A Guide to Economic Development in Buckinghamshire

Transport, Environment & Communities Select Committee
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Introduction

This guide is aimed at helping County Councillors & interested members of the public to get an overview of the different roles & activities taking place across Buckinghamshire to promote economic development.

This guide is produced by the County Council’s TEC Select Committee as an output from a scrutiny inquiry into Economic Development. During the inquiry it became clear that there was a need for a simple accessible guide as the landscape is complex.

David Carroll, Chairman,
TEC Select Committee
What is Economic Development?

1. Economic development = ‘efforts directed at improving the economic wellbeing and quality of life of a community,’ e.g. creating/retaining jobs, growing incomes/tax base

2. Economic development is characterised by an increase in living standards and the freedom people have to enjoy and make the most of opportunities. Measured by Human Development Index (HDI) (income levels, life expectancy and levels of education). Economic development is about sustainability, meeting current demands without compromising future capacity.

3. Economic development can lead to economic growth, measured by an increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) - measures the total value of goods and services produced in an economy.
Why does Economic Development Matter?

• If we can educate young people and equip them with the right skills for work then the Buckinghamshire economy will grow and there will be more high-quality jobs.

• If we invest in infrastructure then we help to create the right conditions for businesses to want to locate in Bucks and create more jobs.

• If we help the economy to grow then our residents will enjoy a higher standard of living and be better off.
What organisations are involved in Economic Development in Bucks?

- Buckinghamshire County Council
- Buckinghamshire Business First
- Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership
- Buckinghamshire Advantage
- BTVLEP Skills Board
- 4 District Councils
- England’s Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance
The National Landscape

• **2010** - Regional Development Agencies abolished and local authorities and business leaders asked to form Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), a more agile mechanism for promoting economic growth.

• **2012** - 39 LEPs established, including Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (BTVLEP), co-terminus with the Buckinghamshire County boundaries. AVDC also members of South East Midlands LEP.

• **2012** – Heseltine’s review ‘No Stone Unturned’. Recommendations gave LEPs more clarity about role, provided core funding of £250,000 per LEP (match funding required) and greater funding opportunities.

• **2014** - all LEPs submitted Strategic Economic Plans (SEP) - the basis of negotiations with Government to secure new Local Growth Funds.
The National Landscape continued

‘LEPs may have started at different times and evolved at different speeds but they are now firmly established as lead agencies for promoting local growth.’

Current Challenges

• Devolution - Many commentators believe Government’s devolution agenda creates two-tier system of LEPs - LEPs in city regions/larger combined authority areas could be in a position to take on extra powers.

• Accountability - LEPs governance arrangements vary. Government has sought to keep bureaucracy to a minimum but there have been criticisms of a lack of accountability and scrutiny.

• Funding - ‘Our shared frustrations are around the short timescales for submitting bids and the changing nature of the bidding and funding requirements, which is due to the way the Government requires all LEPs to operate. This makes longer-term strategic approaches to providing infrastructure and regeneration more difficult to achieve.’
• **Statutory Duty** - Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 - statutory duty to produce a Local Economic Assessment. After 2010 more flexibility in frequency and level of detail allowed.
• **2011** – BCC commissioned Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF), to deliver economic development activity.
• BCC also influences economic development through regulatory powers, procurement, education and and:
  
  – **Policy Making** – eg Strategic Plan and Local Transport Plan 4, create a framework to support economic development and strengthen negotiations with Government.
  
  – **Infrastructure Provider** – BCC has invested in Broadband and road network improvements across the County.
Corporate Landlord – Old County Hall renovated to create incubation office space for micro businesses. BBF taken a lease until Mar 2017 and achieved full occupancy shortly after launch.

Joint Venture Partner – Partner in Buckinghamshire Advantage, seeking to unlock potential housing and employment land via Aylesbury Woodlands proposals, which would also provide leisure facilities and vital road infrastructure.

Wellbeing Programme – Supported individuals in deprived areas back into work, through intensive multi-agency Wellbeing Programme, initially in Chesham and extended to High Wycombe. This has improved the lives of individuals and has shown to create a ripple effect, impacting positively on others in their family or neighbourhood. Clearly demonstrates the value of partnership working and pooling resources.
Every £1 that Bucks County Council invested in 2015/16 in Buckinghamshire Business First generated value for the Buckinghamshire economy of £43.
Buckinghamshire County Council

The Bucks Landscape – Buckinghamshire Business First – Operating at level of the firm

• Est. 2011, Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF) is an independent organisation led by a board of 11 business people - 8,000 members (Mar 2016) - 60% of the private sector employee base in Bucks.
• 40 staff and turnover of £2m pa. Its primary focus is to facilitate growth in the economy and increase the number of jobs in Bucks.
• Strong relationship with BCC as a funder and as a partner on BTVLEP – provides the business representation on the BTVLEP Board and Bucks Advantage.
• Acts as the Growth Hub funded by BTVLEP - recognition from Whitehall as the country’s first non-city Growth Hub in October 2013.
• Ngage Solutions, a wholly-owned subsidiary of BBF is an innovative not for profit deliverer of publicly funded services & ec. development projects.
• Provides economic research underpinning policy developments in Bucks.
BBF supports companies to create new jobs and increase the profitability of their businesses.

