

BE A PART OF SOMETHING
BIGGER

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ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BUSINESS FIRST
YEAR END 31ST MARCH 2024

What businesses say about Buckinghamshire Business First

“It’s being part of something that amplifies my voice and brings it to a larger audience. Together, we can be such a strong force.”

- Angela Spang, JUNE Medical



“There is a real spirit of collaboration within the business community and a wealth of support available. Buckinghamshire Business First is a business’s best friend.”

- Victoria Brocklesby, Origin Global



“Being mentored, and mentoring other businesses, has been really useful with all the new ideas and peoples’ experiences.”

- Greg Thomas, TalkOne





“My business needs me to be the best leader I can be. The support backfills what we’re supposed to know already when running a business and broadens our horizons to take our businesses forward. It’s the best money I invest all year.”

- Sean O’Farrell, Choice Business Loans

“Buckinghamshire Business First has been extremely supportive in our business evolution, particularly with our company rebrand.”

- Roy Kimani, CUBE



“Mixing with smaller local businesses has been really beneficial for us. We have generated leads and opportunities for new business.”

- Michelle Caulfield-Harris, Red Helix

“When you look at the Earth from space, you realise that our planet is a beautiful, interconnected system. We are all in this together.”

- Mae Jemison, former NASA astronaut

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Chairman's welcome

The theme of my introduction this year is challenge. Running a business has never been more challenging and there is little sign of this changing soon. The past year has presented formidable obstacles for Buckinghamshire businesses, reflecting an extended period of profound difficulty and transformation.

The commercial landscape continues to be heavily influenced by a series of interconnected factors that have tested the resilience and adaptability of businesses across all sectors. The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to cast a shadow over the business environment. While some industries have experienced a recovery, many are still grappling with the lingering effects of disrupted supply chains, labour shortages, and shifting consumer behaviours. These disruptions have forced businesses to constantly reassess and adapt their strategies to maintain operational stability.

Economic pressures and geopolitical events have compounded these challenges. The UK economy has faced significant headwinds, including persistent inflation and high interest rates, which have driven up costs for businesses and eroded consumer purchasing power. These conditions have created a delicate balancing act for many businesses, as they try to manage significantly higher costs whilst having to maintain value for customers in a competitive consumer environment. The squeeze on profits is palpable. In addition to the macroeconomic and geopolitical challenges, businesses are facing heightened scrutiny regarding their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices. The transition to a low carbon economy is not only a regulatory necessity but also a societal expectation. Businesses must invest in sustainable practices and demonstrate a commitment to ethical governance, often requiring substantial financial and operational adjustments in a climate where resources are already stretched thin.

While technological disruption offers opportunities for innovation and efficiency, it also introduces new challenges. The rapid pace of digital transformation has exposed businesses to cybersecurity risks and necessitated continuous investment in technology and skills development. Companies must stay ahead of the curve in adopting new technologies while safeguarding their operations and data from increasingly sophisticated cyber threats.

Moreover, the human element of business life cannot be overlooked. The workforce is experiencing unprecedented change, with remote working becoming a norm and mental health concerns rising.



Companies must invest in supporting their employees' wellbeing and adapting to new modes of work, all while striving to maintain productivity and engagement. Buckinghamshire Business First (BBF) is no different from many other businesses and has had to deal with all the aforementioned, so we know at firsthand what our members are facing. We have had another extremely busy year with members' events almost daily, another very successful Business Awards cycle, highly-rated Business Leaders' Dinners and Lunches, and a fabulous Bucks Skills Show at the Stoke Mandeville Stadium. Tribute must be paid to the entire BBF team for their hard work and resilience.

As I look ahead, the path forward will continue to be fraught with challenges. However, we are committed to facing these difficulties with you, leveraging our knowledge and contacts for the benefit of our members. Our commitment to the business community remains unwavering. We work with many different stakeholders and will always unashamedly promote ideas and strategies that are good for business, because ultimately businesses pay for everything and are the cornerstone of our communities.

To end on a positive note, opportunity might be a better way of looking at challenge, and to quote Joshua J. Marine: "Challenges are what make life interesting and overcoming them is what makes life meaningful."

Michael

**Michael Garvey MBE, Chairman
Buckinghamshire Business First
Managing Director, Chandler Garvey**

Part of Something Bigger



Buckinghamshire Business First is more than just a support network; we are a dynamic, business-led community supporting both new ventures and established enterprises across Buckinghamshire. When we succeed, we succeed together in the spirit of collaboration that the Buckinghamshire business community is famed for.

