



Economic Strategy 2024 - 34

Annual report

May 2026

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Context

The Bracknell Forest Economic Strategy 2024 to 2034 was launched in January 2024 with the vision of creating a growing and resilient economy that matches the best in Berkshire. This report highlights the achievements and progress made in the first year of the strategy.

After the challenges of Covid-19, UK's departure from the EU and global economic shocks we re-assessed the economic landscape of Bracknell Forest and what could be done to sustain a thriving economy.

Having assessed our strengths and challenges by way of technical analysis of economic data and a series of workshops held with local businesses organisations and stakeholders, an action plan was developed to set the future economic direction and vision of Bracknell Forest.

The vision for Bracknell Forest's economy:

By 2034, a growing resilient economy that matches the best in Berkshire, supports, attracts and retains high-quality businesses, promotes sustainable growth in clean and green, knowledge-based industries, and provides economic opportunity with good, secure jobs for our people who all have skills to succeed.



The economic strategy focusses on 4 themes:

- Economic performance
- Business competitiveness
- People, work and wellbeing
- Place, climate change, infrastructure and connectivity

The economic strategy included a summary together with related priority actions for each theme.

Economic performance

Bracknell Forest's economic performance has remained stable. There has been a slight improvement in some of the key metrics.

However, productivity and knowledge intensity remain below the Functional Economic Area (FEA) average and have seen little change. This indicates that, despite improved stability, structural challenges persist. These trends reflect the ongoing impacts of Covid-19, shifts in working patterns, global economic uncertainty and continued skills pressures.

Business competitiveness

Bracknell Forest continues to perform well as a place to do business, benefitting from:

- Strong strategic transport connections
- Excellent digital infrastructure
- A broad range of commercial, office and retail space
- Access to a large and diverse labour market

Overall, there has been no significant change in relative competitiveness, reinforcing the need for a continued focus on resilience, innovation and inward investment.

People, work and wellbeing

Bracknell Forest continues to benefit from a growing and relatively young population, alongside consistently high reported levels of wellbeing and life expectancy. These remain key strengths of the borough.

Skills levels within the working-age population have seen an improvement over the year, however we continue to underperform by comparison to lag the FEA average. This remains a medium-to-long-term challenge. Labour market participation has remained high, with no significant change year-on-year.

Place, climate change, infrastructure and connectivity

Bracknell Forest offers good employment opportunities, together with relatively affordable housing, plus the benefit of excellent amenities, including The Lexicon, South Hill Park, Coral Reef, plus 150 parks and green spaces.

Local, regional and national economic context

Bracknell Forest remains an attractive place to live and work, offering:

- Strong employment opportunities
- Relatively affordable housing compared to neighbouring areas
- High quality amenities including The Lexicon, South Hill Park, Coral Reef, The Look Out Discovery Centre and extensive parks and green spaces

Bracknell Forest Economic Partnership

The Bracknell Forest Economic Partnership has continued to provide strategic insight and support for the delivery of the Economic Strategy. The partnership has met four times during the year and has focused primarily on:

- Providing feedback on proposed initiatives
- Developing the three priority areas; grow and attract businesses, procurement for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and promoting Bracknell Forest as a desirable business location.
- Developing task-and-finish groups to support delivery

Tangible outputs have been achieved, and the partnership has become more established, playing an active role in delivery.

Berkshire Prosperity Board and pan Berkshire activity

The six Berkshire local authorities have created a formal joint committee, the Berkshire Prosperity Board. Working collaboratively to encourage economic prosperity for Berkshire. The prosperity board has six core themes:

1. Affordable housing
2. Net zero
3. Health and inequalities
4. Employment and skills
5. Sector development
6. Strategic infrastructure

Each council is leading a theme. Bracknell Forest Council is leading on Net Zero.

The Berkshire Prosperity Board has formed the Berkshire Business Board, with representation from businesses across the Berkshire Local Authorities, with seats reserved for specialist organisations, which include the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, The Skills and Business Hub and the University of Reading. The purpose of the board is to consult on emerging plans, provide feedback on implementation of economic programmes, endorse proposals for significant public funding.

Government plans for economic growth – Invest 2035

Invest 2035 is the Labour Government's 10 year modern industrial strategy, setting out a national framework to drive productivity, investment and inclusive economic growth to 2035. It places labour market objectives at the centre of the growth mission, with a strong emphasis on skills, job quality, and place-based economic development.

