



Bedford

Bedford Borough Economic Prosperity Plan

2023 - 2028

Foreword

Welcome to Bedford Borough Council's Economic Prosperity Plan.

This Economic Prosperity Plan identifies key actions to target and stimulate investment and secure the delivery of growth in jobs and prosperity over the next five years.

Through this plan, Bedford Borough will continue to be a place for business to start up, relocate to and grow. In return this will grow jobs and enable local communities to access employment in a range of job roles.

The borough already has a good rate of employment, with a range of jobs in numerous sectors that require different skills from employees. This is something that is important to continue throughout our future growth and continue to provide employment that increases the skills level of residents and offers opportunities to all.

Bedford Borough benefits from a good location, both nationally and regionally. This enables the borough to appeal to a wide range

of business and people, who want to live and work here. Improving transport links, enabling digital infrastructure and building homes, all contribute to the economic prosperity of the area.

There are also challenges that the borough faces but despite these, the council is committed to developing the borough and its economy, both now and for the future.



Dave Hodgson

Dave Hodgson
Mayor of Bedford Borough

Introduction

This Economic Prosperity Plan (EPP) outlines the strategic ambitions for economic growth in Bedford Borough. It places economic prosperity at the core of the council's activities, outlining areas of focus and the ways in which the council's ambitions can be met. The EPP sits under the council's Corporate Plan and provides an overarching structure for the work that will be completed over the next five years (2023- 2028) by the Economic Growth Team, as well as other council departments.

This plan focuses on three core elements from the council's Corporate Plan that will work together to enable an increase in economic prosperity within the Borough and for its residents. These are:

- EP1 Provide the right support for sustainable business growth**
- EP2 Sustain the vitality of our town centres, and**
- EP3 Support educational attainment and skills development for all ages**

This plan builds on the evidence presented in the paper entitled 'Employment- economic ambitions' prepared as a supporting document for the Local Plan 2040, this can be found in Appendix 1.

Wider Context

This plan has been tailored to address local opportunities and challenges, whilst using national and regional policies to shape its focus.

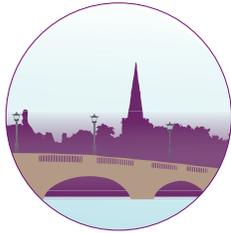


National Priorities

The Levelling Up White Paper, released by the government in February 2022, identified 12 cross-cutting government policy objectives that will help grow the economy nationally. The paper sets out that to 'level up', the focus needs to be on boosting productivity, pay, jobs and living standards. Bedford Borough's ambition builds on this at a local level, to create prosperity for our residents. The areas outlined in the paper focus on, but are not limited to:

- productivity,
- infrastructure,
- pay,
- digital,
- skills,
- pride in place.

Central government released its Industrial Plan in 2017, setting out new strategies to build upon what has been identified as the grand challenges of the future. These include global trends relating to: artificial intelligence and data, an ageing society, clean growth and the future of mobility; all of which, if tackled, have the potential to transform the UK's economy.



Local

The council's Corporate Plan 2021-2026 sets out the strategic direction for the Borough, and includes the goal of enabling prosperity. To reach that goal, the following priorities are listed:

- EP1 Provide the right support for sustainable business growth
- EP2 Sustain the vitality of our town centres, and
- EP3 Support educational attainment and skills development for all ages

In addition to the enabling prosperity goal, the Corporate Plan outlines a cross-cutting theme of dealing with the Climate Change Emergency – setting a goal to deliver what we need to do across all our services to address climate change.

The council's Local Plan 2040 sets out the vision for development across the Borough, determining the ways that local areas will be developed. One main theme set out within the plan's vision is to increase prosperity across the borough – supporting a stronger local economy by building on the strengths of the emerging higher value clusters, to become a location for innovative businesses, with a strategically important employment site as a local innovation hub.

To achieve the Local Plan's goal of a "more prosperous" Borough, there is a need to support a stronger local economy, delivering economic growth, broaden employment opportunities, and both attract and enable high value businesses to prosper.



