



Buckinghamshire offers an ideal environment in which to do business. The County Council is proud to play a strategic role in the successful development of its economy.



We have worked hard with our partners to develop projects that support business and ensure that there is an infrastructure where companies can grow and prosper. We are keen to nurture the many small businesses that set up in the County to ensure that they develop into large profitable companies.

BILL CHAPPLE
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

ACTION PLAN 2001/02

This Action Plan has been developed jointly by the Council and the business community. It is a programme, which supports the vision identified in the Joint Economic Strategy for Buckinghamshire, aiming to achieve:

'A prosperous, modern, diverse and sustainable economy balancing the requirements of business, the workforce, customers, residents and the environment'

Buckinghamshire is one of the most prosperous areas of England and is one of the top ten counties in the country for economic growth. An influential part of the wider economies of the Thames Valley corridor and Oxford/Cambridge axis, it is forecast to continue to grow rapidly. Many world-class businesses have chosen Buckinghamshire because it is particularly well served by road, rail and air, has a good standard of education and is a pleasant place in which to live. Success brings its own problems, however - labour/skills shortages, congestion, lack of development opportunities and a high cost of living.

Encouraging a knowledge driven economy in Buckinghamshire is key to sustaining and developing the future wellbeing of the County. Actions based around:

- Networking, investment and business support
 - Developing and preserving talent
 - Providing quality space for people
 - Facilitating opportunities for business
 - Developing the infrastructure - transport & telecommunications
- will ensure our continued prosperity.

This Plan illustrates how the Council will allocate its economic development budget to ensure it fulfils its duty to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of residents and business.

OBJECTIVES

The four strategic objectives in the Joint Economic Strategy for Buckinghamshire form the basis of this Action Plan. They are:

■ BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS:

To stimulate development, growth and investment among existing and new employers to ensure that they are competitive, environmentally responsible and committed to staying in Buckinghamshire

■ EFFICIENT COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK:

To create and maintain easy and efficient operating conditions for business through the development of transportation, communication networks and business accommodation and to ensure that Buckinghamshire remains an attractive location for both business and the workforce

■ MAXIMISING THE WORKFORCE:

To ensure that both business and the existing and future workforce embrace a learning and training culture to ensure the development of skills and expertise required in the future.

■ QUALITY OF LIFE AND THE ENVIRONMENT:

To maintain and enhance the high quality physical environment, cultural activity, quality of life and distinctive character that makes the County the place of choice to live, work and play

Each action under the above programmes has a brief which illustrates how it meets the objective, who the beneficiaries are, who is the lead officer, the resources required and how it will be monitored (individual briefs are available from the Economic Development Team or on the website - see contacts).

The Council remains actively committed to working in partnership with a wide range of organisations to help it deliver the Action Plan and other programmes. These organisations include Buckinghamshire Economic Partnership, Milton Keynes Economic Partnership, Thames Valley Economic Partnership, SEEDA, the Small Business Service, Learning & Skills Council, Lifelong Learning Partnership, Bucks Community Action and the District Councils.



▶ BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS

▶ KEY PARTNERSHIPS

Working with our partners ensures that Buckinghamshire can:

- Develop a strong, dynamic and diverse economy
- Influence decisions made at a regional, national and European level
- Provide the necessary support to new and developing businesses
- Achieve a greater impact by maximising resources

▶ AFTERCARE, ECONOMIC INFORMATION & MONITORING

Economic data is important not only for understanding the economy and the companies who trade in the county but also provides essential information for the businesses who are looking to locate, expand or invest locally. The new Business, Properties and Sites database together with labour market information will support the development of an Aftercare Programme.

▶ BUSINESS EXCELLENCE

Rewarding business excellence raises the profile of both the companies and their staff who trade in the County and the Council who will sponsor both the Aylesbury and Wycombe Business Excellence Awards.

▶ COMPETITIVENESS/INNOVATION

With partners we aim to support the creation of a knowledge driven economy - the development of an Enterprise Hub and Innovation Centre in Wycombe and Aylesbury will promote design, rapid prototype development and information technology, access to advice and managed workshops for new businesses.

▶ TRADING LOCALLY

Encouraging a fair, honest and safe trading environment is vital. As a key employer the County is a major contributor to the economy through the employment of local people and the purchase of local goods.

