

Economic Development Strategy

2019- 2036



West Berkshire
C O U N C I L



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Foreword



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West Berkshire's local economy is strong, resilient and diverse. Part of the Thames Valley Turbo Economy, the strongest regional economy outside of London, the district has an incredible amount to offer businesses and residents with excellent digital connectivity, key strategic transport links, world class training opportunities and representation from a wide range of industries.

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. We want to make sure West Berkshire's businesses have the opportunity to build on this. Factors such as emerging technology, including 5G connectivity, electric and autonomous vehicles and the Internet of Things will play a huge 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 be giving the next generation the skills they need to thrive whilst ensuring they have a great environment in which to live. It will be this that will drive West Berkshire to bigger and better things in the coming years.

The Health and Wellbeing Board's West Berkshire 2036 Vision document articulates many challenges that are likely to be faced in the future if we are to maintain our position as an economically strong area. Key amongst these challenges is the projected demographic shift in the district which suggests that there will only be two working age people for every retired person instead of four as there are now. This statistic is startling and is one that is likely to shape much of what we do in the coming years. This strategy details how West Berkshire Council and its partners will continue to meet these challenges.

This strategy is not intended to be prescriptive. Quite the opposite. Instead, we are committed to enabling our innovators and to ensuring that West Berkshire is and continues to be a great place to live, work and learn as well as the best place to do business.

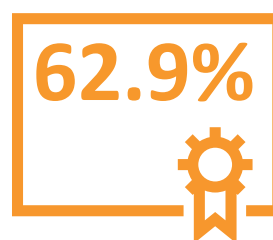
Our newly formed Economic Development Board will oversee this strategy, implementing an action plan that will allow us to fulfil the ambitions it sets out.

We are open for business.

West Berkshire in numbers



Population of
157,900²



qualified to
NVQ3 and
above³



Working age Population⁴

97,600

85.3%

of the 16-64
population

economically active⁵



Almost
9,000
businesses

74% Area of
Outstanding
Natural Beauty



Unemployment

2.7% (full employment)⁶



Average pay

£32,884

Per annum¹⁰

5,700



properties
registered for
business use.
More than
ever before⁸

Healthy life
expectancy⁷



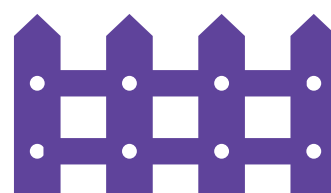
for women for men
70.1 66.4

House prices
v income ratio¹¹

10.65



In **bottom half**
of authorities for
barriers to services⁹



SWOT Analysis

What are our strengths?

- Home to almost 9000 businesses
 - Relatively self-sufficient economy with roughly equal flows of in and out commuting in relation to those who both live and work in the district.
 - AONB- SW vs SE lifestyle/economy
 - Excellent digital connectivity
 - Locational advantages
 - Strong digital tech sector
 - Well qualified workforce
 - Diverse economy across a number of sectors
 - Attractive location to start up
-

What are our weaknesses?

- Lack of tangible brand
- Housing affordability
- Ageing population
- Social mobility gap as per Social Mobility Commission report
- Skills gap as per TVBLEP priority skills statement
- Those from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to be in work
- The Learning and Work Institute's Youth Opportunity Index, published in late 2018, singles out West Berkshire as having a particular issue with underemployment.
- High job density leading to recruitment challenges

Opportunities

- World class apprenticeships (for example, AWE) and the opportunity to expand this.
 - Improvements to the A34 present an opportunity for greater north south connectivity.
 - Grazeley/Sandleford/ developments at strategically important locations
 - Sharing our data, which would make the area more attractive for new and existing businesses.
-

Threats

- Declining working age population
 - National political uncertainty
 - Reliance on major employers
 - Recruitment challenges in some sectors
-

Notable achievements to date

- Emotional Health Academy
- Greenham LDO
- Small Business Saturday
- Market St Development started
- The West Berkshire Education Business Partnership and the TVBLEP already working closely with some of our businesses to deliver innovative vocation-focussed experiences for our young people. These give them the chance to understand more closely what a given career path entails and what it is likely to offer.
- We are proud of the progress we have made to date and the fact that Think Broadband has singled West Berkshire out as having the best rural broadband in the UK. The district is living proof that it is possible for residents and businesses to have the benefit of both excellent broadband speeds and beautiful countryside.
- Recognised by Tech Nation as the 'Top Tech' Town
- Secured funding for LEP projects (MS, Train Station, College Solutions Lab etc)
- Electrification

A new Economic Development Strategy for West Berkshire

In the West Berkshire 2036 Vision we committed to creating:

- 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**

This strategy supports the aims of the Vision. In doing so, it takes into account the diversity of West Berkshire, both geographically and economically, and focuses closely on how all areas, people and industries can seek to benefit from what it contains.