Our company values define who we are, how we act, and how we wish to inspire others to be. Our goal is always to make a real difference to the people, businesses and communities that we serve, all while displaying an integrity and fairness towards our own team that recognises every individual's strengths. That's why we're a Living Wage Employer, a signatory of the Prompt Payment Code, and a member of the Heart of Bucks Community Investor scheme, among other commitments.

In these ways, we can make an impact that creates a ripple effect in our interconnected world. There are moments that remind us that we are all part of something bigger, all interconnected, whether it's a view of Earth from space, memories of a locked down world, a major sports event, a historic event like a coronation, or even a national tragedy.

For those of us immersed in the world of businesses, we know that a business eco system thrives on its connections. No business operates in isolation, but business owners often do, with far too many feeling isolated, overworked, and stressed.

As a consequence, they are unaware of opportunities available to them, funding that can help them unlock growth, the network that can open their eyes to new ideas, or the way that legislation affects their business prospects.

Networking is about more than talking to strangers over nibbles; it's the absence of isolation. Advice is more than just a thought for the day; it's the unearthing of priceless information that wouldn't otherwise have been discovered. Mentoring is about the wisdom of a peer teaching you the mistakes they made so you don't repeat them.



Ironically, when we realise that we're #PartOfSomethingBigger, the world feels smaller, more manageable, easier to navigate. Business owners are not alone. The Buckinghamshire business community is there for them, and so is Buckinghamshire Business First.

The Board

"The Board of Directors are all businesspeople, drawn from businesses both large and small, across many different sectors, and collectively appreciate the challenges of running a business at close quarters. This knowledge and experience helps shape strategies and policies and fortifies the relationship with members. We strengthened and expanded the board significantly in the spring and I am grateful to the new board members for the hard work and enthusiasm already being demonstrated." - Michael Garvey



Michael Garvey MBE
Chairman
Managing Director,
Chandler Garvey



Hiren Gandhi
Vice-Chairman
Partner, Blaser Mills



Philippa Batting
Chief Executive Officer
Buckinghamshire Business First
& Ngage Solutions



Adam Stronach
Treasurer
Director, Evelyn Partners



Elizabeth Adlington
Director, Adlington
Young



Klaus Allion
Owner and Managing Director,
ANT Telecommunications



Victoria Brocklesby
Co-founder and COO,
Origin Frames



Shaun Brownsmith
Managing Director, Dux
Advisory



Kris Theophanous
CEO, Bradbury Tracks



Vicky Hope-Walker
CEO, National Paralympic
Heritage Trust



Mark Schnull
Managing Director, Arrow
Planning



Helen Shellabear
Managing Director,
Shellwin Real Estate



Emma Butt
Managing Partner,
Adroit Services



Henry Tadros
Chairman, Ercol Furniture

Learn more about our board members
and wider team:

bbf.uk.com/meet-the-team

A Year of Success



526

jobs created, worth
£15.96m*, and
thousands of jobs
safeguarded



2,539

businesses
supported



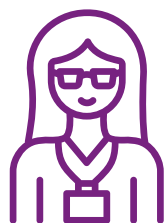
125

events



£929,094

awarded in grants



254

businesses engaged with
local schools and college



£924,000

worth of advice provided
at no cost to businesses



10,264

hours of support
provided



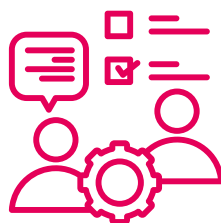
3,110

event attendees



99

people supported to start
their own business



£384,000

worth of Enterprise
Adviser time given
for free to schools
to support the future
workforce



£1.1 million

savings achieved by
businesses to 2030
through Net Zero
initiatives



£2.5 million

worth of skills advice
provided to individuals at
no cost to them

*(Framework for calculating social value metrics, used as a social value measurement standard across the UK.) <https://socialvalueportal.com/solutions/national-toms/>

Growth & Innovation



As the Growth Hub for Buckinghamshire, we use the G-word a lot. But as you can see, growth is more than a buzzword to us, it's something that we live and breathe.

For growth to occur, you need the right conditions. The Buckinghamshire business community has the passion, grit, determination, and open-minded collaborative spirit that fuels dreams into existence. Add in the practical advice, support, mentoring, networking and funding delivered by a Growth Hub such as Buckinghamshire Business First, and you are ready to grow.

We reach businesses in all corners of the county, in all sectors, at all stages of the lifecycle, of all sizes (from those flying solo to those employing hundreds of staff), albeit with a natural lean towards the small business community that predominates our local economy.