The primary objective under Invest 2035 is to accelerate long term economic growth by supporting sectors with the greatest potential for productivity gains and global competitiveness. Job creation is positioned as both an outcome and a driver of growth, with an explicit focus on high quality, well paid, and secure employment, supported by strengthened employment rights and workforce protections.

The strategy prioritises eight growth-driving sectors:

- Advanced manufacturing
- Clean energy industries

- Digital and technologies
- Life sciences
- Defence
- Creative industries
- Financial services
- Professional and business services

These sectors are expected to generate sustained demand for skilled labour and provide pathways to long-term employment across the UK.

Summary of activities 2025 to 2026

Bracknell Forest Economic Partnership

The Bracknell Forest Economic Partnership, (BFEP), brings together representatives from Bracknell Forest businesses, education, business support organisations, including the Federation of Small Businesses and Berkshire Growth Hub and key sector organisations. The partnership acts as a critical friend, helping to shape, challenge and promote targeted actions that support the local economy.

The BFEP has met four times over the past year to agree shared priorities and consider how these can be taken forward. Work is ongoing to build momentum and identify opportunities for collective action around the following areas:

- Growing and attracting innovation and technology businesses
- Promoting local procurement
- Fostering pride in Bracknell Forest

Building on the success of the Partnership, the opportunity has arisen to move to a bi-annual programme of borough wide investment events, the first of which is scheduled for this autumn co-produced with the Bracknell Business Improvement District. Alongside this will be continued focus on the priority actions through dedicated task and finish groups comprising local business and stakeholder representation. A third channel of engagement will be through wider social media networks raising the borough's economic profile.

Invest in Bracknell Forest

Through the BFEP and the Economic Strategy action plan, we continue to galvanise inward investment and to promote the economic, social and physical strengths of the locality as a destination for employers and enterprises. The Invest in Bracknell Forest objective includes an enhanced social media platform, website and communications together with high profile stakeholder events. The first of which is a collaboration with Bracknell Business Improvement District, 22 October 2026.

Invest in Bracknell Forest event 2026



Businesses across the region are invited to attend the upcoming Invest in Bracknell Forest event, hosted jointly by Bracknell BID and Bracknell Forest Council. The event is on Thursday, 22 October 2026 from 9.30am to 2pm at The Capitol Building, Bracknell.

This free event will bring together leading voices from the property sector and global business to explore investment opportunities in the borough.

Designed for both established companies and those considering relocating, the session will focus on:

- occupancy trends

- the strength of Bracknell's commercial property market

- the long-term strategic outlook for investment in the area

Attendees will gain valuable insights from expert speakers while connecting with investors, entrepreneurs and fellow business leaders.

Whether you are a business considering relocation or an investor seeking new prospects, you'll discover why the Bracknell BID, and the wider area stands out as one of the UK's premier business destinations — centrally located within the Thames Valley and often referred to as the UK's 'Silicon Valley'.

Attendance is free, with complimentary refreshments and lunch provided. Further details, including the full agenda and speaker line-up, will be announced soon.

[Sign up and book tickets](#)

The Bracknell Forest Skills Hub

The Bracknell Forest Skills Hub was a project designed to support residents and employers by providing skills training, careers advice and links to local job opportunities. Funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). The Hub offered career guidance, training programmes and connections with local employers, helping people develop their careers and supporting businesses to attract and upskill talent, contributing to local economic growth.

The Skills Hub closed at the end of March following the conclusion of UKSPF funding. During its operation, the scheme supported over 327 career seekers and engaged with over 350 local businesses. An example of which was a bespoke hospitality training course to 33 senior managers and 300 employees.

Bracknell Forest Youth Employment Hub



🇬🇧 Youth Employment Hub launch March 2026 with Peter Swallow MP for Bracknell, Crowthorne, Sandhurst and Whitegrove. and Cllr. Paul Bidwell cabinet member for adults, economy and regeneration.

The Bracknell Forest Youth Employment Hub launched in January at the Open Learning Centre, Bracknell. The hub is a free service to support a minimum of 140 young people who are receiving universal credit who are looking for work, training or direction, aged 18 +.

