs with a reducing number of people to fill them may well cause labour shortages or potentially increased inward commuting assuming workers are available and willing to come to West Berkshire to work. Skill shortages are also a potential risk and are already evident in some sectors;
- West Berkshire's prosperity is not felt by all those who live in the district. Whilst the area has some of the highest economic activity rates in the country, the activity rates within some disadvantaged groups remain very low. Educational attainment shows a similar pattern. Economic inequality and social mobility are real concerns;
- West Berkshire has a highly qualified workforce but recent research has highlighted issues with underemployment which if significant will have an impact on productivity within the district;



- whilst the district has historically been blessed with significant infrastructure investment, the availability of affordable housing remains acute and for some employers is a restriction on future growth. The West Berkshire Local Plan currently suggests that 500-600 homes per year need to be built in West Berkshire to support both population growth and the local economy up to 2036. On average 35% of these should be affordable. The council's new Housing Strategy sets out how this will be achieved;
- future economic growth and development cannot be looked at in isolation from the challenges of climate change. It is essential that West Berkshire moves towards a low carbon economy whilst at the same time delivering the inclusive growth that will be needed to sustain quality of life in the district. The council's new Environment Strategy sets out how this will be addressed.
- the West Berkshire economy is directly linked to both the national economy and the wider international economy. The ongoing challenges within the retail environment is one example of a wider economic trend, as is Brexit and the wider implications associated with the adoption of new technologies. The council has a role in responding to and planning for these.

All of the above trends and issues were highlighted in West Berkshire 2036, a Vision for West Berkshire which was published by the Health and Wellbeing Board in 2020. The commitments created in that document were;

- a West Berkshire where everybody has what they need to fulfil their potential;
- a West Berkshire with a housing mix with something for everyone;
- a West Berkshire that welcomes business, enterprise and industry into a productive, growing and dynamic local economy;
- a West Berkshire where the health and wellbeing of residents of all ages and backgrounds is good;

- a West Berkshire with both beautiful and diverse natural landscapes and a strong cultural offering.

The council embraced this Vision through its own Council Strategy 2020-2023 which was published in May 2020. and identified six priorities for the following four years, all of which are reflected on within this new Economic Development Strategy. They are;

- supporting businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire;
- developing local infrastructure including housing to support and grow the local economy;
- supporting everyone to fulfil their potential;
- ensuring our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes;
- maintaining a green district;
- ensuring sustainable services through innovation and partnerships.

In developing this new Economic Development Strategy for West Berkshire, the council has been cognisant of the aims of the Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy (BLIS). Local Industrial Strategies are being prepared by Local Enterprise Partnerships across the county in support of the national industrial strategy which was published in 2018. Each of these Local Industrial Strategies is based upon the five foundations of productivity, namely **Ideas, People, Places, Infrastructure and Business Environment**.

The council has been actively involved in the preparation of the BLIS. In March 2020 the Framework Document for consultation set out a vision under the heading, 'the Best of Global and Local' and went onto identify the following priorities;

- enhancing productivity within Berkshire's enterprises;
- eco systems which are maturing and evolving and extend beyond Berkshire;
- international trade, connections, collaborations and investments;
- vibrant places and a supportive infrastructure;
- making Berkshire an inclusive area where aspirations can be realised.



The BLIS is a key document and the council will continue to work with the TVLEP to ensure it is implemented. The aim of the West Berkshire Economic Strategy 2020-2023 is not to replicate the BLIS but rather to focus on those areas of activity which will be a particular focus locally here in West Berkshire.

Working to the 2036 West Berkshire Vision, the Council Strategy theme of ‘open for business’ and the foundations of productivity mentioned above, we have developed actions in the four areas seen to have the most relevance locally. These are;

**1. people** – good jobs and greater earning power for all in West Berkshire;

**2. places** – creating prosperous communities across West Berkshire;

**3. infrastructure** – future-proofing West Berkshire’s infrastructure;

**4. business environment** – making West Berkshire the best place to start a grow a business.

The following four chapters set out what we propose to do under each of these themes over the coming four years.

“West Berkshire now has one of the strongest economies in the country sitting within the most successful economic region outside London.”







# People

## Good jobs and greater earning power for all in West Berkshire

In the West Berkshire 2036 Vision we outlined a number of aspirations that would see better educated, more productive communities. These included assisting our young people to develop their digital skills, prioritising STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) subjects, addressing the district's social mobility gap and considering how we can create a more inclusive working environment to help those in certain groups to enter, or re-enter, the workplace. The last two of these are particularly important as the issue of inequality is much more prevalent in West Berkshire than in many other areas of the country; a fact we urgently want to address. In this strategy, we look at how West Berkshire Council can tailor its economic development activities to contribute to these aspirations.

Also in the Vision, we highlighted how the district's demographic profile is shifting, with the number of workers per retired person projected to halve by 2036. Again, we must seek to address this if we are to thrive as a district.

Key to this will be our efforts to attract and retain young people. For too long we have allowed them to reach university age and leave the district as they do not see West Berkshire as a vibrant and, importantly, affordable place for them to begin and progress their career or start a family.

The **Places** chapter looks at how we can deliver the requisite affordable housing and leisure offer to make this a reality. Here, however, we will consider how we can help to deliver the 'West Berkshire where everybody has what they need to fulfil their potential' that we have subscribed to through the 2036 Vision. To do so, we will outline the actions we intend to carry out in two key areas: **inclusive growth** and **skills**.