In a sea of highlights, the stand-out Growth and Innovation Summit & Business Expo in December 2023 was a great example of a business community coming together to learn, be inspired, and create new partnerships.

The annual celebration that is the Buckinghamshire Business Awards once again delivered on its goal of honouring the best of our business community, while we ensured the knowledge and inspiration of our local business leaders was shared widely on our Talking Heads podcast, which (at time of writing) now has 20 episodes of wisdom for people to tap into.

Listen here > bbf.uk.com/podcast

When it comes to future trends that will impact on a business's growth plans, artificial intelligence (AI) is a biggie. It was certainly a popular topic when we hosted AI-related events over the past 12 months, with 330 people eagerly signing up to learn more about what the future has in store. This includes the 100-plus people who joined our Focus on AI event that was so popular that we broadcast a livestream for those who couldn't get a ticket!





The space sector is a big draw, exemplified by the huge turnout at the **Westcott Showcase: Driving Space Innovation** event. The 240 guests, 60% of whom were getting their first glimpse of Westcott Venture Park, enjoyed a tour and learned all about drones, rocket propulsion and careers in space.

One thing we know for sure at Buckinghamshire Business First is that when it comes to opportunities and challenges with growth, access to funding, new technologies and more, we're here to guide businesses through it all.

After a Business Briefing with Steve Baker MP on artificial intelligence, Steve spoke with Michael Garvey on our Talking Heads podcast about the economy, UK planning system & more. Listen here > bbf.uk.com/politics-and-economics



We marked International Trade Week in November with a Simply Exporting workshop run in partnership with the Department for Business and Trade and hosted at Global Infusion Group's HQ in Aston Clinton.



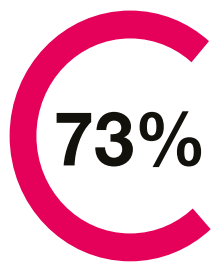
Business leaders Victoria Brocklesby (Origin Global) and Kris Theophanous (Bradbury Tracks) took the reins of our Talking Heads podcast for an insightful conversation about the benefits of pursuing continuous improvement and innovation in business, and the '2-second Lean philosophy'.

Listen here > bbf.uk.com/2-second-lean

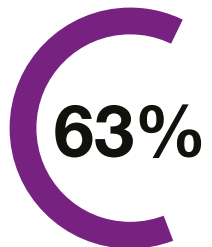
Growth Programme



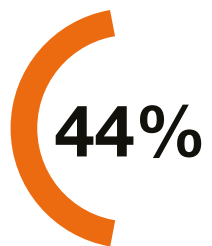
Over the past 12 months, the **Growth Programme** has continued to be the lynchpin of business support in Buckinghamshire. The statistics, outcomes, and inboxes full of positive feedback speak for themselves.



73% of businesses on the Growth Programme increased turnover



63% of businesses on the Growth Programme improved profitability



44% of businesses on the Growth Programme increased productivity

“They’ve provided a whole melting pot of advice. We’re constantly implementing that advice and it forms part of our everyday function and core as a business.”

– Dave Kirby, Old Bills Pest Control

“The support provided by the Growth Advice Service adds infinite value.”

– Charlie Archer, JCL Glass

Peer to peer support is crucial to leadership development in creating a collaborative environment where leaders can learn from each other, hold each other accountable, build trust and camaraderie, empower one another, and reduce feelings of isolation. This support system is essential for nurturing well-rounded and resilient leaders who can thrive in today’s complex and dynamic business environment.

Mentoring is now integrated within our growth offer, so that businesses can be provided with further support from a mentor once they have completed the Growth Programme. A total of 69 mentees have been supported since the start of the programme. There are currently 19 active mentors supporting them.

“I’m really excited for the next steps. Having a mentor that I feel a healthy amount of accountability to really brings out the best in me. I’m so lucky to live in a county that has a resource like yours.”

– Sarah Crowner, Crown VA Services



MD Ngage & Peer Ngage

Our **MD Ngage** and **Peer Ngage** cohorts of business leaders and senior managers tackled business challenges together while learning from experts on a diverse range of topics such as cyber security, sales, AI, innovation, internal communications, CSR, and more.

“It created real conversations and learning.”

– David Finch, Purple Frog, MD Ngage cohort



“This session was perfect in every aspect!”

– Josh Hall, Bradbury Tracks, Peer Ngage cohort

The MD Ngage Momentum group enjoyed a thought-provoking two-day retreat at Danesfield House, focusing on workforce development, people, and skills.

