

# **BUCKINGHAMSHIRE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN 2002/2003**

## **INTRODUCTION**

'Bucks Means Business' A Joint Economic Strategy 2002 – 2006 for business enterprise and partnership in Buckinghamshire was produced by the Buckinghamshire Economic Partnership. This Joint Strategy provides the framework for all economic activity in the County including the County Council's Economic Development Action Plan and has informed SEEDA about economic issues affecting Buckinghamshire during their recent consultation events.

Whilst Buckinghamshire is in the top ten counties in the Country for economic success, it needs to improve its performance if it is to achieve its aim to become one of the top ten business locations in Europe. It is already home to international companies who have chosen to locate in the County because of its natural environment, grammar school education, quality housing, diverse workforce and access to motorways, airports, and railways.

However, there is a downside - economic success masks the high cost of living, congestion, lack of development opportunities and skills/labour shortages which has resulted in some companies looking to Europe where costs are lower and labour is available.

The Joint Economic Strategy sets out to address these challenges and ensure that the economy continues to flourish. This Action Plan illustrates how the County Council will contribute towards delivering the Strategy locally and that where possible working in partnership will ensure that initiatives benefiting and complementing the activities in neighbouring authorities are linked and co-ordinated. Actions supporting partnership ventures, developing opportunities for attracting external funding, enterprise, business development, promotion, people and the environment will be undertaken to sustain and develop the future well-being of the County.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The six strategic objectives listed below and which the County Council has been working to achieve over the past three years will form the basis of the Action Plan. They are:

- BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS**
- BUSINESS INFRASTRUCTURE**
- WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**
- QUALITY OF LIFE AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

□ **PROMOTION, INFORMATION AND MARKETING**

□ **PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

The members of the County Council have identified priorities, which they wish to see addressed under the strategic objectives;

Partnership development  
Small business support  
Rural Development  
Tourism

## **BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS**

The County Council will promote competitiveness through initiatives developed jointly with the Economic Partnerships, local authorities and other support organisations. The main aims are to:

- be the best location for business in the South East
- develop a balanced robust economy
- support enterprise both in the urban centres and the rural hinterland
- avoid duplication and maximise resources to achieve a greater impact
- influence decisions made regionally, nationally and in Europe for the benefit Buckinghamshire

## **ACTIONS**

- Contribute to funding BEP, TVEP and MKEP and work with them to support the Investment Development Managers who will establish an effective Aftercare Programme aimed at supporting the major businesses in Buckinghamshire.
- Provide up to date statistical information, undertake appropriate research and issue bulletins, which will assist in informing partners about the current state of the economy.
- Produce an expanded Business Directory in January 2003.
- Work with Agents and Developers to maintain and develop the newly launched Commercial and Industrial Space website and product a Strategic Sites Register.
- Continue to work with Wycombe District Council, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College, the Buckinghamshire Economic Partnership, SEEDA and other partners to establish an enterprise hub in Wycombe based around furniture, design and rapid prototype development.

- Establish an Innovation Centre in Aylesbury in partnership with Aylesbury Vale District Council, the Buckinghamshire Economic Partnership, Business Link Solutions and SEEDA.
- Submit bids for external funding to support business initiatives and rural regeneration through the External Funding and European Teams. An Interreg III bid based around jobless and spaceless growth will be submitted to meet the September deadline.
- Work with partners to ensure that there is a fair, honest and safe trading environment in Buckinghamshire, giving particular attention to providing consumer advice, giving guidance to small businesses and tackling those issues of greatest concern

## **BUSINESS INFRASTRUCTURE**

A key priority for the Council is to ensure that those who live and work in Buckinghamshire are not disadvantaged through poor access. The aim will be:

- to make sure that there is an adequate provision of buses and other passenger transport to enable people to travel to work and access services
- to have an infrastructure which will facilitate the efficient and safe movement of goods and people.
- to develop opportunities to reduce congestion e.g. staggered start and finish times for schools
- to encourage alternative means of transport and reduce reliance on the car
- to encourage working from home to businesses and for Council employees
- to lobby for a telecommunications infrastructure which will enable people and businesses adopt alternative ways of working
- to encourage businesses to use rail freight rather than road freight where viable

### **ACTIONS:**

- Continue to lobby for the upgrading of the rail network, in particular the East/West rail link and Crossrail.
- Pursue the improvement, where necessary, of the highways network to improve access to the motorway network. Junction 4 on the M40 being a priority.
- Promote Travel Plans to businesses and schools and encourage them to develop their own travel plans.

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

A highly skilled and adaptable workforce is crucial if businesses in Buckinghamshire are to maintain their competitiveness and strive to be the best in the South East and Europe. The Council aims to:

- maintain an adaptable workforce
- increase efficiency in the workplace
- promote training in the 'workplace'
- encourage up-skilling and retraining of employees
- develop opportunities for work for all sectors of the community

The Adult Learning Plan for 2002/3 lists a number of initiatives which address the general ICT upskilling of the Buckinghamshire workforce, particularly individuals with little or no experience in the use of computers. There is a particular focus on assisting individuals living in deprived areas to become more economically active through the extension of Essential Skills and Basic ICT training provision.