The Government's Industrial Strategy was published in 2018 and set out what the UK should do to boost productivity by backing businesses to create good jobs and increase the earning power of people throughout the UK with investment in skills, industries and infrastructure. Supplementary to this will be the Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy (BLIS), which identifies how this aim can be implemented across the Thames Valley Berkshire LEP area. In line with the stated aims of the BLIS, we have chosen to focus on four major areas to facilitate this at district level:

People - Good jobs and greater earning power for all in West Berkshire

This chapter will focus on how we can contribute to ensuring that West Berkshire's people are skilled and have what they need to fulfil their potential.

Places - Creating prosperous communities across West Berkshire

This chapter will focus on how we can create or maintain great places to live and in which to do business

Infrastructure - Future-proofing West Berkshire's infrastructure

This chapter will focus on ensuring that the infrastructure we have is fit for the future.

Business Environment - Making West Berkshire the best place to start and grow a business

This chapter will focus on what West Berkshire Council will do to attract and retain businesses, by supporting them at every stage

In doing so, we must work closely with our Berkshire partners including the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership, the Chamber of Commerce and the other Berkshire Local Authorities, among others, to deliver mutually beneficial results.

A key theme throughout this strategy is West Berkshire is 'open for business'. This is a statement of intent and shows that as a council, we will enable businesses in the area to flourish using well-considered strategic policy decisions and through effective engagement. Overall, the strategy aims to ensure that our well-connected, beautiful district has what it needs to succeed and that its people are given the best possible opportunities.

Furthermore, it is recognised that, the coming years are likely to be unpredictable as the consequences of expected political changes manifest themselves. Regardless of what these are, however, we will work to preserve what is good about our district as well as make improvements to enhance this even further.



People

Good jobs and greater earning power for all in West Berkshire

In the West Berkshire 2036 Vision we committed to 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 help those in certain groups to enter, or re-enter, the workplace. This strategy, looks at how West Berkshire Council can tailor its economic development activities to contribute to these aspirations.

In the Vision we learned that the district's demographic profile is shifting, with the number of workers per retired person set to halve by 2036. We must address this if we are to thrive as a district.

Key to this will be our efforts to attract and retain our 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 outline 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.

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.

From 2019, employers paying the Apprenticeship Levy will be 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 to create a Community 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.



Attract a university presence to West Berkshire

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 facilitate this, the council will engage local businesses and the LEP in the project and offer the college expert advice as they deliver a facility that meets the needs of the district.

Empower everyone to enter the workplace

In the West Berkshire 2036 Vision we ascribed to the aspiration that older workers, those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with mental health issues or learning difficulties would be given the opportunity to participate in the workplace

For this reason, 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 and our commitment to offer council tax discounts to our care leavers.

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 and will, through the West Berkshire 2036 Vision outcomes framework, take action to reduce the occurrence of preventable diseases and conditions which make accessing the workplace difficult.

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 wish to find work for more hours or in employment they find more fulfilling employment.

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.

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 arise, we will develop specialised training consortia to close our skills and provision gaps.

Help to grow digital skills

In the West Berkshire 2036 Vision, we committed to ensuring that our young people are given the skills they need to progress, including coding and computer programming. Not only will this be invaluable for them, but it will also mean our employers will have a wider pool of local digital talent from which to draw.

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.



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, thereby encouraging our young people to consider developing their career within the district.

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 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.

Link rural and urban areas

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.

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.

By realising these ambitions, we will have contributed to the creation of a 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”

A young child with light brown hair is swimming in a bright blue pool. They are wearing a pink and blue t-shirt with a cartoon of Nemo and the text 'Nemo, Dory and Squidward'. They have colorful arm floaties (yellow, red, and blue) on their arms. In the background, other children are also in the water, some with blue inflatable rings.

Places

Prosperous communities

In the West Berkshire 2036 Vision, 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.

Fulfilling this aspiration will require work to ensure that more housing of the right types, locations and tenures is available to residents that local needs. This must be balanced with our commitment to maintaining well-planned, well-connected communities with thriving urban areas and protected 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 to create or maintain prosperous communities across the district for years to come.

We will:

Enhance our leisure offering

The perceived weakness of our leisure offering has been anecdotally expressed as a barrier to younger demographics 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, we will form a forum through which arts, culture and leisure organisations can contribute to community-led evidence-based new culture leisure strategies.

We will also consider plans to revitalise provision at Northcroft Leisure Centre, providing facilities that the community enjoys using.

Assist our communities in the creation of Neighbourhood Development Plans

We will work with our parishes on their Neighbourhood Development Plans so that locations for development can be identified and community-led economic growth promoted widely.