Rural support



Our team specialises in supporting **rural businesses** to thrive against a backdrop of unique challenges that often require a combination of innovative strategies, government support, and community collaboration.

The Buckinghamshire Rural Business Grant, funded through the UK government’s Rural England Prosperity Fund, launched in June 2023 and our team has been working closely with Buckinghamshire Council to support businesses through the application process.



79% of enquiries for the Bucks Rural Business Grant have led to an application



84% of expressions of interest have been approved



£41,000 – the average Bucks Rural Business Grant awarded

Learn about the support on offer for rural businesses:
bbf.uk.com/rural-ngage

King's Awards for Enterprise 2024 launch event



Business Briefing with Sarah Green MP



There was a spotlight on growth at this event held in the Amersham and Chesham constituency at Silverson Machines.

Focus on Funding workshop



Working with the British Business Bank, we guided dozens of businesses through the various types of funding available.



Focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI) event

More than 100 people joined us to explore AI's potential to boost business productivity, combat skills shortages, and unleash innovation.

Buckinghamshire Business Awards



The great and the good gathered at Aylesbury Waterside Theatre on 21st September 2023, with the hard work, innovation and entrepreneurial vision of our business community on full show. The achievements of the winners and finalists showed why nobody does business like Buckinghamshire.

In a wonderful moment, the charity raffle on behalf of Heart of Bucks raised a whopping £1,585, which will be used to deliver grants to charities and community groups in Buckinghamshire.

Guests indulged in a beautiful three-course meal and enjoyed the buzzing atmosphere - while the entertainment was just magic!

"The Buckinghamshire Business Awards are where the business community comes together to pay tribute to the excellence and innovation that are the hallmarks of Buckinghamshire's businesses."

"The judging process is as thorough as can be, with all of the finalists achieving something truly special by making it to the final shortlist for awards night."

- Philippa Batting, CEO, Buckinghamshire Business First

Relive the night with our special supplement:

bbf.uk.com/2023-awards

See the full list of winners at:
bbf.uk.com/bba2023



Saepio Solutions, Growth Business of the Year



Elite HNW, New Business of the Year



StaffHost Digital, Enterprising Business of the Year



Moogies, Net Zero Ambition Business of the Year



Buckinghamshire's visitor economy is worth **£1.1 billion annually** and generates **11,000 local jobs**.

It's been a bittersweet year for Visit Buckinghamshire, with the great developments and milestones achieved tempered by the loss of funding from Buckinghamshire Council, which faced unenviable funding decisions as it meets its circa 1,300 statutory obligations.

This ultimately led to the closure of Visit Bucks, which nonetheless enjoyed a stellar year.



1,580 new sign-ups to e-newsletter (**7,760** in total)



269 new Instagram followers, **202** more Facebook followers



129,399 website sessions on visitbuckinghamshire.org



76.3% engagement rate in London



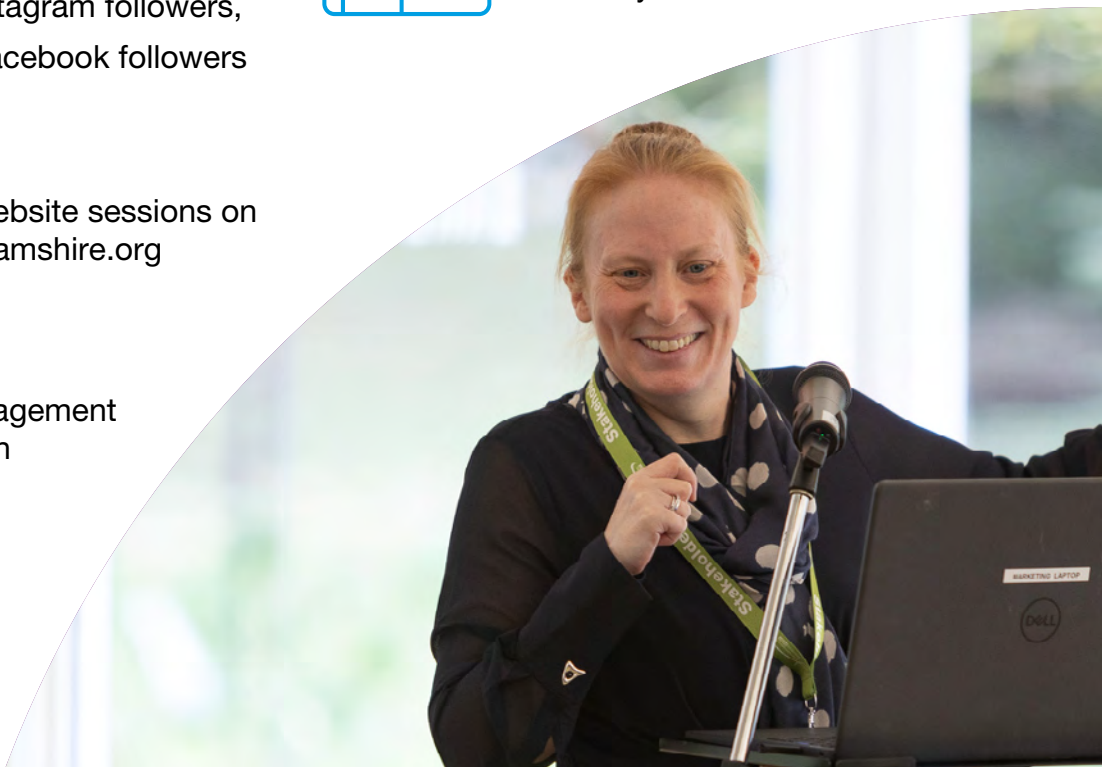
In the last decade, Visit Bucks has secured **£1million** in funding to support the tourism sector



