

# Central Bedfordshire Combined Economic Insight Report 2023

## Introduction

### Executive Summary

Central Bedfordshire is home to over 294,000 people and upwards of 12,000 enterprises. It generates output of around £5.7 billion annually. It is significant in economic terms, with a population higher than Milton Keynes and a similar number of enterprises. The 2023 Economic Insights report brings together a large number of socio-economic data sets to understand how the area has performed in recent years compared to benchmark areas. It considers performance across the following themes: people; business and jobs; place and infrastructure; sub-district analysis. The key points are summarised below by each theme.

#### **People**

In 2021, there were 294,000 people in Central Bedfordshire. The local authority saw a growth in the population of over 38,000 people in the ten years up to 2021. This is equivalent to a 15% increase, which is far higher than the level of growth at the national level (6%).

Elderly dependents (65+ years) are the main driver of Central Bedfordshire's rapid population growth, with this cohort growing by 31% over the past decade. The young dependent population (0-15 years) has also seen significant growth over the same time period (15%).

The local working age population has not kept pace with other age cohorts since it has grown by less than 12% over the same period. Nevertheless, this level of growth is stronger than comparator areas and the England average (4%), which is positive. A growing youth population is also important to the economic future of the area.

Central Bedfordshire's labour market continues to perform well compared to England, with low rates of economic inactivity, unemployment, and claimant counts. However, it has a lower level of residents with NVQ4+ (degree level qualifications) and a slower rate of growth in this group than the national average. This could constrain the supply of skilled labour in the future.

Central Bedfordshire residents have a higher life expectancy than England, with males living to an average of 81 years and females living to 85 years. This compares to 79 and 83 years for England as a whole.

#### **Business and Jobs**

12,375 businesses were operating in Central Bedfordshire in 2022, an increase of 2,030 since 2012. Over this period, the business base increased by 2%, below the

national average of 3%. Compared to neighbouring areas, this growth is distinguished by an increase in medium-to-large businesses (50+ employees). Since 2012, Central Bedfordshire's medium and large businesses have grown by 26% and 29%, respectively, outpacing the national average (20%). This indicates that Central Bedfordshire is a prime location for businesses to expand and grow, which provides further employment opportunities and scope to reach new clients and markets.

It is important to note that expansion of the business base was concentrated in the first five years of the decade, indicating that events like Brexit and Covid-19 may have had a greater effect on the district's economy over the past five years. Since 2017, the annual growth in the local business base has declined at a much faster rate than nationally.

Gross Value Added (GVA) per filled job which is a key measure of productivity was £54,800 in Central Bedfordshire in 2020. This is below the average for the UK, which was £58,800. This is likely to be due to the dominance of lower-paying sectors and commuting flows into higher-paying areas such as London. Nevertheless, levels of productivity have been increasing over the last decade in Central Bedfordshire (35%) compared to nationally (22%).

A Central Bedfordshire study found specialties in high-performance technology, advanced logistics, creative, cultural, and visitor economy. Hatch analysis shows that Education (12,000), manufacturing (10,000), and transport and storage (9,000) were Central Bedfordshire's largest sectors in 2021. Together, these accounted for nearly a third (28%) of employment in Central Bedfordshire.

The key sectors in terms of employment growth (using CAGRs) have been transport and storage (7.2%), information & communication (4.5%) and business admin and support (4.1) which are 2-3 times higher than the average growth in the district across all sectors (2%). An LQ assessment which measures levels of concentration in employment shows that Central Bedfordshire has strengths in transport and storage, motor trades and wholesale sectors. The area's strengths in transport and wholesale is likely to reflect Central Bedfordshire's proximity to key road networks, which provides opportunities for growth in this sector.

There is a mismatch between the skills of employees and the demands of businesses. Employers in Central Bedfordshire are more likely to report skills gaps than other locations in the South East Midlands LEP area. Despite a high proportion of highly skilled residents in Central Bedfordshire, some do not possess the skills required from employers.

## **Place and Infrastructure**

In 2021, there were over 126,000 dwellings in Central Bedfordshire. The area has seen a higher growth in the number of new dwellings in the last 5 years compared to comparator areas, with 10,735 additional homes delivered between 2016 and 2021. The annual rate of housing growth in Central Bedfordshire between 2016-21 was 1.8% per annum compared to just 0.9% for England.

Whilst the level of house building has been strong, housing affordability in Central Bedfordshire has been worsening. The average median house price in Central Bedfordshire was £325,000 in 2022 and between 2013 and 2019, the area experienced a steep increase in house prices (of 59%), which is above the national average. The ratio of house price to residence based earnings is a good indicator of the affordability of housing in Central Bedfordshire. In 2021, this was 9.43 compared to 9.05 nationally.

In terms of the completion of employment floorspace, former B-class (employment) uses saw the most development between 2015 and 2022. Over 80,000 square metres was completed in 2022 alone. Former D-class uses have accounted for the second highest amount of non residential space. This use class includes health/medical services, creche/daycare, sport and recreation uses and community halls. In 2022, this accounted for 25,346 sqm of space, which was an increase on 2021 levels (10,599 sqm).

The report considers journey times to employment centres with at least 500 jobs in 2017. When looking at journey times by either public transport or walking, Central Bedfordshire (15 minutes) performs worse than the national average (13 minutes) and more urban areas such as Milton Keynes and Luton. It does however perform better than some rural areas such as South Cambridgeshire. Bus-travel in Central Bedfordshire has been consistently below other areas. This partly reflects the rural nature of the area which makes it difficult for bus operators to operate.

Travel patterns in the district show average levels of walking and cycling, while rail passenger numbers have dropped due to COVID-19. Between 2015 and 2020, rail patronage saw modest growth of about 1% per year on average.

Digital connectivity in Central Bedfordshire has been improving, with around 95% coverage of superfast broadband speeds compared to 97% for England. The district performs well on 4G outdoor coverage at 96% coverage compared to 89% nationally.

Central Bedfordshire is making progress towards becoming a more sustainable area. In 2020, Central Bedfordshire produced 4.9 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions per capita compared to 5.6 for England. Furthermore, 50% of buildings in the district had an EPC issued at grade C or above in 2022, compared to 45% for England, which is positive.

### **Sub-District Analysis**

The Insights report considers how economic performance has varied within Central Bedfordshire. The analysis shows that across the district of Central Bedfordshire there has been strong growth in the elderly population (65+ years) in the North East of the district. Additionally, the youth population (aged 15 or below) has declined in rural areas stretching from Woburn to Biggleswade. These areas are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of an ageing population.

In terms of the working age (16-64) population, there has also been a decrease, specifically in the southwest of the district. Some parts of the district have been

bucking this trend however, particularly around Ampthill, Houghton Regis and Dunstable.

There have also been strong variations in the economic performance of the district. Some areas have seen large increases in employment between 2016-21, particularly near Dunstable and Biggleswade. Other areas have experienced contractions, most notably in the North East and South East of Central Bedfordshire.

The North-east of the district has also seen economic output (GVA) stagnate or contract between 2014-2019. This has been particularly severe in rural areas to the north of Shefford and the west of Stotfold. Overall, employment has either stagnated or contracted in 61% of LSOAs in Central Bedfordshire between 2016-2021, which is in part likely to reflect Covid-19.

The vast majority of Central Bedfordshire's deprived areas are in the vicinity of Houghton Regis and Dunstable, according to MHCLG's 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation of English LSOAs. There are also some pockets of significant rural deprivation which lie in the rural areas between Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable as well as north of Shefford. Overall, 9% of LSOAs in Central Bedfordshire are ranked in the most deprived areas.

## Introduction and Context

This section introduces the Central Bedfordshire Economic Insights 2023 report and summarises some key economic and policy context of relevance

### Introduction

#### **Purpose of the Economic Insights Report**

The 2023 Economic Insights Report provides a detailed analysis of the performance of Central Bedfordshire's economy. Not only does it provide a snapshot of economic performance, it also provides analysis and information on 'why it matters'.

The document provides comparisons with the performance of neighbouring authorities, and with national trends. It also looks at trends over time. The Economic Insights report was last produced in 2019, and going forward it will be refreshed annually.

#### **National Economic Context**

A lot has changed since the 2019 Economic Insights report was produced and it is important to understand the key changes to the Economic Context which has impacted on Central Bedfordshire.

The impacts of the **COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021** were global in reach and scale. The Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR), an independent body which provides fiscal and economic forecasts to the Chancellor of the Exchequer previously stated that 2020 had seen the greatest peacetime global economic shock on record<sup>1</sup>. Several national lockdowns and continuous economic and social restrictions have had a significant impact on the economy.

**Brexit** has also shaped the last few years. The UK voted to leave the EU in 2016 and officially left the trading bloc on 31 January 2020. Both sides agreed to keep many things the same until 31 December 2020, before a new trade deal was announced and implemented on 1 January 2021. The full impact of this is not yet clear.

Two years on from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the **Russian invasion of Ukraine** is also having major repercussions for the global economy, whose recovery from the pandemic was already being buffeted by Omicron, supply bottlenecks and rising inflation.

## Policy Context

As a net importer of energy, with gas and oil continuing to serve as an important supply to national energy needs, the UK is being heavily impacted by rising global energy prices. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) (a measure of inflation) reached 10.1% - a 40 year high - in September 2022.

The most recent OBR outlook (November 2022) states that with high inflation and rising interest rates weighing on demand, the UK economy is expected to enter a recession lasting just over a year from the third quarter of 2022, with a peak-to-trough fall in output of 2.1 per cent. As energy prices and inflation drop, and short-term interest rates fall back from their peaks, annual GDP growth (Gross Domestic Product, a measure of output) picks up to 1.3 per cent in 2024. Growth is predicted to be even stronger in 2024 and 2025, rising to 2.6 and 2.7% respectively. The detailed impacts of these major shocks to the economy are still emerging.

With relatively few exceptions (for example, claimant count data), the latest government data on the economy, including both business and employment data, is not yet available to provide an up to date picture. Latest data releases from the BRES and other ONS sources are 2020/2021 and therefore not likely to include a full picture of any changes that occurred throughout 2021 as national lockdowns continued. In this regard, the data referred to in this report is the latest available but the picture for 2022 may have changed further.

## Policy Context

The following slides summarise the key policy documents that have and will continue to influence the economy of Central Bedfordshire. These policies are grouped into the following levels:

**National:** there has been a strong focus on Levelling up which formed a core part of the Conservatives election manifesto. Other documents such as 'Build Back Better' seeks to provide a response to Covid-19.

**Regional:** the South East Midlands LEP has prepared a number of relevant plans, including an economic Recovery Plan.

**Local:** a number of relevant documents, including the Vision 2050, Economic Strategy and Local Plan have and will influence the future of the area.

## National Policy

Policy	Objectives
Levelling Up White Paper (2022)	<p>Sets out the UK Government's main missions for levelling up the UK. This is centered around four key missions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Boost productivity, pay, high skilled jobs and living standards</b> by growing the private sector, especially in places where lagging</li> <li>○ Spread <b>opportunities and improve public services</b> and ensure people have access to the necessary physical and digital infrastructure</li> <li>○ Restore a <b>sense of community</b>, local pride and belonging</li> <li>○ <b>Empower local leaders and communities</b> to develop solutions and acquire agency</li> </ul>
Build Back Better (2021)	<p>As part of its recovery from Covid-19, there are three pillars of investment to build economic recovery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>High quality infrastructure</b> – planned capital investment of £100bn in 2021/22</li> <li>○ <b>Skills development</b> – transforming Further Education, encouraging lifelong learning through the Lifetime Skills Guarantee, and building an apprenticeship revolution</li> <li>○ <b>Innovation Focus</b> – provide an uplift in R&amp;D investment and the creation of an Advanced Research and Innovation Agency to promote and fund high-risk and high-reward research</li> </ul>
Skills White Paper (2021)	<p>Sets out how the Government will reform further education so it supports people to get the skills our economy needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Putting <b>employers at the heart of the education</b> system to address productivity and skills gaps</li> <li>○ Invest in <b>higher-level technical qualifications</b> that provide a valuable alternative to a university degree</li> <li>○ Make sure people can <b>access training and learning</b> flexibility throughout their lives</li> <li>○ Reform <b>funding and accountability</b> for providers to simplify how funds are allocated and deliver value for money</li> <li>○ Support <b>excellent teaching</b> in further education</li> </ul>
Industrial Strategy White Paper (2018)	<p>To create an economy that boosts productivity and earning throughout the UK, the strategy is centred around five key foundations of productivity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Ideas:</b> for the UK to become the world's most innovative economy</li> <li>○ <b>People:</b> providing good jobs and greater earning power for all</li> <li>○ <b>Infrastructure:</b> providing a major upgrade to the UK's infrastructure</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Business environment:</b> creating the best place to start and grow a business</li> <li>○ <b>Places:</b> supporting prosperous communities across the UK.</li> </ul>
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## Regional Policy

Policy	Objectives
SEMLEP Economic Recovery Plan and Evidence Base (2020)	<p>To help recover from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and drive prosperity, SEMLEP will focus on three areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Survive</b> – promote innovative responses by local businesses and enable new digital and agile ways of working</li> <li>○ <b>Stabilise</b> – promote the Arc’s innovation and commercialisation strengths, support and promote new and existing R&amp;D assets, strengthen the links between business networks, and engage with innovative businesses to understand their needs and help them access funding</li> <li>○ <b>Grow</b> – continue to be at the forefront of clean growth, the Future of Mobility Grand Challenge, and work with local partners to expand innovation capabilities, sustainability and productivity of the local logistics and manufacturing sectors, and support innovation in life sciences to build resilience to future public health crises.</li> </ul>
SEMLEP Local Industrial Strategy (2019)	<p>To guide the Strategy, SEMLEP sets out six ambitions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Become the <b>connected core</b> of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc</li> <li>○ Lead the way on the <b>Future of Mobility Grand Challenge</b> through continued investment in aerospace and advanced engineering</li> <li>○ Improve <b>productivity and sustainability</b> fuelled by renewable energy, smart and connected transport solutions, and greener vehicles, buildings and design principles</li> <li>○ Provide an <b>exemplary business environment</b> with high-quality commercial premises and support for incubation, scale-up, innovation, trade and investment activity within the Arc.</li> <li>○ Trial new approaches to <b>placemaking</b> to promote and enhance natural capital, clean growth, culture and inclusivity</li> </ul>

SEMLEP Strategic Economic Plan 2017-2050	Sets the ambition and strategic economic direction of the South East Midlands and the foundations needed to build on as a <b>premier location for growth, innovation, creativity and world-leading technologies</b> . It will do this by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Delivering 13,000 homes up until 2025/26 to meet the growing population</li> <li>○ Increased levels of private sector investment, including Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the area, and growing jobs by 10% by 2025</li> <li>○ Focussing on sectors transformational for growth including high performance technology, advanced manufacturing, logistics and supply chain, and cultural and creative industries</li> </ul>
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## Local Policy

Policy	Objectives
Central Bedfordshire Vision 2050	To make CBC a “great place to live and work”, the Vision outlines four key outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We live in a <b>unique and special environment</b> that protects open spaces, its rural character, natural environment, and makes greener choices</li> <li>○ We live in <b>thriving communities</b> recognising CBC leisure and cultural offer in order to attract visitors and residents to the area</li> <li>○ We have the <b>best quality of life</b> through housing delivery and supporting young people and families, as well as those growing older</li> <li>○ We have a <b>prosperous and innovative economy</b>, building on its economic potential within the Oxford-Cambridge Arc and high value sectors including agri-food, visitor economy, high performing technology, and transport and logistics</li> </ul>
Central Bedfordshire Strategic Plan 2022-2027	To meet Vision 2050, CBC has outlined its key priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Creating <b>opportunities for rewarding work</b> to address the challenge of in-work poverty</li> <li>○ <b>Protecting the environment and reducing carbon emissions</b> through the Central Bedfordshire Council Sustainability Plan</li> <li>○ Supporting the <b>health and wellbeing of residents</b> and supporting independent living</li> <li>○ Delivering and <b>improving services</b> such as roads and transport</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Building <b>schools fit for the future</b> through improved educational outcomes, sufficient places and facilitate more SEND provision</li> <li>○ Delivering <b>high quality, affordable housing</b> to meet the need of residents</li> </ul>
Central Bedfordshire Economic Strategy 2021	<p>The Strategy is structured around six interlinked themes of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>People</b> – supporting skills, jobs and sectors of the future</li> <li>○ <b>Businesses</b> – supporting businesses to stay and grow in Central Bedfordshire, attracting new innovative businesses</li> <li>○ <b>Places</b> – creating sustainable, affordable, high-quality and family-friendly places</li> <li>○ <b>Infrastructure</b> – investing in public transport, active travel, energy and digital infrastructure</li> <li>○ <b>Partnerships</b> – collaborating with regional and national stakeholders to deliver inclusive economic growth</li> <li>○ <b>Council</b> – maximising value from council assets and deliver social value objectives through policies, programmes and actions</li> </ul>
Central Bedfordshire Local Plan 2035	<p>Whilst this will be reviewed imminently, the currently adopted Local Plan will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Deliver new <b>high-tech employment and sustainable homes</b> with a goal of 39,350 homes and 24,000 jobs over the next 20 years</li> <li>○ Support <b>priority sectors</b> in agri-food, high performance technologies, R&amp;D, transport and logistics, and the visitor economy.</li> </ul>

### Local Policy (Continued)

Policy	Objectives
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<p>Central Bedfordshire Economic Strategy 2021</p>	<p>The Strategy is structured around six interlinked themes of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>People</b> – supporting skills, jobs and sectors of the future</li> <li>○ <b>Businesses</b> – supporting businesses to stay and grow in Central Bedfordshire, attracting new innovative businesses who will invest and employ locally</li> <li>○ <b>Places</b> – creating sustainable, affordable, high-quality and family-friendly places</li> <li>○ <b>Infrastructure</b> – investing in public transport, active travel, energy and digital infrastructure</li> <li>○ <b>Partnerships</b> – collaborating with regional and national stakeholders to deliver inclusive economic growth</li> <li>○ <b>Council</b> – maximising value from council assets and deliver social value objectives through policies, programmes and actions</li> </ul>
<p>Business Incubation and Innovation Market Assessment (2021)</p>	<p>This suggests there is <b>demand for incubation and innovation space</b>, with the district well placed to <b>accelerate its offer to new and small businesses</b>. The key points are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ CBC should capitalise on being located between Oxford and Cambridge by building on the strengths of Cranfield and Millbrook (with commercialisation and spin-off potential) and complement the R&amp;I strengths that exist.</li> <li>○ There is a strong entrepreneurial economy with positive survival rates, highly skilled residents and high rates of self-employment but a fragmented innovation ecosystem which is not linked to anchor institutions.</li> <li>○ Existing innovation and incubation space exists (such as Cranfield Eagle Lab and Technology Park) but there is need for more flexible, grow-on accommodation. There is evidence of emerging light industrial space but no land is allocated for innovation or incubation facilities.</li> <li>○ Tapping into major schemes such as Marston Vale and East of Biggleswade pose opportunities for growing the population, providing much needed housing and addressing wider innovation ambitions.</li> </ul>

## Document Orientation

This section clarifies the structure of the Economic Insights document and explains its interactivity features.

## Volume Structure

The **Economic Insight 2023** report is divided into five volumes, each with a specific focus:

- **Volume 1:** Introduces the report and defines key terms.
- **Volume 2:** Analyses population trends, economic activity, unemployment rates, skills and qualifications, and health and wellbeing in Central Bedfordshire.
- **Volume 3:** Examines the district's businesses and jobs, including employment rates, business growth and composition, key sectors, GVA and productivity, earnings and occupations, and skills gaps.
- **Volume 4:** Focuses on housing supply and affordability, employment space and town center performance, travel behavior, broadband and mobile coverage, and sustainability in Central Bedfordshire.
- **Volume 5:** Offers small area analysis of many of the above factors within Central Bedfordshire's sub-regions.



## Document Navigation

The **Economic Insight 2023** report is designed to be interactive, meaning that as well as reading the Insight in detail, you can navigate your way through the document in any order that you like.

To read the document **sequentially**, you can click or tap on the left and right navigation buttons on the top right of each page. Clicking on the menu button will return you to the contents of each Volume at any time.

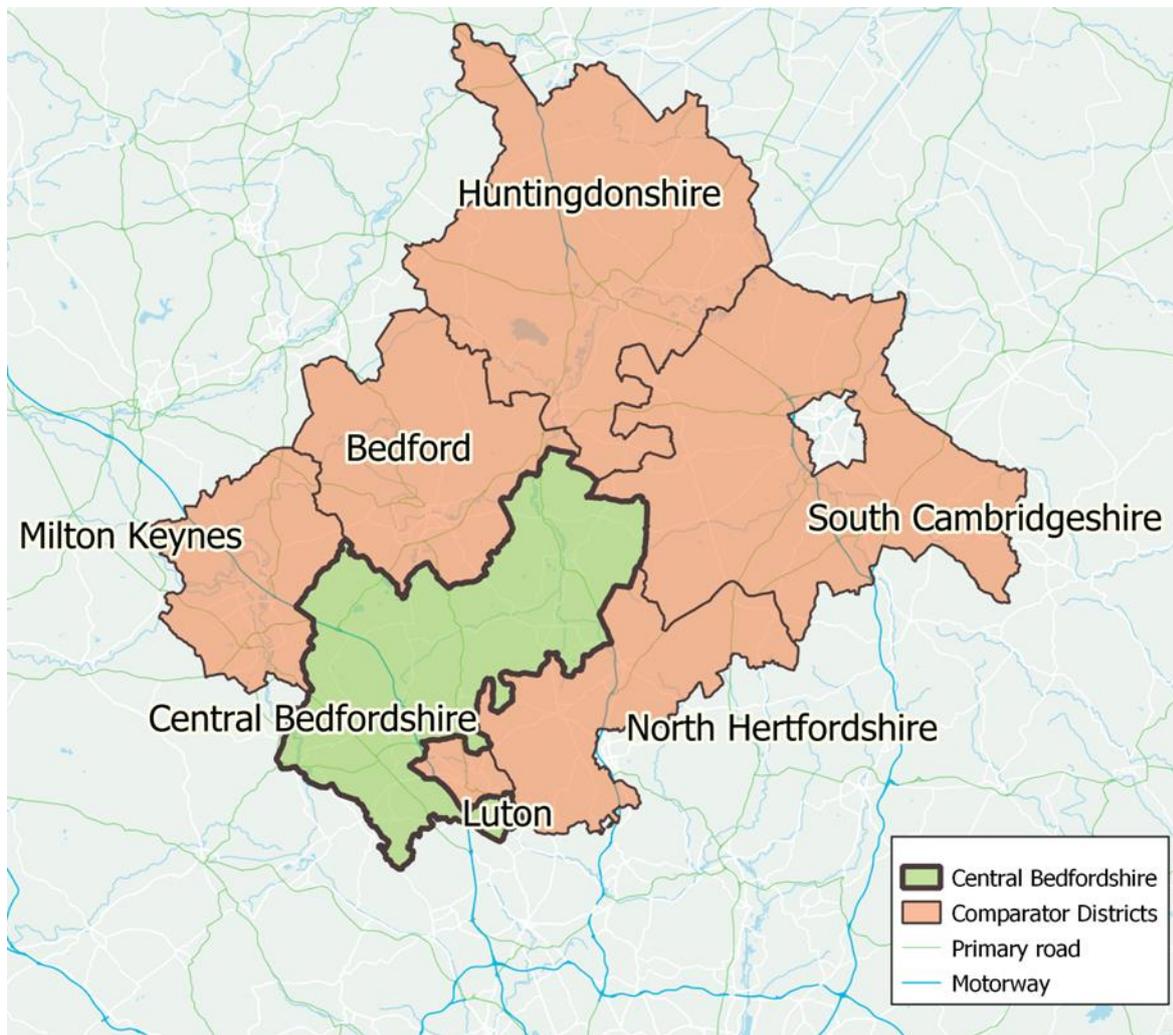
To read the document in **summary**, each page includes topic navigation tabs, which allow you to skip forwards and backwards to each major topic overview page, providing a high-level outline of key findings without delving into detailed analysis.