Regional

The Pan regional partnership provides a framework of opportunities for the region including Bedford, and is home to one of the fastest growing economies in England. The government's ambition for the Arc is to create a world-leading innovation region that will deliver growth in the economy. Connectivity and infrastructure developments are other aspects of the project that provide opportunity for Bedford Borough.

The development of East West Rail will open opportunities for local economies to provide what Cambridge and Oxford cannot. Limited land supply and soaring commercial and residential costs in these areas means companies cannot afford to grow and develop in the university cities, impacting on the local workforce due to rising living costs. Bedford Borough has the opportunity to capitalise on its proximity to Cambridge, and with an established economy already present in the Borough, Bedford is a viable alternative for investment.

The South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) Local Industrial Plan (LIS), identifies a number of regional priorities taken from the national industrial plan. The LIS identifies growth sectors (future mobility, artificial intelligence and data, clean growth, ageing society) that have been fed into our local ambitions for Bedford Borough.

Purpose

The role of the EPP is to provide a roadmap for the economic development of Bedford across the council's activities. The plan outlines the work that will be undertaken over the next five years in response to the challenges and opportunities listed below. This will entail a range of different activities (both measurable and enabling) with impacts being seen over the short, medium and longer term.

Challenges for Bedford	Opportunities for Bedford
Future population projections, an ageing population and the impact on the workforce.	Strategic location within England and Strategic location within England, being 2hrs from 70% of the population. Direct travel links to London and being at the centre of the Pan regional partnership.
Low skilled economy compared to other areas in region. Combined with higher skilled workers commuting out of the Borough.	Bedford's location creates opportunities for growth and the development of a higher value economy.
National challenges felt in local town centres, due to changing shopping habits of consumers.	Already established and diverse business landscape, with high value businesses in the Borough.
Economic shocks felt at local level that cannot be prevented by local actions. This could be for a range of reasons, not limited to but including; global pandemics, international conflicts, supply shortages & changes in national trade regulations.	Capitalise on further and higher Education poles in proximity to Bedford, such as Bedford college, University of Bedfordshire, Cranfield University, University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge.
Changes to the prevalence of sectors in the future, creates the need to address future growth sectors now to enable employment in the future.	Desirability of the area, with good schools, leisure and housing choices on offer.
Due to the changing labour market there is a need for skills provision to adapt, addressing issues now and in the future.	New growth sectors provide Bedford with the chance to build them into the local economy.

Vision

A vision for Bedford Borough has been developed from the evidence produced in the Employment - Economic Growth Ambitions topic paper produced for the Local Plan 2040 (Appendix 1).

That paper concludes that to maximise the opportunities for Bedford Borough, there is a need to prioritise sectors that yield a higher income. This will benefit both the overall economy and individuals within it. Prioritising higher value sectors will increase wage opportunities for the local population, allowing them to both work and live within the Borough, increasing spend locally with consequent economic and employment benefits. As a result, there is an importance to the future local economy of increasing the higher productivity value sectors. The emerging priority sectors have been identified as:

1. Green technologies

2. Medical diagnostics

3. Food and drink manufacturing

4. High value manufacturing and engineering

5. Creative industries

Alongside the prioritisation of the five sectors above, it is important that Bedford Borough has a mixed economy, from a range of sectors providing jobs with a range skills.

Our Vision:

To create a diverse economy within Bedford Borough, growing business already here and attracting new, innovative businesses. Increasing high productivity jobs, and subsequent increase in GVA and wages.

Case Studies

Green Energy Park



The Bedford Green Energy and Technology Park, part funded by Bedford Borough Council and SEMLEP Local Growth Fund, illustrates an example of an emerging and future sector in Bedford Borough now. The park will deliver low carbon, clean energy technologies on a closed, restored landfill site. It consists of over 8,000 solar panels and has the capacity for an anaerobic digestion system and battery storage capability with the site to also be utilised as an education and training centre in collaboration with the University of Bedfordshire, Cranfield University and local colleges.