# Inclusive Growth

## We will:

### Empower everyone to enter the workplace

The West Berkshire 2036 Vision highlighted the need for older workers, those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with mental health issues or learning difficulties to be given the opportunity to participate in the workplace.

We commit to working with our partners to deliver targeted interventions, such as the LEP's Stronger Together Partnership, which is addressing barriers to work through a £1.3m investment, and our own initiatives, such as the pioneering Emotional Health Academy.

There are also opportunities for us to collaborate with the private sector in order to make the workplace more accessible to all. Many local employers, including West Berkshire Council and AWE, are members of the Disability Confident Scheme, which promotes inclusivity in the workplace. There is scope to build on this, particularly through the use of promotional material and the existing work of our Adult Social Care team, to encourage and incentivise more employers to offer opportunities for these groups to enter the workplace.

Similarly, poor mental health can have a major impact on the ability to remain in the workplace and data suggests that this is a greater problem in West Berkshire than in other areas. This is not only damaging for the individuals concerned but also affects labour supply, which is an issue for West Berkshire's businesses. Through our own West Berkshire Wellbeing Service, we will promote the need for increased mental health awareness and mental health first aid training in order to ensure that as many workplaces as possible offer an inclusive working environment.

We will also conduct a review into nursery provision across the district to ensure that the need for childcare is not a barrier to parents wishing to return to work.

### Tackle underemployment

In West Berkshire we have full employment, which is one of the many benefits of a strong local economy. However, the Learning and Work Institute's Youth Opportunity Index, published in late 2018, singles

out West Berkshire as having a particular issue with underemployment, which may involve someone working for fewer hours than they would like or carrying out work that doesn't make best use of their skills. Whilst there are no mechanisms for measuring whether those deemed to be underemployed see this as an issue, the fact remains that some people do wish to work for more hours or in employment they find more fulfilling.

Through tailored careers advice and a more comprehensive range of training opportunities, we will help those facing this challenge to move on in their careers.

## Skills

The Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership's Priority Skills Statement makes clear that, in some sectors, employers are struggling to recruit workers due to an absence of specific skills among the workforce. This is particularly true in the digital, social care and construction industries; all of which are key to our local economy.

## We will:

### Encourage the uptake of apprenticeships

A university education opens up new opportunities and increases earning power. What it isn't, however, is a one size fits all approach to social mobility and this is why we commit to promoting a wider range of education and training opportunities, including T Levels and apprenticeships, so that more people are able to access them.





In order to do so, we will commit to facilitating apprenticeships in every service at West Berkshire Council so that our own workforce more accurately reflects the community it represents, allows for career progression and has the skills it needs for the future. This will also enhance the variety of careers opportunities available in the district whilst creating a more inclusive workplace.

Employers paying the Apprenticeship Levy are now able to transfer up to 25% of their levy payments to another employer, which will allow a wider range of businesses to employ an apprentice. Such a transfer has been done successfully on a small scale, with a local housing association using their levy to provide teaching assistants for one of West Berkshire's academies.

To accelerate this good practice, we will partner with major local employers and the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership to broker an Apprenticeship Levy Fund. This Fund will welcome bids from local organisations who either are too small to pay the levy or who are paying their levy and have been successful in allocating all of their funds to apprenticeships. This will ensure that more Apprenticeship Levy funds raised locally are spent locally, giving more people in West Berkshire better prospects.

### Support Newbury College's University Centre

At the Newbury 2026 Vision Conference in October 2018 Newbury College announced that it was in advanced discussions with a local university and a training provider to explore how this could be developed. Bids for TVLEP funding have also been made, with the support of West Berkshire Council.

In order to support this, the council will engage local businesses and the LEP in the project and offer the college any expert advice it needs as it expands to meet the skills needs of the district.

Once it has been delivered, we will work with the College to place some of its students, whose skills are likely to meet our needs as an authority, within relevant council service areas. Where relevant, we will also facilitate introductions to our suppliers or partners so that they can do the same.

### Help partners to become training providers to meet our skills needs

Through our work with local nurseries and schools, we have identified that there is a need for upskilling in the education sector and for providing a broader range of specialists in West Berkshire who are equipped to deliver the training that will address this. Where suitable partners can be found, we will develop specialised training consortia to close our skills and provision gaps.

### Help to grow digital skills

In the West Berkshire 2036 Vision, a commitment was made to ensuring that our young people are given the skills they need to progress, including coding and computer programming. This is also a key aim of the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership's Priority Skills Statement. Not only will enhancing the availability of provision be invaluable to our young people, but it will also mean our employers will have a wider pool of local digital talent from which to draw further down the line.

Some of this teaching is already taking place in our schools and in our libraries, through coding clubs. We will grow this further, fostering a new generation of digital skills in partnership with the businesses we hope will one day employ our young people.

Whilst this will help us in the future, we recognise that this skills gap exists now. For this reason, we will explore how we can work more closely with partners such as the Jobcentre, local businesses and local day centres to enhance digital skills training provision amongst adults. This is particularly important for many of our elderly residents experiencing social isolation and we believe that undertaking this work will contribute to better wellbeing levels across the district.