To navigate in **your preferred order**, each volume and most 'topics' have a contents page. Click on any contents item to be taken directly to that topic.

## Key definitions

This section confirms the geographies which have been used for the Economic Insight report and key definitions, including for sectors

### Comparator Areas



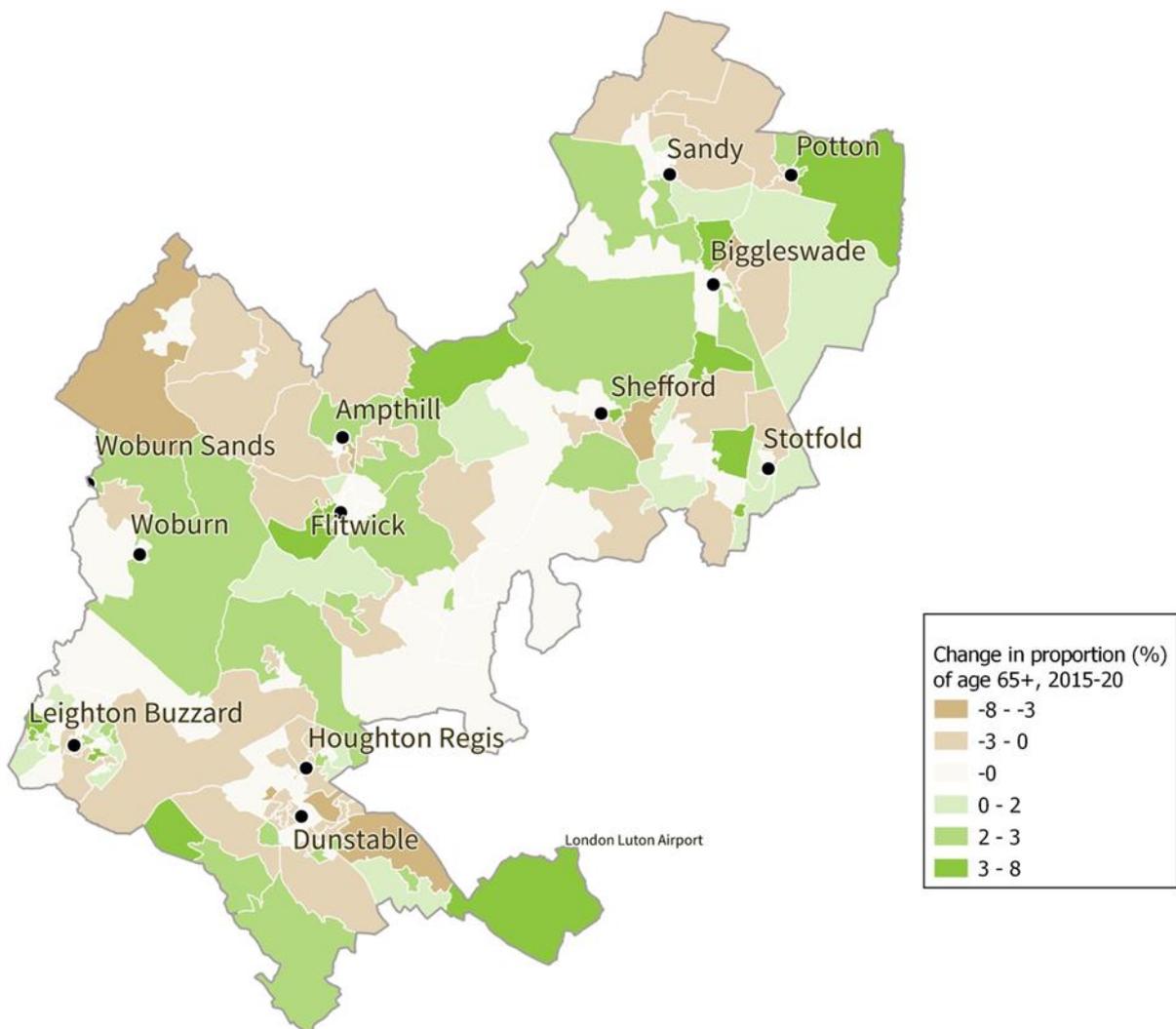
In order to “make sense” of the data for Central Bedfordshire, use is made of “comparator areas”; these help to highlight where Central Bedfordshire performs strongly or less strongly, relative to elsewhere.

This study compares Central Bedfordshire with a set of comparator districts, which are nearby local authorities. These include the following:

- Milton Keynes
- Bedford
- Huntingdonshire
- Luton
- North Hertfordshire
- South Cambridgeshire

In addition, a national comparator has been used. This is the largest out of England, Great Britain, or the UK, given the data source

### Approach to sub-district analysis



The previous Economic Insight report defined four quadrant areas, however these quadrants have not retained significance from a policy point of view. Instead, the 2023 Economic insights report maps data at the lowest level (either LSOA, MSOA or postcode-based), to show the granular variation of performance within Central Bedfordshire.

The sub-district analysis is set out in Section 5 of this Economic Insights report. The analysis provides an analysis of the trends within the district, focusing on rural and urban trends as well

## People

### Key Findings

- **Elderly dependents are the main driver of Central Bedfordshire's rapid population growth**, with a significant increase in this cohort (+31%) and the young dependent population (+15%) over the past decade, outpacing other districts and the national average.
- **The local working age population has not kept pace, growing by less than 12% over the same period** but still experiencing strong growth compared to similar areas and the national average. A burgeoning youth population also bodes well for the future.
- **Central Bedfordshire's labour market continues to perform well compared to England**, with low rates of economic inactivity, unemployment, and claimant counts. However, it has a lower level of residents with NVQ4+ (degree level) and a slower rate of growth in this group than the national average, which could constrain the supply of skilled labour in the future.
- **There is low progression of students on Free School Meals to higher education in Central Bedfordshire (20%)** compared to the national average (28%), with the district consistently lagging behind all comparator areas on this measure over the past decade.
- **Central Bedfordshire has higher life expectancy than England**, with males living to an average of 81 years and females living to 85 years compared to 79 and 83 years for England as a whole. However, average male life expectancy has decreased by 0.4 years in recent times.
- **Central Bedfordshire maintains a favorable health profile**, with 185 preventable deaths due to smoking per 100,000 residents in 2019 compared to 202 per 100,000 across the UK.

### Population

The growth and characteristics of Central Bedfordshire's population can affect the demand for goods and services, the availability and quality of the local workforce, and the mix of businesses and industries in the local area.

#### Population Overview

**Central Bedfordshire has experienced rapid population growth (+15%) in the last ten years, outpacing all nearby districts and the national average**

#### Data Source

The data sources used are the ONS Mid-year Population Estimates, and the Census 2021 drawing down the latest data as of Autumn 2022. Indexes have been used to show growth rates; these are calculated by dividing the target year by the base year and multiplying the result by 100. We have opted to combine pre-Census population estimates with the definitive 2021 population statistics from the recent Census – given the superior accuracy of the latter, a substantial shift in population can be seen for certain areas between 2020 and 2021. For population projections, we have used, the ONS Subnational Population Projections (base year 2018), and migration data comes from the 2021 ONS Local Area Migration Indicators Suite

## **Analysis**

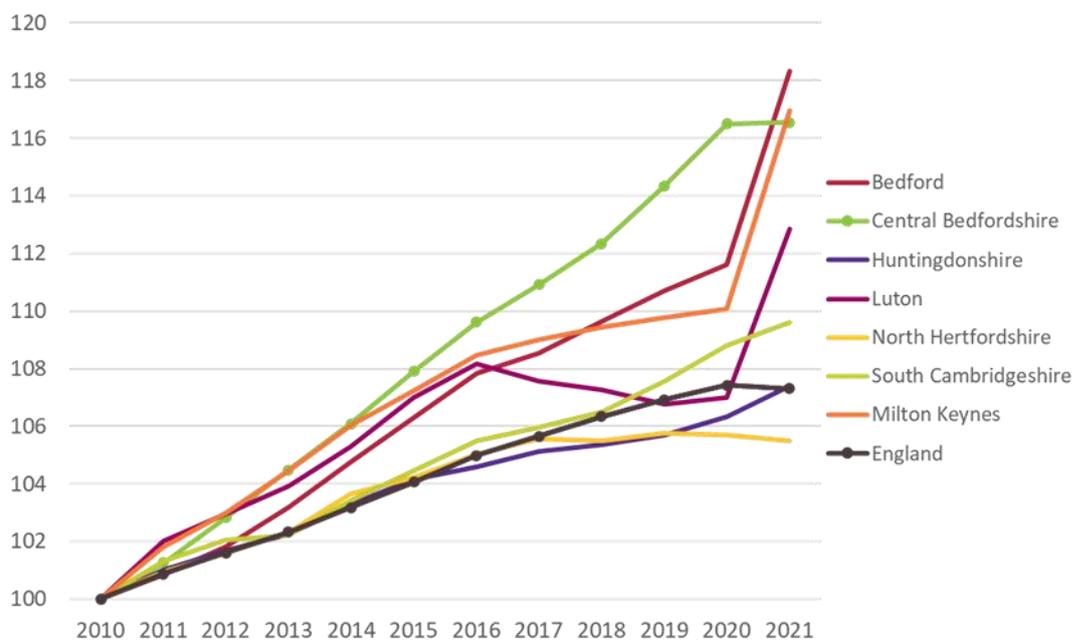
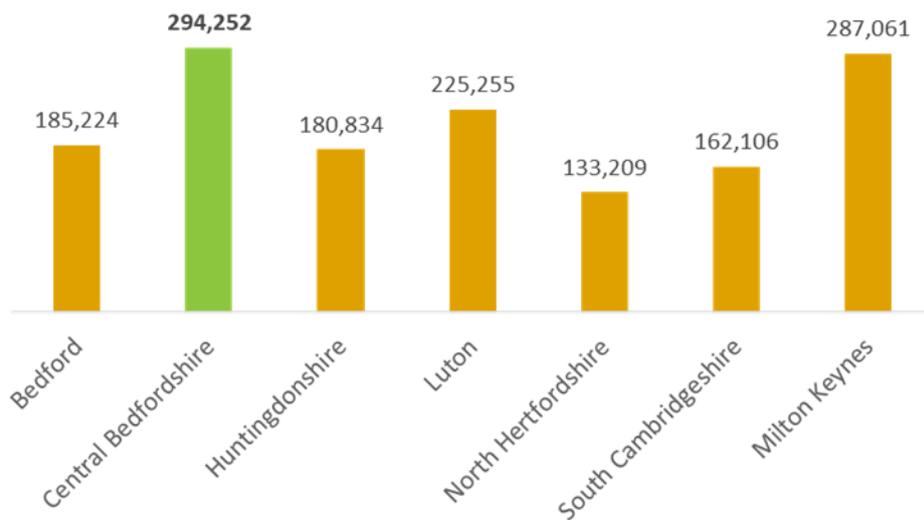
- Population growth in Central Bedfordshire is being driven by younger dependent (aged less than 16) and elderly dependent (aged older than 64) groups. The former has grown more than 15% and the latter has grown by 31% between 2011 to 2021.
- Despite Central Bedfordshire's working age population (WAP) growth not keeping pace with other age cohorts, it is still seeing strong growth compared to similar areas and the national average. Furthermore, its strong growth in the young population in Central Bedfordshire puts it in a good position heading into the decade relative to other areas

## **Implications**

- Central Bedfordshire's population trajectory will directly determine both its supply and demand for labour in the future. The current data suggests that the well reported trend of an ageing population is firmly applicable to Central Bedfordshire, in spite of its strong growth across age cohorts.

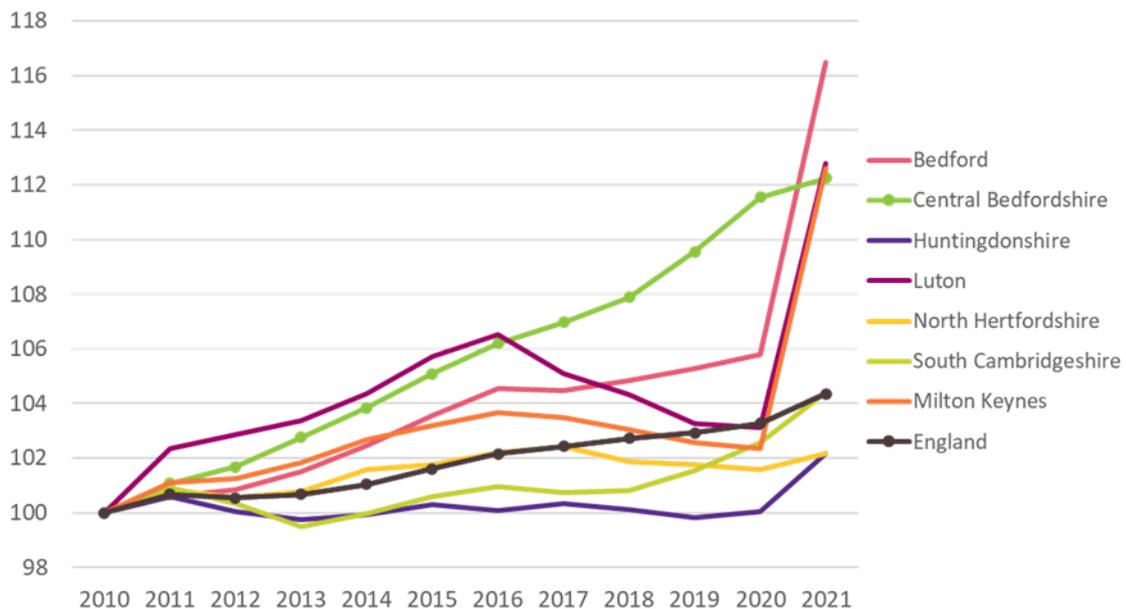
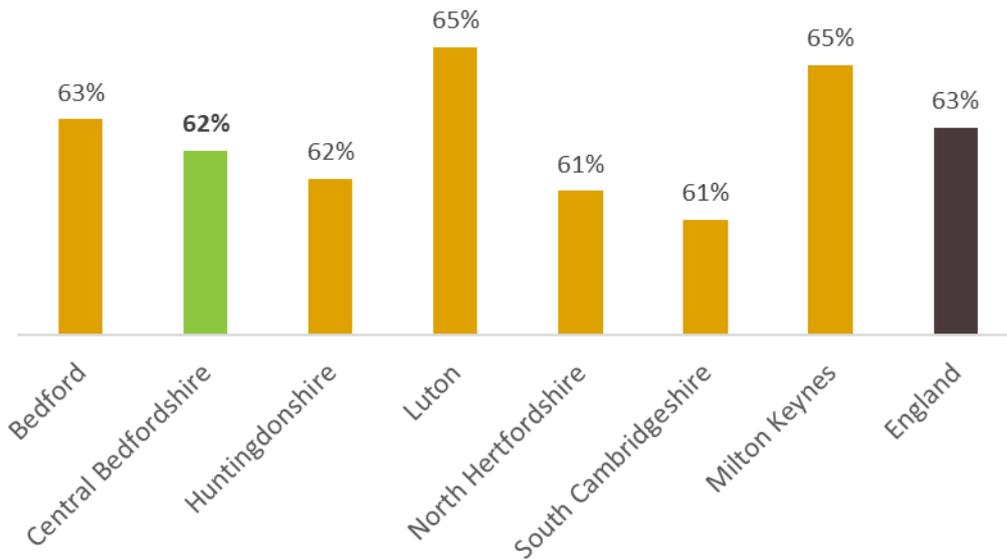
## **Population Total & Growth**

- In 2021, Central Bedfordshire had a population of 294,252, the most of any comparator areas. Compared to these other areas, Central Bedfordshire has seen strong population growth, as shown by the Index of total population below.
- Between 2011 and 2021, the population grew by 15% in Central Bedfordshire, compared to just over 6% for England. The index below combines Census 2021 as well as historic ONS Mid-year Estimates, which explains why certain areas change dramatically in 2021.



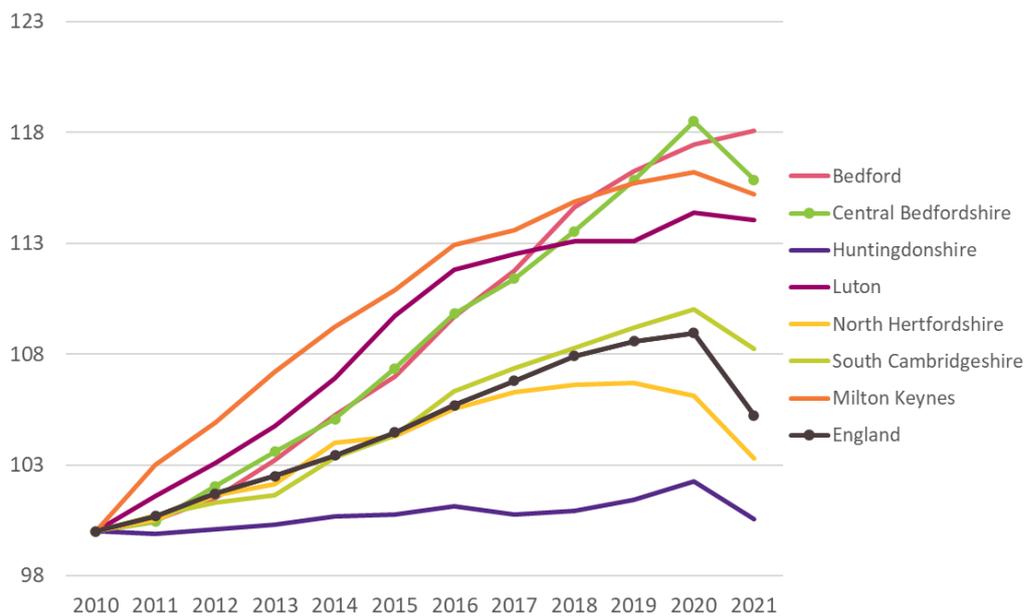
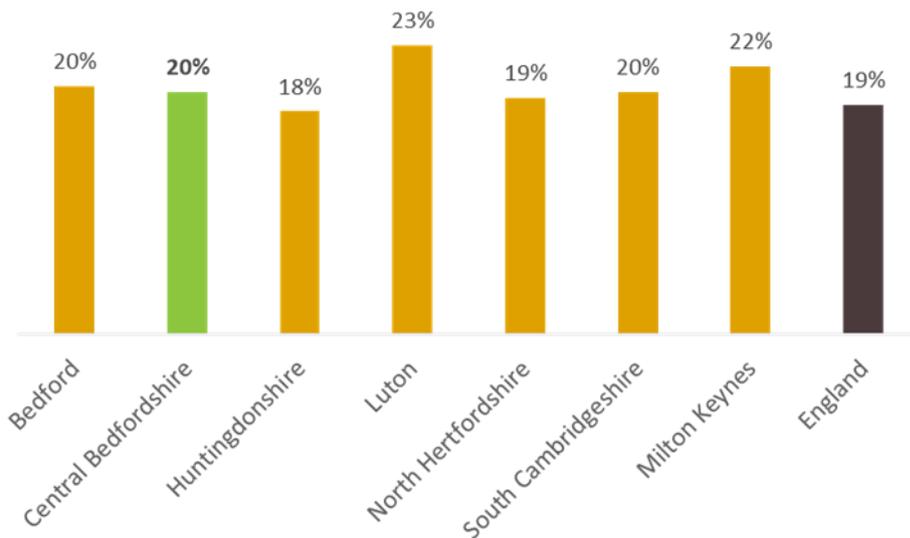
## Working-age Population & Growth

- In 2021, Central Bedfordshire had a working-age population of 183,815, which represents 62% of the total population. This is less than Luton (63%) but equal to or greater than other comparator districts. It is in line with levels for England as a whole.
- Central Bedfordshire has seen strong working-age population growth compared to comparator areas, as shown by the Index below. CBC experienced growth of just less than 12% since 2010, compared to just 4% for England.



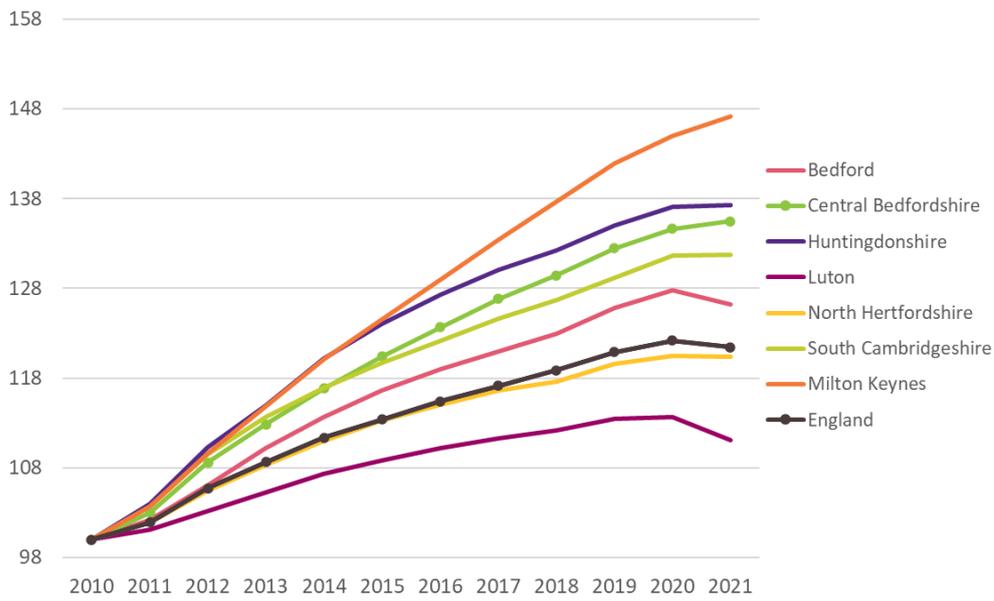
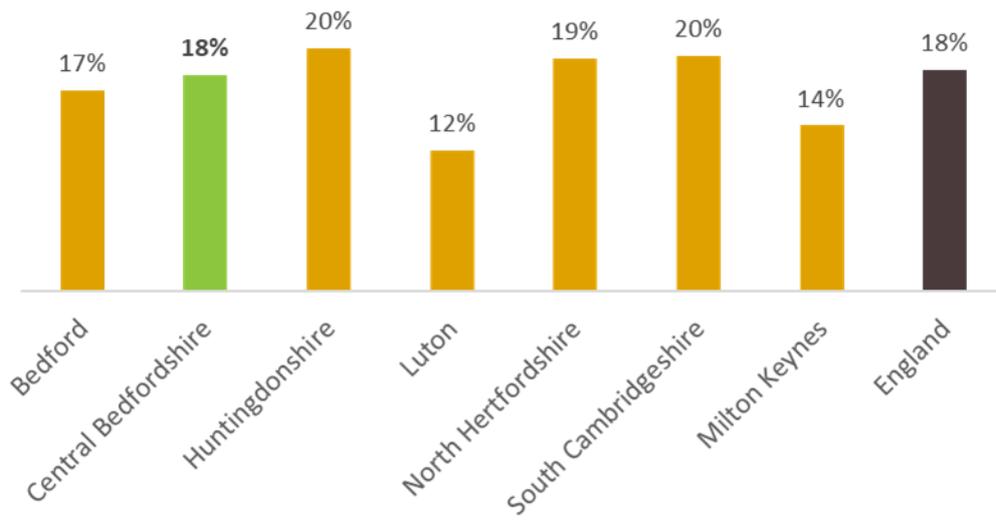
## Young-dependent Population & Growth

- In 2021, Central Bedfordshire had a young-dependent population (under 16 years) of 57,492, which represents 20% of the total population. This is less than Luton (23%) and Milton Keynes (22%) and similar to England (19%).
- Central Bedfordshire has seen the second strongest young-dependent population growth compared to comparator areas, as shown by the Index below. Growth equated to approximately 16% between 2010 and 2021, compared to just 5% for England.