Consider the unique needs of our town centres

Newbury will continue to be the main focus for development in the District up to 2026 with the re-development of Market Street and the regeneration of London Road, which will increase the vibrancy of the town. We will work in collaboration with the Newbury Business Improvement District, the LEP and Newbury Town Council to deliver sustainable, attractive projects of which the district can be proud.

Here, we will also take an active role in the emerging Newbury West Berkshire CIC and, host Vision Conferences in Newbury to showcase the progress of major developments in the town promoting the area's investment needs and addressing concerns about the loss of retail space in the town.

We will also focus on regeneration in **Thatcham** and will seek investment for this purpose. This will ensure that infrastructure and town centre facilities can be upgraded to meet the demands of residents and local businesses.

In **Hungerford**, we will work with stakeholders including Network Rail and Great Western Railway to consider how the town's aspirations can be realised 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 will also commit to raising awareness of the importance of supporting local town centres and independent businesses through direct support, communications and campaigning activities in each of our towns.

This work is not something that we can do alone and so we will continue to work closely with relevant local groups including town and parish councils, the Business Improvement District and the Chambers of Commerce to deliver this. We will drive these ambitions, working with stakeholders such as West Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, Newbury BID 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 landscape

The North Wessex Downs AONB is a nationally protected landscape and is perhaps 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 desire 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 necessary 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 **horseracing 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 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.



Support strategic employment sites across the district

The Eastern Area of West Berkshire has particularly strong economic links to Reading and may, at **Grazeley**, be where there will be significant new housing and infrastructure development. We will work in partnership with our neighbouring authorities and others to deliver a sustainable site 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 SMEs. We will support Theale as a prime location for businesses through our planning processes and will work with partners to enhance the offering there to attract other businesses to locate there.

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 this 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.

Through our work with partners, our parishes and our businesses, we hope to assist with the delivery of the well-planned, well-housed and cohesive communities we committed to in the West Berkshire 2036 Vision.



Infrastructure

Future Proofing our infrastructure

The delivery of strategic infrastructure, of a scale that would enhance West Berkshire's connectivity, is intrinsically linked to 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.

As set out in the Places chapter, this strategy is interwoven with the Local Plan Review to 2036 which will focus 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 which we will implement in collaboration with our partners.

At the time of writing, the following strategic infrastructure requirements have been identified by West Berkshire Council as a result of potential increased development in the district to 2036

	West Berkshire wide	Newbury	Thatcham	North Wessex Downs AONB	Eastern Area
Housing	Meeting the housing need identified in the emerging local plan				
Education	SEN and Pupil Referral Unit needs to be monitored	Secondary school provision is being monitored	New primary school provision		Secondary provision may be required on site, if Grazeley site comes forward
Highways and Transport	Facilitating electric car technology/low emissions and intelligent transport systems	Potential bypass for A339 Fifth access to Sandford and upgrading of A343 Upgrading Pinchington Lane Need to consider options for a Link road to avoid the Robin Hood Roundabout	Upgrade of Crookham Hill 7 crossing Tull Way/Flora way link Link over railway line & upgrade of route to A339		Need to consider transport and highways infrastructure requirements if Grazeley site comes forward
Libraries & Community Facilities	Digital infrastructure requirements Museum collections	'Pop up' library services Visual arts space/digital arts offer			Potential new library services needed if Grazeley site comes forward
Leisure	Future requirements to be set out in emerging leisure strategy		New community leisure hub		Provision for new swimming pool if Grazeley site comes forward
Further /Higher Education		Potential being explored for new higher education provision at Newbury College			

These infrastructure requirements and those provided by other statutory service providers, external to the Council will be continuously reviewed alongside the progress of the Local Plan.

We will:

Future-proof our digital connectivity

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.

We will bid to become a rural 5G testbed by the end of 2019 and will continue to submit bids to pilot emerging technologies.

Investing still more in ensuring 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.

We will also continue to take a lead on the Superfast Berkshire project, delivering high quality digital infrastructure to all residents.

Go into partnership with our neighbouring authorities and other partners to ensure the housing needs of local people at different stages of life will be met across the district

The shortage of genuinely affordable housing is a particular problem, especially in rural areas, which has implications for workforce availability and the economic sustainability of our district. The affordability and accessibility of housing is also absolutely key if we are to attract and retain young people in West Berkshire whilst meeting the needs of an ageing population.

As well as neighbouring authorities in the west of Berkshire, we will work with Thames Valley Berkshire LEP, Homes England and Sovereign, as well as developers to develop more affordable, sustainable homes to buy or rent. This will expand on the recent success of our joint venture with Sovereign Housing.

