



# **ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25**

## **BUCKINGHAMSHIRE BUSINESS FIRST**

**YEAR END 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 2025**

## What businesses say about Buckinghamshire Business First



**“Buckinghamshire Business First is a huge pillar to lean on. I cannot thank the team enough for bringing such well-defined strategic inputs to its members, flawlessly delivered by seasoned experts. Plus, the connections you make are priceless.”**

**- Soumya Dinesh, Atula Technologies**

**“The greatest benefit was having the opportunity to reflect on my business, through the discussions with my Business Adviser. I really appreciated their supportive approach and expertise.”**

**- Vanessa Hunt, Vanessa Hunt Consulting**



**“The business has been going through the challenge of merging three companies and BBF has provided valuable advice and guidance. The courses that we’ve attended have been thought-provoking and provided several practical ideas.”**

**- David Milnes, SEBi Group**



## What businesses say about Buckinghamshire Business First

**“Speaking with an external person unrelated to our business, but with know-how, has made us look at our process in a different way. We have already made some changes that we believe will have a positive impact on our business.”**

**– Charmaine Hooper, World Abilitysports Ltd**



**“The experts at BBF have, as always, given fantastic advice and provided valuable insight and ideas to help us reach our growth goals. Looking at specific challenges and coming up with solutions has allowed me to regain some focus and control.”**

**– Steven Bryant, Aston Commercial Cleaning Ltd**



**“BBF is a good coordinating force for businesses in the local area, bringing them together. The targeted support and training on strategic planning, online marketing and Lean has helped us apply simple improvements to how we work and run the business.”**

**– Tom Jenkinson, The Chiltern Brewery Company**



**“Productivity is never an accident. It is always the result of a commitment to excellence, intelligent planning, and focused effort.”**

– Paul J. Meyer

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## Chairman's welcome

The theme of my introduction this year is once again challenge - but also resilience and readiness.

Over the past twelve months, running a business in Buckinghamshire has remained a formidable task. Many of the pressures outlined last year have not only persisted but intensified. The general election has brought about a change in national leadership, and with the new Labour government comes a different political and economic agenda. Early indications suggest that while some policies may benefit the wider economy, others - particularly those affecting the cost of employment - are already creating headwinds for businesses striving to remain competitive and sustainable.

Meanwhile, artificial intelligence is moving from the edges of the conversation to the centre of business strategy. While AI presents transformative opportunities for productivity and innovation, it also forces us to reconsider the human side of business. Relationships remain at the heart of everything we do. Business is still about people - trust, collaboration, shared goals - and navigating this next wave of technological change will depend just as much on our values as on our systems.

Closer to home, it has been an especially challenging year for Buckinghamshire Business First. The re-profiling of our funding allocation from Buckinghamshire Council has created uncertainty and forced difficult internal decisions. We have remained steadfast, however, in delivering support for businesses in Buckinghamshire, continuing to host a packed calendar of events, including another outstanding Bucks Skills Show and a Business Awards programme that celebrated the very best of local enterprise.

Despite these pressures, recent developments give reason for optimism. The May 2025 local elections marked a change in leadership at Buckinghamshire Council. The new administration, led by Councillor Steve Broadbent, has already signalled a fresh and more collaborative approach. We welcome this wholeheartedly. Early conversations have shown a genuine interest in engaging with



partner organisations like ours, recognising the depth of experience and value that groups such as Buckinghamshire Business First bring to the table. This is not just a shift in tone - it is a tangible step forward.

Throughout the turbulence, our commitment remains unchanged. We stand side by side with Buckinghamshire's business community, supporting you with knowledge, advocacy and practical help. We will continue to champion pro-business policies, because strong businesses create strong communities. They generate employment, drive innovation, and underpin public services.

There will always be challenges - economic, political, technological - but every challenge brings with it the seed of opportunity. It is our job to help you identify it, nurture it, and make it work for your business.

To conclude with the words of the late John F. Kennedy: "The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis'. One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger - but recognise the opportunity."

Let us be ready to grasp the opportunities ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael".

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



## What we do, why we do it



Research has shown that people perceive a hill to be steeper when they are on their own compared to when they're with a friend. Business owners know exactly what it feels like to stare up to the top of a hill and wonder how they are going to make it. Buckinghamshire Business First, which has been described as “a business’s best friend”, has cultivated a support system that ensures a business is never alone.

This couldn't be more important, because it hasn't just been a challenging year for business; it's been year after year of crises, turbulence, roadblocks and uncertainty playing havoc with business strategies, recruitment plans, growth ambitions, and more. Business resilience has been tested like never before.

This matters not only to individual businesses and the people they employ, but to the wider local community and the country at large. It is often said that businesses are the wealth creators, providing the tax receipts that pay for so many of the services that people rely on. Businesses provide the jobs (small businesses provide 60% of them) that give people economic security and purpose, helping them provide for themselves and their families. Businesses circulate money locally, contribute to the character and vibrancy of a locality, and can reduce social inequality by offering accessible employment and services. To do all of this, businesses need support.

Our programmes of business support have delivered measurable outcomes in job creation, increased productivity, carbon reduction, skills development, and business growth, with tangible benefits for Buckinghamshire's residents and communities, including more local jobs for local people, support for high street shops and cafes, helping young people find apprenticeships and start businesses, and more profitable and resilient businesses returning higher tax receipts to the Exchequer.