Partnered with **over 300** tourism businesses in the past year



Visitbuckinghamshire.org attracted **30,000** unique monthly visitors





One of the big success stories in the last year was the growing awareness of Buckinghamshire in the London market. This followed a strong summer campaign called #BrilliantBucks, the development of a Tourism Strategy, and the continued growth of a strong and loyal community base.

However, the loss of council funding, combined with a lack of local support for a Tourism Strategy, meant that Visit Bucks was unable to acquire Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) accreditation from Visit England, leaving Buckinghamshire's official DMO in grave danger.

The fight to save Visit Bucks was on. A fundraising campaign was launched at the Focus on Tourism event at Missenden Abbey in February, the home of Bucks New University's International Hospitality School. A great turnout of 120 local tourism and hospitality businesses heard from Visit England's Andrew Stokes MBE and an inspiring panel who showed how collaboration across the visitor economy can bring benefits to Buckinghamshire.

"The tourist pound is very important for the economy. The money we earn pays suppliers and wages. It also helps the local economy by putting money into people's pockets to enable them to spend locally. Tourism and days out are a major contributor locally."

- Stephen Green,
Buckinghamshire Railway Centre

Despite best efforts and support from local businesses, Visit Bucks was forced to close its doors at the end of March. With no DMO within Buckinghamshire, the sector is at risk now and in the future.

If you would like to discuss any support you may be able to provide for the visitor economy in Buckinghamshire, please contact Philippa Batting at Philippa@bbf.uk.com.



Net Zero



If any issue encapsulates the idea of being part of something bigger, it's surely climate change. After all, our individual actions have ramifications across the globe.

At Buckinghamshire Business First, we are committed to halving our greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and achieving net zero emissions by 2050, something we formally committed to through the United Nations Race to Zero campaign.

We ourselves are learning all the time, and we aim to lead businesses on the journey as we go. We are in a privileged position to inform and inspire businesses about what they can do to become more sustainable, highlighting the support available to them, introducing them to experts in the field, and bringing real-life business success stories to the fore to show what's possible.

"If I was to offer any advice to those starting their journey to net zero, my top tip would be to go to Buckinghamshire Business First. They've just been amazing, the whole team, always at the end of the phone or an email."

- Jacqui Garrad, National Museum of Computing

Our **Net Zero Ngage** suite of programmes covered Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes over the past 12 months, with practical advice and resources (and in the case of Milton Keynes, grant funding) to help businesses understand their carbon footprint and learn how to reduce it.

"I had no idea what our carbon emissions were."

- Alex Vass, Founder of Independent Marketing Sciences (IMS), on the situation before our Net Zero Advisers provided IMS with a report detailing the sources of their emissions and areas for improvement

Learn how being a more sustainable business can help you be a more productive business:
bbf.uk.com/net-zero



If we're talking inspiration, we have to mention the **Net Zero MK: Driving Positive Change** event, held in November at MK Gallery in Milton Keynes. More than 50 businesses heard a quite brilliant keynote speech from net zero pioneer Chris Hines, co-founder of Surfers Against Sewage, and an enlightening panel discussion with local net zero heroes such as Moogies, the National Museum of Computing, and Shellwin Real Estate.