They offer one-to-one support in a safe and welcoming space, and can help with:

- finding a job, apprenticeship or work experience
- write a CV and prepare job applications
- prepare for interviews
- build confidence and motivation
- build your digital and employability skills
- explore training and education options

They are engaging with local businesses to offer:

- employer talks
- industry insight events
- recruitment workshops
- opportunities to meet local businesses

Business Liaison

The business liaison programme is where the cabinet member and a senior representative from Bracknell Forest Council meets with a local business to gain a better understanding of the challenges and needs of the organisation, and any areas in which the Council can assist.

There have been 3 business liaison meetings over the last 12 months, with a variety of businesses; including large organisations with 250+ employees and micro and SMEs plus a property developer who has recently begun redevelopment of a large site in the Western Business area. This includes Jansons, KCP Networks and Cadence.

Attendance at regular external business events such as the Bracknell BID Meet Your Neighbour sessions have been attended by the council officers and councillors.

Business Support

The partnership with Berkshire Growth Hub continues to offer free expert business advice and support to businesses in the borough. During the last year the Berkshire Growth Hub have offered a range of Skills Bootcamps that have been well attended.

They have also delivered a retail-focused support pilot across two retail areas in the borough: Crowthorne and Sandhurst. As part of the pilot, a retail specialist carried out on-site visits to four local businesses to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing retailers in 2026. Following these visits, each business received a detailed report, along with the opportunity to arrange a follow-up meeting with a Berkshire Growth Hub business adviser.

Bracknell Business Improvement District

The links with the Bracknell Business Improvement District have continued to strengthen. They supported the Bracknell Forest Skills Hub project; presenting at BID organised events, sharing details of the hub with Bracknell businesses via their news bulletin plus advertising on the Bracknell BID shuttle bus. Funding from the UKSPF was used to support the wayfinding signing and the installation of CCTV/ANPR facilities in the BID area. The initiatives have been completed further supporting the local business infrastructure.

The Lexicon

The Council maintains a strong relationship with The Lexicon and the new owners, Realty Income and has already developed a range of shared initiatives aimed at sustaining the local retail and hospitality sectors.

The Council is maintaining investment in a diverse programme of cultural and community activity within the town centre, including the annual Pride weekend, Culture & Community Day, civic events and a range of seasonal activities. The events have been delivered in collaboration with The Lexicon and partners, the following events have taken place in the last year:

Bracknell Forest Pride
Culture and Community Day
Armed Forces Day
White Ribbon parade and vigil
Christmas carol concert

Climate Change

We continue to work with the Climate Change team, supporting the development of the climate change strategy.

The Bracknell Forest Healthy Workplace Alliance

The Healthy Workplace Alliance is currently paused to support a staffing restructure; however, the website continues to provide an extensive range of resources to support

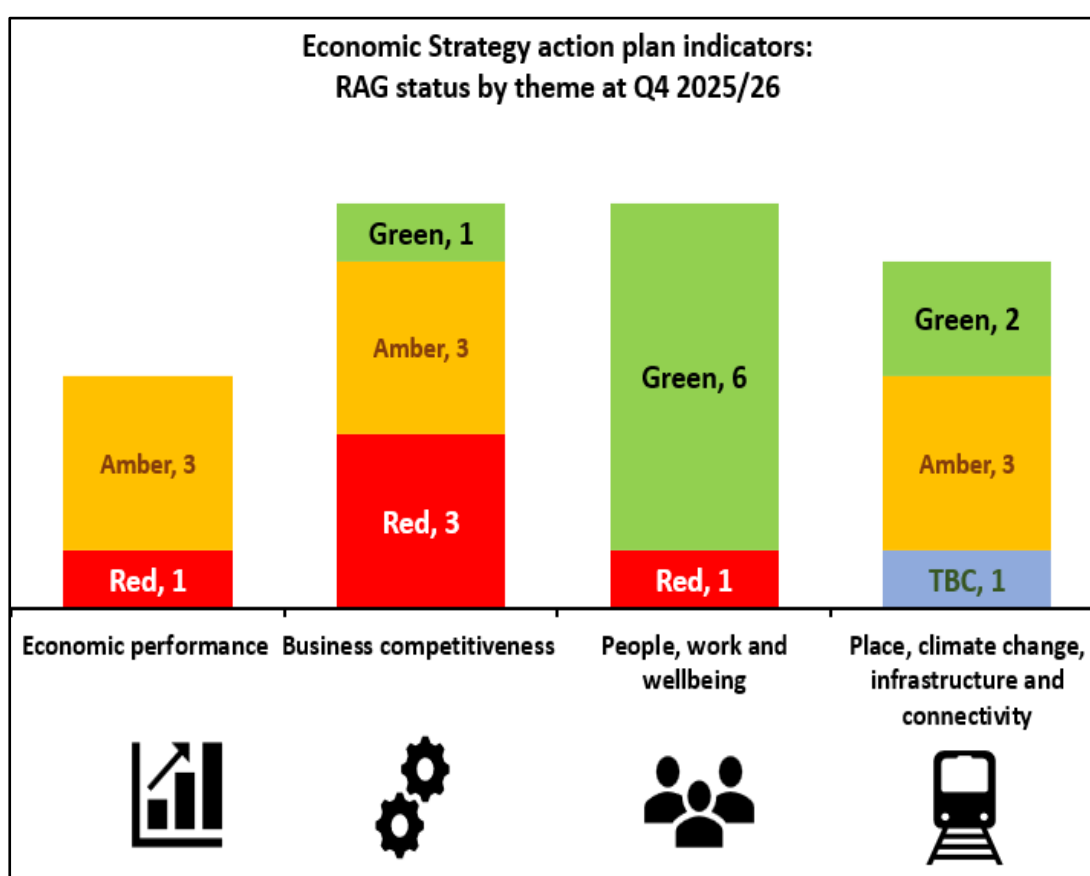
businesses. These resources remain fully accessible and offer practical guidance to help employers promote and sustain workplace wellbeing.