**“A 1% increase in SME productivity could generate £100 billion for the UK.”** - Gareth Thomas MP, Minister for Services, Small Businesses and Exports



**“We joined thinking it would be all about networking and getting new business, but what’s kept us is the chance to learn from other business owners, share our own experiences, and be part of a real community.”**  
– Focus group participant

We believe in collaborative leadership, endeavouring to ‘walk the talk’. When we encourage businesses to be sustainable, develop inclusive workforces, and inspire the next generation, it’s because we as an organisation also strive to do these things, knowing the benefits they bring. From ensuring business resilience through Cyber Essentials accreditation, to supporting local charities and communities through membership of the Heart of Bucks Community Investor scheme, and our Climate Commitment to reach Net Zero, we hope to shine a light on a path that some have already taken, but many have not.

The journey to Net Zero and increased sustainability is now part of our core operations – both in terms of the support we provide to businesses and in our day-to-day actions as a team. We have calculated our carbon footprint over the past three years and, after significant efforts to reduce our carbon emissions, are able to report that we have seen a circa 30% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub>e, from 96 tonnes in 2022/23 to 63 tonnes in 2024/25. This puts us on course to achieve Net Zero by 2040 – 10 years ahead of our original schedule.



### Buckinghamshire Business First membership in numbers



**15,400** members



**75%** of the private sector workforce in the county

**Did you know?** In comparison to non-members, Buckinghamshire Business First members are:



3x more likely to be recognised as high growth



More likely to innovate



More successful at raising finance

Businesses are stepping up to invest and give back to the business community because they know that with BBF by their side, their team gets bigger and climbing up that hill gets easier.



## 2024/25 achievements



**£2.2m**  
awarded in grants



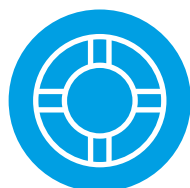
**£2.9m**  
leveraged in match funding



**388**  
jobs created



**£13.2m**  
economic value of jobs  
created



**1,655**  
jobs safeguarded



**£6.65**  
economic value created per  
£1 invested in the Growth  
Programme



**£4.8m**  
economic value created for  
rural businesses



**£4.13**  
economic value created per  
£1 invested in Net Zero Bucks



**21,933**  
business assists



**394**  
businesses received  
workforce development  
advice



**182**  
apprenticeship  
opportunities created



**9,400**  
students received  
apprenticeship advice



**121**  
new technologies or  
processes supported



**111**  
events hosted or partnered  
on



**95%**  
average satisfaction rating  
from 2,595 event delegates



**680**  
tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e saved



**8,556**  
tonnes of committed CO<sub>2</sub>e  
savings



**2,119**  
businesses supported



## The Board

The Buckinghamshire Business First Board is representative of the Buckinghamshire business community, having been shaped to reflect the diverse make-up of our local business scene. Our Board covers the length and breadth of the county, representing sole traders, micro businesses, larger employers, and those in strategically important sectors. They are with us every step of the way as we nurture Buckinghamshire's thriving economy.



**Michael Garvey MBE**  
Chairman  
Managing Director,  
Chandler Garvey



**Hiren Gandhi**  
Vice-Chairman  
Partner, Blaser Mills  
(left March 2025)



**Philippa Batting**  
CEO  
Buckinghamshire  
Business First



**Adam Stronach**  
Treasurer  
Director, S&W Group



**Elizabeth Adlington**  
Director, Adlington  
Young



**Klaus Allion**  
Owner and Managing  
Director, ANT  
Telecommunications



**Victoria Brocklesby**  
Co-founder and COO,  
Origin Doors and  
Windows



**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

## Advocating for our business community

A central part of our work is to advocate on behalf of the Buckinghamshire business community in discussions with policymakers and stakeholders at a local and national level. We ensure the business voice is heard on matters of importance at key meetings that bring businesses and policymakers into the same room to highlight challenges and collaborate on solutions.

This year, our reach and influence on national government has been stronger than ever before, culminating in the visit in March of Gareth Thomas MP, Minister for Services, Small Businesses and Exports, to engage directly with small business owners and industry leaders on the government's Small Business Strategy.

### Business Roundtable with Small Business Minister

The minister's visit was hosted in partnership with Laura Kyrke-Smith MP and took place at the Aylesbury Waterside Theatre. During the visit, the minister met with local entrepreneurs, founders, and business leaders to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing small enterprises in today's economic climate, including access to finance, skills development, digital transformation, and regulatory reform.



**“Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, driving innovation, creating jobs, and enriching local communities. This is the first comprehensive Small Business Strategy in over a decade, and it's crucial that it delivers real impact. Small businesses create 60% of UK jobs, and a 1% increase in SME productivity could generate £100 billion for the UK - so getting this right is vital for the UK's growth, innovation, and prosperity.”** - Gareth Thomas MP, Minister for Services, Small Businesses and Exports

### Welcoming Buckinghamshire's MPs

Just two months after the General Election, we invited all six of Buckinghamshire's parliamentary representatives - Callum Anderson MP, Sarah Green MP, Laura Kyrke-Smith MP, Joy Morrissey MP, Emma Reynolds MP, and Greg Smith MP - to attend a meet-up with the BBF Board and Ambassador members at the Walled Garden in West Wycombe to set the tone for a collaborative partnership on behalf of local businesses.



### MPs Briefings

In 2024/25, we continued our series of events inviting businesses to meet with their local MP to discuss challenges and opportunities affecting their business:

- Spotlight on Business Rates with Callum Anderson MP, Horwood House, Little Horwood
- Spotlight on Skills with Emma Reynolds MP, Origin Doors and Windows, High Wycombe
- Spotlight on Tourism and Hospitality with Sarah Green MP, Kings Chapel, Old Amersham



## Bank of England Lunches

An invaluable opportunity to influence the thinking of, and get insights from, those that set interest rates. Three briefing sessions with the Bank of England were held this year, hosted by Origin Doors and Windows in June, Bosch in October, and Red Helix in February. Businesses in the room were given the Bank of England's projections for the year ahead and shared their experience of business at the coalface.