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 also work hard to try to attract a provider of rented accommodation specifically for single young professionals to West Berkshire.

Make 'green' choices and make it easier for our businesses to do the same

Evidence compiled as a part of the West Berkshire 2036 suggests that integrity of water supply is likely to be a major issue for some of our businesses with the South East projected to be highly susceptible to supply-demand deficits.

We will respond to climate change mitigation targets and the district's vulnerability to flooding and rising consumption of finite resources, especially water, 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.

Deliver the infrastructure required for electric and autonomous vehicles

Given the Government's commitment that almost all vehicles will be electric by 2050 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.

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.



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, operation 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 this strategy.

In the 2013-18 Economic Development Strategy we committed ourselves to encouraging and communicating a business friendly environment. We now look to go beyond this commitment, collaborating with partners such as the TVBLEP as we do so.

We will:

Promote West Berkshire as an incubator district by creating an environment that helps start-ups and existing small businesses to grow

We will develop plans to convert space that has gone unused in our retail centres for some time into incubator and shared working space to boost opportunities for start-ups and growing businesses who require flexible, good value spaces for their fledgling enterprises. Where appropriate, we will do this by placing Employment and Skills Plans into planning applications to facilitate the delivery of such space.

We will also deliver purpose-built incubator space at Newbury railway station as part of the multi-million pound Market Street development.



Expand our business rate relief

Business rate relief has proven effective as both an incentive for new businesses and a helping hand for existing ones. West Berkshire Council already allows businesses to take advantage of 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.

We will also, through effective communications, raise awareness of available schemes so that all who are eligible are able to access this support.

Build the West Berkshire brand by promoting West Berkshire as a place that offers the best of both worlds (i.e. protected natural environment and good access to Reading/London)

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 an incredibly difficult concept to develop as the area is vast and offers excellent prospects across a diverse range of industries.

The emerging Newbury West Berkshire Community Interest Company, which is being developed by partners including the Newbury BID, the Newbury Weekly News and Greenham Trust, will give us an opportunity to address this issue together. 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.

Use our planning system to stimulate growth in target employment areas

The council's planning policies will facilitate and support a strong, diverse and sustainable economic base across the district. Through the Local Plan 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 and consultants, Pro Vision, 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.

“we committed ourselves to encouraging and communicating a business friendly environment”

Support businesses to start and to grow

As a council, we are members of the Thames Valley Berkshire Local Enterprise Partnership who provide specialised business advice services through the Berkshire Growth Hub, including 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.

Capture and share data more vigorously in order to make West Berkshire a leader in big data

Data is, arguably, the newest form of infrastructure. The availability of this data increasingly has an impact on how businesses and those in the public sector deliver their services. As part of the Reading Smart City Cluster, funded by TVBLEP, West Berkshire has the opportunity to use the data it already collects to transform what we do so that our business environment is as well-planned as possible.

For this reason, we will develop data policies that will lead to benefits for local businesses and organisations across West Berkshire, from more efficient transport systems to real-time information on our services, and beyond.

We will also explore ways of sharing and anonymising our data to enable local innovators to work alongside the council to support the community.

Ensure the council operates in a business friendly way

In the Vision, we showed a strong commitment to economic development and recognised its importance to the future of the district's vibrancy. As such, being customer-focussed and 'open for business' is a key strategic commitment. This is why we will 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 resource in its economic development function. Furthermore, it is restructuring teams within its Planning and Development service to consider economic development consequences more closely in its decision making.

Consider how our own procurement processes can boost local SMEs

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. and Furthermore, we will hold local events pre- tender to provide them with opportunities to understand future requirements.

We will also 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.

Engage with businesses

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.

Moving forward, we as a council will seek to improve 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 look to facilitate a programme of networking events for our businesses.

Of course, an important part of this is getting out and about in the community, meeting businesses and gathering their views. We will do this 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.

It is our hope that in delivering these ambitions, we will have created the best possible environment in which our businesses are able to thrive.

Conclusion

West Berkshire is ambitious and must be well-prepared for the future. As a council we will champion, along with our partners, the need for sustainable economic development in all we do, we will embrace technological change and we will support strategic investment choices, thereby future-proofing the district for generations to come.

We will continue to collaborate with our partners over time to monitor these changes against our key performance indicators and targets to pave the way for a West Berkshire that continues to thrive. This will include reflecting new challenges and new aspirations for our future in both the West Berkshire 2036 Vision and this Economic Development Strategy. We are committed to cementing the district's status as a fantastic place to live, work and learn for generations to come.

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.

We are ambitious for the future.

We are ambitious for West Berkshire.

We are open for business.

References

References for infographics on page 4.

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¹¹<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/datasets/ratioofhousepricetoworkplacebasedearningslowerquartileandmedian>



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