### **ACTIONS:**

- Set up a Business Support Centre with Business Link and the District Councils to provide advice and support for new and small businesses.
- Work with the Learning Partnership and Social Services to support employment initiatives for the disadvantaged, especially those with learning difficulties, physical disabilities and mental health issues.
- Implement, through the Buckinghamshire Economic Partnership, the actions identified in the 'Over 50's' Study, to help this group of people back into the work.
- Work with business and education providers to ensure that young people are developing the appropriate skills required in the workplace.
- Adult Learning, with assistance from European Social Funding will provide free higher level training for IT Champions in SMEs

## **QUALITY OF LIFE AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

Buckinghamshire is a first class business location and offers a good quality of life for those who live in the County. The natural environment is outstanding; the standard of education is high and the opportunities for employment diverse. However, this creates pressure, as the price of housing is high, forcing lower paid workers to live outside the County where prices are lower and commute into the County to work. The Council aims to:

- support rural diversification and the regeneration of market towns
- work with SEEDA, DEFRA and the Countryside Agency to identify funding opportunities which will improve rural services and sustainability
- promote the need for key worker and affordable housing
- develop tourism opportunities
- promote environmental best practice through energy savings and conservation
- ensure that all residents have the opportunity to work and enjoy a good quality of life
- tackle urban deprivation through pursuing opportunities to gain regeneration funding from SEEDA's 'Single Pot'

### **ACTIONS:**

- develop an interactive Food Directory on the web, produce a 'Food Buyers' directory and organise training for the Food Group
- organise a food exhibition at the County Show in August 2002
- through the Chilterns Conservation Board support the marketing initiative for beef and lamb produced in the Chilterns
- review the strategy for rural tourism
- support the appointment of a Rural Housing Enabler
- fund a Retail Adviser to support village shops in partnership with Bucks Community Action and the Local Authorities
- sponsor the Corporate Environmental Advisory Council to generate environmental awareness and provide training for businesses
- sponsor the Southern Tourism Board to provide advice and practical support to the Buckinghamshire Tourism Officers Group
- contribute to the Town Partnerships and develop joint projects
- provide support for carers and those with mental health issues by providing access to information to ensure that they have the opportunity to work
- continue to provide, develop and promote countryside access/recreation opportunities with general or specific links to local tourism-related businesses
- support projects promoting the local woodland economy and local woodland produce

- in partnership with the Chilterns Conservation Board publish guidance promoting the use of locally produced timber in the manufacture and supply of countryside furniture
- support projects providing advice and assistance to farmers to promote sustainable agricultural practice and the uptake of agri-environment schemes

## **PROMOTION, INFORMATION AND MARKETING**

Promoting and raising the profile of Buckinghamshire will be crucial if the County is to sustain and improve the economic success it has achieved. It will be important, when marketing the benefits of ‘doing business in Bucks,’ to balance economic growth, provision of housing and protection of the environment to ensure that Buckinghamshire remains the ideal place to live and work. The provision of clear, concise and easily accessible information will support business and staff development. The Council aims to:

- raise the profile of the county and influence decisions made at regional, national and European levels
- promote and market economic success through developing links with business
- provide information to support business development

### **ACTIONS:**

- provide a ‘One Stop Shop’ website which will provide relevant, clear information and signpost businesses, through hyperlinks, to the most appropriate site for dealing with their queries.
- maintain and develop an interactive website about economic issues and produce a quarterly newsletter in partnership with the European and External Funding teams.
- organise with the support of the Royal Bank of Scotland a Business Awards event for Buckinghamshire to promote achievement
- sponsor a category in both the Wycombe and Aylesbury Business Excellence events.

## **PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Working in partnership with other organisations avoids duplication of effort, ensures activities are co-ordinated and adds value to project development. Creating a clear infrastructure for business support will make it easier for businesses to access the help they need from the most appropriate source. The Council aims to:

- work with partners to reduce the duplication of support activities
- maximise funding opportunities
- develop joint projects

### **ACTIONS:**

- provide partnership funding for the Buckinghamshire, Thames Valley and Milton Keynes Economic Partnerships
- continue membership of the Southern Tourist Board
- provide project funding for joint ventures

The actions included in the Action Plan will each have a brief which will demonstrate how it meets the objective, who will the lead project, the resources required and how it will be monitored. These briefs will be available from the Economic Development Team.

In addition to working with a wide range of organisations the Action Plan draws together activities across the services of the County Council, which contribute towards the economy of Buckinghamshire. The partners include the District Councils, Buckinghamshire Economic Partnership, Milton Keynes Economic Partnership, Thames Valley Economic Partnership, SEEDA, Business Link Solutions, the Learning and Skills Council, the Learning Partnership, Southern Tourist Board and Buckinghamshire Community Action.

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