### Work with partners to improve Careers Advice

In engaging directly with industry to provide careers advice, including through the West Berkshire Education Business Partnership and our work with the TVBLEP, we will enhance the range of careers advice available across all of our schools and will showcase the excellent range of employment opportunities available in West Berkshire. This will encourage our young people to consider developing their career within the district.

Not only this, but we will provide materials to teachers, parents and pupils to advise them on employment opportunities in the district and will use the Skills and Enterprise Partnership, a sub-group of the Health and Wellbeing Board, to bring together educators and employers to decide collaboratively on the best way to address both the needs of pupils and of the employment market as we move towards a more inclusive local economy.

### Put employment and skills at the heart of all we do

As a local authority, we are well placed to extend the benefits of development and growth to everyone in the community. For this reason, we will, when appropriate weave Employment and Skills Plans in to every major development, ensuring as much as we can that local people are involved in every stage of the project, from build to completion and beyond. This may take the form of apprentices being involved in the build, developers investing in training opportunities or contributing to established community schemes and social enterprises. This maximises the social value of development in the district, contributing to a more inclusive local economy and environment overall.

### Ensure environmental stewardship is integral to the school curriculum

As our Environment Strategy outlines, embedding an understanding of climate change into teaching in our schools from a very early age is important if we are to ensure that our young people are equipped to become custodians of our natural environment and to carry out the green jobs of the future.

**By realising these ambitions, we will have contributed to the creation of an inclusive, skilled West Berkshire where communities work and grow together as outlined in the West Berkshire 2036 Vision**

“We committed to a number of aspirations that would see better educated, more productive communities”







# Places

## Prosperous communities

In the West Berkshire 2036 Vision, we made a commitment to making West Berkshire a place where everybody has the opportunity to thrive and fulfil their potential in a high quality and safe environment.

Fulfilling this aspiration will require work to ensure that more housing of the right type in the right locations and of the correct tenure is available to residents so that it meets local needs. This must be balanced with our commitment to delivering well-planned, well-connected communities with thriving urban areas and high quality rural ones. We will need to ensure that the leisure, education and community facilities complement this housing so that we create an even greater place to live, work, relax and do business.

From busy town centres, to the gallops in Lambourn, to world class digital tech facilities, West Berkshire's businesses operate in a diverse range of locations.

This chapter explores how through carefully considered planning, we can:

- help our communities to shape their own places
- Use the Local Plan to encourage inclusive growth
- Reshape our town centres
- Promote the AONB as a living, working landscape
- Enhance the district's cultural and leisure offering

Under these headings, the following actions will ensure that West Berkshire continues to be a great place to live, work and do business.



## We will:

### Help communities to shape their own places

In the West Berkshire 2036 Vision we reflected on the fact that in some areas, particularly in rural parts of the district, access to services is challenging and that work must be done to ensure all of our communities are able to play their part in the district's future. As we set out at the beginning of this document, we do not wish to take a prescriptive approach as we do so. Instead, we will work with our parishes across the district on their Neighbourhood Development Plans so that locations for development can be identified and community-led economic growth promoted widely.

### Use the Local Plan to plan for a cohesive district

The **east of West Berkshire** has particularly strong economic links to Reading and therefore may be where there will be significant new housing and infrastructure development. We will work in partnership with our neighbouring authorities and others to deliver sustainable low carbon development with a strong sense of community, as well as great employment opportunities for its residents.

**Theale**, located at Junction 12 of the M4, is of particular economic importance as it is the location of Arlington Business Park, which houses the international headquarters of a number of firms, as well as some creative, and rapidly growing, small and medium sized businesses. We will support Theale as a prime location for business by protecting its status as an important employment location through our planning processes and will work with partners to enhance the infrastructure and offering there to attract other businesses to the town.

The **Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE)** has two bases in this area, at Aldermaston and Burghfield. AWE is an important provider of local jobs but its location has implications for the future level of development in the surrounding area. We will consider how we can support sustainable growth on these sites, ensuring that AWE's status as a world leader in innovation and employment opportunities is allowed to grow.

We will focus on town centre masterplanning in **Thatcham** and will seek external investment for this purpose. This would ensure that infrastructure and town centre facilities can be upgraded to meet the demands and ambitions of Thatcham Town Council and the town's residents and businesses.

**Newbury** which was recognised recently as having more economic potential than any other UK small town, will continue to be a major focus for development in the district up to 2036 with the re-development of Market Street and the regeneration of London Road Industrial Estate, which will increase the vibrancy of the town. This will be facilitated by a town centre masterplanning exercise, undertaken by independent consultants in conjunction with the local community. We will then work in collaboration with the Newbury Business Improvement District (BID), the LEP and Newbury Town Council to deliver sustainable, attractive projects of which the district can be proud.

In **Hungerford**, we will work with stakeholders including Hungerford Town Council, Network Rail and Great Western Railway to consider how the town's aspirations can be realised, including for the area surrounding the station. We will also work with the Chamber of Commerce to highlight the town's unique offer as a thriving retail centre with a variety of exciting independent retailers.

We commit to address this through better use of technology, including through the Internet of Things as part of the Smart Cities project, so that where our people live does not affect their chances of securing employment and opportunities.