Medical Diagnostics



An example of the emerging medical diagnostics sector in Bedford Borough is Global Access Health (GAH), located at Thurleigh Business Park. GAH are global leaders in pioneering work to discover and prototype malaria diagnostic apparatus which can be implemented in the Global South. In recent years the company has branched into COVID diagnostics and was awarded a government grant at the beginning of the pandemic to create accurate,

cheap and mass manufactural lateral flow tests. Formerly Mologic and Global Access Diagnostics (GAD), the companies now sit together as part of Global Access Health, which incorporated the manufacturing element and have now been acquired by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Soros Foundation, to acts as a third sector entity to continue its global pinioning work with £30m worth of new funding from its parent owners.

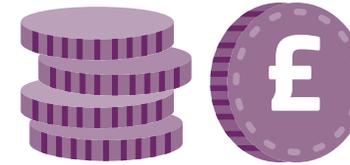
Other established Bedford Borough businesses operating and innovating within the Medical Diagnostics sector include Fujifilm UK and Swiss Precision Diagnostic (SPD) amongst a number of other smaller businesses.

Economic Profile



Key Facts & Figures

Population **185,300** (Census 2021)
GVA 2020 **£4,220 million**
Employees **79,000** (2020)
Business **7,325** (2021)



Average weekly wage (mean weekly)
by workplace £679.50 (2021)

Average weekly wage (mean weekly)
by residence £736.20 (2021)

Of those who are economically active



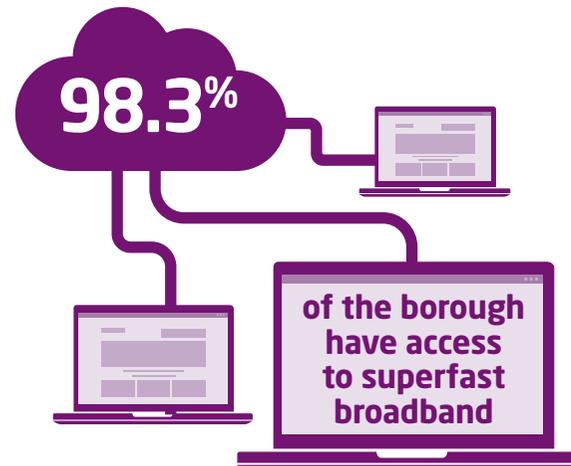
73% are in employment
(Jan - Dec 2021)

4% are unemployed
(Jan - Dec 2021, model based)

Level 4+ qualifications
49.5% (2021)

Level 1+ qualifications
88.4% (2021)

No qualifications
5.3% (2021)