Porter’s Lodge in Aylesbury opened Feb 2016

April - Dec 2015, BBF distributed almost £2.5m in grants

3 Hubs in Aylesbury, Chesham and Saunderton, with free WiFi and meeting rooms
The Bucks Landscape – Buckinghamshire Thames Valley Local Enterprise Partnership (BTVLEP)

- BTVLEP is the youngest LEP and geographically the smallest. Richard Harrington, BTVLEP’s Chief Executive maintains that what counts ‘is the scale of your ambition and the attractiveness of the projects you are putting forward’.

- A core staff of 4 co-located at Saunderton with BBF. BTVLEP has utilised BBF as a ready-made Growth Hub, making up one of BTVLEP’s three delivery arms.
The Bucks Landscape – BTVLEP – Creating the conditions for Success
The Bucks Landscape – BTVLEP – Brokering effective multi-agency relationships

- BTVLEP operates across Buckinghamshire and has the challenge of building effective relationships across the private and public sector, in order to present a coherent and unified vision to Government and to secure the investment which is needed to maintain and further grow the Bucks economy.

- BTVLEP is also a partner in England’s Economic Heartland, working to promote Buckinghamshire’s interest at a sub-regional level.
The Bucks Landscape – BTVLEP Successes

• **2014** – Strategic Economic Plan (SEP): Collaborative effort between local authorities and private sector in Bucks backed by a strong evidence base. SEP identified *Infrastructure, Business Support and Skills* as key areas for investment.

  - Secured Local Growth Deal worth £44.2m, subsequently extended with a further £8.8m, for projects to be delivered between 2015-2021.

  - Also received £6.27m through Growing Places Fund – used to improve Aylesbury/Wycombe town centres and projects including Handy Cross Hub, Broadband, Aylesbury Woodlands proposal and access to finance for SMEs.

  - **Autumn 2015** – Secured Enterprise Zone status for Silverstone, Westcott Venture Business Park and Arla/Woodlands.
BTVLEP Skills Board Successes

- **2015** – Launched *Opps in Bucks* online platform, to foster links between schools and businesses.

- 3 Enterprise Co-ordinators liaise with Schools to promote Skills agenda and work with local businesses to facilitate work experience placements, career insight talks and after school clubs.

- In future will market higher level apprenticeships as Industry Sponsored Degrees and an online platform to match students to potential apprenticeships.

- Longer term, will support BTVLEP aim of attracting inward investment in high value industries e.g. engineering, motor sport, food technology, space technology. In order to support ‘Innovative Tech’ talent it is important that educators and business align.
England’s Economic Heartland Strategic Alliance – Operating at sub-regional level

Established Dec 2014 by the Leaders of Buckinghamshire CC, Oxfordshire CC & Northamptonshire CC

Primarily focussed on strategic infrastructure issues and has established a Strategic Transport Forum.

Strategic Transport Forum had its first meeting Feb 2016. Priority will be to develop an overarching transport strategy for the Heartland.

Early 2015 – Corresponding LEPs joined the Alliance
By Autumn 2015 – expanded to include: Milton Keynes Council, Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council, Luton Borough Council and Cambridgeshire County Council and SEMLEP.
The Strategic Transport Forum

- A non-statutory partnership which shares technical expertise/resources to develop proposals and enables more meaningful engagement with the Department for Transport, service providers and infrastructure agencies, e.g. Highways England.

- Has gained credibility with Government - referred to alongside other initiatives e.g. Transport for the North and Midlands Connect, as an example of sub-national transport initiatives.

- The Cities and Local Government Devolution Act enables local transport authorities to prepare a proposal to establish a statutory Sub-national Transport Body. This would give more direct influence over decisions currently controlled by Government. The Strategic Alliance has begun to explore this as a potential development of the Strategic Transport Forum.
Further information

BBF Website – www.bbf.uk.com
BTVLEP website – www.btvlep.co.uk
Bucks Advantage Website – www.bucksadvantage.co.uk
Opps in Bucks Website – www.oppsinbucks.org

Case Study – Framework Digital, Aylesbury

Footnotes – ¹ – 2015 PWC & The Smith Institute Report
‘Delivering Growth: Where next for LEPs?’

² – Quote from Katrina Wood, Leader of Wycombe DC
Case Study

Tomas Pukalski of Framework Digital, a company in Aylesbury which designs and builds websites, told us about his experiences in Bucks -

- Tomas felt that working from home was holding him back. He used BBF’s Business Hubs to meet potential clients and also attended some of their training courses and networking events.

- Although he could use technology to share files and collaborate with a colleague, an office would enable things to happen more quickly, and the synergy between people working together would result in a more creative outcome.

- In February 2016, Framework Digital moved into an office in Porter’s Lodge. BCC own the building and BBF manage the space and facilities. At the launch, Tomas made two contacts which immediately led to new business for his company.
• Tomas has also started to work collaboratively with a copywriter and a graphic designer.

• **Business Community** - Tomas has received valuable advice from other companies in Porters Lodge and has reciprocated with website help.

• **Paying it back** – Framework Digital now offers work placements to students from Aylesbury’s University Technical College. Two 17 year olds have recently been working with him on a pilot telehealth program. This link was facilitated through **OppsinBucks**.

• Framework Digital Ltd are planning to employ at least one person this year.