

Caroline Hargrave  
Head of Research  
Buckinghamshire Council  
Queen Victoria Road  
High Wycombe  
Buckinghamshire  
HP11 1BB

Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group  
150 Edinburgh Avenue Slough  
Berkshire SL1 4SS  
Tel: +44 (0)1753 870500

Executive Assistant: Alexandra Keane: +44 (0)1753 870582  
Email: [AlexandraKeane@tvchamber.co.uk](mailto:AlexandraKeane@tvchamber.co.uk)  
[www.thamesvalleychamber.co.uk](http://www.thamesvalleychamber.co.uk)

11<sup>th</sup> July 2024

Submitted via email to: [pgsandcommunitiesbi@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:pgsandcommunitiesbi@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)

Dear Caroline,

### **Buckinghamshire Economic Strategy Refresh**

On behalf of the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC), we thank you for the opportunity to provide the following comments on the Buckinghamshire Economic Strategy refresh.

Our comments have been prepared in collaboration with selected members, including those from the Chamber's consultation panel, across Buckinghamshire.

In providing comment may we also draw your attention to the following key policy statements developed in partnership with our business community. These will resonate and complement much of what is being proposed in your economic strategy, as well as highlight areas of particular focus for you to consider:

- [Local Policy Priority Statement for Buckinghamshire](#)
- [2024 Business Manifesto](#).

**The following reflect our consultations, the above policy statements and previous submissions we have made relating to Buckinghamshire and its economic well being** (see [The Local Plan for Buckinghamshire, submitted in February 2022](#)).

Our comments are also made in the context that Buckinghamshire is not an island and much of what the County does/is doing influences and is influenced by the wider functional economic geography that is the Thames Valley. This includes the business representative organisations and key stakeholders, like TVCC who are focused on supporting the ambitions of our business community (members or not).

### **Growing Key Sectors**

We have long advocated a sector-based approach to supporting business growth and development. Therefore, we welcome the broad objective of a strategy centred on **growing key sectors** in which we look to promote and showcase where Buckinghamshire, and the Thames Valley, has a comparative advantage - and being bolder – a global presence (e.g., high end television and film).

- TVCC already hosts several sector-based groups covering [health and life sciences](#) and [sustainability](#). In developing your strategy, we call upon you to join these existing groups, don't duplicate; to strengthen the representation and collaborative/business opportunities they might create for Bucks business (ref: robust growth and improving productivity).

- Linked to the above, develop sector propositions that help promote these key sectors globally. Showcase within these propositions, the centres of excellence and key R&D assets. Include, or separately, prepare ‘invest-ready’ commercial opportunities (real-estate documents) that promote specific sites – once again – globally. TVCC can help here.
- TVCC hosts the only region-wide and dedicated [inward investment portal](#) showcasing the region’s key sector strengths to the world. Buckinghamshire is well represented, but this could be strengthened as a ‘global marketing’ tool.
- Delivering effective, and sustained, key account management (KAM) is a key component of engaging and understanding businesses across Bucks’ key sectors. We support every effort to establish an effective KAM programme with agreed ‘targets’ which should include capturing a greater volume, and value, of foreign direct investment. TVCC has an established KAM programme which we should be looking to strengthen, in partnership with Buckinghamshire Council, rather than duplicate effort.
- We might reflect on the most recent publication of the [DBT inward investment results 2023 to 2024](#) that the number of foreign direct investments, into Buckinghamshire, could be improved with (i) a stronger focus and funding towards inward investment, and (ii) the co-development and partnership of delivery with the region’s proven inward investment centre of excellence within TVCC (which is directly linked to completing the Enterprise Zone programme).