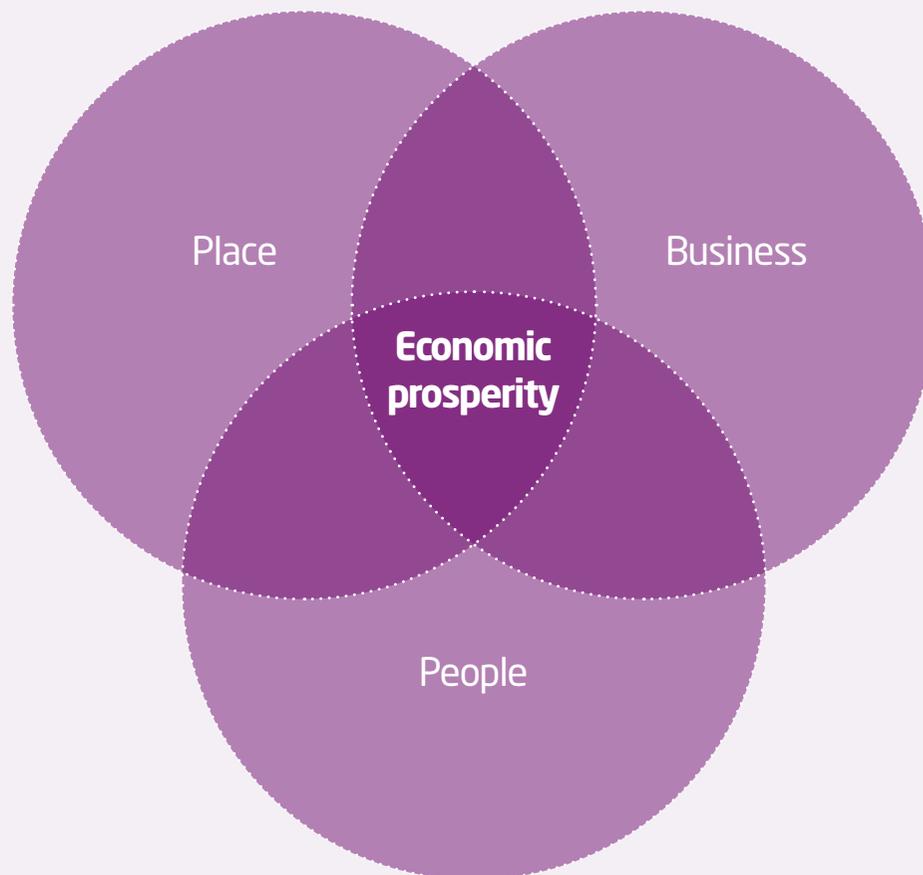
Over 73%
of businesses survive
over 2 years in Bedford,
higher than the UK
average of 70%

[ONS 2021]

Achieving prosperity

To achieve economic prosperity, the challenges outlined above need to be addressed. This document outlines the ways the council and its partners will tackle them.

The challenges have been split this into three key themes: business, place and people.



Businesses, places and people work synergistically to achieve economic prosperity. To attract businesses and retain the local population the importance of place is key; creating a place where businesses and employees are happy, and have access to the infrastructure and services they need.

Attracting investment into the Borough, and growing those businesses already here, creates employment opportunities for the local population.

To maximise the impact of these opportunities, the local population need to be equipped with the skills to gain employment now and in the future.

Each one of the themes of business, place and people has been split into three areas of activity:

Action	What	Why
Business		
Business investment	To promote high value investment opportunities Business support.	Supporting existing businesses to thrive and also grow. Supports local employment and brings value to the local economy, creating a healthy and attractive business landscape.
Business growth	To grow and enhance the competitiveness of our business base.	Provides employment for the local population, also brings money into the local economy.
Strategic sites	To create the right conditions for business investment and growth.	To enable the provision of sites that are required to develop investment in key target sectors.
Place		
Infrastructure	To deliver a modern integrated transport and digital structure.	Provide the right infrastructure for residents and businesses to grow and thrive.
Place shaping	To influence developments within the Borough.	Ensure we have a diverse economy that provides a range of employment for all.
Town centre	To create a high quality multi-functional centre, building on our distinctive identity.	Increase use of the town centre and related expenditure, filtering it back into the local economy.
People		
Jobs	To create a Borough where everyone who is able to work, can.	Increased disposable income due to employment enabling people to spend locally, also reducing the need for public support.
Skills	To ensure our workforce is equipped with the skills it needs in both the current and future labour markets.	To ensure a pipeline of skilled workers for businesses across the borough.
Wellbeing	To support initiatives that improve residents' and employees' wellbeing.	Better attendance at work if people are in good health, which increases productivity of businesses across the borough.

Delivering and Measuring Growth

To deliver the vision set out in this plan the table below outlines the priority actions that will be undertaken in the next five years throughout the lifetime of this plan.

To enable the delivery of these actions the Economic Growth Team will work with a range of departments across the Council to collaborate and support where appropriate.

Throughout the delivery of all actions the cross cutting theme of the climate change emergency will be prioritised as appropriate.