Chris also sat down with our Climate Change Programme Manager Dan Cope for an episode of our Talking Heads podcast all about shaping a greener, more sustainable future. Their thought-provoking conversation covered the economic benefits of embracing green practices, and how to tackle greenwashing, while Chris shared his advice for people keen to embark on a positive journey of change. Listen here > bbf.uk.com/greener-future

"Once we lowered our defences around this topic, we really enjoyed this process, and it's given staff something to focus on as a team."

- Net Zero MK grant recipient

Engagement was high at our series of **Net Zero Power Hours** in early 2024. These interactive webinars, hosted by our Net Zero advisers, saw lots of ideas and questions raised. This curiosity and collective support is also typified by our **Net Zero Ngage Collaboration Circle** on LinkedIn, which has grown to 135 business members who share tips and insights on reducing carbon emissions.

"It's the first time we've put a social media post out about our environmental actions. Thank you for giving us the confidence we needed."

- Net Zero Bucks applicant & member of the Net Zero Collaboration Circle

To really move the needle on climate change, we need big ideas and businesses that can deliver on them, and that's exactly what Buckinghamshire's Gridserve is doing with its pioneering solar and battery-powered electric vehicle charging network. CEO Toddington Harper spoke on our podcast about the climate crisis, demystifying electric vehicles, sustainable energy, and what Gridserve is doing to reshape energy and transport in the UK. Listen here > bbf.uk.com/sustainable-energy

Last year, we said farewell to the **Low Carbon Workspaces** project, which left a huge legacy. Projects produced annual CO₂e savings of 5,000 tonnes, equivalent to the energy use of over 1,500 homes or 2,350 cars on the road. A 500kg reduction in nitrous oxide directly improved air quality too. See what we mean with this impressive showreel of achievements: bit.ly/lcw-showreel

The **Better Business Driving** project, launched with Buckinghamshire Council to promote sustainable transport and reduce air pollution, and the support for tradespeople to upskill on renewable technologies are examples of the new ways we are helping business to go green in 2024/25, as we continue to show that what's good for the planet is good for business.

909 tonnes of CO₂e saved in 2023/24 is equivalent to:



Annual car mileage of 184 cars



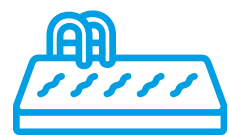
Annual energy usage of 276 homes



1,822 tonnes of waste recycled instead of landfilled



Carbonating 151,500,000 cola bottles



Gas volume of 202 Olympic swimming pools

People Planning & Skills



Building a successful team is a delicate process, particularly when employers are encouraged to forego the cookie cutter approach to recruitment and instead build teams of people with diverse experiences and skill sets.

We know from despatches that employers can struggle to find the right people and skills, but in the past 12 months our Workforce Skills Team has been supporting businesses with their 'people plans', tackling recruitment, apprenticeships and workforce development. Over 200 businesses now have 'people plans' that align with their business plans to help them expand or develop their workforce.

We have been joining the dots of our **Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)** activity to ensure employers can influence the learning and training of the next generation of talent in Buckinghamshire. Our **Bucks Skills Hub Under 19s Team** have been creating excellence with their stand-out Teacher Encounters programme, inspiring Enterprise Advisers (with over 80 volunteers from business now working with schools), and the brilliant Green Schools Challenge.

We can help you refresh your recruitment and retention strategies and upskill your team. Contact us at: WorkforceSkills@bbf.uk.com or 01494 927130.

The **Green Schools Challenge** saw year 12 students tackle green issues in their school or community, pitching their entrepreneurial solutions to a Dragons Den-style panel. Supporting the students were local businesses: Construction Specialties, KWSP, Lunaz, Shellwin Real Estate, Softcat, WhiffAway, and Zenopa.

"It is all well and good using textbooks, but it is really important that we go to places and I can use that knowledge and inform my students of their next steps."

- Dr Luke Newton, Head of Health and Social Care, Grange School, Aylesbury - Teacher Encounters participant

The **Teacher Encounters Programme** brings teachers into the workplace to learn firsthand about the different career pathways relevant to their subject. Of the teachers:



91% felt increased confidence to have careers talks with students



78% said it made them better at teaching their subject

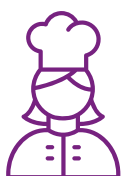


93% said it was a good use of their time and they'd like to do more of it

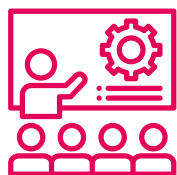


The Under 19s Team promoted apprenticeships to over 14,000 young people and 700 parents through initiatives like online events held during National Apprenticeship Week which saw apprentices, including degree level apprentices, from Softcat, All Spring Media, Redrow, Sumitomo, Amazon Prime, Zenopa, Cisco, Saffery, and the Digital Manufacturing Centre share their own experiences with young people and parent carers.