### Creating the Conditions for Robust Growth

TVCC supports a strategy focused on **creating the conditions for robust growth**, which should also drive wider conditions for key sector growth and productivity, including:

- Advocate for [essential infrastructure proposals](#) that reduce the dependency on the car and deliver sustainability ambitions which (i) are vital for stimulating investment and boosting the Buckinghamshire economy, such as [East-West Rail](#) and the [Western Rail Link to Heathrow](#) (see below); (ii) enhance the use, availability and connectivity of public transport to key locations / growth drivers like [Heathrow](#), the world’s most connected airport and the UK’s only hub airport – businesses like Pinewood cannot operate without such key ‘assets’ on their doorstep; (iii) provide smart, multi-modal mobility solutions and simple ticketing; and (iv) optimise the provision of low-carbon alternatives.
- Enabling digital transformation (e.g., through adoption of Artificial Intelligence) and delivering new infrastructure to enable technology-driven growth. Delivering AI-ready critical infrastructure networks is a ‘must have’ (rather than a nice to have) component. Practically, and because of the locational advantages of Bucks, this means meeting the evidential demand, from datacentres (DCs) operators, to accommodate DCs in, most especially, southern Buckinghamshire (see next bullet).
- Provide greater certainty and clearer guidance on planning decisions. Resource major planning applications appropriately to ensure decisions are/can be delivered in a timely manner. Reflecting on the evolving national policy debate, we encourage greater consideration and emphasis placed on economics and economic development in planning decisions. This includes a higher degree of importance placed on strategically important projects that will drive UK/region-wide economic growth and productivity.

The WRLtH scheme will run through, and DIRECTLY, benefit Buckinghamshire. For the reasons we outline on our web portal, this is a transformational project for our region which will help deliver all your strategy aims and objectives. Your strategy should/must unequivocally, include direct reference to this scheme and the Council’s support for its timely delivery as a key driver of our economic ambitions. You may wish to listen to the April adjournment debate, which highlighted the cross-Party support for the WRLtH scheme. At the bequest of the Department for Transport, we are

currently finalising the commission of an economic study refresh and inviting stakeholders to help fund this work. Exclusively private sector funded, at present, we are inviting Buckinghamshire to contribute financially to enable this study to commence this summer.

### **Improve Productivity of our Business Base**

TVCC strongly advocates for a strategy focused on **improving the productivity of the Bucks business base**. This can be achieved by:

- Delivering the transformational digital technology and networks outlined above.
- Improving connectivity to London Heathrow and ensuring the timely delivery of the WRLtH scheme.
- Helping to ensure more business export and trade international. Supporting many businesses across Bucks already, TVCC hosts a centre of excellence for International Trade that does 'exactly' what your strategy is aiming to do - grow export activity. Work with us to co-develop programmes that can deliver in this area. -
- Addressing the challenges many small businesses face on the journey to net-zero. Last year TVCC undertook the first comprehensive study that considered a region-wide perspective on the Thames Valley's pathway to net zero and how we are considering climate change and sustainability. [The State of the Region report](#) on sustainability highlighted some very interesting challenges facing micro and SME businesses. This primary research can and should form the basis of, once again, a co-developed programme of business support, activity and shared learning should the Council have the ambition to work alongside us.
- Alongside Bucks, one of TVCC's main priorities is to shape our **future skills** needs and actively promote initiatives that show how employers can best influence skills and their future workforce across the County/wider Thames Valley region. There is much shared learning to be had in ensuring our work across the [Local Skills Improvement Plans](#) results in business-led solutions. May we invite you to reach-out so we might facilitate a separate, more detailed, discussion with our respective leads.

For the reasons outlined in our response above we welcome and look forward to the opportunity of continued, ongoing, dialogue, with Buckinghamshire Council on how we can deliver the aims and objectives of the Economic Strategy together. We invite you to engage TVCC and work with us to co-develop and deliver the projects and actions to secure the best future for the Buckinghamshire economy.



Paul Britton  
Chief Executive  
Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce Group

### **About the Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce**

The Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce (TVCC) is one of the largest accredited Chambers within the UK and the only accredited Chamber of Commerce for the region. The Chamber is a proven centre of excellence for trade and inward investment services and represents the views of over 5,000 businesses in the Thames Valley.