



## **West Berkshire Chamber of Commerce Business Plan 2010**

West Berkshire Chamber Council is the independent voice for members in West Berkshire with an influential role in planning, debating and actioning change. The Business Plan sets out the key areas of concern to business in the area affecting not only the working environment but also the quality of life. The Chamber believes in partnership and is keen to offer support to all sections of the community to bring about the achievement of the Vision.

### **Introduction by Ian Vickerage – President, West Berkshire Chamber Council**

Wealth in any country like the UK or district like West Berkshire comes from the activities of private business, whether it's Vodafone or small shopkeepers. Business pays the salaries which enable employees to buy their houses, cars and consumer goods, and generates the money to pay the corporate and personal taxes which fund both central and local government services. It is important that everyone recognises this vital role, and the need to help UK business compete with our international rivals. The Government could help UK business as a whole by cutting taxes and red tape, but of course we in West Berkshire are also competing with other regions of the UK.

West Berkshire offers the same benefits as the rest of the Thames Valley, the UK's fastest-growing region over the last 30 years. Good motorway and rail links giving easy access to Heathrow Airport and Central London have been crucial to the high tech businesses which have powered this development. The UK's "Silicon Valley" is also a terrific area to live in, which has resulted in a concentration of high quality employees in the area.

So how will West Berkshire measure up in the future?

Well, we have some serious concerns: first with transport, a source of strength in the past with our position at the crossroads of the M4 and the A34, especially since the bypass and J13 improvements. Second, housing is a big problem: existing house owners are benefiting from house price inflation (up 100 % in last 7 years), but new buyers are struggling, with Newbury prices 40% higher than the national average. These problems reinforce each other, with ever more employees commuting into the area from lower cost locations clogging up the arterial and local routes. So what we need from the Council is a clear plan and commitment to build more houses, especially "affordable" homes, in West Berkshire for our future staff needs, plus road improvements to ease the commuting problem.

On the good side this is certainly a great place to live, with wonderful countryside, fine towns and villages, and excellent amenities like Newbury Racecourse, two theatres, and outstanding restaurants. As for film, in addition to the 40 seat digital cinema at the Corn Exchange, the town of Newbury has recently added a new multi-screen Vue cinema.

We are not advocating a massive house and road building programme in this area, but the balance has tipped too far the other way at the moment, with major resistance in many quarters to all road and housing schemes. We are calling

for the community, business and West Berkshire Council to work together constructively to get this balance right. Good news on this front was received in January 2010 with the granting of outline planning permission to Newbury Racecourse for the development of 1,500 dwellings on the racecourse site. This development, which offers a location within walking distance of the town centre and with excellent transport links, helps to secure the future of the Racecourse, and has been vigorously supported by the Chamber over the last two years.

## **Key Local Business Issues & Representation**

The Chamber has identified the following key priorities for its members in West Berkshire area. They are not the only areas for development, but they will form the focus its work with the District Council, Town Council and other organisations during the 1 - 2 years.

- Economic Development and Sustainability – Ian Vickerage/Sarah Hordern
- Transport – David Danielli
- Property & Planning – Peter Atkinson
- Business Security – Russell Downing
- People & Skills – Andrew Hooper/Amanda Richards
- Town Centre Partnership – Peter Atkinson
- Regulation & Red Tape – Gary Cranford

## **Economic Development and Sustainability**

The West Berkshire Chamber Council will continue to offer its support to the Inward Investment campaigns and work with other Business Support Agencies – The aim being to encourage new businesses to relocate to West Berkshire and provide support to existing and start up businesses, enabling them to grow and stay in the West Berkshire area.

Necessary actions to realise West Berkshire's economic potential

- Attract inward investment
- Encourage enterprise
- Attract knowledge-based industries
- Lobby for housing to meet local needs and employment requirements
- Address Skills Shortages

## **Transport**

The Chamber supports an integrated transport strategy. In order to encourage business to change transport choices, appropriate alternatives must be available. It is keen to see improved public transport, road and rail. The Chamber will establish contact with appropriate transport organisations and groups.

The Chamber will:

- Support Newbury Vision 2025 and all its aspirations
- Work with West Berkshire District Council in the development of its Local Transport Plan
- Lobby for more frequent train services and increased capacity in both directions for all commuting and leisure trips
- Work with the local bus operators to improve the vehicle standard, coverage and frequency of their services for commuters and shoppers
- To encourage West Berkshire Council to improve local congestion by trialing radical traffic flow ideas
- Lobby for signage to be improved, including the rationalization of the existing Town Centre and Racecourse signage
- Oppose workplace parking charges
- Support road tolls for new capacity

## **Property & Planning**

Planning regulations should support business to provide jobs, employment and wealth. Decisions should be made quickly, efficiently and with due consideration of their impact on business and the economic wellbeing of the area. The West Berkshire Chamber Council will support the new Planning regime and West Berkshire District Council to develop and deliver the aspirations of a "Sustainable Community Plan". This is achieved both directly and through continued representation on the West Berkshire Strategic Partnership. The West Berks Chamber, through its representative Peter Atkinson, has that role as current LSP Board Vice-Chair with specific responsibility for performance Management within the Public, Private and Voluntary Sector.