## Reshape our town centres

The changing role of town centres has been well-documented. Footfall nationally has declined in the face of online shopping and the future is likely to see our town centres used for a wider variety of activities, including office, leisure and experiential uses. This is also a key theme of the BLIS, which highlights the increasing importance of effective placemaking to our economic prosperity.

Starting first in Newbury, our largest town, and moving elsewhere as resources allow; we will undertake work and research to determine how the future of our high streets is likely to look and what we can do as a council to facilitate this.

We also recognise that running an independent business can be particularly challenging and are committed to raising awareness of the importance of supporting all of our town centres and independent businesses in our district through direct support, communications and campaigning activities.

This work is not something that we can do alone. We will drive these ambitions, working with stakeholders such as the Newbury Business Improvement District, the Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company, TVBLEP and others.

**“We committed to making West Berkshire a place where everybody has the opportunity to thrive and fulfil their potential in a high quality and safe environment”**

## Promote the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty’s status as a living and working landscape

The North Wessex Downs AONB is a nationally protected landscape and is West Berkshire’s biggest environmental asset. Covering 74% of the district, from Hungerford and Lambourn in the west to Pangbourne in the east together with Bradfield Southend, Chieveley, Compton, Great Shefford, Hermitage and Kintbury.

Our approach to development will continue to reflect our duty to protect this asset whilst balancing the need to ensure the vitality of our rural communities and economy through well-planned infrastructure.

We recognise that the current financial climate can be challenging, particularly for our rural businesses, which is why we intend to assist them to diversify where appropriate to increase their income potential. Many of our businesses and local estates have already managed to do this with great success and we will work with the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP to help others follow suit.

One of the strongest rural industries in West Berkshire is the racehorse industry. We are home to a world class racecourse in Newbury and the ‘Valley of the Racehorse’ (Lambourn) which is worth over £22m each year to our economy and employs over 700 people. We will further improve links with the industry, carefully considering how we can help to deliver a setting that allows it to develop at pace as an integral part of the rural landscape.

## Enhance our leisure and cultural offering

The perceived weakness of our leisure offering has been anecdotally expressed as a barrier to younger people choosing West Berkshire as a place to live, work and learn.

To reflect the importance of this in retaining young people, contributing to positive wellbeing and making West Berkshire a great place to live, the council will work with partners to develop new Culture and Leisure Strategies.

**Through our work with partners, our parishes and our businesses, we will assist with the delivery of the well-planned, well-housed and cohesive communities as set out in the West Berkshire 2036 Vision and the Council Strategy 2020-2023**



# Infrastructure

## Future Proofing our infrastructure

Effective strategic infrastructure, is key if we are to deliver the aspirations laid out in the West Berkshire 2036 Vision and, consequently, this strategy.

The identification, funding and provision of this physical, social and environmental infrastructure will ensure that West Berkshire will thrive economically. It is the reliability of local transport networks, the security and cost of energy, the affordability of housing, the resilience of local utility services and digital connectivity that will be critical to local people and businesses in the years to come. This infrastructure should be well-planned, unlocking the district's potential and contributing to an inclusive environment in which we are proud to work and live.

As set out in the Places chapter, this strategy is interwoven with the Local Plan Review to 2036 which will focus the location of new development based upon the Plan's spatial strategy. Physical infrastructure will need to adapt to and complement future development proposals, which will be achieved through the development of an Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) which we will implement in collaboration with our partners. The key parts of this IDP are likely to be:

- Green infrastructure
- Digital infrastructure
- Housing
- Transport, including road, rail and cycling



## Through the delivery of this strategy we will:

### **Improve our green infrastructure and create a low carbon future for West Berkshire.**

In July 2020, West Berkshire Council declared a Climate Emergency and committed to working towards carbon neutrality by 2030. An integral part of delivering this will be in the implementation of our Environment Strategy 2020-2030.

As well as measures to boost recycling, protect our natural environment and address the district's carbon budget, the Environment Strategy includes plans to ensure the delivery of sustainable utilities, offer support to businesses wishing to adopt green initiatives and invest in green infrastructure, including public transport and flood defences.

We will respond to climate change mitigation targets and the district's vulnerability to flooding and rising consumption of finite resources, and seek to minimise carbon emissions by locating major developments in the most sustainable locations.

We will also do all we can to minimise the impact of our own buildings on the environment and assist residents and businesses to do the same whilst considering new ways of generating energy. We have recently invested a significant amount into solar panels across the district and will look to work on similar projects as funding allows.

### **Future-proof our digital infrastructure**

Throughout this strategy, reference is made to the importance of the digital technology industry in West Berkshire, now and in the future. Central to this is the need to ensure that even better digital infrastructure is in place to further enhance the district's already excellent offer.

The Superfast Berkshire project, which West Berkshire Council leads, has delivered almost 100% superfast broadband coverage across West Berkshire in recent years. A key priority for this project in future years is likely to be the installation of full fibre across Berkshire. At present 12% of businesses and residents have access to 'full fibre' and it is hoped to significantly increase this over the period of this Strategy.

We will encourage the deployment of 5G, or other relevant emerging technology, across the whole of West Berkshire, not just the urban parts. We will seek to ensure that the Government's 5G Testbeds and Trials programme includes West Berkshire, and will participate in bids to achieve this to ensure that rurality is not a barrier to business success and access to digital services.