## Ambassador Networking Lunches

This new event series brings together some of Buckinghamshire's most significant employers to delve into critical business topics such as infrastructure, employment and skills, and to discuss how we can collaboratively address the challenges we face. The first two lunches - at Danesfield House in October and Stoke Park in January - were a great success, and we thank Blaser Mills Law and Seymour Taylor Accountants and Tax Advisers for sponsoring these events.

## Gathering views from the coalface

The Buckinghamshire Business Barometer is our six-monthly survey that takes a temperature check of what business feels like at the coalface, ensuring the local business voice is heard loud and clear. Our latest survey, published in January, also asked how businesses were feeling in response to the Government's Autumn Budget and if they were likely to cut back on recruiting new staff in the next 12 months. The answer was clear:



Business input is crucial in helping us understand the challenges and opportunities facing local businesses day in, day out. Survey responses help us evidence-base our discussions with policymakers who can remove barriers to growth, and they feed into our own responses to government and stakeholder consultations, with first-hand examples of positive change occurring directly as a result of what businesses have told us.



## Buckinghamshire Council Planning Service Roundtable

BBF was asked to support Buckinghamshire Council in hosting a business roundtable as part of the council's review of the planning service. The event took place on 24th July and was attended by 21 representatives from local organisations.

## Underpinned by robust research

We are the primary source of information and intelligence on Buckinghamshire's economy. Our work involves mixed qualitative and quantitative methods including data analysis, surveys, literature, policy reviews, interviews and focus groups. This intelligence is used to ensure strategies and policies across the county are based on current and robust evidence and to make sure government at all levels is aware of the economic issues facing Buckinghamshire's communities.



## Growth Programme



### A productivity boost and a huge return on investment

Having been a consistent part of the business support landscape in the county for the best part of a decade, the Growth Programme continues to provide the support that businesses need, with no signs of slowing down. In fact, our team saw a 34% increase in demand for Growth Programme support in the last 12 months, attracting businesses that haven't received significant support before - 60% of the businesses supported in the last 12 months had not received any in-depth support from us in the last nine years.

The Growth Programme has boosted turnover, productivity, and GVA in Buckinghamshire, adding a significant £3.1m in social economic value. For every £1 invested in the Growth Programme by our funder, there has been a return of £6.65 of economic value.

Feedback from the Growth Programme beneficiaries tells us that:



**78%** will increase productivity



**84%** will increase turnover



**83%** will increase profitability



**“We experienced a 67% year-on-year growth in turnover, 57% growth in customer acquisition, and 11% growth in average sale price. We also hired one full-time equivalent (FTE) member of staff and two freelancers.”**

- Cécile Mazuet-Eller, NameSwitch

Hear more of Cecile's growth story: [bbf.uk.com/NameSwitch](https://bbf.uk.com/NameSwitch)

Our support exceeded all targets, particularly impressive in challenging economic conditions:



**286** businesses received support



**101** FTE jobs created



**1,581** jobs safeguarded



**70** businesses adopted new technologies or processes



**33** businesses improved productivity

## What actions are businesses taking?

Almost all beneficiaries (98%) have taken or plan to take at least one action towards growing their business since receiving support under the Growth Programme, and 84% are planning to or have taken multiple actions. The most common actions are:



**95%**

Updating the business strategy



**89%**

Targeting new customers



**80%**

Increasing the skills within the business



**74%**

Introducing new technologies or processes



**70%**

Launching new products or services



**64%**

Taking on additional staff



**31%**

Seeking additional business finance

## These actions are forecast to collectively:



Increase turnover by **£41m**



Add **£16m** in GVA to the local economy

Lean principles can streamline operations, reduce waste, and drive growth for businesses of all sizes, which is why it's part of our Growth Programme support. Tim Scurlock of Applied Lean Consulting delivered a popular masterclass on the subject in October and spoke all about Lean on our podcast earlier in the year with Jane Dell, BBF's Growth Programme Manager. Listen to their chat: [bbf.uk.com/lean-principles](https://bbf.uk.com/lean-principles)

**"Our Growth Adviser was a terrific sounding board. He helped me develop my own thoughts and plan of action. The advice I received was crucial in identifying our next steps. The masterclasses gave our team a new lease of life, enabling staff to think out of the box and collaborate with each other to come up with new solutions and offers for our customers."**

– Gudan Ghai, Casagrande UK

**"The Growth Programme has delivered a direct benefit to my business, starting with setting a strategy and having the confidence and focus to see that through. Along the way, we've employed new people and have improved our systems, processes and productivity as a result."**

– Carys Dorritt, The Polka

Highlights from a packed events programme that brought the business community together and ensured that everyone in attendance became part of something bigger.

## Innovate Local

A collaboration with Innovate UK brought over 100 businesses to Buckinghamshire New University in September to showcase the national and regional support available to help businesses of all sizes capture market opportunities, sharpen their competitive edge, and strengthen their growth strategies through innovative thinking.



## Westcott Showcase

In September, over 180 companies and representatives from academia were treated to a tour and update on the exciting developments at Westcott Venture Park, including drones, rocket propulsion, and sustainability in space. Run in partnership with Buckinghamshire Council, Satellite Applications Catapult, and more.