## Elderly-dependent Population & Growth

- In 2021, Central Bedfordshire had an elderly-dependent population (aged over 64 years) of 52,945, which represents 18% of the total population. This is the same as England (18%) but less than comparator districts Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire (both 20%) and North Hertfordshire (19%).
- Central Bedfordshire has seen strong elderly-dependent population growth compared to benchmark areas, with growth of approximately 31% since 2011. This growth outpaces Great Britain (21%) but is much less than the growth seen in Milton Keynes (45%) and Huntingdonshire (37%).



Population projections – All Ages

	2022 to 2027 CAGR	2027 to 2037 CAGR
<b>Central Bedfordshire</b>	0.7%	0.4%
Bedford	0.7%	0.4%
Huntingdonshire	0.3%	0.3%
Luton	-0.4%	-0.3%
North Hertfordshire	0.2%	0.2%
South Cambridgeshire	0.2%	0.1%
Milton Keynes	0.2%	0.1%
<b>England</b>	0.4%	0.3%

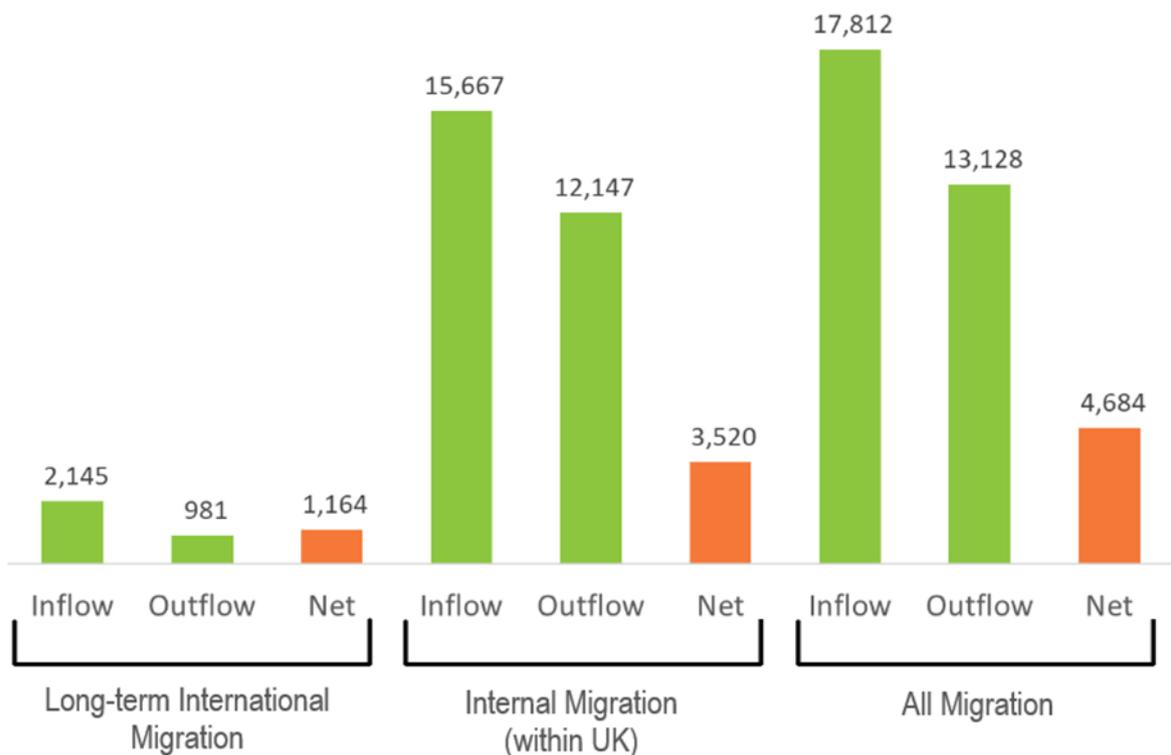
- The 2018-based population projections indicate that population growth is expected to be stronger in Central Bedfordshire than most comparator areas. For Central Bedfordshire, compound annual growth of 0.7% is forecast between 2022 and 2027, with 0.4% forecast for the following ten years.
- This represents a stronger rate of growth than England, especially between 2022 and 2027, but less so thereafter (2027 to 2037).
- Besides from Bedford, most of Central Bedfordshire's comparators are forecast to grow only very moderately, with Luton's population forecast to decline substantially

## Population Projections by Age Cohort

	2022 to 2027 CAGR	2027 to 2037 CAGR
Working age population (16 to 64)		
Central Bedfordshire	0.5%	0.2%
England	0.2%	0.0%
Young dependent population (0 to 15)		
Central Bedfordshire	-0.1%	-0.5%
England	-0.6%	-0.5%
Elderly dependent population (65+)		
Central Bedfordshire	2.4%	1.9%
England	1.9%	1.8%

- Central Bedfordshire is expected to see reasonable levels of growth in its working-age population. It is forecast to grow by 0.5% per year between 2022 and 2027, and then by 0.2% per year between 2027 and 2037. England's working age population, on the other hand, is only forecast to grow by 0.2% per annum between 2022 and 2027, and by 0% thereafter.
- Both Central Bedfordshire and England are projected to see a declining number of young people (aged 15 or less), with Central Bedfordshire's decline accelerating to 0.5% per annum by 2027. This will be a similar rate to England at that stage.
- Central Bedfordshire is projected to see substantial growth in the elderly dependent age cohort (age 65+), with annual growth faster than that of England during both the period between 2022 and 2027 (2.4% for Central Bedfordshire vs 1.9% for England) and between 2027 and 2037 (1.9% for Central Bedfordshire vs 1.8% for England)

## Migration



- The net inflow of 4,700 residents in Central Bedfordshire between 2019 and 2020 is a substantial increase on the 2000 levels observed in 2017.
- Around 75% of the net-inflow is accounted for by UK-internal migration.

# Economic Activity & Unemployment

The Economic Activity Rate and Unemployment are important metrics for Central Bedfordshire because they provide a snapshot of the labor market and can be used to gauge the overall health and trajectory of the local economy.

## Economic activity & Unemployment

**Central Bedfordshire's economic activity rate has been consistently higher than the England average since 2013, and the rate of welfare claimants has been consistently lower.**

### Data source

The data sources used are the ONS Annual Population Survey, drawing down the latest data as of Autumn 2022 for labour market indicators (economic activity and unemployment). For these indicators quarter 2 (i.e. the year to June) is the latest available data; time series are based on the year to the date shown. For the claimant count data, the ONS Claimant Count via Nomis, was used, as of October 2022.

### Analysis

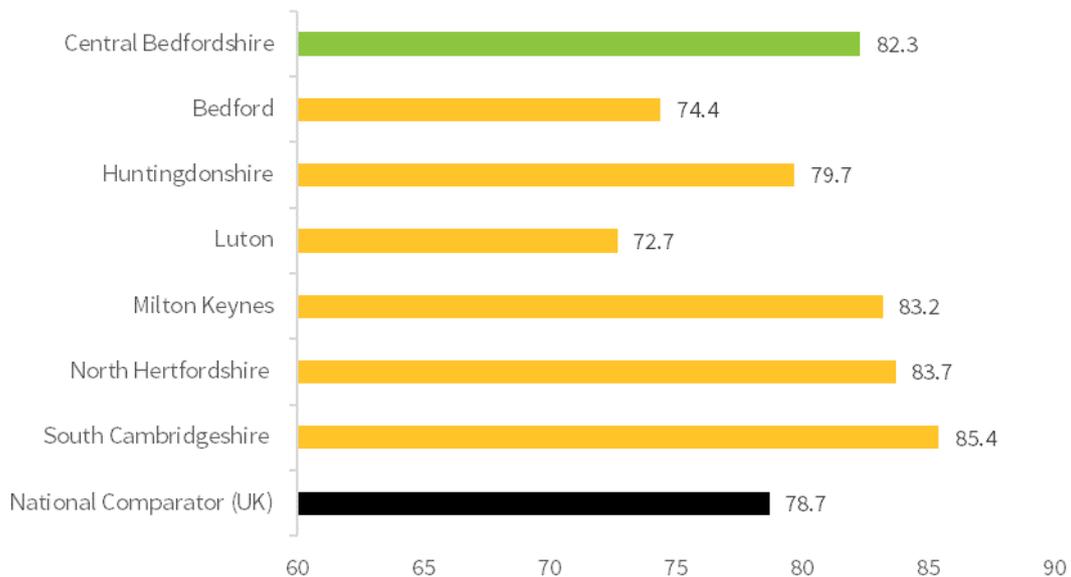
- The analysis shows that Central Bedfordshire's economic activity rate was 82% in Q2 2022. Since 2013, the rate has not been below 80%. During this period, Central Bedfordshire's rate has been higher than the England average.
- Central Bedfordshire has a very low rate of welfare claimants (Universal Credit). In October 2022, claimants accounted for 2% of the working age population. This is approximately half of the UK's rate (4%).

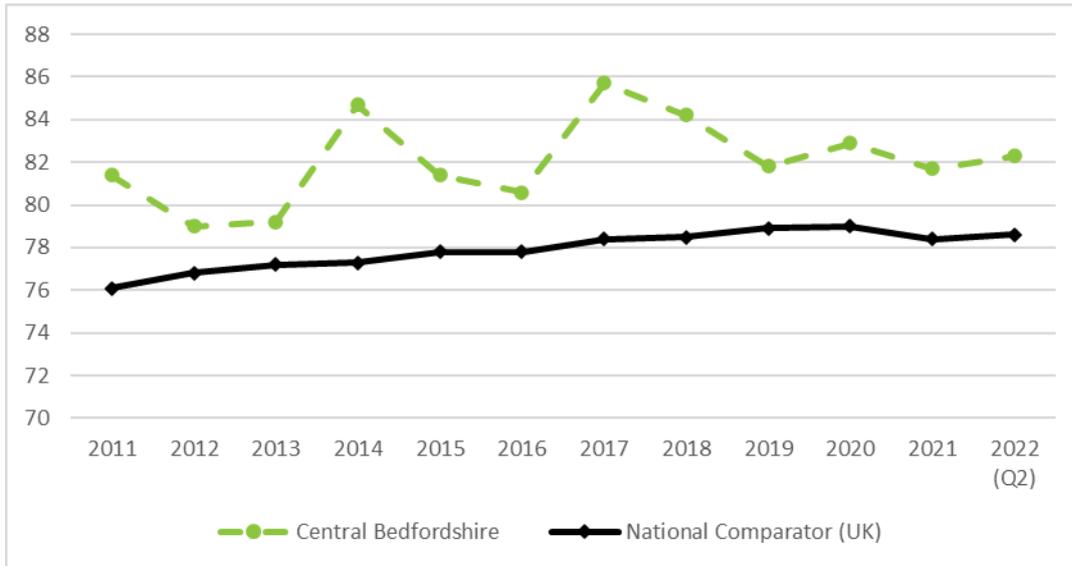
## Implications

- This matters because...the economic activity rate tracks the utilised potential of the labour force. A low or declining rate implies that working age people are leaving the workforce.

## Economic Activity

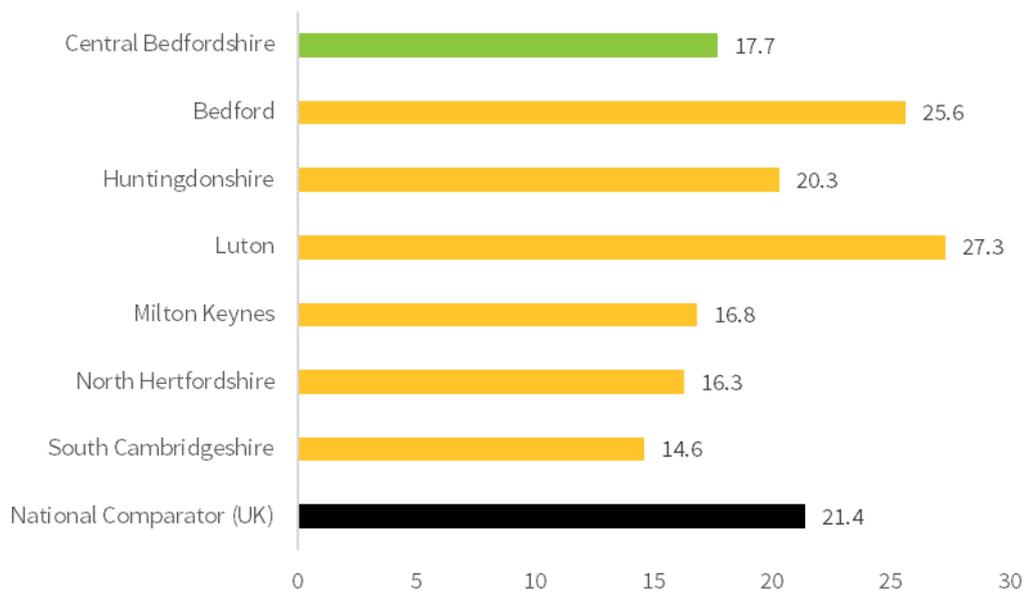
- In Q2 2022, the economic activity rate in Central Bedfordshire was 82%, which is higher than the average for the UK (79%). Over the past decade, the economic activity rate for Central Bedfordshire has been consistently higher than the UK average.
- Compared to benchmark areas, only Milton Keynes (83%), South Cambridgeshire (85%) and North Hertfordshire (84%) have rates which are higher than Central Bedfordshire.

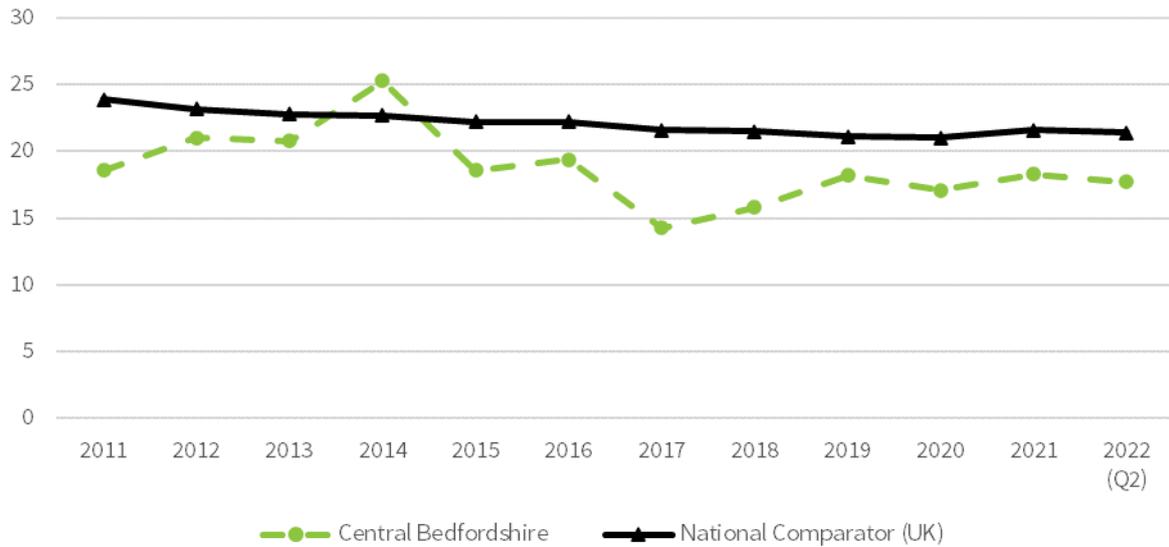




## Economic Inactivity

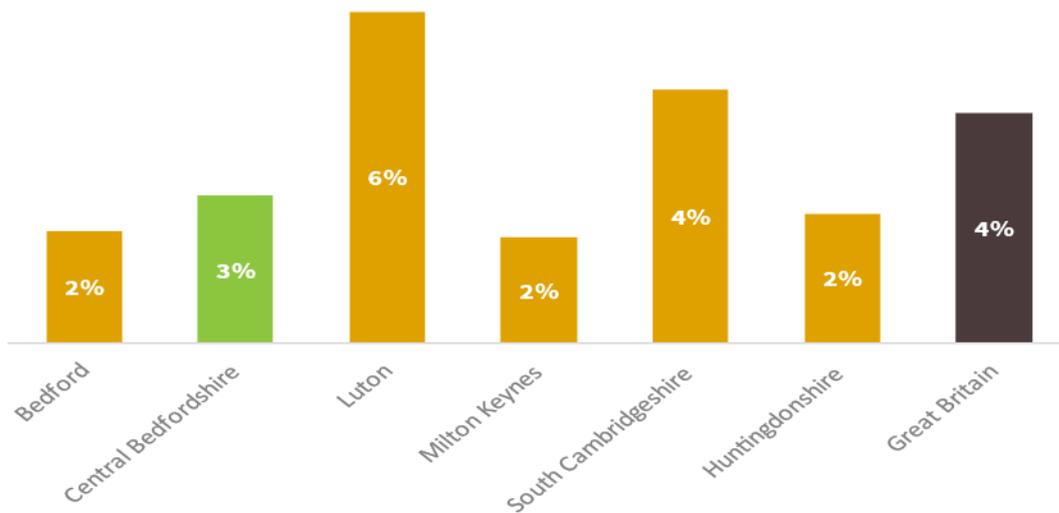
- In Q2 2022, Central Bedfordshire experienced an economic inactivity rate of 18% which was lower than the national rate of 21%. Huntingdonshire (20%), Bedford (26%) and Luton (27%) all have rates of economic inactivity which are higher.
- Over the past decade, Central Bedfordshire has consistently outperformed the U.K, with lower economic inactivity rates except in 2014.





## Unemployment

- Unemployment in Central Bedfordshire is slightly below the national average (3% versus 4% nationally) as of Q2 2022. Whilst this is above some of its comparators, unemployment rates in Luton and South Cambridgeshire are higher.
- Compound Annual Growth Rates (CAGR) show that Central Bedfordshire has had one of the slowest reductions in unemployment over the last decade, with locations such as Bedford and Milton Keynes having the highest. However, over the last five years, Central Bedfordshire's reduction in unemployment has been greater than nationally (-6.4% versus -3.3%).



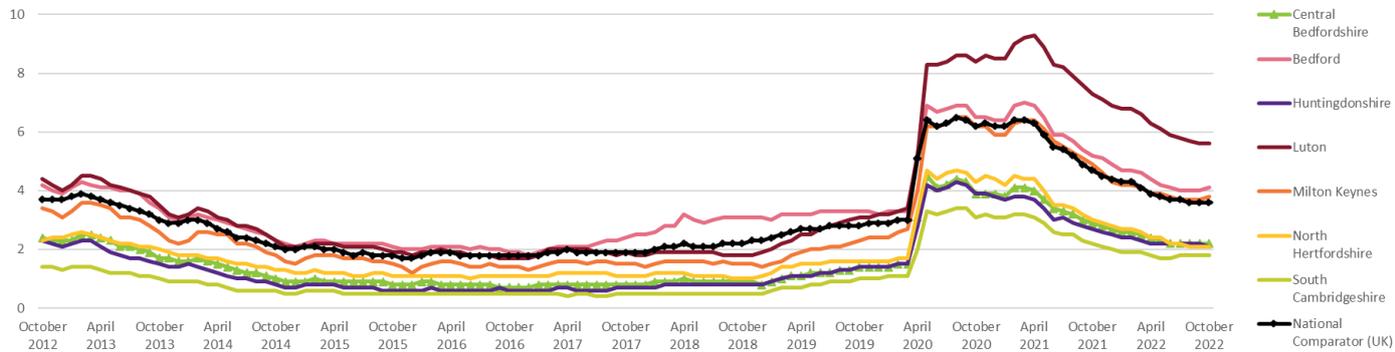
	2011 to 2016 CAGR	2016 to 2021 CAGR
Central Bedfordshire	-5.4%	-6.4%
Bedford	-8.7%	-17.8%
Luton	-8.9%	0.3%
Milton Keynes	-13.4%	-14.2%
South Cambridgeshire	-12.4%	14.9%
Huntingdonshire	-13.8%	-2.0%
Great Britain	-9.8%	-3.3%

## Claimant Count

Area	Claimant Count Rate of working-age population
Central Bedfordshire	2%
Bedford	4%
Huntingdonshire	2%
Luton	6%
Milton Keynes	4%
North Hertfordshire	2%
South Cambridgeshire	2%
National Comparator UK	4%

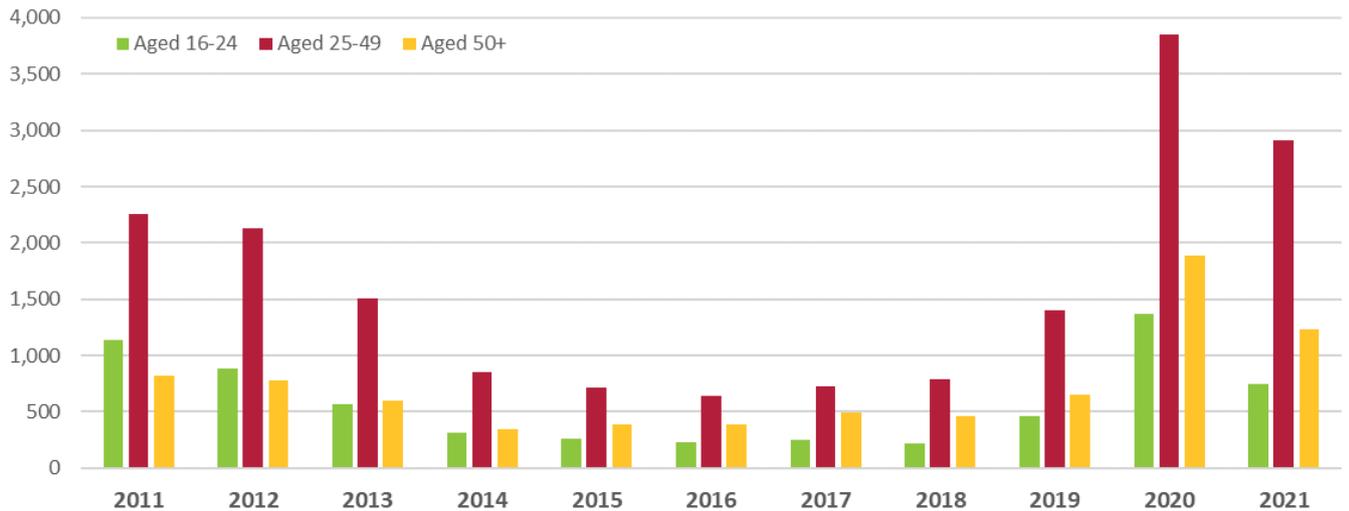
- In October 2022, Central Bedfordshire had a relatively low claimant count (this measures total welfare claimants as a percentage of working age residents). At 2%, this is less than the national average at 4%.
- Central Bedfordshire has a similar claimant count rate to its comparators such as North Hertfordshire (2%) and Huntingdonshire (2%).
- Luton has the highest rate at 7%.
- Time series data suggests that the claimant count rate in Central Bedfordshire has consistently been below the national average and similar to Huntingdonshire. South Cambridgeshire has consistently had the lowest claimant count rate over the past decade and in 2021, this was 2%.
- From April 2021 onwards, there has been a steady decrease in the claimant count and in more recent months there have been signs of the rate flattening out. Overall, the time series data reveals strong alignment with Covid-19

rates. There was a large increase in the claimant count when rates were high and this decreased as restrictions were eased.