The Chamber will:

- Support extension of retail shopping, leisure and evening economy throughout West Berkshire's main conurbations.
- Support development of the Rural Economy.
- Support West Berkshire District Council and other Partners in developing and delivering Town Centre improvement plans throughout the District.
- In connection with general support of Newbury Vision 2025, the Chamber will specifically:-
  - Support full pedestrianisation of Northbrook Street, Bartholomew Street (North) and Mansion House Street and Wharf Street Newbury
  - Support development at Parkway as site for shopping
  - Support the Urban Village concept for Market Street
  - Support canal basin development plans
  - Support Business Improvement Districts (BIDS)

## **Town Centre**

The Chamber will:

- Continue to support the work of the Town Centre Events Manager and TCP's aspirations to achieve sufficient income to appoint a Town Centre Manager
- Support the delivery of the Town Centre CIC (Community Interest Company) Business Plan 2008 - 2013

## **Business Security**

Whilst business has the prime responsibility to protect its own customers, staff and property, the Chamber also believes that support for businesses is best achieved through partnership policing. The Chamber has formed, and now chairs a Business Action Group (BAG) to form a local focus for the business community with the following objectives:

- identify the most pressing business security issues, identify solutions and work with appropriate agencies to put them into action
- direct and support the PCSO as a key driver of the above.
- promote the objectives and work of the BAG in order to sustain and increase membership/buy-in.
- evaluate the success/value of the BAG/PCSO
- work on a medium-term plan for wider rollout of PCSO's in Berkshire

The BAG will be part of the management of a Police Community Support (PCSO) specifically deployed to the local business community. The PCSO will support the local business community in reducing its exposure to crime through

- forming a high-profile relationship with the business community, and identifying key (crime/security) operators within those businesses
- using available data resources, and researching the community itself, to establish definitive information and identify key areas for attention
- Actively targeting the highest priorities, working with the BAG, police and other local agencies as appropriate

The Chamber encourages business to play its part to increase the supply of intelligence available to partnership policing and works alongside Thames Valley Police to ensure the security of the business community receives high priority.

Additionally, the Chamber will:

- Support efforts to increase the number of fully operational police officers, civilian staff and special constables in West Berkshire
- Lobby and work with the police to reflect the business victim and the cost of crime to the business community in its reporting and crime statistics
- Support of the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership and local police board
- Support ad hoc problem-solving anti-crime initiatives, particularly when relevant to the business community

## **People & Skills**

Business has a duty to support and train staff to the highest standards. Government-support organisations, such as the Business Link and the Skills Funding Agency alongside schools, colleges, training providers and universities have a key role to play in training and education of our workforce.

West Berkshire has a working age population of 94,200, 87% (82,000) of whom are economically active (compared with 82% and 79% for the south East and UK respectively. Of those economically active, 96% (78,400) are in employment.<sup>1</sup>

The main employment sectors in West Berkshire and Berkshire are:

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Employment in West Berks</b>	<b>Employment in Berkshire</b>
Retail (excluding motor vehicle)	7,238	40,272
Health & Social Work	5,582	35,886
Education	6,380	35,886
Computer & Related industries		35,868
Transport & Communications	7,177	31,401
Wholesale distribution (excluding motor vehicle)	6,041	30,389
Legal, Accounting, Tax, Market Research & Management Consultancy		29,166
Hotels & Restaurants	4,785	26,915
Engineering	6,380	13,457
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,165</b>	<b>279,241</b>

15% of employers in Berkshire report skills gaps in their workforce, similar to the regional and national average. This represents 26,950 current employees working in Berkshire who are not proficient in their roles. 4% of companies indicate they are suffering from skill shortage vacancies (SE Region 5%).

West Berkshire Chamber Council will actively engage all parties concerned with work-based skills to promote an acceptable program of improvements in the standard and availability of suitably qualified people in order to improve productivity, growth and profitability of local businesses.

The Chamber will:

- Support Lifelong Learning Partnerships to inform SFA and SEEDA of local needs
- Lobby Funding Agencies to support local employers
- Encourage research and identify specific local skills shortages
- Encourage employers to forecast skill requirements
- Encourage employers to invest in staff training and development
- Promote investment in meaningful skill development
- Forge stronger links with Colleges and Training Providers to develop maximum effectiveness from existing staff.
- Support Pathways to Employment

## **Regulation & Red Tape**

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: NOMIS, June 2009

Regulation and Red Tape costs Britain around £50 billion annually. Every 6 months new legislation is introduced by Brussels often before businesses have got to grips with the current legislation. It is a particular burden for small and medium enterprises and those starting up who do not have the staff to deal with these issues. The West Berkshire Chamber will work with other Chambers in the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group and the British Chambers of Commerce to lobby government to reduce these costs and prevent unnecessary additional burdens. The Chamber recognises the need for proportionate regulation but it should be well targeted and business friendly.

### **Services to Chamber Members**

West Berkshire Chamber of Commerce is part of the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group, a membership organisation, which must maintain and expand its services and benefits to members of all sizes.

To this end the Chamber will work towards providing the following:

- Training for companies and individuals to support skills development and business success
- Networking events to encourage business development and a dynamic forum for business interchange, tendering and supply chain opportunities
- Business information services in the form of mailing lists and member directories
- Specific and targeted events and focus groups on People & Skills, Property & Planning and Waste & Recycling
- Social events to foster business and community links
- Support to members thinking of taking their first step towards an overseas market, and ongoing services to those already exporting through our International Trade department.

### **Summary**

The Chamber is keen to maintain the successful development of West Berkshire for the benefit of our members, employers and residents. It will work with appropriate organisations to deliver its vision. This document does not attempt to identify all the issues affecting the area, but merely sets out the priorities for the Chamber and our members at this time.

### **Focus Groups**

Town Centre Management Steering Group

Local Strategic Partnership (West Berkshire Partnership)

Local Economic Development

Vision 2025

Business Action Group (BAG)