Local centre support

Support in our local centres includes the continued success of late-night Christmas shopping events. Following the successful introduction of a Crowthorne Banking Hub in a temporary location last Spring, the Banking Hub has recently relocated, and is now in the High Street Coop. This reintroduction of banking facilities has been well received by individuals and businesses alike.

Summary of 2025/26 performance against the action plan

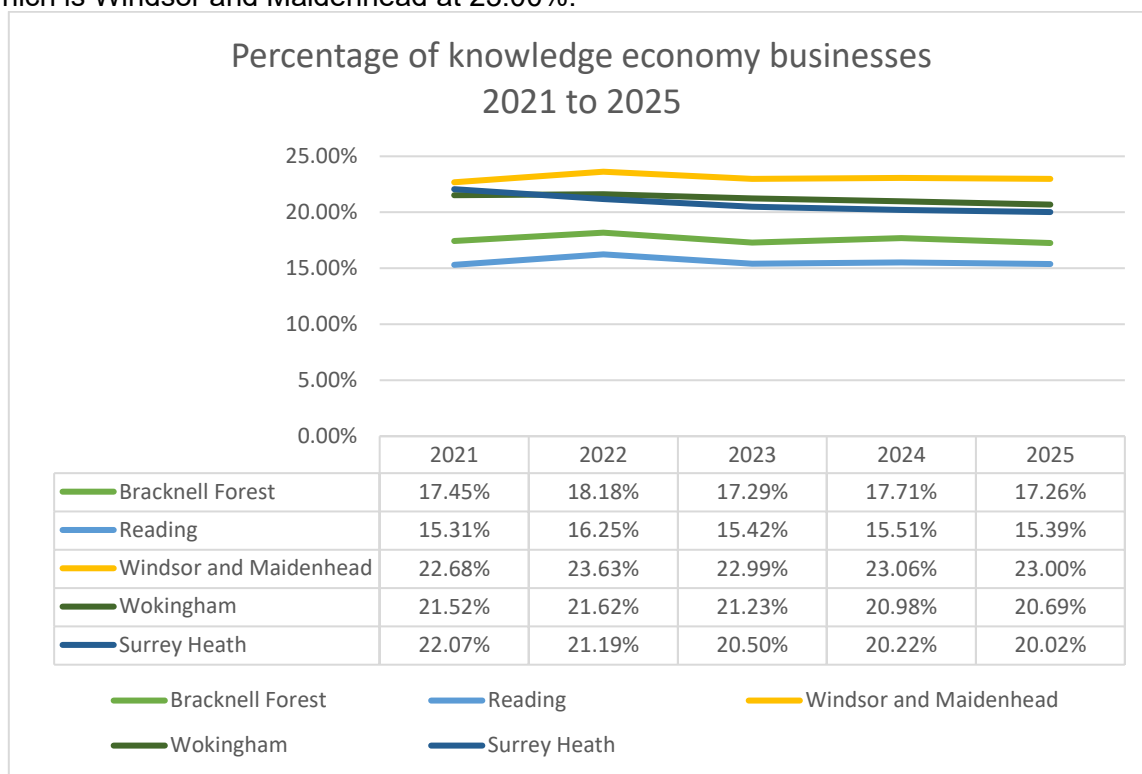
The chart below shows an overview of the Economic Strategy action plan.