- Around 60% of claimants in Central Bedfordshire are aged between 25 and 49 years, and 25% are aged over 50 years. Only a small proportion of claimants (15%) are aged between 16 and 24 years.
- Between 2011 and 2021, there was a large decline in younger claimants (aged 16-24), whilst there has been an increase in claimants within the other age bands.

Age	2011	2021
Aged 16-24	27%	15%
Aged 25-49	54%	60%
Aged 50+	19%	25%



## Skills & Qualifications

Skills and qualifications refer to the abilities and knowledge that a person has acquired through education, training, and experience. They are important factors for Central Bedfordshire because they provide insight into the quality of the local workforce and help determine the types of future jobs that are well-suited to the area.

### Skills & Qualifications Overview

**Whilst Central Bedfordshire is lagging behind other areas in terms of degree level qualifications, the area has a low rate of residents with no qualifications.**

#### Data source

The data source used is the ONS Annual Population Survey, drawing down the latest data as of Autumn 2022 for qualifications data, whilst data on apprenticeships and those not in employment, education or training, come from the Department for Education's NEET Participation Tables, 2021. For the North Hertfordshire no qualifications dataset, 2020 data has been used as 2021 data has not been recorded. For Huntingdonshire, no data was recorded by the DfE for

apprenticeships, as the figures are included with wider Cambridgeshire.

\* [Overview of human capital estimates in the UK - Office for National Statistics](#)

[ons.gov.uk](https://ons.gov.uk)

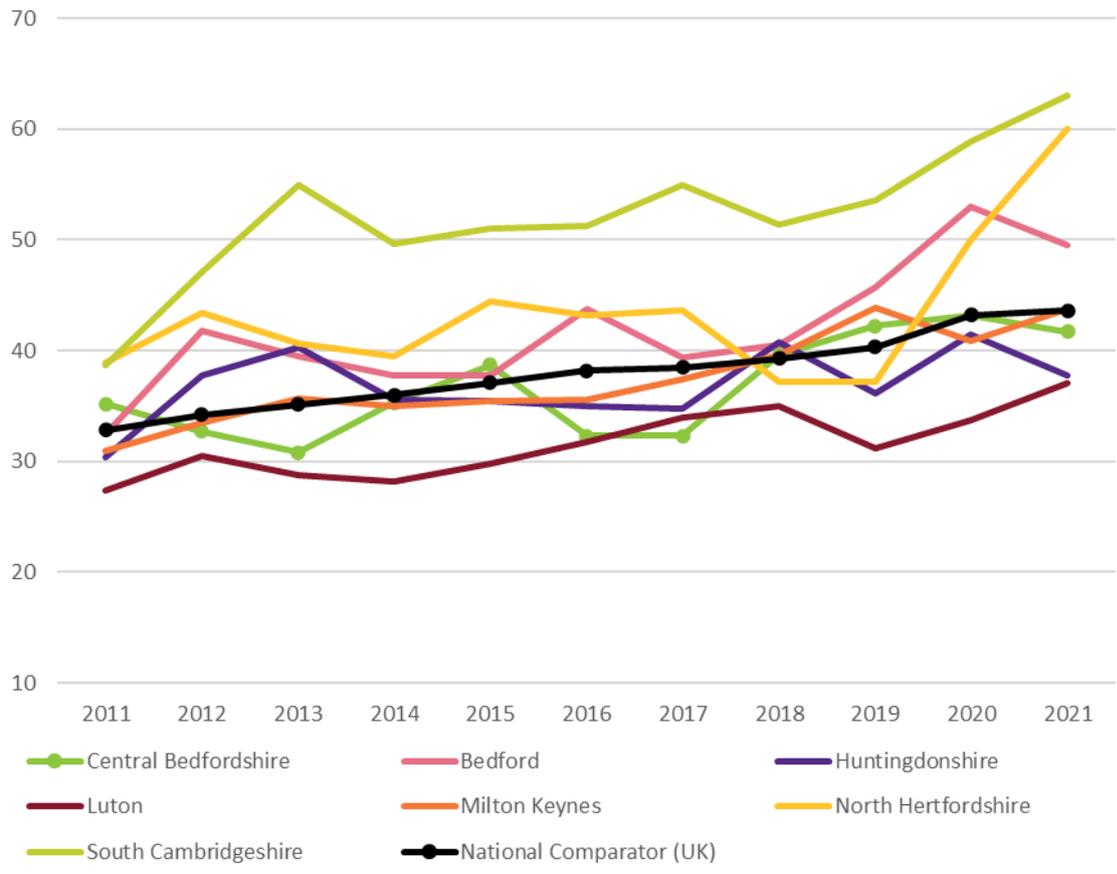
## **Analysis**

- The analysis shows that as of 2021, 42% of residents in Central Bedfordshire held degree level qualifications. This is less than the UK (44%) as well as Bedford (50%), North Hertfordshire (60%) and South Cambridgeshire (63%)
- Central Bedfordshire does however have fewer residents with no qualifications (6%) compared to the UK average (7%)

## **Implications**

- This matters because...  
Research by the ONS demonstrates that qualifications up to and including degree-level yield substantial increases in worker productivity and lifetime earnings\*

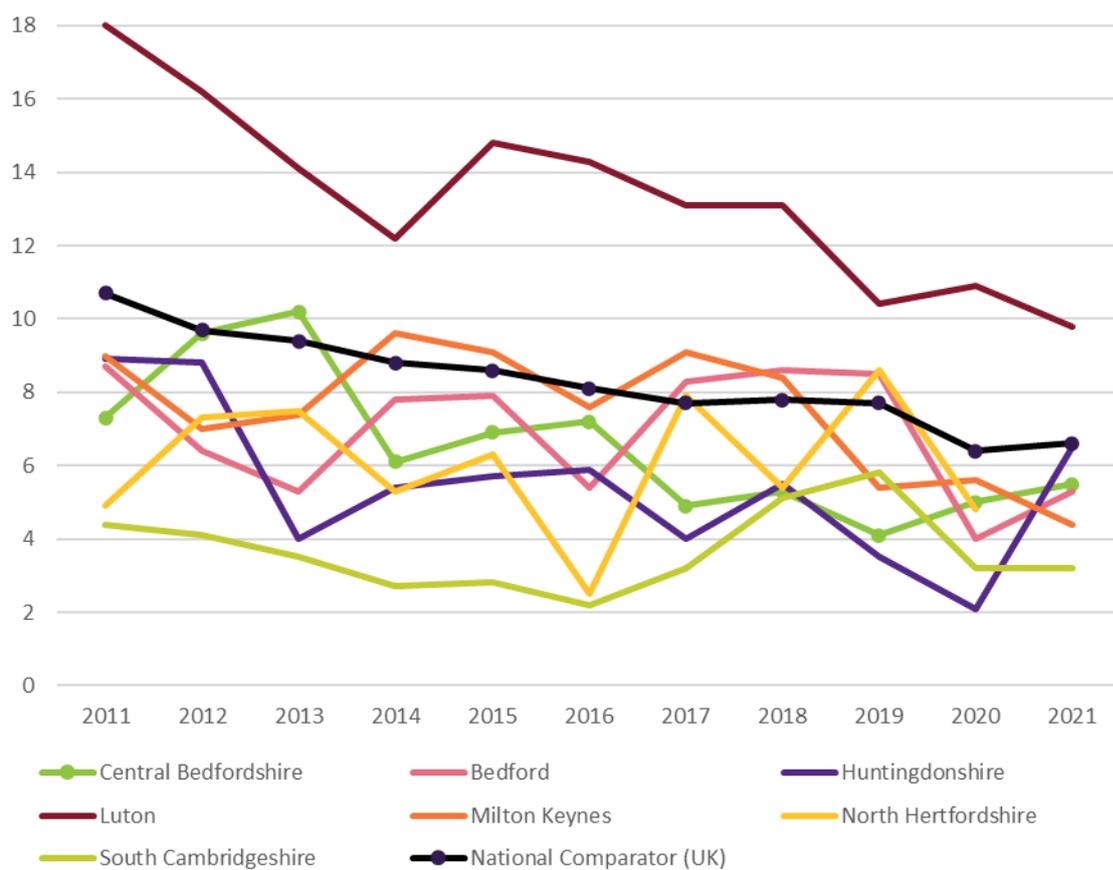
## **NVQ4+ Qualifications**



- In 2021, 42% of Central Bedfordshire residents were qualified to NVQ4+, which is similar to the national level (44%). Only Luton (37%) and Huntingdonshire (38%) have lower percentages of residents qualified to NVQ4+ and above.
- Over the past decade, there has been a 7 percentage point increase in those who hold NVQ4+ qualifications in Central Bedfordshire.

Area	% of residents
Central Bedfordshire	42%
Bedford	50%
Huntingdonshire	38%
Luton	37%
Milton Keynes	44%
North Hertfordshire	60%
South Cambridgeshire	63%
National Comparator UK	44%

## No Qualifications



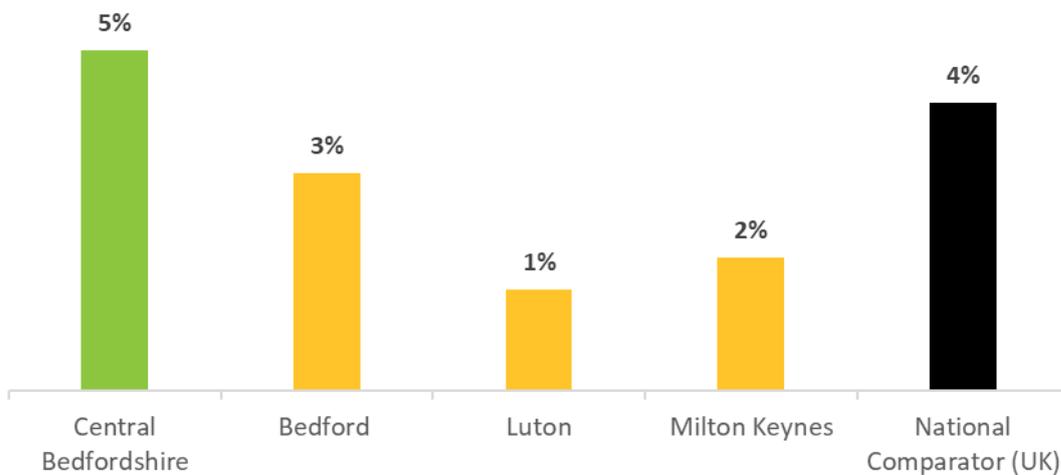
- In 2021, 6% of Central Bedfordshire residents had no qualifications which is lower than the national level (7%). Only Luton (10%) and Huntingdonshire (7%) have a higher proportion of residents with no qualifications.

- There has been a 1% decrease in the percentage of residents in Central Bedfordshire who have no qualifications over the past decade.

Area	% of residents
Central Bedfordshire	6%
Bedford	5%
Huntingdonshire	7%
Luton	10%
Milton Keynes	4%
North Hertfordshire	5%
South Cambridgeshire	3%
National Comparator UK	7%

## Apprenticeships

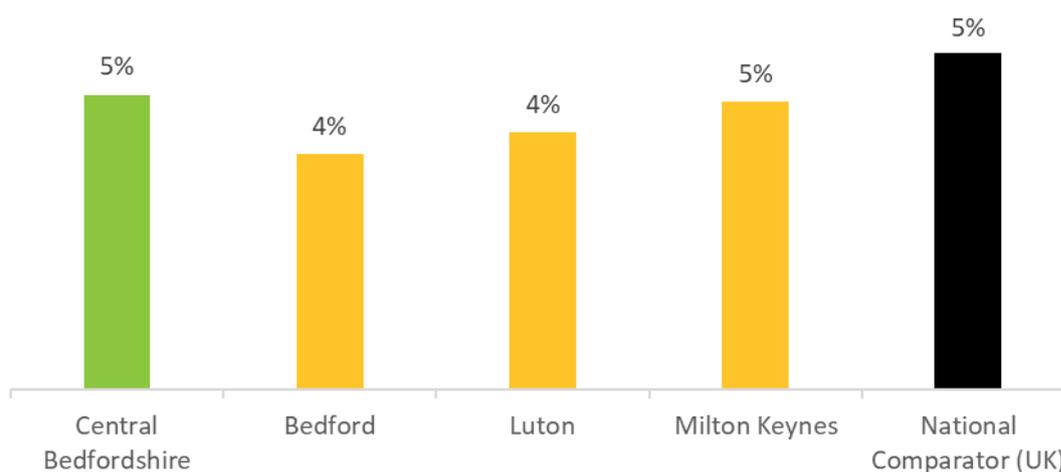
- Central Bedfordshire performed above the national average (4%) in terms of the proportion of 16 to 17 year old residents in apprenticeships as of 2021.
- Central Bedfordshire had the highest percentage of 16 to 17 year residents entering into apprenticeships (5%) compared to comparator areas such as Luton (1%) and Milton Keynes (2%).



Area	Number of 16 to 17-year-olds	% in Apprenticeships
Central Bedfordshire	6050	5%
Bedford	3870	3%
Luton	5360	1%
Milton Keynes	6560	2%
National Comparator (UK)	1182880	4%

## People Not in Education, Employment or Training

- In 2021, 5% of 16-17 year olds in Central Bedfordshire are not in education, employment or training (NEET) which is the same as the national average.
- Central Bedfordshire had the highest percentage of 16 to 17 year residents who are NEET (5%) compared to comparator areas such as Luton (4%) and Bedford (4%).



Area	Number of 16–17-year-olds	% in Apprenticeships
Central Bedfordshire	6050	5%
Bedford	3870	4%
Luton	5360	4%
Milton Keynes	6560	5%
National Comparator (UK)	1182880	5%

## Health & Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing are critical for the overall well-being and prosperity of individuals and communities. Promoting health and wellbeing can lead to increased productivity and economic growth, as well as long-term cost savings and increased social cohesion.

### Health and Wellbeing Overview

**Children in Central Bedfordshire tend to experience less income deprivation and are less frequently raised in workless households.**

#### Data source

The data sources used are from the Department for Education (2022), Department for Work and Pensions (2022), the ONS: Children living in long term workless households (2021), Deaths registered by area of usual residence (2020), Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, The Social Mobility Index (2016), Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy: Fuel Poverty Statistics, 2019, Cost of Living Crisis Vulnerability Index, 2022 and the ONS Life Expectancy by Local

Authority time series, 2020. The 2021 Census was used to ascertain the quantum of households living in various degrees of deprivation

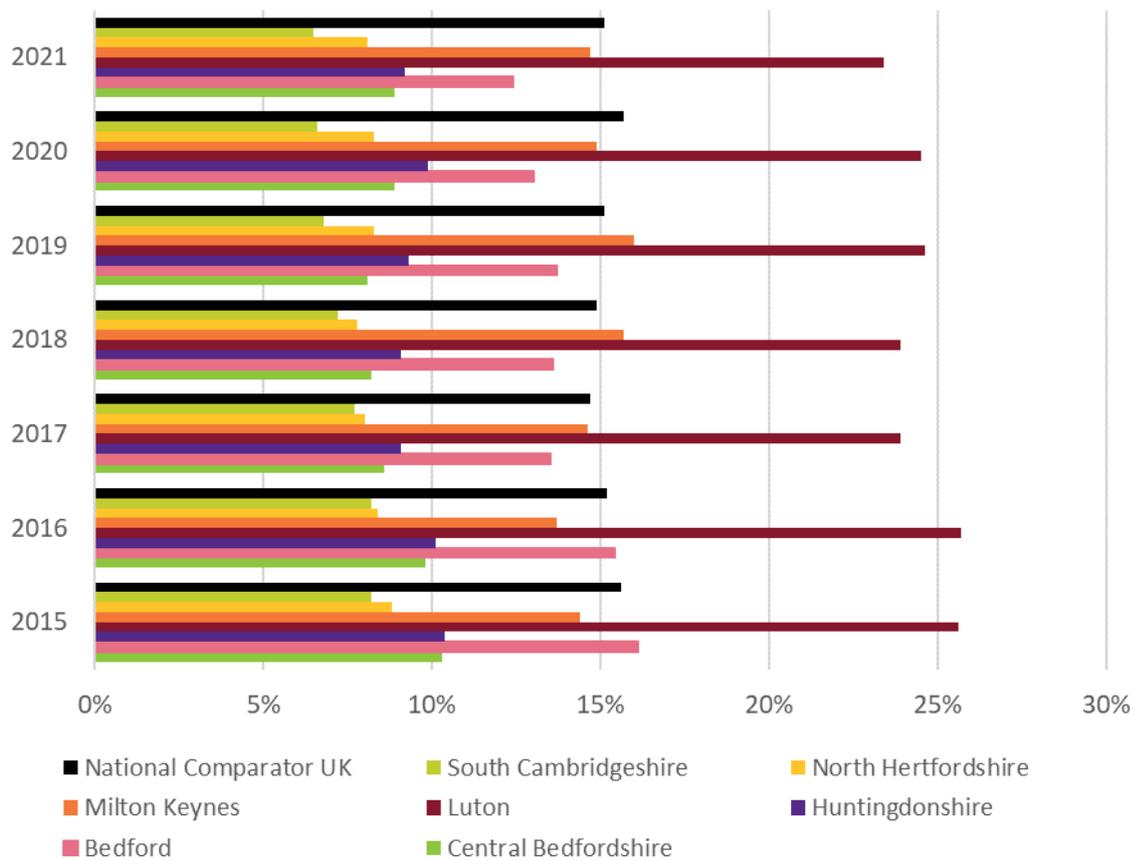
### **Analysis**

- The analysis shows that Central Bedfordshire has consistently ranked the lowest amongst comparators in terms of the percentage of children living in absolute low-income families.
- Central Bedfordshire also ranks very favorably in terms of the rate of children living in workless households and child mortality rates. However, it compares less favorably against comparators in terms of academic progression of free school meal recipients.

### **Implications**

This matters because...in addition to being intrinsically bad for children, prevalence of child poverty and disadvantaged children failing to progress in school will hamper the future basis of Central Bedfordshire's workforce.

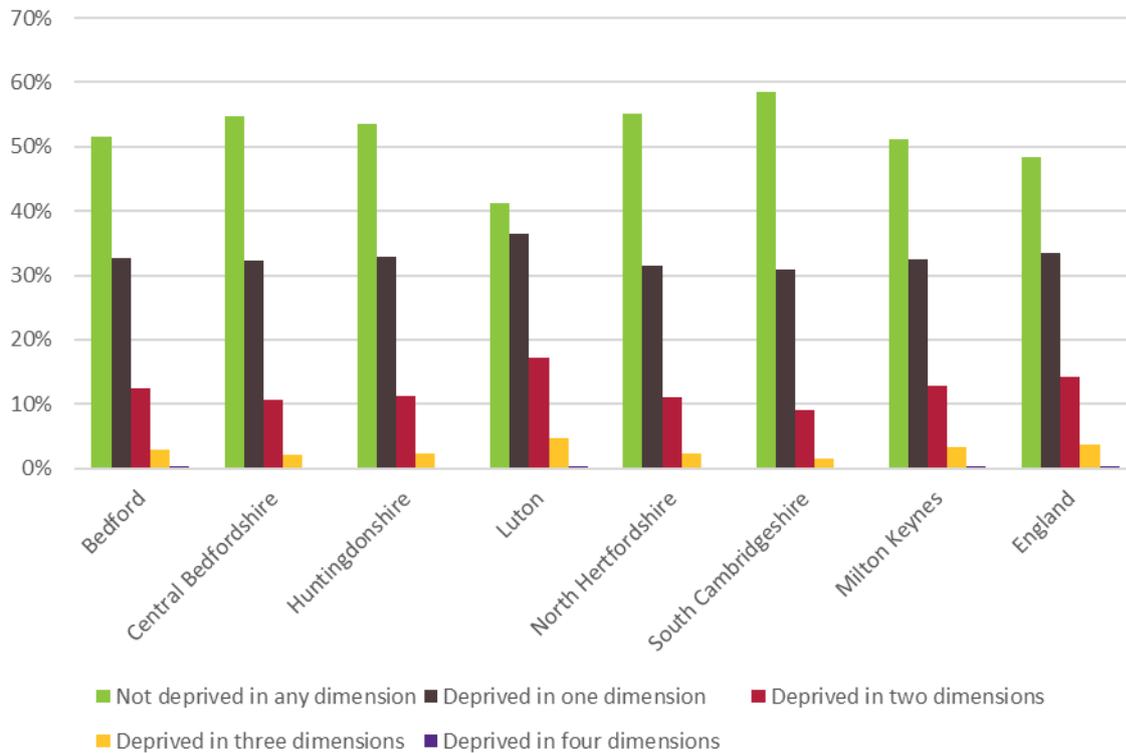
### **Children in Poverty**



- Timeseries data suggests that Central Bedfordshire has a moderately low percentage of children living with absolute low income families.
- In 2021, around 10% or less of children aged under 16 live with absolute low income families. This is similar to comparator areas such as Huntingdonshire and North Hertfordshire.

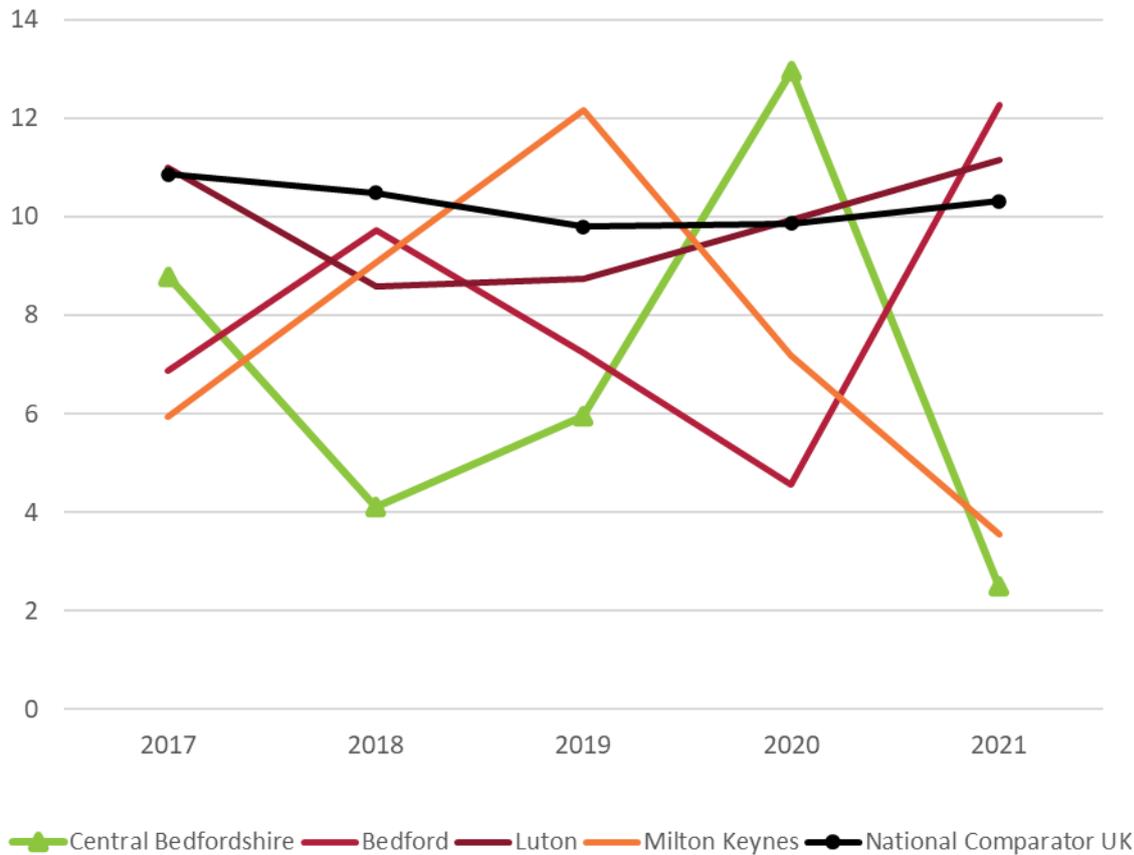
Central Bedfordshire has a lower share of children living within absolute low income families compared to the national average over the past 6 years.