Through the emerging Local Plan, we will include plans to require the installation of gigabit capability in all new builds in urban areas and all developments of over 10 homes across the district, subject to viability.



### **Redress the district's housing mix**

The shortage of affordable housing is a particular problem, which has implications for workforce availability and the economic sustainability of our district. The affordability and accessibility of housing is also key if we are to attract and retain young people in West Berkshire whilst meeting the needs of the whole population. The council's Local Plan Review and Housing Strategy will outline what we will do in order to achieve this.

Through our Housing Strategy, we will review the need for further provision to be made for key workers. We will also consider how we can provide affordable housing to those who work in the care industry so that they can afford to live as well as work in the district and will work hard to try to attract a provider of rented accommodation specifically for single young professionals to West Berkshire.

## Enhance our transport infrastructure

The council will develop a new Local Transport Plan, which will outline how our roads, rail, pedestrian and cycle ways can be improved in order to meet the demands of the future. Among the actions currently being considered are:

### Roads

Given the Government's commitment that almost all vehicles will be electric by 2035 as well as emerging technology in autonomous vehicles, we must ensure that the infrastructure is in place to support them. In doing so, we will help to reduce carbon emissions, reduce congestion and make travel smarter.

The council will seek to develop further use of Intelligent Transport Systems, including intelligent roads and bridges, to help manage transport networks and to provide better information to transport users.

Additional public charge points will be installed at safe, convenient and sustainable locations throughout the district, including in on-street residential settings, to minimise barriers to charging for those who wish to use electric vehicles.

To demonstrate our own commitment to this we will increase the percentage of our existing car club vehicles as well as others in our fleet that are electric.

### Rail

Improvements to our railway stations are already underway, with the benefits of electrification having delivered additional services to central London and a £ 6 million redevelopment at Newbury Station starting in 2020. As funding allows, we will extend this to other stations so that as many people as possible are able to take advantage of enhanced rail connectivity.

### Cycling

In recent years, we have seen significant investment in our cycling infrastructure. In line with our commitments in the Environment Strategy, and in order to increase the number of travel modes available to residents and workers in the district, we will further expand this in the future.

**It is our hope that in realising these ambitions, we will have contributed to the creation of a high tech, well-connected West Berkshire that is open for business.**



“In recent years, we have seen significant investment in our cycling infrastructure. In line with our commitments in the Environment Strategy, and in order to increase the number of travel modes available to residents and workers in the district...”





# Business Environment

## The best place to start and grow a business

The council plays a major role in the local economy. It is one of the district's biggest employers and is a key local influence due to its regulatory functions (such as planning and licensing), its collection of business rates, ownership of leisure and cultural facilities as well as its delivery of services to residents such as waste collection, road maintenance, education and social care.

How we as a council can help to create the 'West Berkshire that welcomes business, enterprise and industry into a productive, growing and dynamic local economy' that partners subscribed to in the West Berkshire 2036 Vision is key to the delivery of this strategy. In order to do so, we must:

- Create an environment that helps businesses to start up
- Ensure existing businesses are able to grow
- Promote West Berkshire as an inward investment destination
- Be a business-friendly council
- Foster relationships and networks

This is not something we will deliver alone. We will commit to funding the emerging Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company (EDC), which will play a leading role in this work, making West Berkshire the go to destination for businesses. In order to do this, together.

## We will:

### Create an environment that helps start-ups and existing small businesses to grow

We want to do all we can to encourage businesses to start up and to help them to expand. For this reason, we will develop a clear **package of business support** that will act as a **one stop shop** for our businesses. We will work directly with business owners to ensure this is tailored to each of the sectors operating in the district. This will allow as many businesses as possible to take advantage of this service.

Furthermore, we are members of the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership, who provide specialised business advice services through the Berkshire Growth Hub. This includes courses for start-ups, accelerator programmes for high growth businesses, information sessions on marketing and advice about access to finance. By referring our businesses to the programme, we will help them to develop the skills they need to grow.

With the growing profile of the **green agenda** and the need to move towards carbon neutrality, many new green businesses are emerging. Across our district there are examples of businesses taking responsibility and showing leadership on this issue and grasping the market opportunities arising from a low carbon global economy.

The policy decisions we make and the infrastructure we provide should enable our businesses to grow in a responsible and sustainable way. To support this, facilities such as remote working, a wider range of travel options and access to sustainable utilities will be made readily available to them. Equally, the existing support offered to businesses through our work with the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership will help new and existing green businesses to grow and develop within the district.



The Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership has undertaken research into the availability of **incubator space** for early stage businesses and has highlighted that West Berkshire is lacking such facilities. It is felt that such facilities may boost opportunities for start-ups and growing businesses who require flexible, good value spaces for their fledgling enterprises. We will therefore develop a business case to establish whether there is a need to convert space that has gone unused for some time into incubator and shared working space. We will also, through the Local Plan Review, consider how the planning process might assist in facilitating the delivery of such space across the district.

### Remain the most business-friendly council

West Berkshire is already a great place to do business, with Newbury being recognised as the most business friendly small town in the UK. In the West Berkshire 2036 Vision, we showed a strong commitment to economic development and recognised its importance to the district's future if we are to build on this.