▶ OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH EUROPE

Identifying opportunities for regeneration and funding through transnational cooperation (eg Transnational Woodland Initiatives Group)

▶ SOCIAL INCLUSION

Addressing issues such as affordable housing, support for carers, those with mental health issues and providing access to information will help ensure that all residents have the opportunity to work and enjoy a good quality of life.

▶ MAXIMISING THE WORKFORCE

Buckinghamshire achieves high levels of attainment in its schools, has a skilled and flexible workforce and continues to maintain low levels of unemployment. An ageing population and a declining labour supply are forcing companies to develop innovative working initiatives such as flexible working, employing the over 50's and women returners and provide crèche facilities. Difficulty of recruitment can generate a competitive climate among employers and force higher wages. Making sure education is providing what business wants and introducing pupils to the world of work, creating a greater understanding of what business is about and the skills required is high on the agenda and will be the subject of a high profile seminar in the Autumn.

▶ EMPLOYMENT FOR ALL

The Council is keen to promote 'employment for all' and ensure that everyone in the community can participate socially and economically. Training for disaffected youngsters and developing programmes for those with learning disabilities will ensure that their needs are met.

Patterns of learning, living and working are all changing, this means that not only must individuals adapt to change but so must organisations and institutions. The Council will work in partnership with:

- **The Learning and Skills Council for Milton Keynes Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire**, the leading body in the development of post-16 education and training, to ensure learning is available for all.
- **The Buckinghamshire Lifelong Learning Partnership**, a catalyst for change, enabling and facilitating innovative learning projects and collaborative activities to ensure that lifelong learning is accessible and relevant to everyone in the County.
- **The Small Business Service** is working to help small businesses by making it easier for them to understand and comply with regulations such as trading standards, planning, environmental health, food and safety, which apply to them. Advice and support is available through Business Link.



▶ EFFICIENT COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

The efficient movement of goods and people is vital if the economy is to be sustained. Access for all, particularly for those who live in rural areas is a key priority and the Council is working to ensure an adequate provision of rural transport.

▶ TRAVEL PLANS

The Council will promote the development of Green Travel Plans to

- reduce congestion
- address parking problems
- suggest options for working from home
- improve communications between local authorities & business
- encourage alternative means of transport
- reduce reliance on the car

Two Travel Plan Officers, funded by Government will work closely with schools and business to develop their own travel plans.

▶ LOBBYING

A key focus will be the upgrading of the rail network; the Council will continue to lobby Central Government for Aylesbury upgrades, northern links to Oxford and Milton Keynes and for the development of the East West rail link and Cross Rail. The Council will also pursue the improvement of the strategic highways network, particularly Junction 4 on the M40.

▶ STRUCTURE PLAN REVIEW

The review of the Structure Plan, a document that outlines future land use within the county, begins in 2001-02. The Council will work with key partners and businesses to facilitate appropriate and timely input into the review of this Plan.

▶ WIRED BUCKS

The development of a rural enterprise hub will aim to address the problems of access for those who live and work in rural areas. The project will provide training and managed workspace for new rural businesses.

▶ QUALITY OF LIFE

People who live in Buckinghamshire enjoy a good quality of life: pleasant environment, high standard of education, variety of housing and opportunities for employment. However, the constraints on the development of land means that the price of property is high, leading to a shortage of affordable housing for key workers.

The rural economy is under particular pressure, not only as a result of the decline in agriculture but due to BSE and the foot and mouth epidemic, which although bypassing the County has had an impact on its economy. The Rural Strategy has been updated to secure effective multi-agency working to deliver improved rural services in Buckinghamshire.

▶ TOURISM

Tourism plays a major role in the rural areas, particularly for farmers who are looking to add value to their farming activities. Working with partners we will develop promotional material highlighting visitor attractions, short breaks and guided walks. The Economic Development team would like to encourage more visitors to the county and increase the amount of time they spend here.

▶ REGENERATION OF MARKET TOWNS

In rural areas there are growing disparities between those who live and those who work in the countryside. Affluence and poverty run side by side creating social and economic pressures such as the high price of housing, reduction in public transport and loss of local services. Single Regeneration funding through the 'Rural Towns, Rural Life - making the most of your Market Towns' programme will support new initiatives aimed at addressing these problems.

▶ DIVERSIFICATION

A recruitment campaign for bed and breakfast and guesthouse accommodation has recently been launched to support farmers wishing to diversify into tourism. A food group to promote locally produced food, develop local supply chains and encourage residents to buy locally is about to be launched and aims to compile a Food Directory listing all local food producers.