## Households by deprivation dimensions

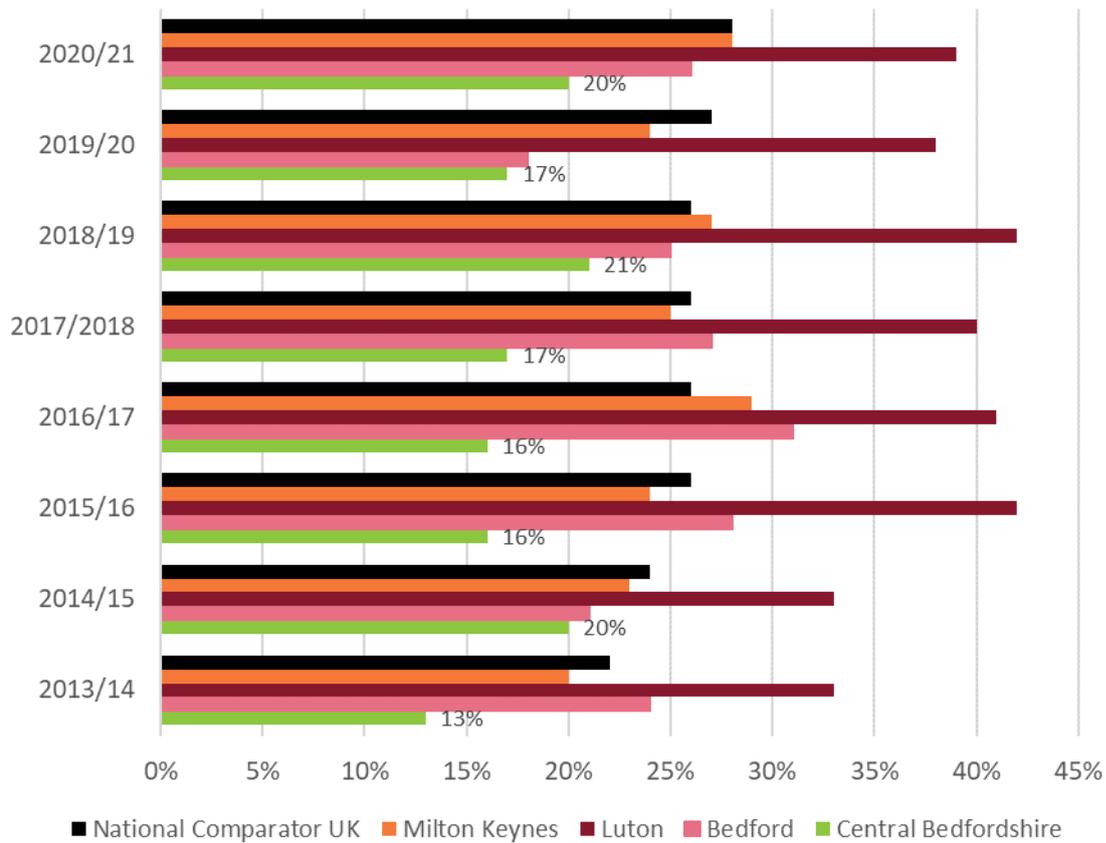


- The adjacent chart shows the percentage of households in each location by how many dimensions of deprivation the household is categorised with, as of 2021.
- The dimensions of deprivation used to classify households are indicators based on four selected household characteristics: **education** (a household is classified as deprived in the education dimension if no one has at least level 2 education), **employment** (deprived if any member, not a full-time student, is either unemployed or long-term sick), **health** (deprived if any member is disabled), and **housing** (deprived if the household's accommodation is either overcrowded, in a shared dwelling, or has no central heating).
- On this basis, Central Bedfordshire has 55% of households not experiencing any such deprivation. Only South Cambridgeshire has a more favourable rate.

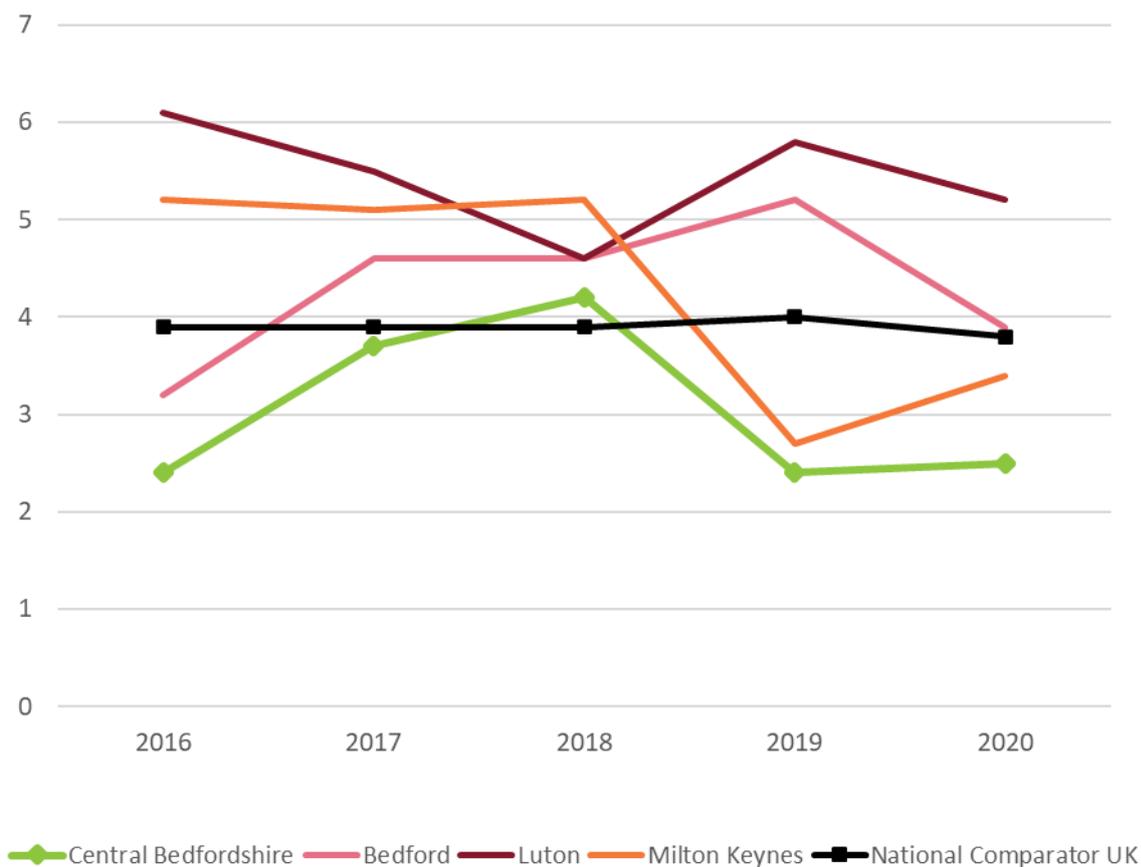
## Children in Poverty



- As of 2021, Central Bedfordshire had the lowest percentage of children (3%) residing in workless households.
- In 2020, during the covid pandemic Central Bedfordshire had experienced the highest percentage of children living in workless households (13% in 2020) compared to the national average and comparator areas.
- Over the past 5 years, Central Bedfordshire and Bedford have had the lowest percentages of children living in workless households.



- Time series data suggests that Central Bedfordshire has a low percentage of Free School Meals (FSM) students progressing into higher education in comparison to national and comparator areas.
- Over the past 8 years, Central Bedfordshire has consistently had the lowest progression compared to the national level and comparator areas.
- This illustrates that students with free school meals based in Central Bedfordshire are less likely to enter into higher education compared to the comparator areas.



- Between 2019 and 2020, Central Bedfordshire had on average the lowest infant mortality rates compared to benchmark areas. 2018 is the only year where infant mortality rates were slightly lower at a national level.
- The most recent data for 2020 shows that Central Bedfordshire had the lowest infant mortality rate compared to benchmark areas at 2.5 deaths per 1000 children.

## Social Mobility

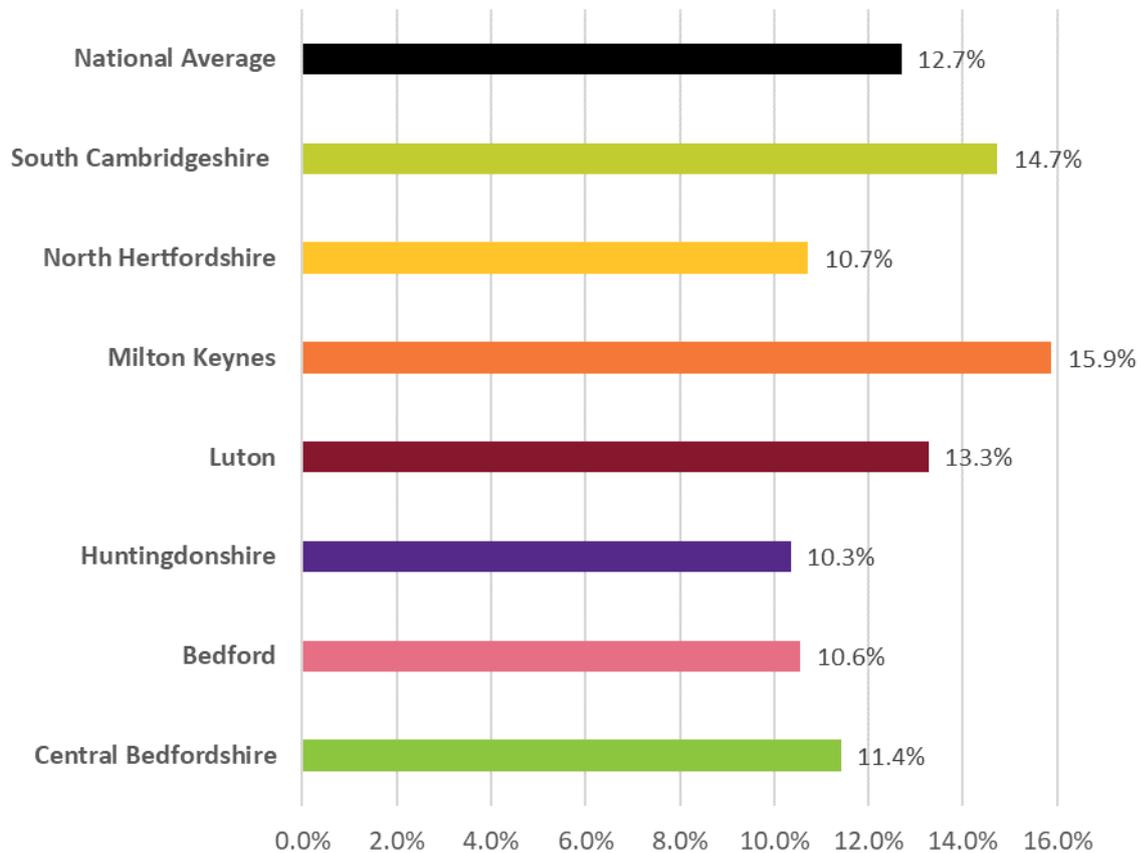
- The table below shows the social mobility rankings for Central Bedfordshire and comparator areas. The higher value indicates lower social mobility, which is highlighted in yellow, and lower values represent high social mobility highlighted in dark green.

- Central Bedfordshire has a lower level of social mobility compared to comparator areas. It ranks at 178 out of 324 local authorities, which is below the national average of 162. On the other hand, Bedford (87), Luton (83) and North Hertfordshire (117) have above average social mobility rankings.
- Central Bedfordshire has above average social mobility at the early years and adulthood stage but low social mobility at the school and youth stages.

Overall Rankings (out of the 324 local authority districts)

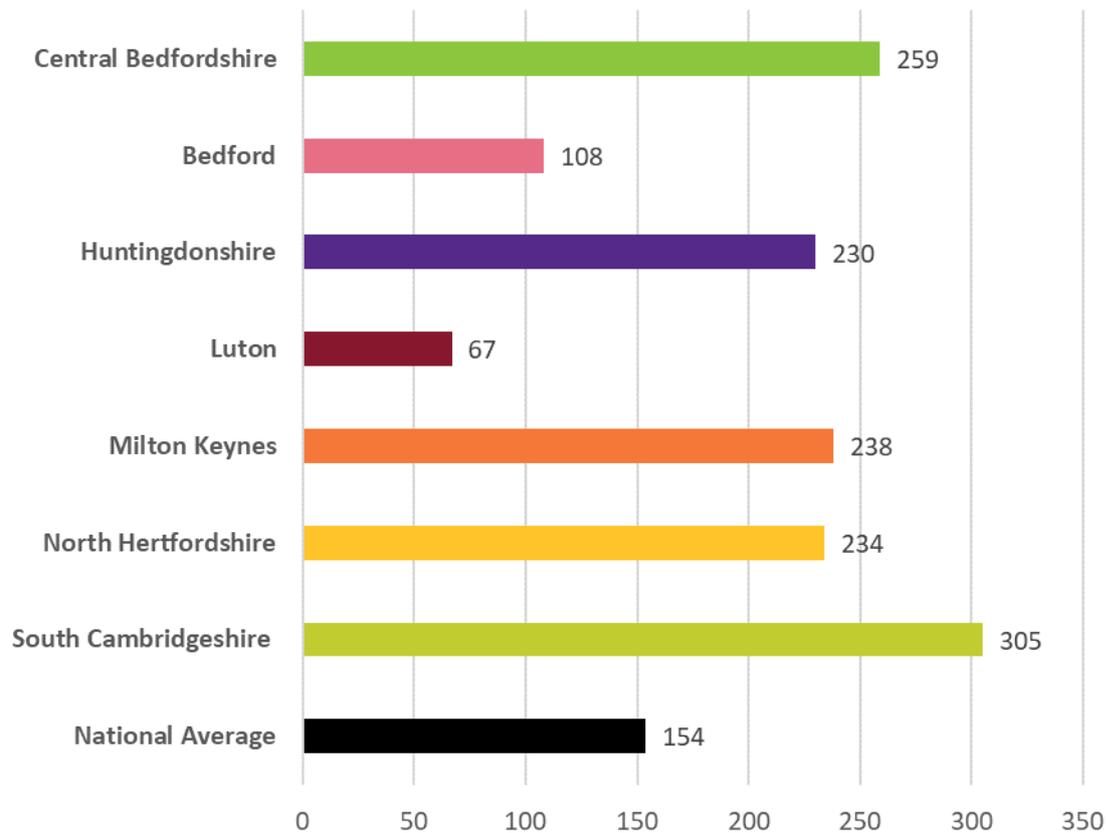
Area	Overall	Early Years	School	Youth	Adulthood
Central Bedfordshire	178	129	234	238	86
Bedford	87	45	138	221	76
Huntingdonshire	210	98	300	267	48
Luton	83	138	55	64	228
Milton Keynes	168	220	220	94	98
North Hertfordshire	117	120	225	81	115
South Cambridgeshire	170	174	258	306	4
National Average	162	162	162	162	162

## Fuel Poverty



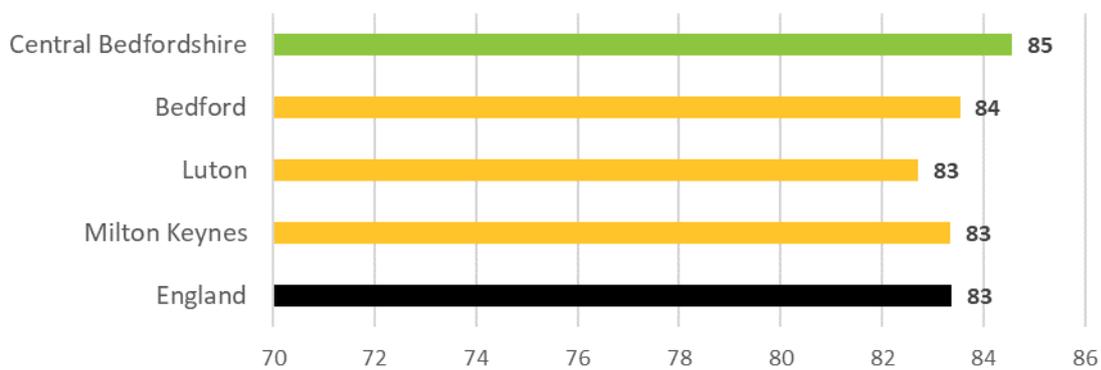
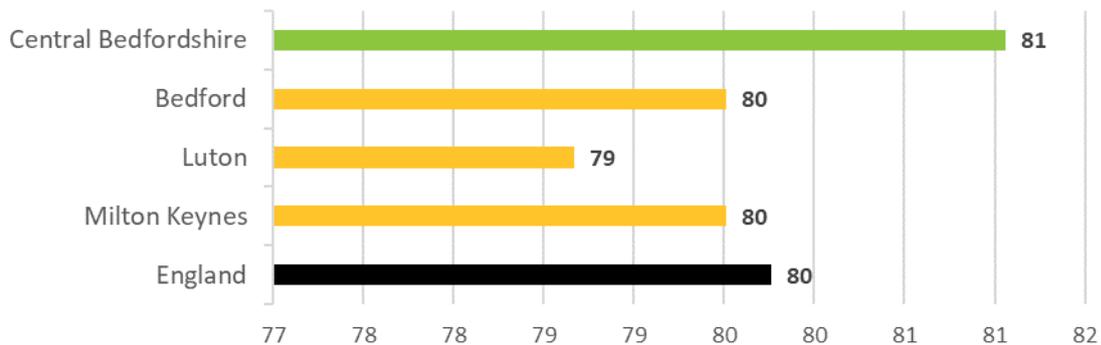
- Fuel poverty is measured based on required energy bills rather than actual spending.
- The Low Income Low Energy Efficiency (LILEE) indicator considers a household to be poor if:
  - It is living in a property with an energy efficiency rating of band D,E,F or G as determined by the most recent Fuel Poverty Energy Efficiency Rating (FPEER) methodology.
  - It's disposable income (income after housing costs) would be below the poverty line.
- In 2019, 11.4% of households in Central Bedfordshire were experiencing fuel poverty which is below the national average of 12.7%.

## Cost of Living



- The Cost of Living Vulnerability Index has been created to provide a greater understanding of which local authorities would be most impacted without further government funding.
- Indicators that have been included within the index include: claimant count, fuel poverty, child poverty economic inactivity and food insecurity.
- This is highly relevant given the rising cost of energy, food and housing costs. These are some of the most significant drivers of the rising inflation at this point of the crisis.
- Central Bedfordshire was ranked 259 out of 307 local authorities. This indicates that Central Bedfordshire has been more resilient during the cost of living crisis in comparison to Luton (ranked 67) and Bedford (ranked 108).

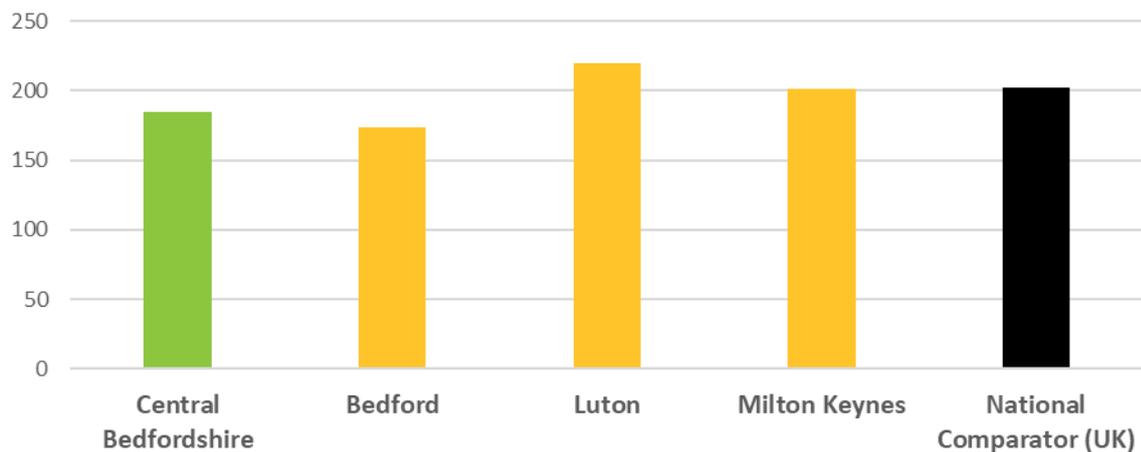
## Birth Rates and Death Rates



- The birth rates indicator refers to the average number of years a person would expect to live based on contemporary mortality rates. For a specific area and time period, it is an estimate of the average number of years a new-born baby would survive if he or she experienced the age-specific mortality rates for that area and time period throughout his or her life.
- The data suggests that the life expectancy at birth for males and females in Central Bedfordshire was relatively high for 2016-2018 at 81 years and 84 years respectively.
- Residents of Central Bedfordshire had a higher life expectancy at birth in 2017-19 than all other comparator areas and notably higher than the national averages which were 79 years and 83 years respectively.

## Number of Deaths due to Smoking

- Smoking remains the biggest single cause of preventable mortality and morbidity in the world (WHO, 2009). The aim of the indicator is to provide a measure of the impact that smoking has on residents in Central Bedfordshire and its comparators.
- Between 2017-2019, there were 185 deaths due to smoking per 1,000 population in Central Bedfordshire. This was lower than the national average and suggests the burden of smoking related illnesses and mortality is less in Central Bedfordshire than other areas.



Area	Number of deaths due to smoking per 100,000
Central Bedfordshire	185
Bedford	174
Luton	219
Milton Keynes	202
National Comparator (UK)	202

# Business and Jobs

## Key Findings

- **Central Bedfordshire's business base has grown at a slightly slower rate than nationally.** A notable feature of this growth is the increase in medium-to-large businesses (50+ employees) compared to neighboring areas, indicating that Central Bedfordshire is a prime location for businesses to expand and grow, which provides further employment opportunities and scope to reach new clients and markets.
- **Employment and business growth in Central Bedfordshire was concentrated in the first five years of the decade.** This suggests that factors such as Brexit and Covid-19 have had a greater impact on the district's economy over the past five years, resulting in above average declines in businesses and employment.
- **Central Bedfordshire experiences lower levels of productivity compared to the national average.** This is likely due to the dominance of lower-paying sectors and commuting flows into higher-paying areas such as London.
- **Sectoral activities linked to logistics continue to grow in terms of the number of enterprises and jobs.** This captures a distinct feature of Central Bedfordshire's local economy, with the area's transport and wholesale specialisms.  
  
This partly reflects the areas proximity to key road networks which provides opportunities for growth within this sector.

- **There is a mismatch between the skills of employees and the demands of businesses.** Employers in Central Bedfordshire are more likely to report skills gaps than other locations in the South East Midlands LEP area. Despite a high proportion of highly skilled residents in Central Bedfordshire, some do not possess the skills required from employers.