**Business rate relief** has proven effective as both an incentive for new businesses and a helping hand for existing ones. West Berkshire Council already provides businesses with a variety of business rate relief schemes with good results. As part of our ongoing drive to support more and more businesses, we will regularly review our relief schemes and consider, where affordable, whether they can be expanded. In line with our commitment to inclusive growth, we intend to target this where possible at firms who demonstrate a commitment to an inclusive local economy and who can evidence the social value they contribute.

We will also ensure that our own processes do not place an unnecessary burden on those who choose West Berkshire as the location in which to run their business.

West Berkshire Council has decided to reflect this prioritisation by applying new resource in its economic development function and developing the services provided by the **Public Protection Partnership**. Furthermore, it is restructuring teams within its Planning and Development service to consider economic development consequences more closely in its decision making.



The council's **planning** policies will facilitate and support a strong, diverse and sustainable economic base across the district. Through the Local Plan Review we will continue to ensure sufficient sites are provided in the right locations to foster sustainable economic growth, and the district's Protected Employment Areas will continue to play a vital role in maintaining a portfolio of suitable sites to meet future demand.

In 2018, West Berkshire Council worked with Greenham Trust to produce a successful Local Development Order for Greenham Business Park. This LDO offers those wishing to relocate to the Park the opportunity to create bespoke premises in which to grow their business through a simplified planning process. We will continue to promote this LDO and look to implement other similar initiatives to boost our economy, where appropriate.

As a local authority, we **procure** a great deal of goods and services as well as works as part of major spending through our Capital Programme. We will support our local SMEs and voluntary and community sector organisations by providing guidance about how they may form consortia bids with their peers to deliver value. Furthermore, we will hold local events pre-tender to provide them with opportunities to understand future requirements.

We will encourage SMEs and voluntary community sector organisations to bid for contracted work at a scale that is appropriate to their capacity and capability and hold periodic supplier forums for specific areas of purchasing such as adult social care to ensure that there is good understanding in the market about current requirements and developments in the sector to aid contract delivery.

We will also, as part of our commitment to inclusive growth, seek to encourage bidding from businesses who share our aspirations towards inclusive growth and social value-friendly practice including the opportunities available to their own workforces, payment of the Real Living Wage to its employees and their environmental sustainability records.

### **Promote West Berkshire as an inward investment destination**

West Berkshire has many assets. What it does not have, however, is a clear brand identity that is recognisable to those who do not live in, or at least close to, the district. Arguably, this is a difficult

concept to develop as the area is diverse and offers excellent prospects across a wide range of industries.

The Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company will partner with us to address this issue. Together, we will work to attract new businesses to West Berkshire by promoting available land in the district and offering a 'soft-landing service' to potential new movers to the area whilst assisting existing businesses with their future growth plans.

The EDC will also work with the various volunteer groups and networks it has established to create events which help promote the local area for the benefit of all of those who live and work here.

Although the form this will take is still unknown, we are confident that the range of stakeholders involved with the project will give us the best possible chance of success.

### **Foster relationships and networks**

We know we aspire to be business-friendly and that we are ready to help but this is irrelevant if the business community doesn't know it too.

An important part of this is getting out and about in the community, meeting businesses and gathering their views. We will do this even more often, including during our annual budget setting when we will host an engagement event for our businesses. It is therefore our intention to continue developing these activities, ensuring that our engagement is innovative and tailored to the individual needs of those we meet.

Moving forward, we as a council will seek to further increase our use of social media across a wider range of platforms so that we are able to engage with businesses in a more dynamic way and will also contribute to a comprehensive programme of networking events for our businesses, to be organised by the Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company.

**It is our hope that in delivering these ambitions, together with the the Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company, we will have created the best possible environment in which our businesses are able to thrive.**

# Delivering the Strategy

West Berkshire is an ambitious district and must be well-prepared for the future. Ensuring that we are is not the role of West Berkshire Council alone. For this reason, it is our intention to continue to work with our partners, including the TVLEP and the Chamber of Commerce to realise the objectives and programmes we have outlined. We will also continue to work with the Newbury Business Improvement District and local councils, particularly to support our own place shaping aspirations and those of our local communities.

To support the Delivery Plan, the council is intending to recruit an additional post into its Economic Development Team. We also, subject to appropriate governance agreements being put into place, intend to provide financial support to the Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company as we see them as a key partner in delivering a number of the aspirations outlined in this strategy. We have highlighted within the attached Delivery Plan where we feel our joint working would be most beneficial.

In the coming years, a range of factors, both within our control and otherwise, will influence the future course of West Berkshire. Demographics will change, the implications of national political change will be manifested and trends will come and go. In realising the ambitions in this strategy, we will have ensured that we are as well-positioned as possible to remain on a course that benefits all of our residents and businesses.