Whilst there are areas that have seen improvement there is scope for focussed action in the areas that remain red and amber, with these being a focus for year two of the strategy. Over the last year we have produced a quarterly report providing an update on progress. In line with the strategy, we have measured key metrics to demonstrate the progress of the action plan and areas where focus is required. The following set out the key data.

Knowledge based economy

The percentage of knowledge economy businesses decreased from 2024 to 2025 from 17.71% to 17.45% a decline of -0.19%, the target for this metric is to match the best in FEA, which is Windsor and Maidenhead at 23.00%.

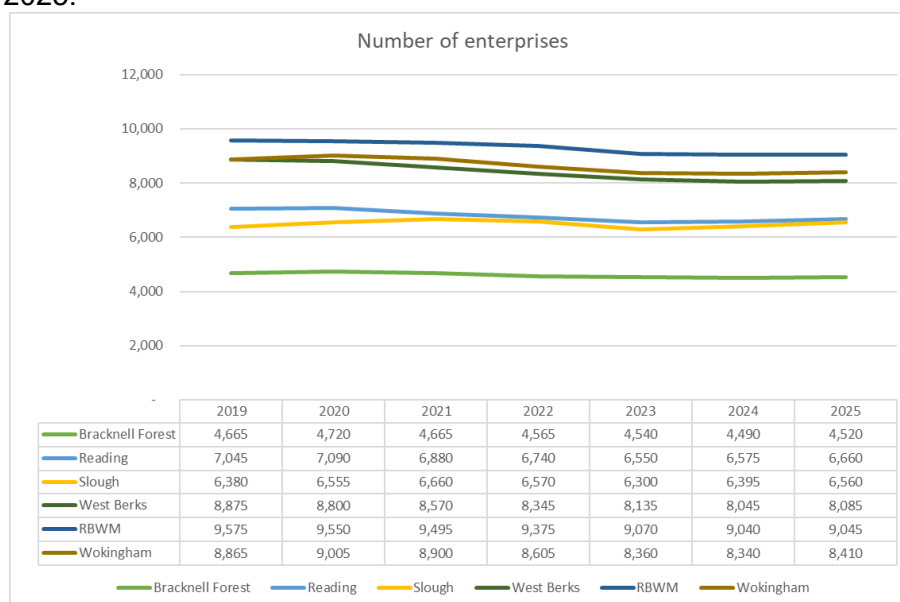


Actions to bring this back on track include:

- Review the availability of relevant skills within the existing workforce. Identify gaps and develop sector specific training programmes through further and Higher education providers
- Expand high growth and sector specific business support services working with Berkshire Growth Hub and business support agencies.
- Devise promotional collateral to raise Bracknell Forest's identity to attract new investment

Business Growth

The number of businesses in the borough for 2025 has increased slightly, from 4490 in 2024 to 4520 in 2025.



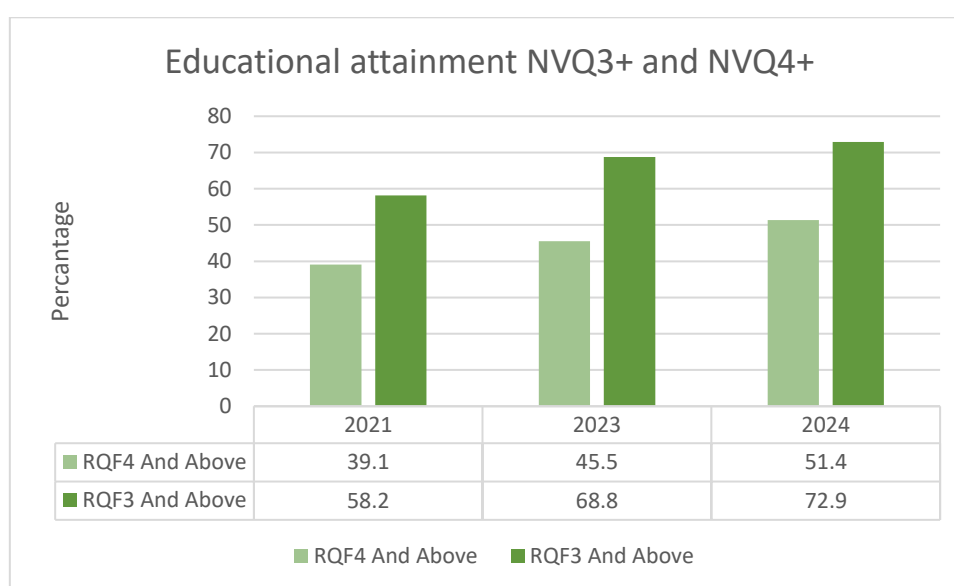
Percentage change in number of enterprises from 2019 to 2025