## Employment

Employment refers to the number of jobs located within Central Bedfordshire. It is an important indicator of the local economy's health and vitality.

### Employment Overview

**Despite an overall growth in jobs over the last ten years, Central Bedfordshire has experienced one of the slowest rates of employment growth compared to benchmark areas since 2016**

### Data Source

Sources include the ONS UK Business Count, with data from the latest release as of Autumn 2022. ONS advises that changes in methodology may result in a notable reduction in the number of businesses registered in 2018. CAGR have been used to calculate average growth across two five-year periods (2012-2017 and 2017-2022).

ONS Population Estimates were used to calculate business density per 1,000 working-aged people. Commercial property enquiries from April-November 2022 were provided by Central Bedfordshire Council.

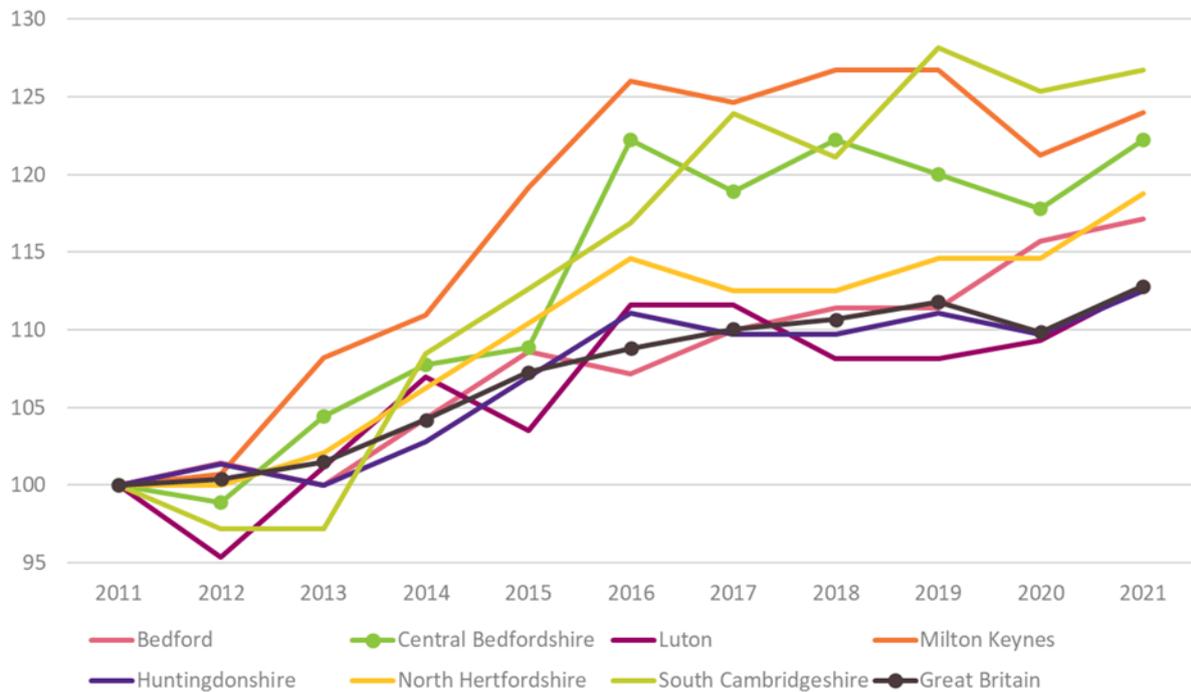
### Analysis

- Whilst employment at the end of the decade may seem to be higher in Central Bedfordshire than the start (+20,000), five-year averages show that this growth was concentrated during the first half of the decade (4.4%) and has peaked.
- Since 2016, the district has been experiencing one of the highest annual declines in its employment (0.3%).

### **Implications**

- This is likely to reflect the economic pressures placed on Central Bedfordshire's labour market since 2016 due to events such as Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst this decline has been experienced across the UK, Central Bedfordshire's above average decline indicates that these shocks may have had a more profound effect on its economy.
- This slow growth is expected to continue as the UK enters a recession and businesses restrict recruitment, risking potential increases in unemployment and delaying economic recovery.

### **Change in Employment**



- In 2021, there were around 108,800 jobs in Central Bedfordshire.
- An index change has been used to analyse employment growth rates year-on-year based on employment in 2011.
- Time series data shows that, from 2013, annual job growth in Central Bedfordshire (2%) began to exceed the national average (1% since 2013) with the district encountering notable growth in 2016.
- Between 2016-2020, employment growth on the whole started to decline in Central Bedfordshire. However, the index change for 2021 offered some optimism that growth will be returning to pre-2016 levels.

## Employment Growth

	2011 to 2016 CAGR	2016 to 2021 CAGR
Central Bedfordshire	4.4%	-0.3%
Bedford	1.4%	1.8%
Luton	2.3%	0.1%
Milton Keynes	4.7%	-0.3%
South Cambridgeshire	2.8%	2.0%
North Hertfordshire	2.8%	0.7%
Huntingdonshire	2.0%	0.4%
Great Britain	1.7%	0.7%

- Compound annual growth rates (CAGRs) allow us to understand the average growth in employment experienced on a year-by-year basis over two periods during the last decade.
- CAGRs suggest that the majority of growth experienced in Central Bedfordshire was between 2011-2016. Over this period, jobs grew by 4.1% (+20,000) versus 2.4% nationally, with only South Cambridgeshire (4.9%) and Milton Keynes (4.4%) experiencing higher growth.
- Whilst Central Bedfordshire experienced the second highest CAGR up until 2016, since 2016 it has witnessed one of the slowest growth rates and has lagged behind Great Britain.
- The decline in CAGR is likely to reflect the economic challenges faced by Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic during this period.

## Business Base

Business base refers to the collection of businesses operating within Central Bedfordshire. Understanding the composition, growth and characteristics of this base is crucial as it provides insight into the economic health and potential of the region.

## Total Enterprises

**Central Bedfordshire saw significant growth in its business base for the first half of the decade. However, by the end of the decade, it witnessed the greatest decline in the number of businesses.**

## Data Source

Sources include the ONS UK Business Count, with data from the latest release as of Autumn 2022. ONS advises that changes in methodology may result in a notable reduction in the number of businesses registered in 2018. CAGR have been used to calculate average growth across two five-year periods (2012-2017 and 2017-2022).

ONS Population Estimates were used to calculate business density per 1,000 working-aged people. Commercial property enquiries from April-November 2022 were provided by Central Bedfordshire Council.

## Analysis

- There were 12,380 businesses in Central Bedfordshire in 2022, an increase of around 2,000 since 2012.
- Business growth since 2018 in Central Bedfordshire has continued to lag behind pre-2017 levels which still indicates a more challenging business environment over the last five years.
- Alongside this, low business density in Central Bedfordshire compared to its neighbours indicates a lower level of enterprise.

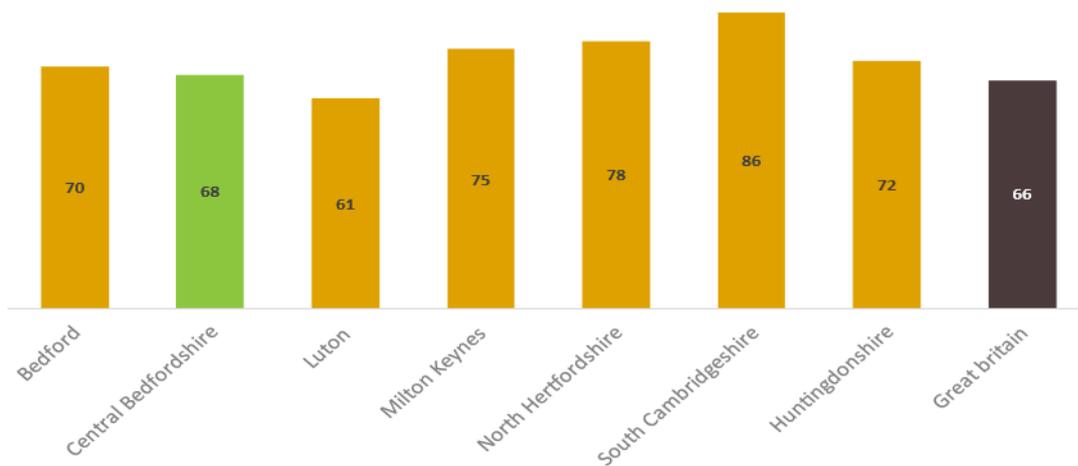
## Implications

- This change matters because it reflects the changing dynamics of Central Bedfordshire's business ecosystem. Increasing enterprise generates wealth creation and can indicate economic vibrancy to future investors when making choices on where to establish new enterprises.

## Registered Businesses

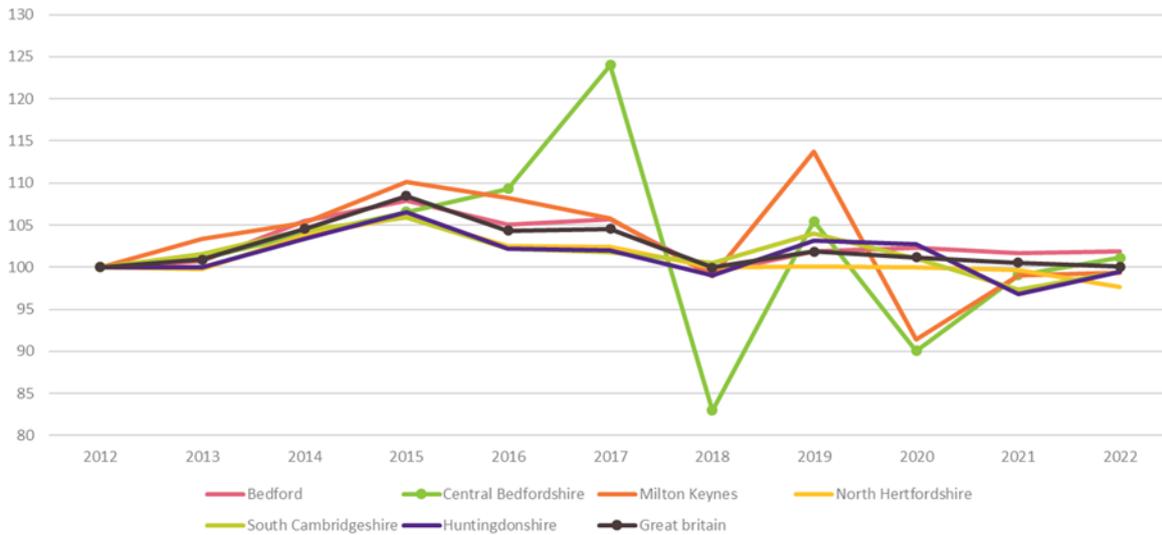
- There were 12,375 registered business enterprises in Central Bedfordshire in 2022. When compared to neighbouring areas, this is the second highest number with only Milton Keynes having a slightly higher number of businesses.
- Business density, however, allows us to compare business concentration across geographies of different sizes. This shows that Central Bedfordshire has the third lowest number of businesses per 1,000 working aged people (68) which is slightly above the national average (66). This signifies a lower level of enterprise in the district than its comparators.





## Business Growth

- Time series data shows that enterprises in Central Bedfordshire started and ended the decade with similar levels of growth to the national average. Despite the fluctuations in business growth between 2017-2018 due to changes in business registrations, growth has slowed down after this period and does not reflect pre-2017 levels. Please note, Luton has been omitted from this chart, due to the years 2017 showing an extreme rise and subsequent fall, which compresses the chart axis – this is reflected in the adjacent table.
- CAGR estimates show that, whilst Central Bedfordshire underwent the highest rate of growth during 2012-2017, the last half of the decade saw the highest decline in enterprises at -5% compared to 1% nationally.

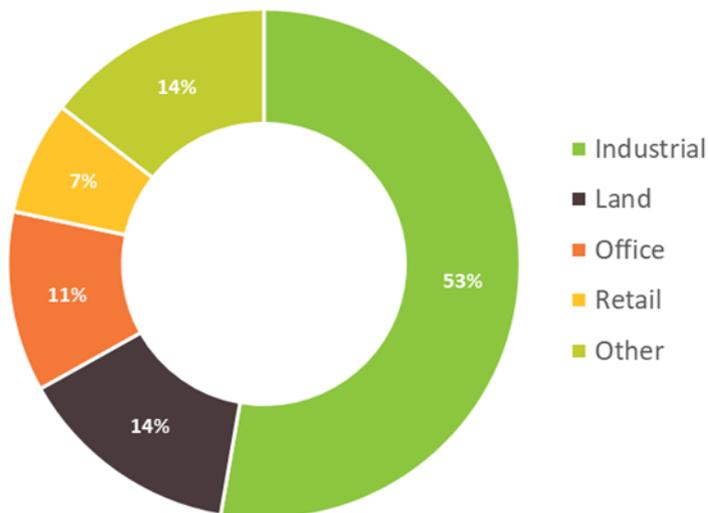
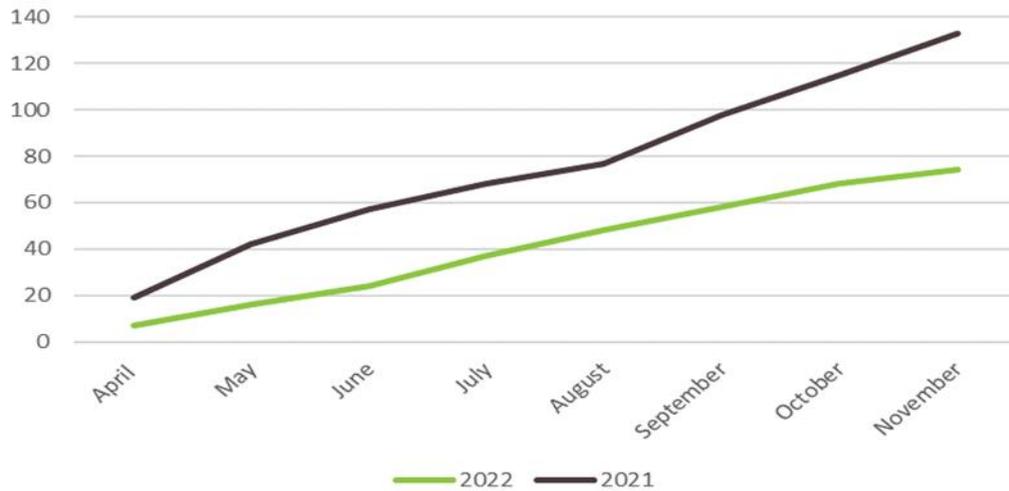


	2012 to 2017 CAGR	2017 to 2022 CAGR
Central Bedfordshire	8.7%	-4.6%
Bedford	4.9%	1.4%
Luton	16.1%	-3.3%
Milton Keynes	6.5%	0.2%
South Cambridgeshire	2.9%	-0.5%
North Hertfordshire	3.2%	0.5%
Huntingdonshire	2.8%	0.2%
Great Britain	4.5%	0.7%

## Inward Investment

- Central Bedfordshire received 332 enquiries from businesses looking for space in the area between April and November 2022. This compares to 609 for the same period in 2021, a reduction of -45%.
- When broken down by type, over half (53%) of enquiries to date have been for industrial properties.

- The main locations which businesses were interested in were within the M1 Corridor (49%), Leighton Buzzard (27), Dunstable (17%) and the A1 Corridor (15%).



## Enterprise Size

**Business growth in Central Bedfordshire has been driven by growth in its medium and large enterprises which exceeds the national average**

## Data Source

The data sources used are the ONS UK Business Count, drawing upon data from the latest release as of Autumn 2022.

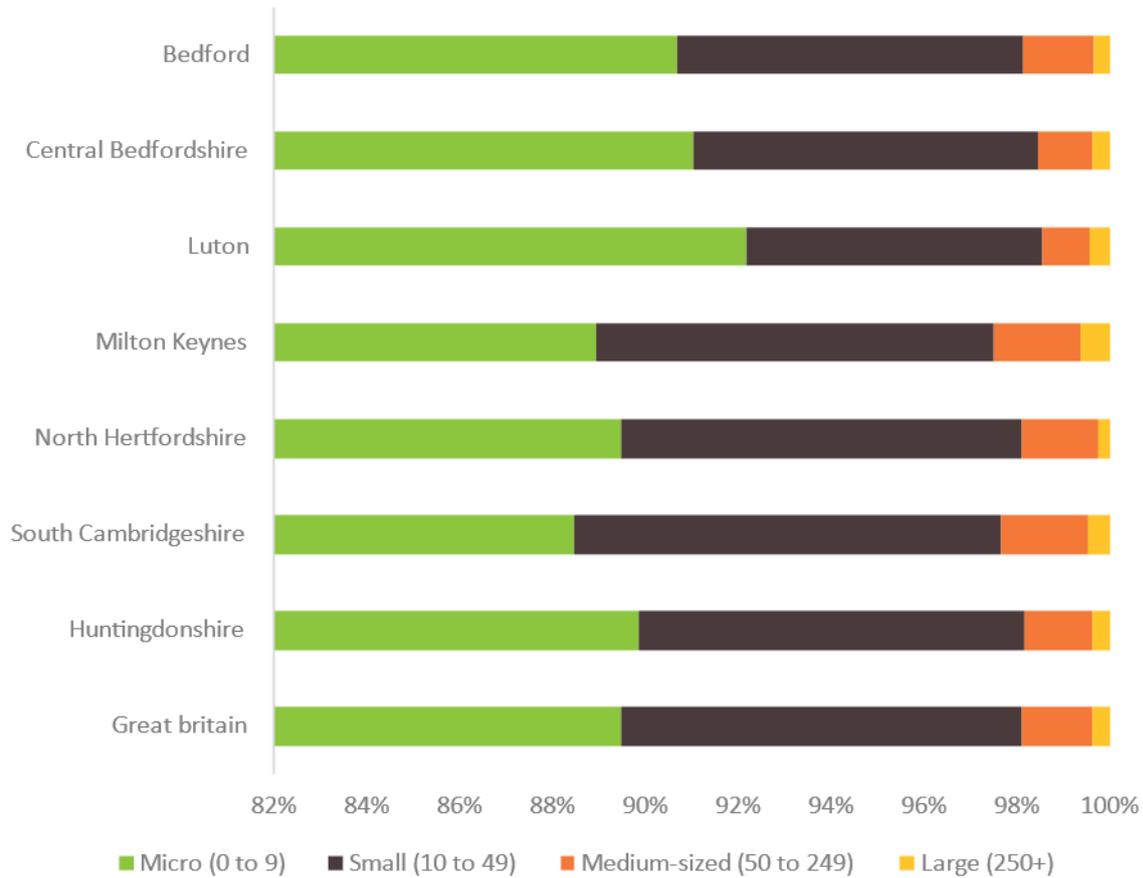
## **Analysis**

- Despite micro businesses dominating the business base, Central Bedfordshire has experienced one of the smallest increases in the proportion of micro businesses over the period 2012-22 (20% versus 30% nationally). It is trumped by growth in places like Luton (89%).
- However, medium and large enterprises have grown in Central Bedfordshire by 26% and 29% since 2012 and notably exceeds the national average (20% respectively).

## **Implications**

- This matters because it suggests Central Bedfordshire continues to be a good place for enterprises to grow. Whilst Luton exceeds micro business growth, it has seen stagnation or decline in medium-to-large enterprise growth (0% and -22%).
- This could suggest businesses wanting to upscale and grow may relocate to Central Bedfordshire from neighbouring areas to pursue expansion and take advantage of the district's business infrastructure.

## **Business Size and Composition**



- The composition of Central Bedfordshire’s business base shows that micro businesses account for a higher proportion of the business base than the national average (91% in Central Bedfordshire versus 81% nationally).
- Due to this, there are fewer small-to-medium sized enterprises in the district than seen nationally (8% in Central Bedfordshire versus 9% nationally).
- Whilst Central Bedfordshire’s business base has grown by 20% in total since 2012, this has been driven by an increase in medium and large enterprises (26% and 29%) compared to the national average (20% respectively).

## Business Survival and Perceptions

**Since 2017, there have been more business deaths than births per annum in Central Bedfordshire.**

### **Data Source**

The data sources used are the ONS Business Demography, drawing upon data from the latest release as of Autumn 2022. SEMLEP's Business Survey has also been used to identify business perceptions and performance. For more information on the 2021 SEMLEP Business Survey, the latest report can be found [here](#).

### **Analysis**

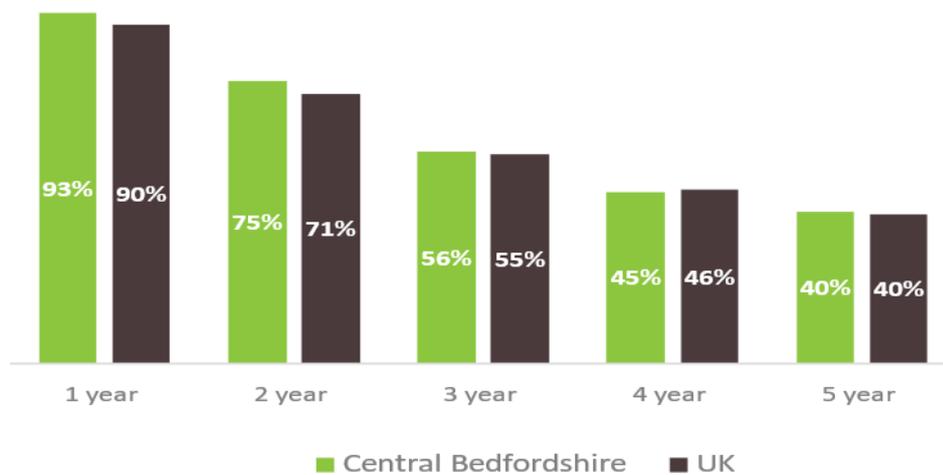
- Central Bedfordshire's 5-year survival rate aligns with the UK average of 40%, but business deaths have exceeded births since 2019.
- The proportion of businesses experiencing negative performance has risen from 30% in 2019 to 40% in 2021 according to the SEMLEP Business Survey, primarily attributed to Covid-19 and Brexit trade challenges. Public transport (38%) and local business support (33%) are the lowest-rated aspects of trading in Central Bedfordshire, according to survey respondents.

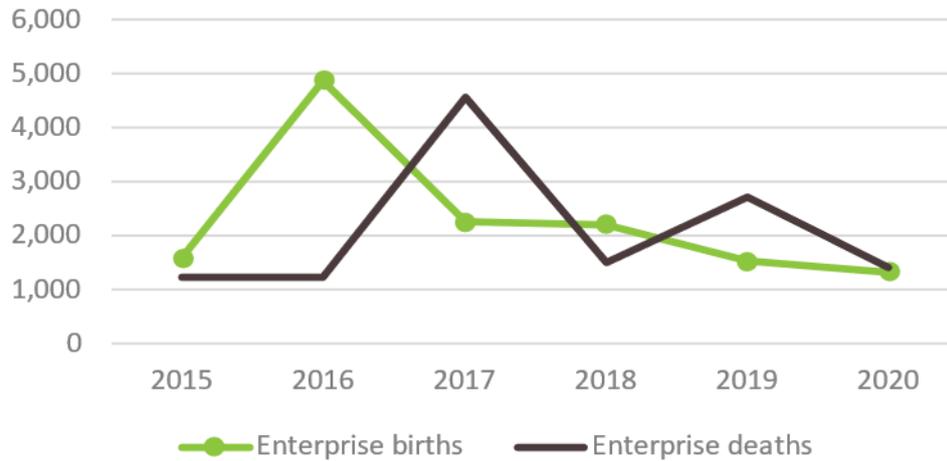
### **Implications**

- Business births, deaths and survival rates matter because they help illustrate the health of local economies and the entrepreneurial ecosystem. In order to encourage more people to start businesses and increase survival rates, negative perceptions about trading are key to understanding how to better support businesses.
- Ensuring the infrastructure and support provision is in place will be crucial over the coming years to mitigate the effects of an economic recession.