Number	EDS Chapter	Strategic aim	Linked Council Strategy Priority(ies)	Link to BLIS Theme	Action(s)	Responsible organisation	Governance Group	Resource	KPI/Measures	Q1 2020	Q2 2020	Q3 2020	Q4 2020
1	People-Inclusive Growth	Create a more inclusive working environment	Support everyone to fulfil their potential Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes	People, Priority Skills Statement	Promotional campaign around disability confident scheme West Berkshire Wellbeing courses World of Work programme	WBC	Economic Development Board Workforce Board	Economic Development Team, Post 16 Team, West Berkshire Wellbeing	Reduction in number of NEETs Promotion scheme established by Q4 2020 3 businesses referred to WBW courses per quarter				
2	People- Skills	Encourage uptake of apprenticeships across West Berkshire	Support everyone to fulfil their potential Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships	People, Priority Skills Statement	Create a Community Apprenticeship Levy Fund	WBC or TVBLEP	Economic Development Board Workforce Board	Economic Development Team, Workforce Board	WBC to recruit 10 businesses to Apprenticeship Levy Fund 15 apprenticeships created				
3	People- Skills	Encourage uptake of apprenticeships at West Berkshire Council	Support everyone to fulfil their potential	People, Priority Skills Statement	Create workplace apprenticeships at WBC	WBC	Workforce Board	Strategy and Governance	WBC to create 24 apprenticeships annually including 9 for low employment groups				
4	People- Skills	Support the university centre at Newbury College	Support everyone to fulfil their potential Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships	Ideas, People, Priority Skills Statement	Create placements for Social Care students Work with Newbury College on Employment and Skills Plans	WBC	Economic Development Board	Economic Development Team, HR Support	100% of ESP to consider needs of UCN construction students Assistance with funding bid submissions for expansion plans as appropriate				
5	People- Skills	Ensure comprehensive careers advice is available	Support everyone to fulfil their potential Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships	People, Priority Skills Statement	Deliver tailored careers advice Deliver a more comprehensive range of training opportunities Showcase employment opportunities available in the district at a careers fair or similar event through SEP/NWBEDC Rebadge Skills and Enterprise Partnership as an employer/educator forum	WBC, TVBLEP, Education Business Partnership, Skills and Enterprise Partnership	Skills and Enterprise Partnership	Economic Development Team	Delivery of annual careers fayre Renewed ToR for Skills and Enterprise Partnership TBA WBC work experience programme established by Q3 2021				
6	People- Skills	Improve digital skills provision	Support everyone to fulfil their potential Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships	People, Priority Skills Statement	Expand coding club provision Bid for funding for equipment	WBC		Economic Development Team, Libraries, Schools Improvement Team	Funding bid submitted by Q2 2021 Partnership with local day centre established for adult training by Q3 2021 3 employers recruited as volunteers by Q2 2021				
7	People- Skills	Achieving skills legacy from major development	Support everyone to fulfil their potential Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships	People, Priority Skills Statement, Infrastructure	Embed Employment and Skills Plans into major applications	WBC	Economic Development Board	Economic Development Team	ESP delivered for 100% of large developments				



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1	Places-Help communities to shape their own places	Ensure that Economic Development consequences are considered in the planning process	Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy	Places, People, Infrastructure	Offer consultation advice and/or responses on all major non-residential planning applications	WBC	Economic Development Board	Planning Policy Team	95% of all Major Non Residential Applications to have a Economic Development response to the planning application consultation				
2	Places- Local Plan	Ensure that adequate employment land is identified in the Local Plan to 2036	Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire	Places, Business Environment, Ideas, Infrastructure	Produce HELAA and promote sites that are recommended for development	WBC	Economic Development Board	Planning Policy Team, Economic Development Team	The promotion of suitable employment policies in the local plan at every stage of the process until adoption.				
3	Places- Town centres	Promote West Berkshire as a business destination and inform the business community of development within Newbury	Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire	Places	Host regular New in Newbury Conferences	WBC	Economic Development Board	Economic Development Team	Annual conference delivered				
4	Places- Town Centres	Plan for the future of Newbury Town Centre	Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire	Places	Prepare Masterplan for Newbury Town Centre London Road Industrial Estate	WBC	Economic Development Board	Economic Development Team	Plan delivered by Q2 2021 Projects contained delivered (dates to TBA)				
5	Places- Town Centres	Plan for the future of Thatcham Town Centre	Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire	Places	Submit LGF bids where available Submit High Street Fund bids where available	WBC, TTC	Economic Development Board	Economic Development Team, Planning Policy Team	Bids submitted Projects completed subject to funding				
6	Places- Town Centres	Plan for the future of Hungerford Town Centre including Station and surrounding area	Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy	Places	Submit LGF bids where available Submit High Street Fund bids where available	WBC, HTC, Hungerford Neighbourhood Development Group		Economic Development Team	Bids submitted Projects contained delivered TBA				
7	Places- Town Centres	Promote independent businesses in town centres as a retail destinations	Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire	Places, Business Environment	Hold Small Business Saturday events Develop marketing campaigns for town centres	WBC, Newbury BID, NTC, HTC, TTC, TPC	Economic Development Board	Economic Development Team, Graphics	Decline in vacancy rates, position on retail index maintained, retaining footfall, Business rates receipts increase				
8	Places- Rural and AONB	Support and encourage rural diversification including racehorse industry	Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire	Places, Business Environment, Ideas	Join and contribute to WIRE Establish regular meetings with rural businesses, including the Estates and Newbury and District Agricultural Society	WBC, TVBLEP, Berkshire Growth Hub	Economic Development Board	Economic Development Team	Rural network established by Q1 2021				
9	Places- Culture and Leisure	Create new Culture and Leisure Strategies	Maintain a green district Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy	Places	Produce and implement a new Cultural Strategy Produce and implement a new Leisure Strategy	WBC	Place directorate	Public Protection and Culture	Strategies to be delivered by date agreed on Forward Plan				