## Focus on Funding for Innovation

In March, working in partnership with Innovate UK Business Growth, British Business Bank and Seymour Taylor Accountants and Tax Advisers, we brought 33 businesses together at Adams Park in High Wycombe to discover the latest funding and finance that can support their innovations.

**"I really liked the format of the Focus on Funding for Innovation event; a great balance of receiving information and having a relaxed setting to discuss items in more detail."**

- Catherine Reavey, Oxitec Ltd



## Power Hours

Over 130 businesses attended online Power Hours led by our Business Advisers and representatives from the British Business Bank, the Department for International Trade, the Intellectual Property Office, and Innovate UK. A total of 17 sessions covered topics including innovation, exporting, recruitment, apprenticeships, finance, intellectual property, and getting the best out of a team.



## Bringing businesses together

By popular demand, the past year saw the return of our Simply Networking events, described by Will Leach from Five on a Bike as **“a really welcoming environment. No time wasted in getting straight to the networking!”**

Meanwhile, our Next Gen Business Network, delivered in partnership with Blaser Mills Law and Seymour Taylor Accountants and Tax Advisers, is proving highly beneficial for young professionals and senior managers who want to build their network.

## Business Leaders' Dinners

Dozens of Buckinghamshire's most prominent businesses basked in the July sun at the world-famous rowing course at Dorney Lake for high-level conversations and an after-dinner speech from British Paralympian Helene Raynsford, who spoke about the importance of being “part of something bigger”.

Circa 50 businesses attended a pre-Christmas dinner at Hartwell House Hotel to make game-changing connections with influential CEOs, MDs, and leaders of all kinds. Guest speaker Tim Harris drew upon his experience of rowing across the Atlantic when talking about how businesses can build resilience and thrive in the face of adversity.

It's not just fancy food and small talk at these events; millions of pounds worth of business deals have been struck thanks to relationships forged at Business Leaders' Dinners!



Two familiar faces at our events combined for an insightful podcast on how to build a remarkable brand. Listen to the conversation between Hiren Gandhi (Blaser Mills Law) and David Finch (Purple Frog) here: [bbf.uk.com/building-brands](https://bbf.uk.com/building-brands)



## Empowering growth in social care

S&P Care Services is a Buckinghamshire domiciliary care provider with a £1.2 million turnover and a team of over 20 staff. Through support from our Growth Programme, co-founders Casey Jonson and Ruth Mabika have transformed their approach to growth, created six new jobs and safeguarded a further 19.

**“The Strategic Planning Masterclass was really interesting and offered some real soul-searching,”** says Casey.

Ruth describes the outcome of having their growth plan turned into a living document: **“We ended up having some KPIs and proper goals for growth, which we managed to achieve.”** The support helped them step back from day-to-day operations, reclaim personal time, and focus on scaling sustainably. Their story exemplifies how targeted support can unlock both business and personal transformation.

Listen to Casey and Ruth tell the story of their support and growth: [bbf.uk.com/SP-Care](https://bbf.uk.com/SP-Care)



## Learning and growing with a supportive business network

VIKASO is a robotics business and technology specialist that won New Business of the Year at the Buckinghamshire Business Awards in 2021. VIKASO's Director, Volley, explains their journey with Buckinghamshire Business First.

**“We’ve engaged with Buckinghamshire Business First since we started in 2020 and the support we have received from them has been very valuable. The biggest value is in the support network, the people you meet who have been through similar challenges to you, and learning from other people’s experiences.”**

Volley's colleague, Sarah Whitmore, takes up the story. **“The Growth Programme is incredible. Learning about what support is available in Buckinghamshire, what sort of finance would apply to different parts of the business, I have learned so much, made some really good connections, and picked up things I can immediately apply in the business.”**

Listen as Volley and Sarah explain what our support has done for their business:

[bbf.uk.com/Vikaso](https://bbf.uk.com/Vikaso)



## Bringing support to rural businesses

Support for rural businesses is undergoing a fundamental shift as the UK transitions away from European-funded schemes. Our Rural Ngage programme, part-funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, provides a structured system that helps rural businesses capitalise on new support.

In the last 12 months, we've developed the Rural Business Network, engaged at farm cluster meetings, enabled upskilling and knowledge sharing between farm businesses, supported landscape recovery schemes, and supported the development of the Westcott Agri Living Lab. We delivered the Rural Business Advice Service on behalf of Buckinghamshire Council to help businesses access grant funding and increase their productivity through new products, services, and markets. It was funded through the Rural England Prosperity Fund by Defra.

### Outcomes:



**£53,134** average grant award to businesses



**£13,847** average cost per job created



**£4.8m** local economic/social value



**£1.8m** total commitment from grant scheme



**10** new technologies or processes adopted



**212** businesses provided with non-financial support



**112** jobs safeguarded



**33** FTE jobs created



**£5.5m** total investment, incl. match funding



**37%** of businesses got advice on planning permission



**43** businesses received 6+ hours of support from our team

### Further outcomes forecast over the next 12 months:



**103** new FTE jobs



**22** new products



**10,554** additional day visitors

### Some of the projects funded:



**Burgervore (£20k grant):** Expanded mobile catering offer, grew the business, created a job, shortlisted for national award, increased local footfall.



**The Walled Garden (£80k grant):** Developed soft play area at its café, boosted local supply chains, created 13 jobs.



**The Shepherds Hut Day Nursery (£70k grant):** Developed an outdoor day nursery, provided childcare space for up to 40 children, created 20 jobs.