Bracknell Forest	Reading	Slough	West Berks	RBWM	Wokingham
-3.11%	-5.46%	2.82%	-8.90%	-5.54%	-5.13%

Actions to bring this back on track include:

- Expand a programme of start-up business support working with the Bracknell BID, FSB, Chamber of Commerce and Berkshire Growth Hub
- Identify opportunities for new enterprises to access local supply chains and contracts through procurement awareness events.
- Devise and deliver entrepreneurial skills training for residents.

Working Age Population skills



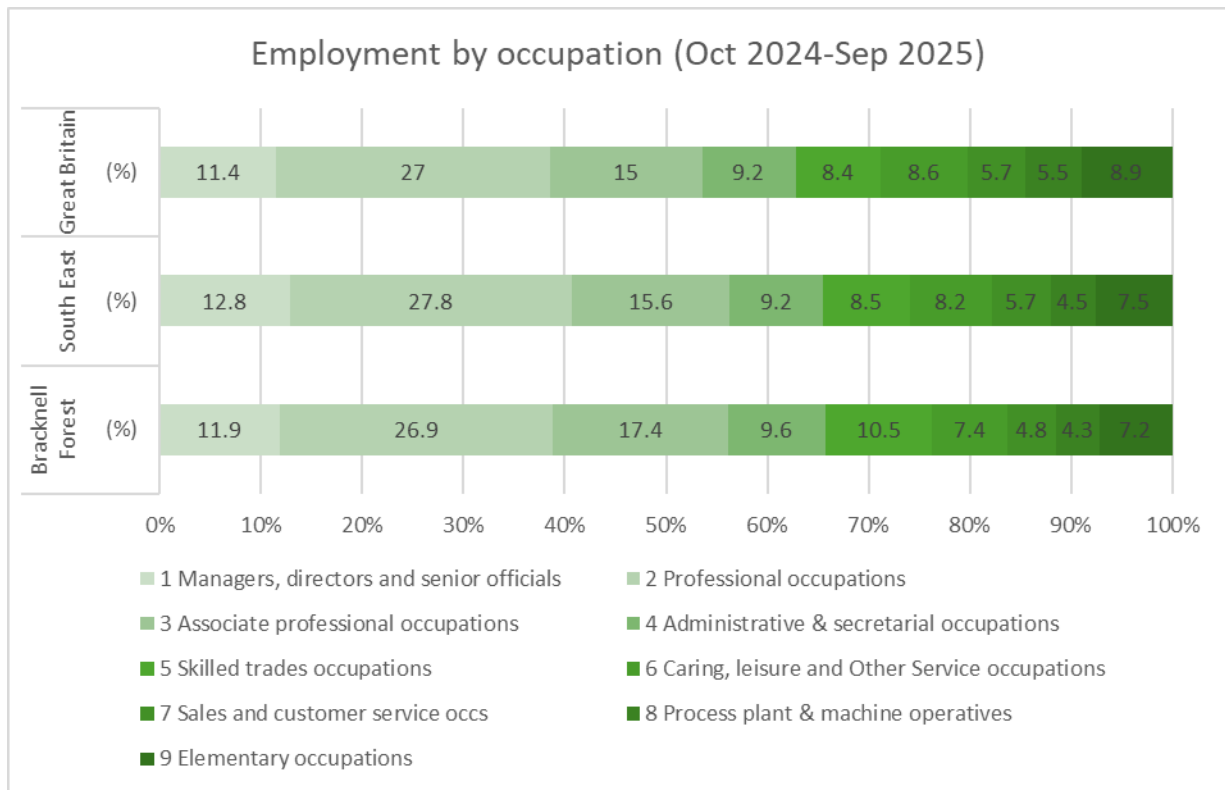
There has been an improvement in the attainment reporting for Bracknell Forest, whilst Bracknell Forest is still behind comparator areas, it is now reporting above the South East figures of 48.5% (NVQ 4+) and 70.3% (NVQ 3+).