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	Infrastructure- 1 Digital	Further improve digital infrastructure, including 5G	Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy	Infrastructure, Ideas, Business Environment	Promote the availability of gigabit capability in every development through the Local Plan WBC to lead on Superfast Berkshire Smart Cities Project Bid for Rural 5G Test Bed Status	WBC, TVBLEP	Economic Development Board Berkshire Digital Infrastructure Group, Planning Advisory Group	Economic Development Team, Planning Policy Team	Delivery of associated projects Completed bid to DCMS New policies in Local Plan review Level of coverage 98.7% by Q3 2020. Further timescales and projects to reach 100% to be established by Berkshire Digital Infrastructure Group				
	Infrastructure- 2 Housing	Enable the construction of more affordable housing, including affordable rented accommodation for young professionals	Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy	Infrastructure	Delivery and implementation of a new Housing Strategy Sovereign JV	WBC, TVBLEP, Sovereign	Housing Board	Housing Team	Targets contained in housing strategy including average 35% affordable- key worker in narrative				
	3 Infrastructure- Rail	Improve rail infrastructure	Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy	Places, Infrastructure	Newbury Station improvements Thatcham, Theale and Hungerford railway stations Market Street Development	WBC	Economic Development Board, Transport Advisory Group	Market Street Development Project Team, Planning Policy Team, Economic Development Team, Transport Policy Team	Railway station projects completed				
	Infrastructure- 4 Cycling	Improve cycling infrastructure	Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy	Places, Infrastructure	New Local Transport Plan, Environment Strategy	WBC	Environment Board	Planning Policy Team, Economic Development Team, Transport Policy Team	A4 cycle lane plus further strategic network improvements as funding allows				
	Infrastructure- 5 Green	Increase availability of green infrastructure	Maintain a green district Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy	Infrastructure, Energy Strategy	Environment Team to confirm post-consultation	WBC, TVBLEP	Environment Board	Environment Team	To be advised by Environment Team/Environment Strategy Delivery Plan				
	Infrastructure- 6 Green	Encourage uptake of greener modes of transport	Maintain a green district Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy	Places, Infrastructure, Energy Strategy	Increase car club fleet Deploy EV Charging Points	WBC	Transport Advisory Group	Transport Policy Team	Measured decrease in congestion Delivery of transport schemes Additional charging points installed WBC fleet 100% ULEV by 2030				



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1	Business Environment- Start ups	Help start up businesses to develop and grow	Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy	Business Environment, Ideas	Develop incubator space business case Develop a soft landing business support package	TVBLEP, Newbury West Berkshire EDC	Newbury West Berkshire EDC, TVBLEP	Economic Development Team	Business birth rate and business death rate to remain steady Vacancy rate to decline No decline in footfall Business support package in place by Q1 2021 Inward investment strategy delivered by Q2 2021 Governance and Terms of Reference in place by Q3 2020 Business case demonstrating need for incubator space to be developed by Q4 2021				
2	Business Environment- Existing businesses	Offer support to existing businesses	Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire	Business Environment, Ideas	Develop a soft landing business support package	Newbury West Berkshire EDC	Newbury West Berkshire EDC	Economic Development Team	As above plus 30 businesses to be referred to Berkshire Growth Hub each quarter, including 5 to the scale up programme				
3	Business Environment- Business friendly council	Ensure our regulatory functions act as enablers for businesses	Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy	Business Environment	Consider how we can improve our own procurement to promote local businesses Use the planning process to enhance strategic employment sites eg LDOs PPP Undertake regular business rate reviews Meet the professionals engagement events	WBC	Economic Development Board	Economic Development Team, Development & Planning, Public Protection Partnership, Revenues & Benefits	Annual business rates review to take place as part of budget setting Six monthly 'Meet the professional' sessions held Annual 'Meet the buyer' event to be held				
4	Business Environment- Networks	Develop a business engagement and networking events programme	Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships	Business Environment, Ideas	Hold regular, targeted events	Newbury West Berkshire Economic Development Company	Newbury West Berkshire EDC	Economic Development Team	6 networking events hosted annually including 2 sector-based sessions Number of attendees to increase by 10% per quarter Number of companies as members to increase by 15 per quarter High growth in social media reach and content Evidence that geographical spread of businesses involved in NWBto be extended beyond Newbury				

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People- Inclusive Growth	Tackle underemployment	Support everyone to fulfil their potential Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes	People, Priority Skills Statement	TBA	WBC	Economic Development Board	Economic Development Team, Post 16 Team	TBA				
Infrastructure- Roads	Improve road infrastructure	Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy	Places, Infrastructure	TBA	WBC	Environment Board	Planning Policy Team, Economic Development Team, Transport Policy Team	Measure of congestion Smart motorways project delivered Car patronage				
Infrastructure- Green	Encourage uptake of greener modes of transport	Maintain a green district Develop local infrastructure, including housing, to support and grow the local economy	Places, Infrastructure, Energy Strategy	Public Transport enhancements	WBC	Transport Advisory Group	Transport Policy Team	Public transport measure TBA				
People- Skills	Support the university centre at Newbury College	Support everyone to fulfil their potential Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships	Ideas, People, Priority Skills Statement	Create placements for Social Care students Work with Newbury College on Employment and Skills Plans	WBC	Economic Development Board	Economic Development Team, HR Support	TBA number of students placed in ASC				





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