# Sustainability and Net Zero

From decarbonisation reports and carbon literacy training to Net Zero Power Hours and Summits, our support for businesses as they journey on the road to Net Zero continued apace in 2024/25 and produced some great results.



**680** tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e saved



**8,556** tonnes of committed CO<sub>2</sub>e savings



**£4.13** economic value created per £1 invested in Net Zero Bucks



**568** jobs safeguarded



**2,631** employees benefited from support



**100** decarbonisation reports delivered



**3** Net Zero Power Hours hosted



**6** businesses made formal commitments to Net Zero



**50** new technologies adopted



Increased staff engagement



NHS Evergreen Certification



**30** businesses received carbon literacy training

**“BBF provided us with a great platform to set up our Net Zero plan and produced an invaluable report for us which is now our main point of reference.”**

- Sian Pringle, Supplies Web

**“The carbon literacy training was great, super engaging and insightful.”**

- Ria Daly, Ley Hill Solutions

## Clean Air Day 2024

On a day focused on improving air quality, we teamed up Buckinghamshire Council and PJA to provide support and advice on electric vehicles, energy bills, grant funding, and Net Zero action plans, while a panel of business leaders discussed their personal sustainability journeys.



### Talking about sustainability

Sustainability has been a constant theme of our podcast episodes, including:

**Helen Shellabear (Shellwin) and Fiona Campbell (Biffa)** talking waste management and Simpler Recycling legislation: [bbf.uk.com/biffa-podcast](https://bbf.uk.com/biffa-podcast)

**John Palman (Xpress Labels) talking with BBF's Heather Dean** about building a successful, sustainable business: [bbf.uk.com/xpress-podcast](https://bbf.uk.com/xpress-podcast)

## Net Zero Summit and Business Expo

A February day full of energy and inspiration, action and collaboration at Aylesbury Waterside Theatre, welcoming nearly 200 businesses. Throughout the engaging conference, brilliant peer-to-peer session, insightful panel discussion with businesses that are #OnTheJourney to Net Zero, and the vibrant networking throughout the day, the message was clear: sustainability is a money maker and is intrinsically linked with business growth. The event was delivered in partnership with Buckinghamshire Council, whose Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment, Cllr. Thomas Broom, spoke about how businesses benefit from sustainable actions. Listen here:

[bit.ly/net-zero-summit-bucks](https://bit.ly/net-zero-summit-bucks)

Buckinghamshire businesses also benefited from the 2024 iteration of the Net Zero Summit and Business Expo held at Silverstone Circuit in November. More than 170 people attended the event, held in partnership with Milton Keynes City Council and West Northamptonshire Council. There was inspiration from the brilliant panel of experts who covered education, AI and future-proofing the workplace, and our team of advisers running popular sessions on carbon literacy and footprinting. It was clear that what's good for the planet is good for business.

**“BBF’s Net Zero team have provided invaluable support, meaning that we could apply for the NHS Evergreen Assessment with accurate emissions figures and have a robust Carbon Reduction Plan that has laid the foundations for a Net Zero future - sooner rather than later!”**

- Charlotte Ralph-Gledhill, H-trak



**“Going through the Net Zero calculator piece by piece as a business really opened up my understanding. Without it, I might not have realised the impact my business has in helping organisations reduce their Scope 3 emissions.”**

- Preethi Pinto, Orca & Bee Refills



## Buckinghamshire Business Awards 2024

Aylesbury Waterside Theatre was once again the perfect host for the ceremony as the county's top businesses came together to celebrate another year of remarkable achievements. Each winner and finalist showed themselves to be part of something bigger, possessing the spirit of entrepreneurship that means nobody does business like Buckinghamshire!



**"The ultimate achievement and validation of everything we've been through in the last five years. It shows the commitment and dedication from the whole team. We're so pleased to be part of BBF. We look forward to growing our relationship with them and the local business community for years to come."**

- Karim Kassam, Horwood House Hotel, Company of the Year



**"It was heartening to see so many businesses gathering to celebrate and reflect on their achievements. Congratulations to the winners and finalists."**

- Philippa Batting, Buckinghamshire Business First

See the full list of winners at the Buckinghamshire Business Awards 2024: [bbf.uk.com/bba2024](https://bbf.uk.com/bba2024)



## Celebrating success

In March, we kicked off the next Buckinghamshire Business Awards cycle with a big launch event and Entry Workshop. We are delighted that Origin Doors and Windows are the Headline Sponsor of the 2025 Awards (who better than the 2023 Company of the Year!), and so is Origin COO Victoria Brocklesby: **“We feel immense pride as the official Headline Sponsor. Winning meant a lot to our whole team, as did being at the glitzy ceremony celebrating with the Buckinghamshire business community. It’s a night where you truly feel part of something bigger.”**



Victoria also took the reins of our Talking Heads podcast in January to chat with Gary Grant, founder of The Entertainer, who shared how he and his family built the UK’s largest toy retailer from humble beginnings in Amersham in 1981. A great listen for entrepreneurs: [bbf.uk.com/Entertainer](https://bbf.uk.com/Entertainer)

Bonnie May of Global Infusion Group, former Company of the Year at the #BucksBusinessAwards and winner of two (then) Queen’s Awards, spoke to Philippa Batting on our podcast to reflect on the company’s journey and how they overcame huge challenges, embrace sustainability, and became a Disability Confident Employer. Listen to this compelling story of resilience: [bbf.uk.com/GIG](https://bbf.uk.com/GIG)

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Get the latest updates on the Buckinghamshire Business Awards 2025: [bbf.uk.com/bba2025](https://bbf.uk.com/bba2025)

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## The royal approval for local businesses

Buckinghamshire is full of exciting and innovative businesses, so it’s no surprise to see our county represented among the winners of The King’s Awards for Enterprise.