Through our work supporting businesses:



172 apprenticeship and T-level opportunities were identified



Our Workforce Skills Team delivered **19 employer workshops** and attended **25 employer events**



We convened 28 businesses at the home of Ercol in Princes Risborough for a Spotlight on Skills event with Greg Smith, MP for Buckingham, who said he was “grateful to BBF for inviting me to meet with local businesses – and to Ercol for hosting. With Spring Budget approaching, invaluable to hear directly from businesses what’s working and where the challenges are so I can best represent everyone in Westminster.”



Ercol Chairman Henry Tadros appeared on our Talking Heads podcast to speak about apprenticeships, inspiring the next generation, and the rich history of the iconic Ercol brand. Listen here > bbf.uk.com/ercol-family

What is the LSIP? It's a ground-breaking report that has established the specific skills priorities for Buckinghamshire and created the blueprint for how these needs can be met. Read it here > bbf.uk.com/LSIP



The showpiece **LSIP Summit** in June 2023 focused on what the plan means for local businesses and delved into the profound impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on jobs, skills, and the workplace. With digital skills and the adoption of new technology high on the list of business concerns, it was great to feel the collaborative energy in the room, with attendees sharing ideas, experiences and potential solutions to the challenges facing their organisations.

“What I found helpful was information from employers about the job market and trends in the recruitment of young people.”

- Andrew Markland, Buckinghamshire New University

“The panel discussion at the LSIP Summit was so insightful.”

- Emma Whiting, Adviza

To help us deliver on the LSIP's potential, we created **Sector Employer Groups** made up of local employers whose role is to advise Buckinghamshire Business First on issues related to post-16 technical education and skills which cause them to face barriers to growth within the key sectors outlined by the LSIP: engineering; digital; film & TV; education and training; and construction.

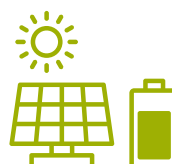
There have been notable successes in 2023/4 as we and our partners continue to pursue the aims of the LSIP. These include:



£2.5 million from the Local Skills Improvement Fund to address skills priorities



£3.2 million from the Department for Education to create Skills Bootcamps



Funding from the Home Decarbonisation Regional Skills Pilot to boost renewable tech skills under the **Retrofit Agenda**



£5.9m from the UK Space Agency to build a 62,000 sq. ft hub at Westcott Venture Park with training and technical facilities



Building a diverse team



We are working hard to inspire businesses about the great benefits an inclusive workforce can bring and to make the most of the diverse talent pool available. Studies show that companies that are more inclusive and diverse tend to be more innovative and profitable, but the employment rate for people with SEND is lower than the rest of the population. Schemes such as the **Armed Forces Covenant** and **Disability Confident Employer** programme, both of which Buckinghamshire Business First is signed up to, offer practical support for businesses that want to open their potential talent pool as wide as possible.

Our **Employer Guide to Supported Internships** is a useful document that explains to businesses how supported internships offer young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) the chance to develop skills and achieve sustained employment, while also bringing benefits to businesses, including higher morale and productivity. Read the guide here > bbf.uk.com/internships

For an insight into the concrete benefits that being a Disability Confident employer brings, look no further than our podcast with Fairhive Homes' John Wallbank, who spoke with Philippa Batting about the transformative impact of fostering an inclusive culture.

Listen here > bbf.uk.com/breaking-barriers

There are countless businesses that are already excelling at opening themselves up to a wide range of talent, including those that attended a Disability Confident workshop and exhibited at June's **Confident Futures Skills Show**, a careers event for people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and other career seekers who might have had their confidence dampened by facing barriers to employment. A whopping 600 people and 40 exhibitors convened at Stoke Mandeville Stadium for a day that aimed to tear down those barriers.

"It was amazing to see the students engaging in such a focused and creative environment, providing them the chance to explore a career opportunity in various sectors regardless of their ability. I would also highly recommend this opportunity for enterprises to expose themselves to a pool of talent sitting behind systemic barriers."

"A great day and I will be attending again next year!"