## Rate of Births, Deaths and Survival

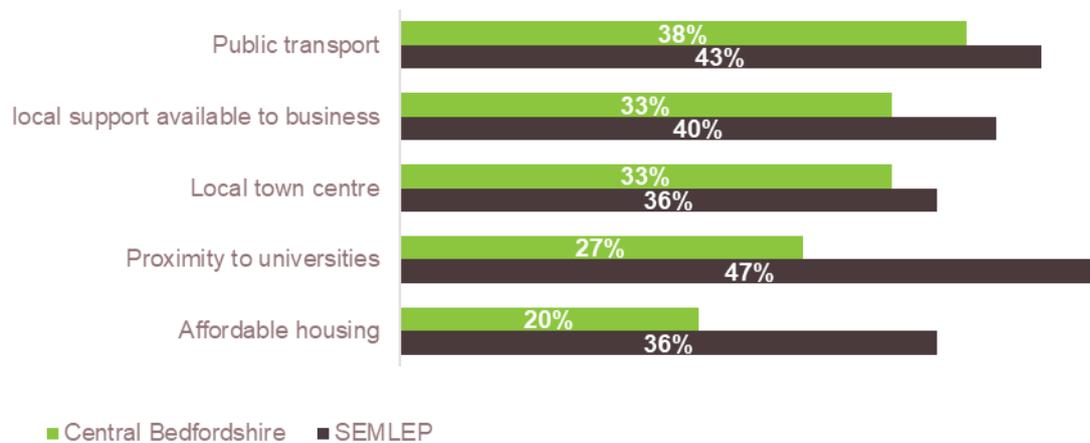
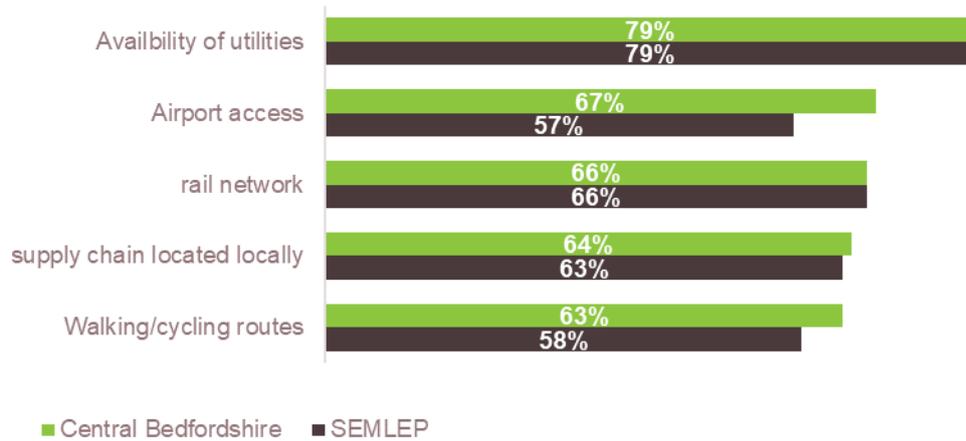
- Business survival rates in Central Bedfordshire are in line with the UK average, with 40% of businesses born in 2015 surviving the first five years.
- Up until 2016, business births in Central Bedfordshire were higher than business deaths. However, since 2017 business deaths have largely exceeded the number of births. Whilst this gap has started to reduce, the number of business births has continued to decline in the district suggesting a contracting entrepreneurial environment. The trends are likely to be partly as a result of Covid-19 and other national factors which are occurring as the economy moves into a recession.





## Business perceptions

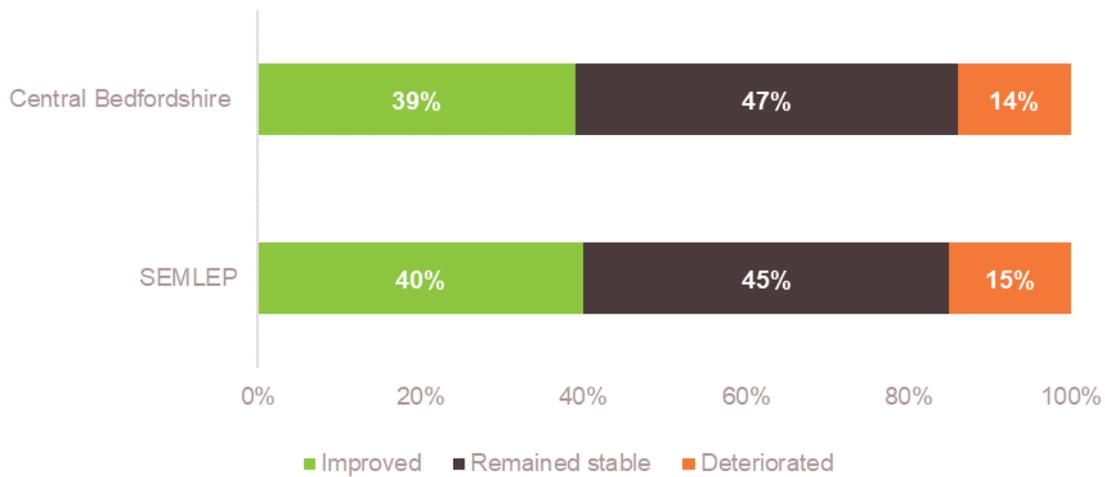
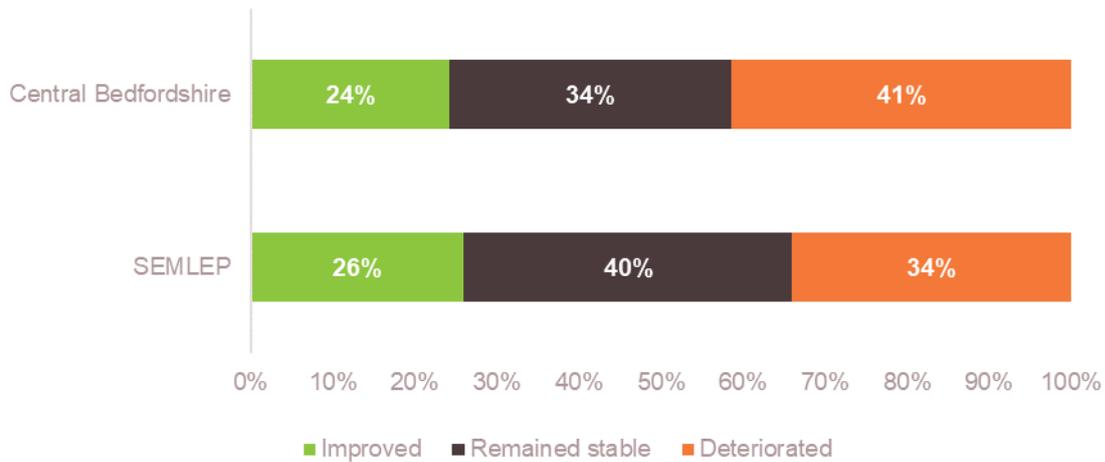
- According to the SEMLEP Business Survey (2021), the majority of businesses in Central Bedfordshire rated the district as a good place to do business (76% versus 71% in the wider SEMLEP area). This is an increase of 18 percentage points since 2014.
- Compared to the wider LEP area, businesses were specifically positive about the availability of utilities (such as broadband) and airport access, whilst negative about public transport and local support available to businesses in the district. However, at 33%, this was still below the rating given by businesses in the wider LEP area.



## Business perceptions

- Over 40% of businesses in Central Bedfordshire which responded to the SEMLEP Business Survey (2021) reported that over the past 12 months business performance had been negative which was higher than the whole of SEMLEP and the previous figure reported in 2019 (30%). Two-fifths of businesses expected their performance to improve over the next 12 months which was broadly in-line with the average for the whole of SEMLEP.
- Covid-19 and Brexit were the most commonly cited constraints on business growth (25% and 48% respectively). Of those who mentioned Brexit,

importing from the EU (28%) and increased business costs (13%) were the main challenges.



## Sectors

Sectors are groups of businesses that produce goods or services in a similar way.

Understanding the sectors within Central Bedfordshire is important because it provides insight into the current makeup of the local economy and its future resilience.

## Employment Sectors

**Central Bedfordshire has notable employment specialisms in transport and storage, motor trades and the wholesale sector compared to the national average.**

### **Data Source**

The data sources used are the ONS Business Register and Employment Survey, drawing upon data from the latest release as of Autumn 2022.

CAGR have been used to calculate the compound growth rate across two five-year periods. This takes the mean average across five years rather than just the start and end of the period. For employment sectors, this period is 2011-2016 and 2016-2021. For business sectors this period is 2012-2017 and 2017-2022. A CAGR calculates the mean.

### **Analysis**

- The analysis shows that growth in employment since 2011 has been driven by high CAGRs in transport and storage (7.2%), information & communication (4.5%) and business admin and support (4.1) which are 2-3 times higher than the average growth in the district across all sectors (2%).
- Specialisms in the transport and storage, motor trades, and wholesale sectors likely reflect Central Bedfordshire's proximity to major transport corridors (e.g. A1(M) and M1).

### **Implications**

- ONS analysis suggests that the East of England has seen increased demand for warehousing and logistics, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic, due

to the growth in online retail. This trend is expected to continue, driving employment growth in Central Bedfordshire.

- However, earnings in this sector are lower than average. Changes within the sector such as automation presents risks and opportunities. Ensuring that the sector can secure highly skilled, well-paid jobs is crucial to its future sustainable growth.

	Employment (2021)	% of all employment	LQ
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	1,750	2%	1.0
Mining, quarrying & utilities	300	0%	0.2
Manufacturing	10,000	9%	1.2
Construction	7,000	6%	1.3
Motor trades	3,000	3%	1.6
Wholesale	6,000	6%	1.6
Retail	9,000	8%	0.9
Transport & storage	9,000	8%	1.6
Accommodation & food services	9,000	8%	1.1
Information & communication	3,500	3%	0.7
Financial & insurance	700	1%	0.2
Property	3,000	3%	1.5
Professional, scientific & technical	9,000	8%	0.9
Business administration & support services	9,000	8%	0.9
Public administration & defence	3,500	3%	0.7
Education	12,000	11%	1.3
Health	7,000	6%	0.5
Arts, entertainment & recreation	6,000	6%	1.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>108,750</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1.0</b>

- In 2021, education (12,000), manufacturing (10,000) and transport and storage (9,000) accounted for nearly a third (28%) of employment in Central Bedfordshire.
- Location Quotients (LQ) measure the concentration of employment in a specific sector in an area compared to national sectoral employment. A LQ

above 1 indicates that an area has a high degree of concentration in that sector relative to national levels and as such is likely to have a degree of business specialism.

- Using this measure, Central Bedfordshire has concentrations of employment in transport and storage, motor trades and wholesale sectors, which have a LQ of 1.6.

	<b>CAGR (2011-21)</b>	<b>Job growth (2011-21)</b>
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	0.0%	0
Mining, quarrying & utilities	-4.0%	-150
Manufacturing	1.1%	1,000
Construction	1.6%	1,000
Motor trades	2.9%	750
Wholesale	1.8%	1,000
Retail	-1.0%	-1,000
Transport & storage	7.2%	4,500
Accommodation & food services	4.1%	3,000
Information & communication	4.5%	1,250
Financial & insurance	-2.5%	-200
Property	4.1%	1,000
Professional, scientific & technical	1.2%	1,000
Business administration & support services	4.1%	3,000
Public administration & defence	1.6%	500
Education	2.9%	3,000
Health	0.0%	0
Arts, entertainment & recreation	0.0%	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>18,750</b>

- Compound Annual Growth Rates (CAGRs) suggest that employment growth in Central Bedfordshire has been driven by growth in the transport and storage (7.2%), information and communication (4.5%) and business administration and support services (4.1%) sectors.

- These sectors account for nearly half (47%) the job growth witnessed in Central Bedfordshire since 2011.
- Mining and utilities (-4.0%), financial and insurance (-2.5%) and retail (-1.0%) have experienced the greatest decline in their sectoral employment.

## Business Sectors

**Central Bedfordshire's business base is dominated by specialisms in public administration and defence, construction, and motor trades sectors**

### Data Source

The data sources used are the ONS UK Business Count, drawing upon data from the latest release as of Autumn 2022. CAGR have been used to calculate the average growth across two five-year periods. SQW's 'Sectors, Assets and Potential' report for CBC has been used to inform understanding of key sectors in the district.

### Analysis

- Despite these business specialisms, in absolute terms these businesses represented a relatively small number of enterprises.
- The low employment base of these sectors suggests they are likely to be dominated by small enterprises. Growing sectors in the district included public administration (6.4%), financial and insurance (6.1%) and transport and storage (5.8%) sectors.

### Implications

- This is important as supporting these sectors to grow and transform into medium-to-large employers could help improve performance and output.

Sectors such as financial and insurance and public administration also hold the prospect to provide well-paid, highly productive jobs in the district.

## Business sectors count

	Business count (2022)	% of all businesses	LQ
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	430	3%	0.8
Mining, quarrying & utilities	50	0%	0.7
Manufacturing	695	6%	1.1
Construction	2,370	19%	1.4
Motor trades	445	4%	1.2
Wholesale	520	4%	1.1
Retail	735	6%	0.7
Transport & storage	665	5%	1.1
Accommodation & food services	540	4%	0.7
Information & communication	905	7%	1.0
Financial & insurance	270	2%	1.0
Property	370	3%	0.7
Professional, scientific & technical	1,930	16%	1.0
Business administration & support services	1,000	8%	1.0
Public administration & defence	65	1%	1.8
Education	260	2%	1.2
Health	320	3%	0.7
Arts, entertainment & recreation	805	7%	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,375</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>1.0</b>

- In 2022, construction (2,370), professional, scientific and technical (1,930) and business administration (1,000) accounted for nearly 45% of businesses in Central Bedfordshire.
- Central Bedfordshire has concentrations of business specialism with high LQs in public administration and defence (1.8), construction (1.4) and motor trades (1.2).

## Business sectors growth

	CAGR (2012-2022)	Total growth (2012-2022)
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	-0.1%	-5
Mining, quarrying & utilities	2.3%	10
<b>Manufacturing</b>	0.1%	5
Construction	3.2%	640
Motor trades	1.7%	70
Wholesale	-0.3%	-15
Retail	0.8%	55
Transport & storage	5.8%	285
Accommodation & food services	0.7%	35
Information & communication	0.6%	55
Financial & insurance	6.1%	120
Property	3.2%	100
Professional, scientific & technical	1.0%	185
Business administration & support services	2.9%	245
Public administration & defence	6.4%	30
Education	3.2%	70
Health	1.0%	30
Arts, entertainment & recreation	1.7%	125
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>2,030</b>

- CAGRs suggest that business growth in Central Bedfordshire has been driven by growth in public administration (6.4%), financial and insurance (6.1%) and transport and storage (5.8%) sectors.
- These sectors account for over a fifth (21%) of the business growth witnessed in Central Bedfordshire since 2012.
- Wholesale (-0.3%), agriculture (-0.1%) and manufacturing (0.1%) have experienced the greatest decline in number of businesses in the district.

## Key Sectors

- Recent research for Central Bedfordshire Council suggests that key sector specialisms for the local authority include the following:

- **High performance technology** – there are major established companies and specialist research in Cranfield University which provides growth in areas of automotive, motorsports, energy and agri-tech.
- **Advanced logistics** – there has been substantial investment in the logistics sector which has grown during the pandemic. If sites can be found, this sector will continue to grow locally.
- **Creative, Cultural and Visitor Economy** – there are some large attractions locally. However, there is a need to focus more on the ‘experience of place’ particularly within town centres and provide high-quality jobs that are not just seasonal.
- **Enterprise package** – with good access to London, the business and professional services sector is growing. To develop this sector further, there is a need for a good and supportive environment for the growth of small businesses.

## GVA and Productivity

Gross Value Added (GVA) is a measure of the value of the output that is produced in Central Bedfordshire’s economy, while productivity measures how efficient the economy is. Together, they provide a comprehensive picture of the local economy’s efficiency and competitiveness.

### GVA and Productivity Summary

**Between 2019-2020, Central Bedfordshire experienced the second highest contraction in its economy due to Covid-19 representing a loss of £4m in Gross Value Added (GVA).**

## Data Source

The data sources used are the ONS Regional GVA (Balanced) , drawing upon data from the latest release as of Spring 2022. This data measures GVA output in current prices.

## Analysis

- The analysis shows that in 2020, total GVA was £5.7bn in Central Bedfordshire compared to £6.1bn in 2019. This represents a contraction in Central Bedfordshire's economy of -7% (or £4m) which is more than double that seen nationally (-3%).
- Over the last 10 years, GVA in Central Bedfordshire has grown at a similar rate to the national average (36% versus 35%).
- Central Bedfordshire's GVA per filled job (£54.8k) is the third lowest of comparator areas and is below the national average (£58.8k).

## Implications

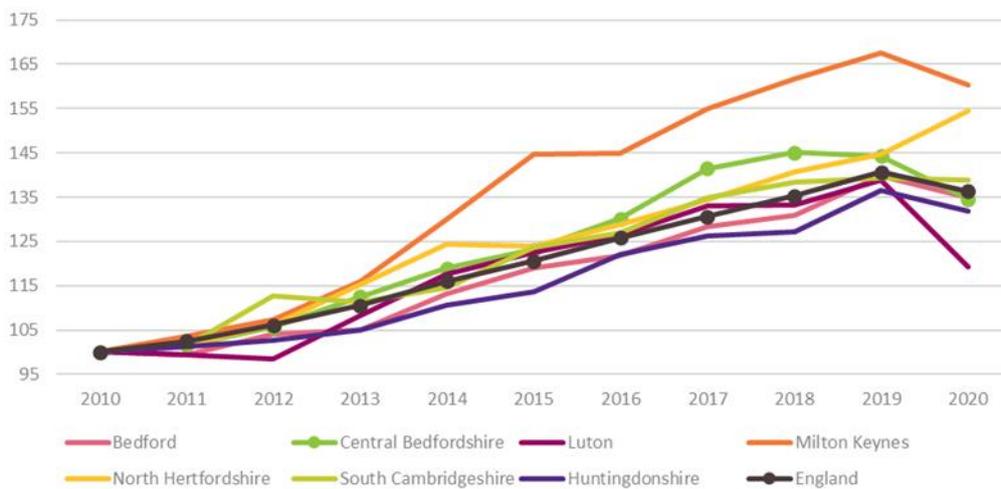
- This matters because it suggests that the economic impact of Covid-19 has been felt greater in Central Bedfordshire which may prolong the recovery required. This is not helped by the district's low productivity challenge which in turn affects resident's quality of life and future prosperity.

## Gross Value Added (GVA)

- In 2020, Central Bedfordshire's Gross Value Added (GVA) was £5.7bn. Between 2010 and 2020, total GVA in the district increased by 35% compared to 36% nationally. Despite a decade of strong growth in Central Bedfordshire, the economy contracted by -7% (-£4m) between 2019 and 2020. This

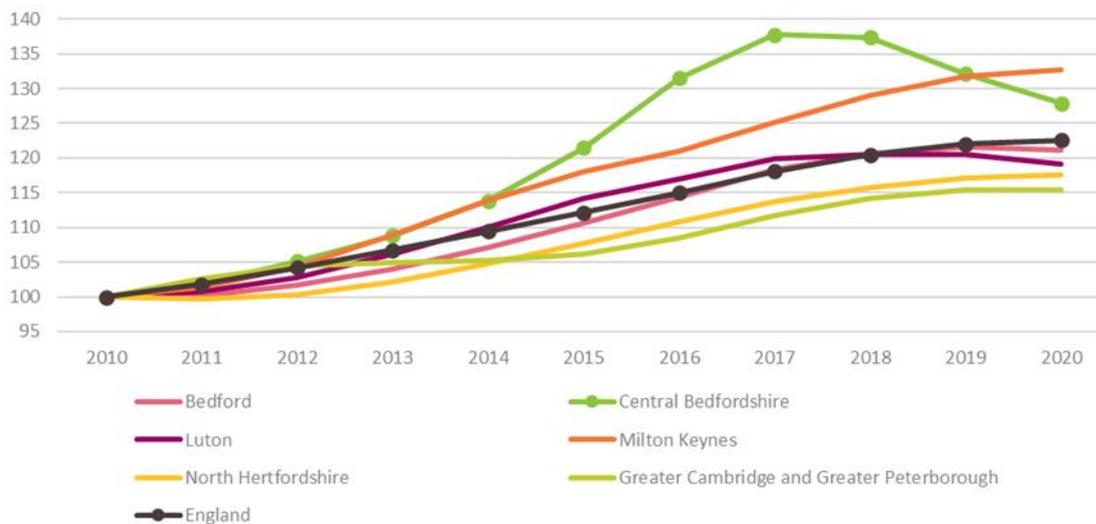
compares to a decline of -3% nationally. This was the second highest contraction, with only Luton experiencing a higher level (-14%, a loss of £8.8m).

- This suggests that, despite growth which was previously above or in-line most of its comparators, Central Bedfordshire was more severely affected by the pandemic.



## Productivity

- In 2020, GVA per filled job, which acts as a proxy for productivity, stood at £54,800 in Central Bedfordshire, which is below the national average of £58,750. This was the third lowest of all the comparators. Please note that Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire are included within Greater Cambridgeshire as the data is not available below this level.
- However, between 2010 and 2020, Central Bedfordshire has experienced the highest growth in productivity (32% versus 22% nationally), with only Milton Keynes experiencing similar levels of growth (32%).



# Earnings & Occupations

Occupations refer to the type of work performed by individuals in Central Bedfordshire, with earnings being the income received for the work they perform. Together, these factors provide insight into the profile of the local labour market and its potential strengths and weaknesses.

## Earnings and Occupations Overview

**Central Bedfordshire has the highest gap between workplace and resident-based earnings compared to comparator areas.**

### Data Source

The data sources used are the ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings. This contains data on the breakdown between workplace-based earnings and resident-based earnings, with the latter including those who live in an area but do not work there. It also contains data on the occupational breakdown of residents.