Two Buckinghamshire businesses - Lund Halsey Console Systems and Navsa International – won the 2025 King’s Award for International Trade, following in the footsteps of Red Fox ID (winners in 2024 for both Innovation and International Trade), and Cableflow (winners in 2023 & 2024 - they also won a Queen’s Award in 2005!).



They add their names to the roll call of winners of the predecessor Queen’s Awards, which include Origin Doors and Windows, JUNE Medical, Martin Audio, Mediplus, Melford Technologies, and Trio Healthcare.

This year, the Department for Business & Trade (DBT) received more King’s Awards applications from Buckinghamshire businesses than in previous years, and we like to think we had something to do with that. As well as two joint Entry Workshops held at Pinewood and Silverstone for the Buckinghamshire Business Awards and King’s Awards, we also hosted a very popular online King’s Awards Entry Workshop in partnership with the Buckinghamshire Lord Lieutenantcy and DBT.

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Learn all about entering the King’s Awards: [bbf.uk.com/kings-awards](https://bbf.uk.com/kings-awards)

# Talent & Workforce Skills

A business is only as strong as its people. Getting staff recruitment, training and wellbeing right will never stop being a priority for successful businesses. The most forward-thinking employers also have one eye on helping the next generation get excited about their career prospects and prepared for work.

Through the Bucks Skills Hub and the Workforce Skills Team at Buckinghamshire Business First, we help employers find and nurture the best talent, create an inclusive workspace, inspire students, and build the very best team possible.

## Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP)

The Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) is a game-changer for employers, education and training providers, students and career seekers that unites Buckinghamshire's stakeholders to tackle long-standing skills problems and collaborate on solutions.

Buckinghamshire Business First led the research and development of the LSIP in our role, designated by the government, as the official Employer Representative Body (ERB) for skills in our county, working closely with employers, sector-specific focus groups, education and training providers, representatives from Buckinghamshire Council, and our local Members of Parliament.

We have just published the 2025 LSIP Progress Report, which sets out in detail the progress we have made and the profound effect it is having on Buckinghamshire's skills landscape. We look forward to working with stakeholders on the new LSIP for Buckinghamshire to continue the impactful work carried out so far and leave a truly tangible legacy that benefits every person in Buckinghamshire.

**"I am pleased to see the progress being made to bring these Local Skills Improvement Plans to life. Skills England will work hand-in-hand with businesses, education providers, Mayors and Strategic Authorities, unions, and other bodies to tackle skills shortages, co-creating solutions to ensure more opportunities for young people and existing workers wherever they are based in the country."** - The Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Malvern, Minister for Skills

**"We congratulate every ERB and their partners for their leadership and commitment to delivering these progress reports. This key work is helping to ensure that learners and businesses across England have the skills they need to thrive."** - Sarah Maclean & Tessa Griffiths, Skills England

## Overview of skills priorities in Buckinghamshire



Engineering



Digital



Digital Literacy



Construction



Health & Social Care



Green: Net Zero



Film & TV



AI



Work Readiness



Skills Bootcamps are a response to skills gaps identified by Buckinghamshire Business First through the LSIP, delivered in partnership by BBF, Buckinghamshire Council, and local training providers, with the costs to employers heavily subsidised. These intensive training programmes are designed to equip employees with the skills they need for a particular job, whether it be in agriculture, digital, engineering, construction or the creative industries. A Cyber Security Bootcamp for information security business Saepio Solutions was so popular that a bespoke course was set up for 26 of its employees. Read their story: [bbf.uk.com/Saepio](https://bbf.uk.com/Saepio)



The launch of the Green Energy Skills Hub at Bucks College Group showcased the huge opportunity within Buckinghamshire's renewables sector and how businesses can benefit from the exciting opportunities on the road to Net Zero. As green renewable energy technologies improve and increase in popularity, additional skills and knowledge will be crucial for electricians, plumbers, roofers, and building companies to adapt to these changes, remain profitable, and ensure a sustainable future.

Over 200 businesses were supported with skills in 2024/25, while the team delivered multiple Skills Power Hours on topics including 'Trying to recruit', 'Getting the best out of your team', and 'Demystifying apprenticeships', while member workshops on negotiation behaviours helped leaders further hone their skills.



## Did you know?

Buckinghamshire Business First is the **only** organisation in the country with contracts for Growth Hub support, the Local Skills Improvement Plan (as the Employer Representative Body), and the Careers and Enterprise Company (CEC), enabling us to seamlessly support businesses to grow, develop their workforce and nurture their future talent pipeline.

Not only has the LSIP supported **£11.6m** of funding for skills into the county, it also helped us bring engineering training back into the county. The new School of Engineering at Buckinghamshire New University has seen nearly 150 applications for its degree courses, with Bucks College Group also set to begin engineering courses in 2027.

Business owners are always on the lookout for great talent and potential to join their team. Sometimes the smart hire is the person with less experience and fewer traditional skills, but who brings a fresh pair of eyes to age-old dilemmas. Some people's life experiences mean they pose questions that businesses hadn't previously thought to ask, such as whether their products, services, recruitment processes, websites and premises are accessible to everyone, including people with physical, hearing, visual, learning or sensory impairments.