Bucks Skills Show



The annual extravaganza that is the **Bucks Skills Show** once again lit up the futures of thousands of young people and older career seekers. More than **6,000 people** visited the Stoke Mandeville Stadium venue over two days in March 2024, thanks in no small part to the support of headline sponsors **SYLO Beyond HR**, and partner sponsors **Buckinghamshire College Group**.

Real-life outcomes from the Bucks Skills Show:



Alcom IT lining up work experience for young people they engaged with



De Soutter Medical offering work experience to students they met



Align JV interviewing a qualified quantity surveyor who attended the evening event



Zenopa interviewing young people interested in their apprenticeship programme

“It has been a very engaging experience. We met a lot of students wishing to pursue a career in mechanical engineering.”

- Andy Darby, Silverson Machines

“The Bucks Skills Show has given us as a company the opportunity to meet enthusiastic individuals who are interested in the world of engineering and STEM.”

- Bradley Hollander, Martin Baker

Learn more about the biggest and best careers event in Buckinghamshire:
BucksSkillsHub.org/the-skills-show





“Having been to many careers fairs across my education, and now representing one of the companies at the Bucks Skills Show, I can confidently say that this is one of the best events I have come across. Bravo!”

- Amber Botting, Stantec

“It was nice to see my children interacting with the businesses and to realise they have so many options moving forward with their next stages of life.”

- Parent visiting with children aged 16 and 18

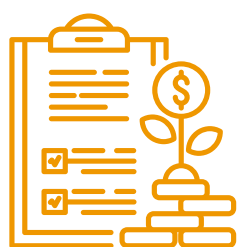


Our views on the priorities for economic development



On Skills

Focus on skills and the availability of talented labour resource, ensuring that people and their skills are retained within the county for the benefit of local businesses. Buckinghamshire businesses will be supported to publicise the career opportunities within their organisations.



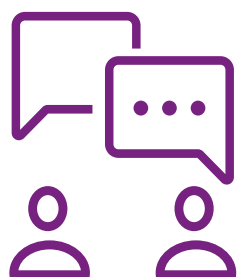
On Growth

Support businesses to thrive, with an emphasis on increased productivity, increased turnover and increased profits.



On Infrastructure

Capture the fourth industrial revolution by thinking 'Digital First' and supporting smart infrastructure and connectivity, ensuring digital needs and sustainability are considered before build. These tech advances can improve business capacity, productivity, efficiency, resilience, and services. Develop more land for employment sites, especially in the face of large volumes of housing developments, or risk a 'brain drain' and turning Bucks into a commuter county. Where residential sites are built, these must include affordable housing options to encourage people to move here or return after university.



On Business Support

The direct, one-to-one, bespoke support provided by BBF on a daily basis to individual businesses is vital to maintain growth.



On Net Zero

A low carbon, green economy must be nurtured and businesses supported to be more sustainable. This will also support resilience against ever-increasing energy costs and climate change.

Motivation

- To cultivate the conditions that encourage businesses to invest, grow and thrive in Buckinghamshire, therefore providing opportunities for growth and jobs within the county.
- Successful and growing businesses will provide the revenue required to deliver first-class services that benefit everyone in Buckinghamshire.
- Ensuring Buckinghamshire is a vibrant and economically healthy county, able to provide value to residents, tourists and businesses. The value that a vibrant local economy creates for the public sector helps to relieve the burden on the state and contributes to the national economy.
- To act as an effective advocate for businesses in conversations with policy makers at national government and local government level in order to decrease the challenges and barriers to growth for businesses.



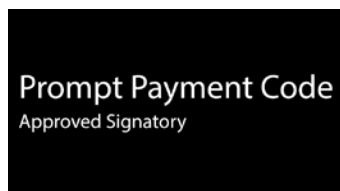
Accreditations and commitments



NPHT

NATIONAL PARALYMPIC
HERITAGE TRUST

RACE TO ZERO



We are proud of the accreditations we have worked hard to be awarded over the years.

They reflect our support for our employees, the business community, the environment, our suppliers, and charity and community groups.

They provide reassurance to our members, partners and funders that we are a safe pair of hands in the delivery of projects and business support activity, and that we are dedicated to achieving a fair, healthy and prosperous future for our employees and society as a whole.

We endeavour to 'walk the talk' on corporate social responsibility, and we encourage other businesses and organisations to pursue these accreditations too.

Because in our connected and collaborative business community, we are all part of something bigger, and we can all leave a lasting legacy.

Learn more about our credentials here >
bbf.uk.com/accreditations



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01494 927130



@bbfuk



info@bbf.uk.com