

Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group

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12th December 2019

Planning Team
Bracknell Forest Council
Market Street
Bracknell
RG12 1JD

Dear Sir/madam,

Bracknell Forest Council Local Plan Consultation & Jealott's Hill (Section 6.5 and Policy LP 7)

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Council's consultation on its revised growth strategy for the emerging Bracknell Forest Local Plan.

General Comments and the Chamber's Business Manifesto (2020)

We support the proposals to extend the plan period up to 2036. We believe this provides opportunity for long-term planning and *planning for economic development* within the context of the Local Plan.

The ongoing viability and vitality of Bracknell is a balance between delivering the right mix of housing in the appropriate locations and securing sustainable economic growth linked to ensure we have the resilient infrastructure (water, electricity, gas, telecommunications, road, rail, etc) in place to support the future needs of the resident and business community.

We have recently published our Business Manifesto (2020) and are encouraged to see common themes. We welcome the Council's continued strategic focus on key issues we identify that affect Bracknell and the wider sub-region, including:

- Continued support for the funding and delivery of the Western Rail Link to Heathrow (WRLtH). Advocate the environmental benefits the scheme will bring to Heathrow Airport and its environs.
- Promote the need for a comprehensive and resilient infrastructure network, including the expansion of Heathrow Airport, that will support the region's future and sustainable economic growth.
- Lobby Government to deliver practical and real-world interventions to ensure any business impacts of Brexit are mitigated by frictionless trade, investment and freedom of movement for the workforce.

Within the context of the Local Plan we wish to make the following, broad comments, but welcome the opportunity (see duty to cooperate below) for continued dialogue and discussion with the business community.

Economic development

Within the vision we support the broad thrust of the Plan that seeks to protect key employment areas, and focus on ensuring a diverse and thriving economy, encouraging people to live and work in the Borough. We welcome:

- the vision that Bracknell aims to be an “exceptional place for business”.
- and encourage the Council to work with key partners, such as the Department for International Trade and the Thames Valley Chamber – as one of its local delivery partners, to attract investment (both from UK and foreign owned businesses) to “support economic growth and resilience”.
- a strategy (para 7.2) that supports those evidentially key economic sectors to continue to thrive. A sector, and market-based, approach should reflect on sub-regional (Berkshire); regional (Thames Valley) and national strategies in place and/or under development to ensure Bracknell is best-placed to maximise the benefit. This will and should include reference to the developing Local Industrial Strategy for Berkshire and the Government’s Industrial Strategy and Sector Deals.
- A strong/er focus on delivering ambition to support sustained levels of economic growth. This includes a continued commitment to secure higher levels of inward investment into the Borough. Working alongside the Chamber, we also welcome focus on delivering a programme of effective account management that maintains engagement with the business community.

The revised growth strategy, as you have stated, identifies several main changes that the Council have had to make. This includes the redevelopment of the Syngenta R&D site at Jealott’s Hill, Warfield (Section 6.5 and Policy LP 7), to deliver a new science and innovation park, facilities and a community of 4,000 homes based on garden village principles. We take this opportunity to make the following observations and comment:

- We support the proposals which would help ensure that we retain *and grow* the Syngenta facilities at Jealott’s Hill as an international and significant R&D facility in the sub-region.
- The economic importance of this facility, to Bracknell, the Thames Valley and UK plc is significant; its retention and capacity to grow will help retain 850 jobs, create 2,000 new jobs and deliver more than £50m in business rates and between £6.4 - £7.1 billion in GVA over the 20 years following completion. Clearly this benefits the local (regional and UK) economy.
- Strategically, proposals to retain and grow the science park facility supports Her Majesty’s Government Industrial Strategy proposals and Thames Valley Berkshire Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) aims, objectives and priorities. This includes ambitions to deliver growth in the agri-tech sector, deepening supply-chains and driving exportable products and technologies; developing next generation clean-growth facilities and supporting GVA and productivity growth targets.
- As a strategic site and facility of national and international importance, the research work taking place at Jealott’s Hill is world leading and is developing future technology to feed a growing population, more efficiently and in an environmentally friendly way.
- The mix-use development of a comprehensive master plan for the site will provide opportunity to maximise wider benefit for the community and wider Bracknell area. This would include: (i) new primary and secondary schools on site providing educational opportunities and linking Syngenta scientists in driving STEM subjects; (ii) Providing additional, including affordable, housing; (iii) extensive, new and accessible green spaces, and; (iv) because of the scale of the development, opportunity to explore innovative technologies and future proof design/s that can provide the Borough with an exemplar environmentally friendly development delivering reductions in energy, water consumption and carbon.

Linking back to our own Business Manifesto, the proposals will help deliver many of its aims and objectives, including the promotion of a business-led approach to help accelerate the delivery of sustained economic growth, infrastructure investment and resilience in the Thames Valley.

Further, protecting skilled jobs, creating new work opportunities, offer additional housing, particularly those that are deemed more affordable, are all areas that the Chamber has actively championed in the past, and lobbied Government, where necessary.

Duty to co-operate

With regards to the duty to cooperate framework we note the absence of business membership organisations being listed as consultees. Moving forward, we welcome a proactive approach, that is beyond the statutory, that engages organisations like the region's only accredited Chamber of Commerce (and other membership organisations) and reflects the progressive, forward thinking Council you are. There are existing, and we can provide other, avenues for the Council to actively engage. We invite you to discuss ways in which we can work more closely with the Council to ensure we establish a sustainable and ongoing engagement process.

We thank you for the opportunity to respond to your consultation and, for the reason's outlined above, support the:

- Broad thrust of planning for economic development principles we cover. proposals outlined in the growth
- Proposals outlined for the Syngenta R&D site at Jealott's Hill, Warfield (Section 6.5 and Policy LP 7).

Yours sincerely



Paul Britton
Chief Executive