YOUR LOCAL  
GROWTH HUB

## Developing a Disability Inclusive Workforce - an employer guide



Disability Confident Employers, like Buckinghamshire Business First, are those willing to support employees with a disability, ensure their recruitment processes are accessible, and help tackle the low employment rate for disabled people. We've been spreading the word at events like the Disability Confident Employer Workshop in June that attracted nearly 40 guests, and we developed the Disability Inclusion Guide for employers packed with information on how to recruit and support disabled employees. Download the guide here: [bbf.uk.com/inclusion](https://bbf.uk.com/inclusion)

As part of the 2024 Paralympic Games celebrations, BBF partnered with the National Paralympic Heritage Trust (NPHT) to boost the number of Disability Confident organisations in Buckinghamshire, the birthplace of the Paralympic Games. Mark Schmull, MD of Arrow Planning, became so inspired after hearing Paralympic Champion Helene Raynsford speak at a Business Leaders' Dinner in July that he took action the very next day to become Disability Confident! Read about Mark and Arrow Planning's story: [bbf.uk.com/Arrow-Planning](https://bbf.uk.com/Arrow-Planning)

BBF is a proud member of the Armed Forces Covenant and the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme, pledging moral and practical support to armed forces personnel and their families. We feel it's everyone's duty to help those who serve our country to transition to civilian life and fully utilise their skills and experience, including in the workplace. We commit to supporting existing or potential employees who are members of the armed forces community, and being open to employing reservists, veterans, cadet instructors and military spouses/partners. Employers can learn more about the schemes here: [bbf.uk.com/armed-forces](https://bbf.uk.com/armed-forces)

Learn all about becoming a Disability Confident employer: [bbf.uk.com/disability-confidence](https://bbf.uk.com/disability-confidence)



## Under 19s



As one of the leading careers hubs in the country, Bucks Skills Hub continued its mission to help prepare young people for whatever the future holds for them, and to help businesses play their crucial role in inspiring the next generation.



**7,000** young people and **1,500** parents learned about alternative pathways to employment thanks to the ASK Project



**83** volunteer Enterprise Advisers boost students' career prospects



**100+** teachers visit workplaces to connect the curriculum to careers



Buckinghamshire schools and colleges have achieved above the national average for all **8** Gatsby Benchmarks



New work experience opportunities offered to **10 schools** in a pilot project



Bucks Skills Show & Confident Futures Skills Show inspire thousands



Green Schools Challenge nurtures the next wave of sustainable leaders



**12,600** job postings available on the Bucks Skills Hub website, with a dedicated area for SEND



Classroom to Careers newsletter sent to students, parents and carers, and newsletter for Careers Leaders



Employer Guide to Supported Internships outlining the benefits and practicalities of employing young people with SEND:  
[bbf.uk.com/internships](http://bbf.uk.com/internships)



Careers Conversation booklet for disadvantaged young people, including those with SEND

**“Our achievements at Borlase in developing a strong and effective careers programme are a direct reflection of the tireless effort and invaluable input from Bucks Skills Hub. Thank you for everything you do. Your work has a profound and lasting impact.”** - Caroline Wingrove, Sir William Borlase's Grammar School

Volunteer Enterprise Advisers help ensure careers education is reflective of the real world of work. More than 80 industry professionals from employers such as the RAF, LEAP Academy, Royal Mail, Arcadis, Softcat, Costain, Morgan Sindall, and Cisco have worked with Careers and Education Leaders in schools and colleges to build connections between employers and education institutions.



**Over 100 teachers visited workplaces through the Teacher Encounters programme, helping them connect their subjects to the world of work in a way that engages students.**

**“It’s incredibly important for us as businesses to educate the educators, for teachers to come on site and understand how what they’re teaching actually applies in real life.”**

– Lilia Frunzo, Align JV. Read about the Teacher Encounter the company ran: [bit.ly/align-jv](https://bit.ly/align-jv)

**“The Teacher Encounter has really helped me in my role as Careers Lead and as a business teacher. It’s been really helpful to see what happens in industry rather than just textbook. I would recommend all teachers attend these.”**

– Clodagh Shanahan, The Buckingham School. Read about the Teacher Encounter they attended at GE Healthcare: [bit.ly/te-ge-healthcare](https://bit.ly/te-ge-healthcare)

**“Teaching English and drama is often something that students can’t relate to the wider world, so actually having real-life examples of where they could use certain skills in industry is great.”** – Natasha McDonagh, Royal Grammar School. Read about the Teacher Encounter they attended at the National Film & Television School: [bit.ly/te-NFTS](https://bit.ly/te-NFTS)

**“We can give more knowledge to teachers of what we’re expecting from potential candidates. If businesses are looking for local talent and want to engage and help the local area from an education and social perspective, definitely take the time to do Teacher Encounters.”**

– John Gladstone, Softcat. Read about the Teacher Encounter the company ran: [bit.ly/te-softcat](https://bit.ly/te-softcat)

Our team has continued to bang the drum for apprenticeships, including at the Apprenticeship Showcase event at Highcrest School in February, with some great success stories emerging in the last 12 months.

One of TP Smart Repairs’ newest apprentices, Ruby, came to them through a valuable project run by Bucks Skills Hub, in collaboration with partners, that empowers children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs to flourish. Read this inspirational story of a girl who had no GCSEs begin an apprenticeship as a Vehicle Maintenance Technician and set her sights on a career in Formula 1:

[bbf.uk.com/TP-Smart-Repairs](https://bbf.uk.com/TP-Smart-Repairs)





# Green Schools Challenge

Businesses took part in the Green Schools Challenge, helping teams of students come up with innovative and sustainable solutions to environmental issues, and build a range of employability, technical, creative and academic skills in the process.