Actions to bring this back on track include:

- Promote the employment support services that are available to residents; including Bracknell Forest Youth Employment Hub, Connect to Work, community adult learning.
- Create better awareness of apprenticeships
- Bracknell Forest Economic Partnership to explore potential partnerships between academic institutions and businesses.

Skills Profile

The economic strategy has shown that there has been a slight improvement in the number of those in the lowest 3 occupational groups from the 2024/5 report (see table below).



Whilst the actions to continue to see an improvement in this metric will largely be influenced by schools and colleges, and increased apprenticeship participation together with vocational training. The opening of the Youth Employment Hub will offer a proactive environment for 18 to 24 years who are unemployed to be supported through training and job searching to enhance their employability.

Wage Levels

Residents' wages have continued to increase and are now £862.40, the gap between residents' and work place wages has shrunk, as shown in the chart and table below.

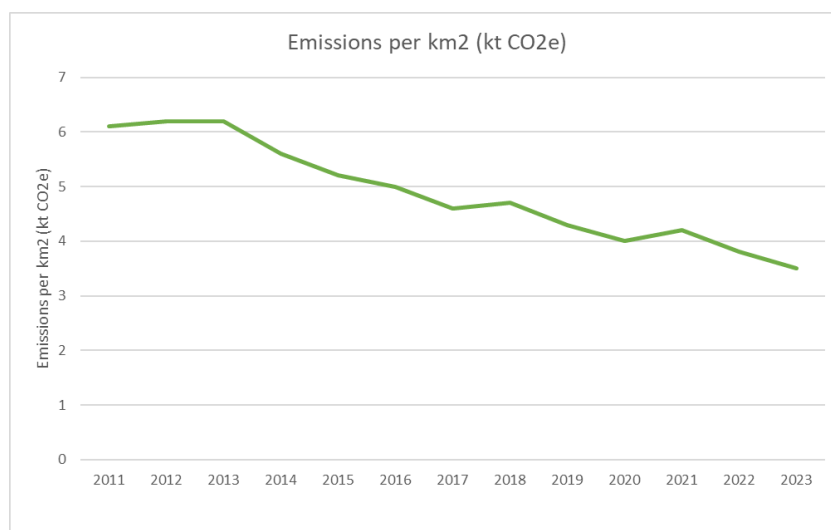


Actions to keep this on track are:

- Promote employer events and Bracknell BID jobs fairs to residents.
- Engage with employers to identify opportunities to recruit and train from the local workforce.

Climate Change

Bracknell Forest's greenhouse gas emissions have continued to decrease. The Climate Change Strategy will continue to develop future initiatives to see this decrease further.



Actions to keep this on track include the operations of bodies like the Council's highways term contractor, Climate adoption of council assets and efforts being undertaken in the Bracknell BID area all contribute to maintaining this trajectory. A business lead partnership is being developed to identify the scope to increase energy efficiencies and alternative provision.

Next steps, 2026 / 27

The focus for the delivery of the economic strategy for the coming year and to tackle the lower performing indicators is to:

- Develop the Bracknell Forest Economic Partnership, task and finish actions. To include:
 - Growing and attracting innovation and technology businesses
 - Promoting local procurement
 - Fostering pride in Bracknell Forest; and
 - Expanding opportunities to grow the film and TV screen sector
- Support the Pan-Berkshire economic development activity to deliver targeted skills and business support activity working with the training providers, businesses and college
- Assist the formation of a strategic authority in relation to economic development functions.
- Expand the business liaison programme, with continued engagement with local businesses.
- Support the delivery of the government's Connect to Work programme
- Deliver the Cultural programme, specific to town centre events and marketing to attract visitors.
- Explore business support opportunities, including start up and sector mentoring.
- Support the Berkshire Local Visitor Economic Partnership and development plan to attract visitors and expenditure.