Action

- ✓ Be alert to any funding opportunities and submit funding bids as and when appropriate.
- ✓ Promote investment opportunities and secure jobs through strategic engagement.
- ✓ Co-ordinate and host six strategically important investment meetings per year with developers / end-users to secure business investment.
- ✓ Engage with further and higher education providers to identify opportunities to bring business investment into Bedford Borough
- ✓ Target inward investment from priority sectors' businesses.
- ✓ Use social media and digital marketing to promote Bedford Borough and the opportunities available, including e-newsletter.
- ✓ Produce an annual Business Support factsheet detailing the advice, funding, training etc. available to businesses in Bedford Borough.
- ✓ Hold regular intermediary network events and meetings with agents.
- ✓ Undertake business engagement visits to better understand the strengths and opportunities for growth, as well as offering support in removing any obstacles to development.
- ✓ Feed into regional economic strategies as they develop to ensure Bedford's needs are prioritised.
- ✓ Secure end-user occupiers on key strategic employment sites.

Action

- ✓ Ensure the efficient and effective implementation of Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) contracts / programmes.
 - ✓ Identify, consider and apply (where appropriate) for additional funding to support the delivery of superfast broadband infrastructure.
 - ✓ Deliver the One Public Estate programme, including viability and master planning work to make more efficient and effective use of local public sector assets, and to bring forward the regeneration of key town centre and edge of centre sites.
 - ✓ Deliver regeneration projects including the Town Deal Investment Plan and High Street Heritage Action Zone.
 - ✓ Work with partners, including Bedford BID and commercial agents, to attract multiple and quality independent retailers through direct marketing and town centre performance information.
 - ✓ Work with partners to deliver an improved town centre outdoor events and activities programme.
 - ✓ Deliver the Town Centre Plan
 - ✓ Provide employability support through the Jobs Hub e.g. CV writing, interview techniques, job searching.
 - ✓ Develop specific areas of focus and increase support provision.
 - ✓ Support key partners (including DWP) to increase employability, skills and enterprise in targeted communities.
 - ✓ Promote free skills training courses e.g. digital, ESOL, numeracy, literacy, core competencies.
 - ✓ Promote support services to address housing, language, finance, health and basic skills issues that create a barrier.
 - ✓ Promote employment opportunities within the Borough through the Jobs Hub.
 - ✓ Proactively promote apprenticeships to the Borough's private and public sector organisations, creating increased opportunities at all levels.
 - ✓ Deliver the Skills Led Recovery Plan
 - ✓ Engage with regional bodies to develop sector-specific approaches to skills development and employment provision.
 - ✓ Increase employer engagement to ensure accurate Labour Market Information and skills demand and proactively share this with education and training providers and employment support organisations.
 - ✓ Work with large developers to ensure Employment & Skills Plans reflect the needs of the Borough.
 - ✓ Develop school and college business partnerships, linking local employers with young people and school leadership teams.
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Measuring attainment

The success of the plan will be measured by the following indicators over its five year life span. This will provide data to illustrate the effectiveness of the strategy implemented, and whether its targets have been met.

Primary statistical / numerical indicators:

- **Increase in Gross Value Added (GVA) [current prices per head]**
- **Increase in employment and the range of employment offered, including the five priority sectors**
- **Number of new business in the five priority sectors**
- **Average wages for employees and residents**
- **Unemployment rate / claimant rate**
- **Businesses / companies attending Council organised or sponsored events**
- **% with access to gigabit / superfast broadband**
- **Number of strategically important businesses visited by the Economic Growth team.**
- **Town centre footfall**
- **Vacant units**
- **Town centre promotional events**
- **Residents' skill levels**



Alongside the tangible numbers that can be measured in respect of our primary indicators, there will also be work that is undertaken within the 2023 - 2028 time frame that is both intangible, and / or delivers secondary and tertiary impacts.

Data on both levels of indicator will be fed into an annual report that will monitor our progress in delivering the plan.

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