Each group learned from professionals in the fields of green technology and sustainable practices and was paired with a business that mentored them as they created an idea to help reduce their school's carbon footprint. After this showcase of the incredible talent and innovative spirit of the next generation, it's clear the future is in safe hands!

The schools and businesses were Aylesbury High School (Whiffaway), Buckingham School (Construction Specialties), Bucks College Group (Shellwin Real Estate), Sir Henry Floyd Grammar School (Biffa), Waddesdon Church of England School (FCC Environment), and The Highcrest Academy (Zenopa).

**“The Green Schools Challenge has been a joy to be part of, encouraging the students to think creatively and practically about sustainability, and to understand the basics of running a business - skills that are imperative for the future. I was really impressed by the way the students threw themselves at the task.”** - Helen Shellabear, Shellwin Real Estate

The Bucks College Group team took the win with their idea of buying a woodchipper to turn timber waste into shavings and chippings that are donated for things like animal bedding and garden and landscaping projects, thus repurposing the waste and potentially saving the college £30k per year on disposal costs. The project could also reduce the college's carbon emissions by 700,000kg per year!

In October 2024, our Bucks Skills Hub team received the Innovation in Education Award at the National Enterprise Network Awards for their work on the Green Schools Challenge. The judges said: **“Buckinghamshire Business First's dedication to nurturing the next generation of environmentally conscious leaders and entrepreneurs exemplifies their commitment to both local economic growth and sustainability.”**





## Bucks Skills Show



The Bucks Skills Show remains a seminal event in Buckinghamshire, with 7,000 people attending across two days in March to meet over 100 employers. The Stoke Mandeville Stadium venue welcomed over 6,000 students from every secondary school and college in the county, including Pupil Referral Units (PRU), while hundreds of adults looking for careers support attended an evening event.

The ripple effects of the event will be felt for years to come. See the pictures of a great day: [bit.ly/skills-show-2025](https://bit.ly/skills-show-2025)

Read how events company NicLen found their next star employee at the Bucks Skills Show: [bbf.uk.com/NicLen](https://bbf.uk.com/NicLen)

**“This is why it’s so important for businesses to attend the Bucks Skills Show. They can inspire young people and help satisfy their own recruitment needs. What a great success for both NicLen and Lawrence!”**

- Marina Jackson, Buckinghamshire Skills Hub



Watch the brilliant video recap of the Bucks Skills Show: [bbf.uk.com/skills-show](https://bbf.uk.com/skills-show)



## Confident Futures Skills Show



The spacious, sensory-conscious environment of the Confident Futures Skills Show brought circa 60 employers together to inspire young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and adults who face barriers to entering the workforce, including the long-term unemployed, those lacking digital skills, armed forces veterans, refugees and migrants, people at risk of violence, and more. See all the pictures: [bit.ly/confident-futures](https://bit.ly/confident-futures)

Both Skills Shows were supported by Headline Sponsor De Soutter Medical and Partner Sponsor Buckinghamshire College Group. In the lead-up to the Bucks Skills Show, Andrew Butchard of De Soutter Medical joined our podcast to talk about the importance of apprenticeships and the rewards of investing in and developing young talent. Listen to his chat with Ercol's Henry Tadros: [bbf.uk.com/De-Soutter](https://bbf.uk.com/De-Soutter)





### **Advocating for Buckinghamshire's businesses**

Buckinghamshire Business First will continue to act as an effective voice for businesses, helping to explain their challenges to those in power and ultimately help our business community overcome any barriers that impede their progress. We will speak out openly to check and challenge policies that affect our local businesses.



### **Influencing local decisions**

Utilising the expertise and networks of our Board Members, Senior Managers and staff, we can bring positive change to our business community. Our regular meetings and events with all of Buckinghamshire MPs, as well as Ministers and the Bank of England, have already yielded positive results, and we will continue to utilise these connections to ensure decisions made locally and nationally are taken with Buckinghamshire's business interests in mind.



### **Building the evidence-base**

Understanding the needs of local businesses requires an understanding of the Buckinghamshire economy. We will expand the levers of our economic intelligence gathering across Buckinghamshire, which will feed into our responses to government consultations and help us to evidence-base requests to deliver funding and support programmes.



### **Business support delivery**

Improving the local economy and supporting business growth is our past, present, and future. Our day-to-day business support functions will continue to be our bedrock, with our team dedicated to supporting businesses of all sizes, at all life stages, in all sectors, throughout the whole of Buckinghamshire.



### **Nurturing an invested business community**

When businesses collaborate with each other, they achieve greater outcomes. We will continue to promote the benefits of engagement and collaboration to local businesses and grow the number of invested businesses as part of our ongoing efforts to build a supportive business community network.



## Finances

Buckinghamshire Business First receives funding for its day-to-day activities from Buckinghamshire Council, project funders, and members. The Financial Statements for the year, ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, have been submitted for external audit scrutiny and are summarised below. Full, signed accounts will be submitted to Companies House and be available on the Buckinghamshire Business First website.

Income		Expenditure	
Income	£2,938,418	Direct costs	£2,727,428
Interest received	£19	Overheads	£196,462
Total income	£2,938,437	Finance cost - bank charges	£1,843
		Tax	£4
		Total expenditure	£2,925,737
		Excess of income over expenditure transferred to reserves	£12,700

Balance sheet as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025		Funded by	
Fixed assets	£100	Retained reserves b/fwd 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2024	£149,957
Current assets	£721,923	Excess of income over expenditure	£12,700
Creditors	£559,366	Retained reserves as at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025	£162,657
Total assets less liabilities	£162,657		



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