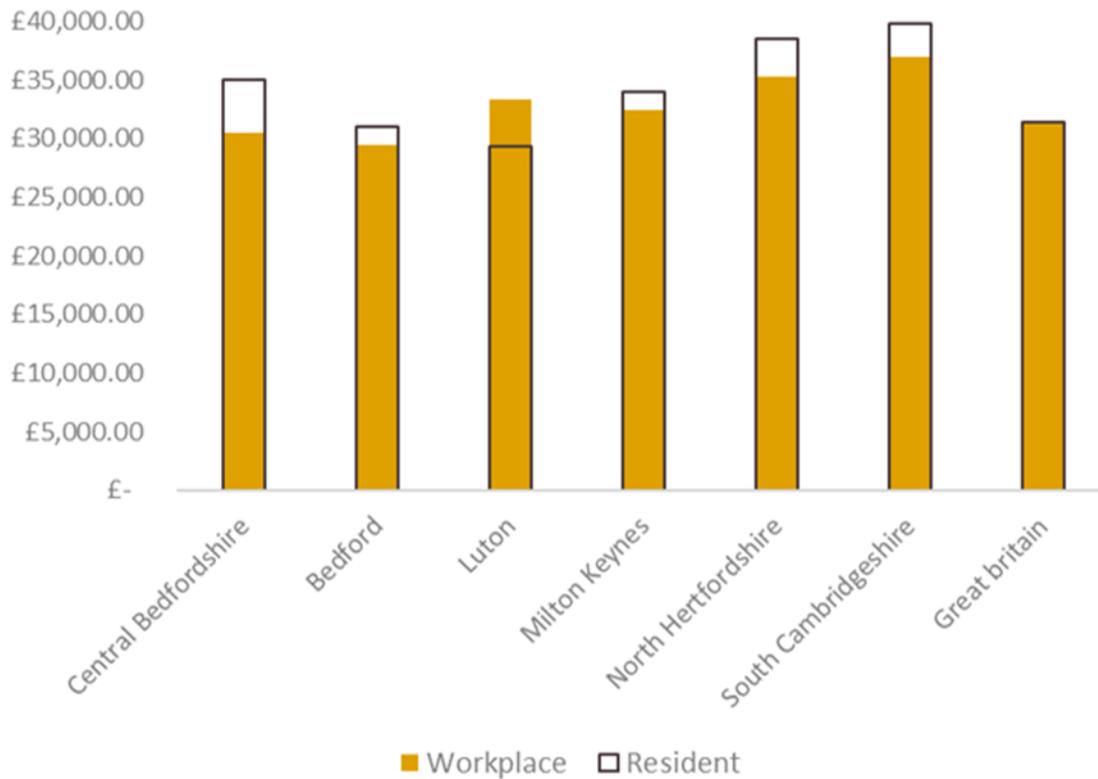
### Analysis

- The analysis shows that Workplace earnings are £5,000 short of resident-based earnings (£30.5k versus £35.5k) despite the district containing a larger proportion of highly skilled occupations.
- This disparity is likely to reflect the sectoral make-up of Central Bedfordshire's labour market, with many of its large employment sectors (such as manufacturing and transport and storage) often including lower paid jobs. It reflects the fact that people are generally commuting out of the area to secure higher paid jobs.

## Implications

- The disparity between workers and residents is important as it suggests that residents look outside the district for higher paid work opportunities. This prevents the district from fully capitalising on the economic benefits associated with a highly skilled residents-base, including productivity gains and spend in the local economy, and creates challenges for retaining those workers in the future.

## Average Earnings

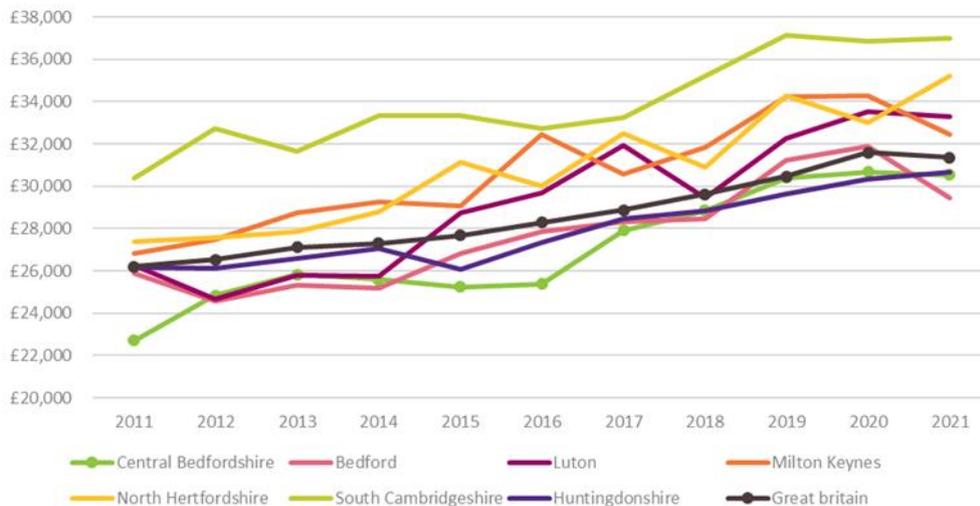


- Workplace earnings in Central Bedfordshire are low at £30,500 compared to £31,300 nationally.
- Whilst most of the comparator areas, apart from Luton, also experience a gap between workplace-based earnings, the gap is more pronounced in Central

Bedfordshire. Resident earnings are around £35,500, which is 13% higher than workplace earnings.

## Change in Earnings

- Whilst workplace earnings have continued to be below average in Central Bedfordshire since 2011, the district has encountered the highest absolute growth rate over the last decade (£7,850 versus £5,160 nationally).
- Compound Annual Growth Rates (CAGRs) show that over the last five years, Central Bedfordshire has experienced the highest rate of growth in workplace earnings (3.8% versus 2.1% nationally). This is despite a period of lower growth for its neighbours and contrasts with the slower growth seen during the first half of the decade.



	2011 to 2016 CAGR	2016 to 2021 CAGR
Central Bedfordshire	2.3%	3.8%
Bedford	1.5%	1.1%
Luton	3.9%	0%
Milton Keynes	2.5%	2.3%
South Cambridgeshire	0.9%	2.3%
North Hertfordshire	1.8%	3.2%
Huntingdonshire	1.5%	2.5%
Great Britain	1.5%	2.1%

## Occupations

	Central Bedfordshire		Great Britain
	Number	%	%
Managers, Directors and Senior Officials	21,100	14%	10%
Professional Occupations	34,700	23%	26%
Associate Prof and Tech Occupations	26,800	18%	15%
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	17,100	11%	10%
Skilled Trade Occupations	10,300	7%	9%
Caring, Leisure and Other Service Occupations	7,500	5%	8%
Sales and Customer Service Occupations	7,600	5%	7%
Process, Plant and Machine Operatives	13,900	9%	6%
Elementary Occupations	12,900	8%	10%

- In 2022, over half (55%) of Central Bedfordshire's residents were employed in highly skilled occupations compared to 51% nationally. This is driven by a higher proportion of people employed in managerial positions (14% versus

10%) and associate prof and technical occupations (18% versus 15%). In this category, only professional occupations fall slightly below the national average (23% versus 26%).

- A higher proportion of residents also work in process, plant and machine operative occupations than nationally (9% versus 6%).

## Skills Gaps & Shortages

Skills gaps reflect a difference between the skills and knowledge possessed by Central Bedfordshire's workers and those which are required by its businesses.

Identifying and addressing these gaps is important to ensuring a skilled and competitive workforce, which can attract and retain businesses and drive economic growth.

### Skills Gaps and Shortages Overview

**Central Bedfordshire has the highest number of skills gaps amongst its employers compared to neighbouring areas.**

#### Data Source

The data sources used are the Employers Skills Survey (2019) which provides a breakdown on the skills profile of businesses across England. This provides insight into the skills challenges of businesses and how this impacts upon vacancies and performance.

Data was not available for North Hertfordshire or South Cambridgeshire. The Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) Business Survey (2021) was also used to provide up-to-date figures.

## **Analysis**

- Alongside Bedford, Central Bedfordshire has the highest proportion of businesses reporting a skills gap (18% versus 13% nationally).
- More recent research from the CBC Business Survey reported an increase to 23%. Those businesses which are classed as large organisations were more likely to be delivering support to address these skills gaps compared to micro businesses (75% versus 35%).

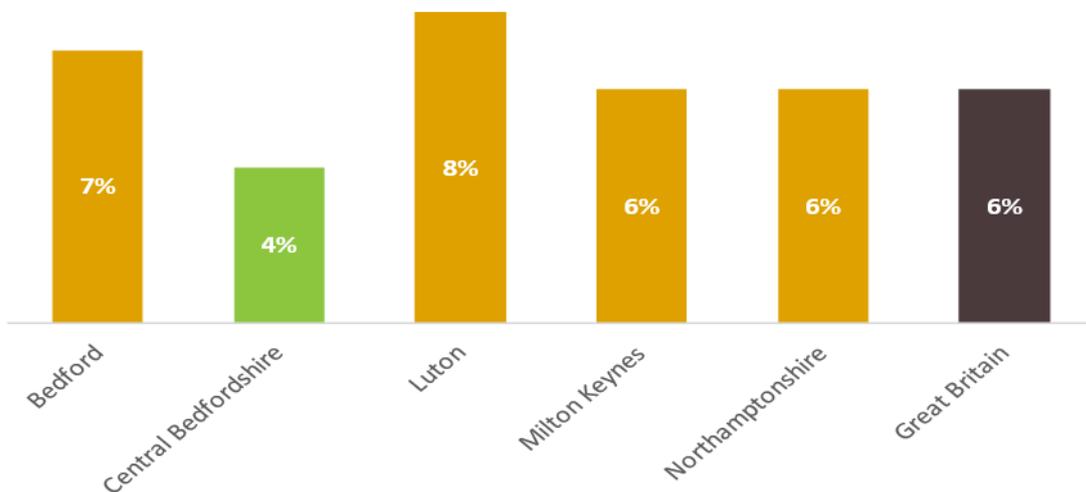
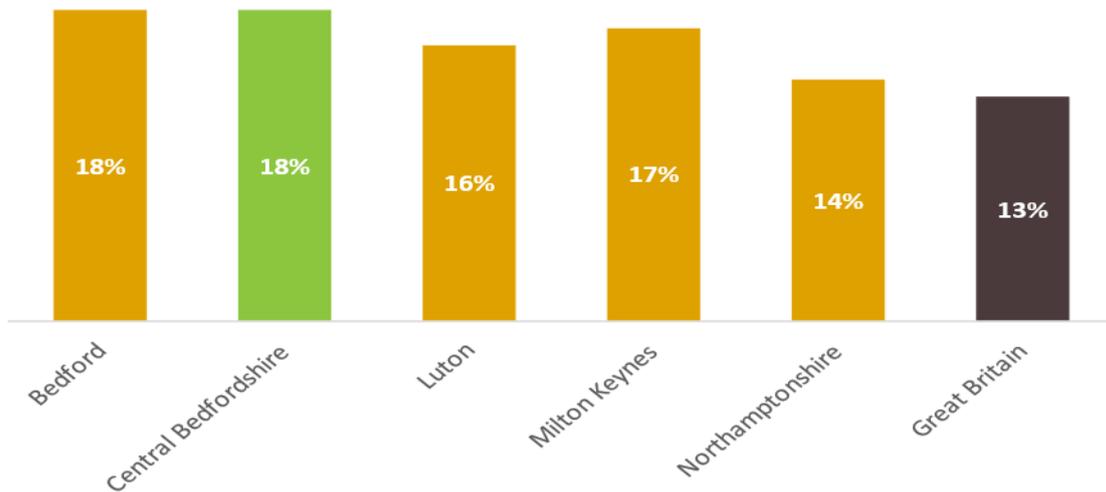
## **Implications**

- Whilst national data is not available for this comparison, it is important as it indicates a growing problem in Central Bedfordshire with upskilling and training staff.
- Given the dominance of micro businesses, it also suggests that the majority of businesses are unable to deliver support to improve the skills profile of their staff.

## **Skills Gaps and Shortages**

- Central Bedfordshire, alongside Bedford, has the highest rate of employers with a skills gap. At 18%, this is notably above the national average where 13% of employers report a skills gap. More recent research through the Central Bedfordshire Council Business Survey reports a skills gap of 23% in 2021. Large businesses were more likely to be citing this as an issue rather than micro firms (75% versus 35%).

- Fewer employers, however, have reported a vacancy to address a skills shortage, with Central Bedfordshire having the lowest skills shortage vacancy (4%) of its comparators. This compares to a national average of 6%.



## Place & Infrastructure

### Key Findings

- **House building has been progressing well in Central Bedfordshire but affordability is worsening.** Housing completions have grown at double the national rate since 2016. Consistent with the district's strong population growth, prices are rising faster than the national average and housing is less affordable when compared to earnings.
- **B-class uses saw the most development in terms of employment completions,** with over 80,000 square meters of B1, B2 and B8 floorspace completed in 2022 alone.
- **Central Bedfordshire town centers had a 7.4% vacancy rate as of November 2022, down from 8.7% in August.** Despite the decrease, vacancy levels remain significant and are indicative of the lasting effects of the pandemic and a weakening national economy.
- **Travel patterns in the district show average levels of walking and cycling, while rail passenger numbers have dropped due to COVID-19.** Between 2015 and 2020, rail patronage saw modest growth of about 1% per year on average.
- **Digital connectivity in Central Bedfordshire is improving,** with about 95% coverage of superfast broadband speeds compared to 97% for England. The district performs well on 4G outdoor coverage at 96% compared to 89% nationally.
- **Central Bedfordshire is making progress on sustainability,** with 12.5% lower per capita greenhouse gas emissions compared to England. 50% of buildings in the district had an EPC issued at grade C or above in 2022, compared to 45% for England.

# Housing

Adequate and affordable housing supply can help to ensure that Central Bedfordshire's population has access to a range of housing options at different price points, which can support economic growth and development by providing residents with a stable foundation for their lives and businesses.

## Housing Overview

**On the whole, there has been an increasing number of housing completions in Central Bedfordshire but the area remains less affordable than the national average**

### Data Source

The data sources used are the GOV.UK Live tables on dwelling stock in 2016 and 2021. Compound Annual Growth Rates (CAGR) have been used to show annual growth rate over a time period, making comparison between areas possible. ONS median house prices in 2007-2022 was also used, as well as ONS House price to residence-based ratio in 2021. Data on dwellings completion was provided by Central Bedfordshire Council. The 2021 Census was used to ascertain the quantum of households by type of dwelling.

### Analysis

- The analysis shows that there were 126,104 dwellings in Central Bedfordshire in 2021 and the housing stock has been increasing over time. In 2018, Central Bedfordshire saw a level of completions (2,103) which was 118% higher than 2013 (966).

- House prices have been increasing over time and housing in Central Bedfordshire is less affordable compared to national levels. The median house price to median residence based earnings was 9.43 in 2021 in Central Bedfordshire compared to 9.05 nationally.

### Implications

- This matters because...sufficient housing is important to ensure that there is a suitable workforce to meet the needs of local businesses. Housing affordability issues can affect all age cohorts and restrict them from accessing housing but it particularly affects the younger population

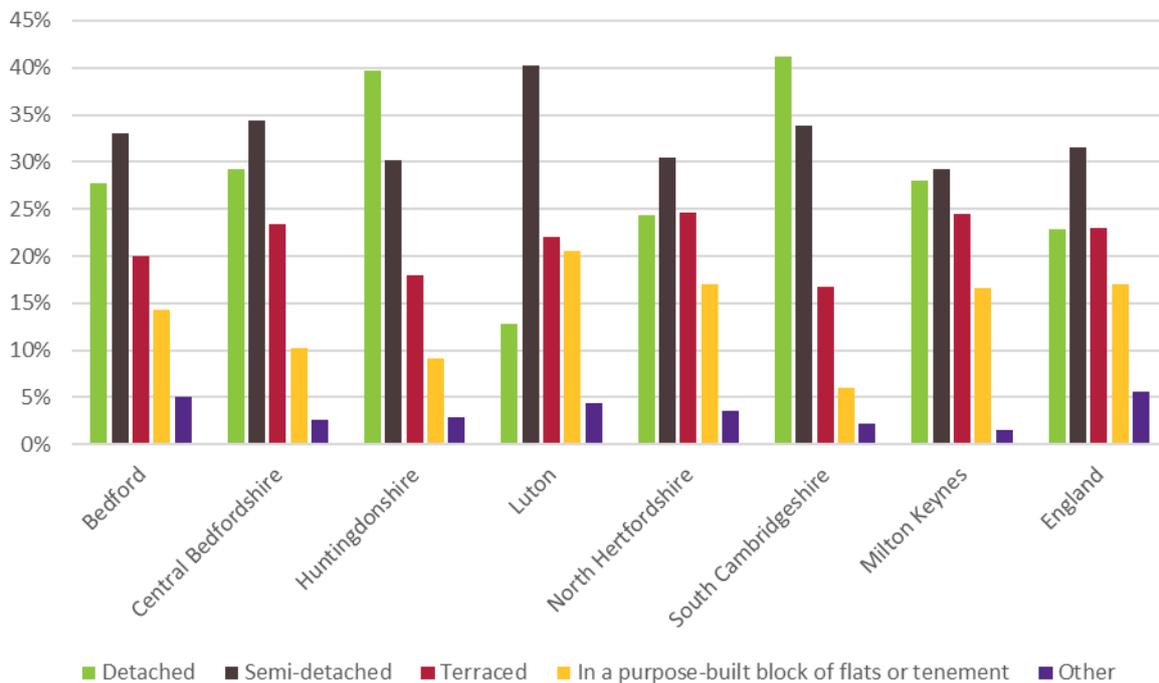
### Housing Stock

	No. of Dwellings in 2021	5-Year CAGR 2016-2021	Absolute growth since 2016
<b>Central Bedfordshire</b>	126,104	1.80%	10,735
Bedford	77,884	1.67%	6,189
Luton	81,289	0.90%	3,563
Milton Keynes	117,306	1.53%	8,564
North Hertfordshire	58,497	0.72%	2,068
Huntingdonshire	78,943	1.19%	4,519
South Cambridgeshire	70,014	1.44%	4,831
<b>England</b>	24,873,321	0.94%	1,140,694

- In 2021, there were 126,104 dwellings in Central Bedfordshire, the highest out of all comparator areas. Milton Keynes had the second-highest number of dwellings with 117,306.

- Between 2016 and 2021, the number of dwellings in Central Bedfordshire grew by 10,735, this was the largest growth across all comparator areas.
- The housing stock in Central Bedfordshire had a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 1.80% between 2016 and 2021. This is higher than the comparator areas and well above the national average of 0.94%. The CAGR represents the average annual growth rate over a period, given that growth compounds year-on-year. It is calculated by taking the total percentage change over the period and raising it to the power of  $1/n$  where  $n$  is the number of years in the period

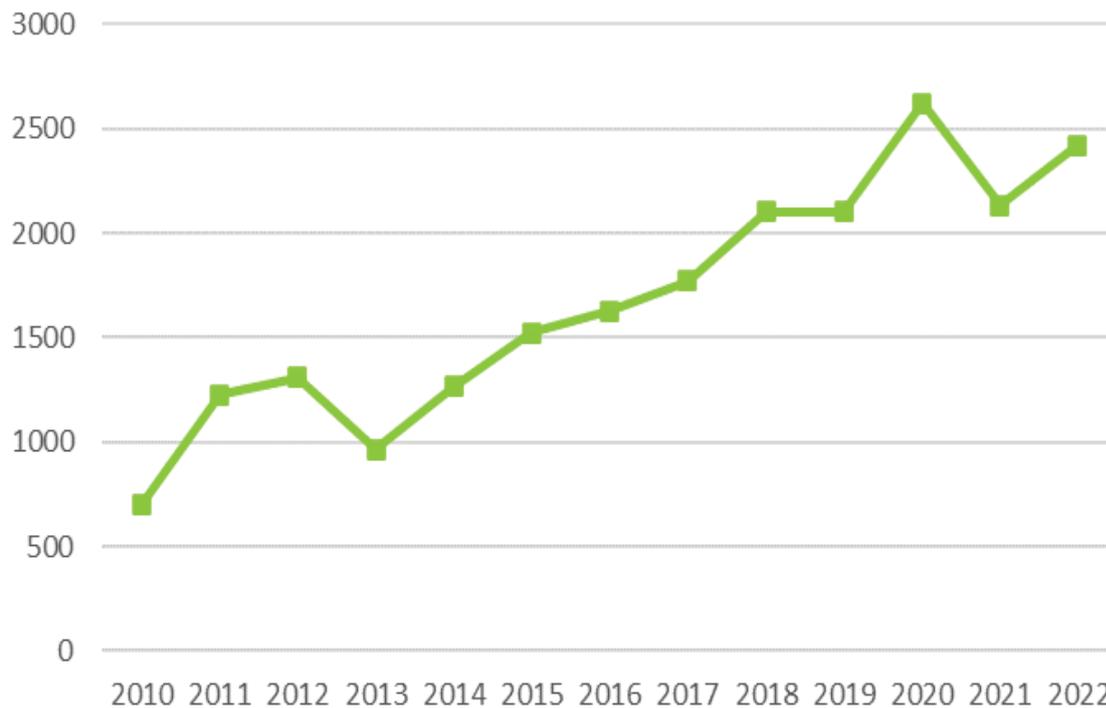
### Households by accommodation type



- The adjacent chart shows the percentage of households in each area by type of accommodation (of the household)

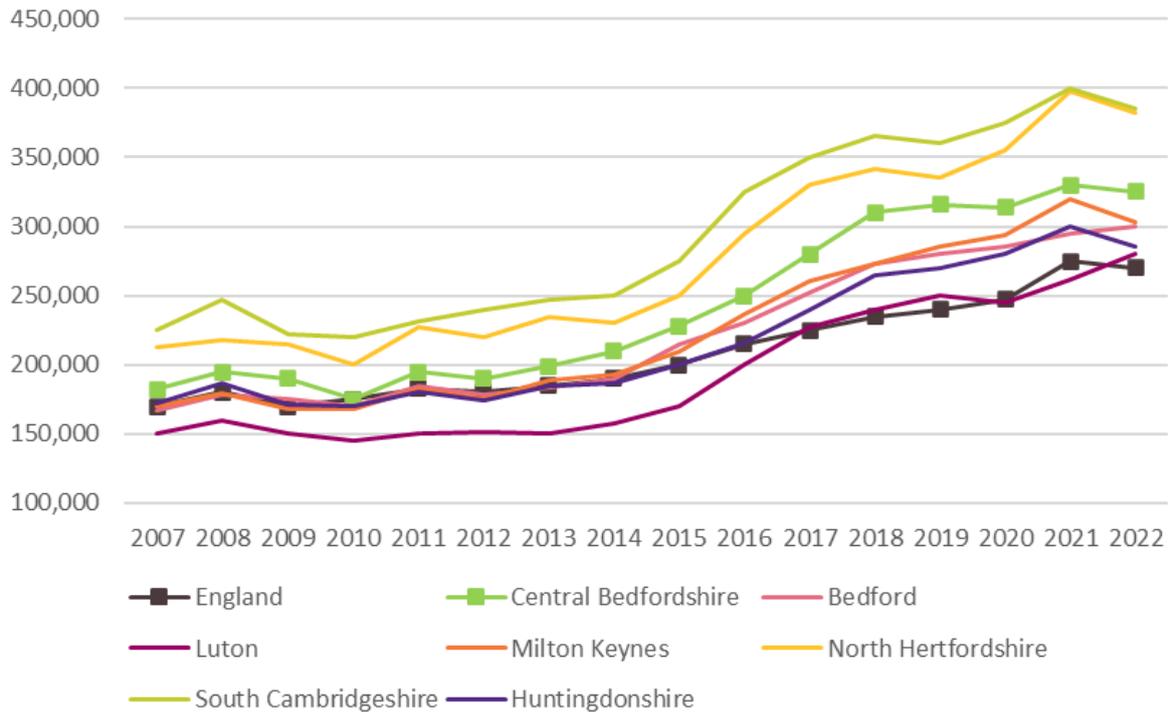
- In Central Bedfordshire, 29% of households are in detached accommodation, 34% are in semi-detached accommodation, 23% are in terraced accommodation, 10% are in purpose-built flats or tenement accommodation, and 3% are in other types of accommodation consisting of:
  - Part of a converted or shared house, including bedsits
  - Part of converted building, e.g, former school, church or warehouse
  - In commercial building, e.g. office building, hotel or over a shop
  - A caravan or other mobile or temporary structure
- As such, the most common modal accommodation type for Central Bedfordshire is semi-detached. This follows the trend for England and all comparator areas besides from the especially rural Huntingdonshire and South Cambridge.
- Where Central Bedfordshire stands out is in its low share of households living in flats – which at 10% is much lower than most comparators.

## Dwelling Completions



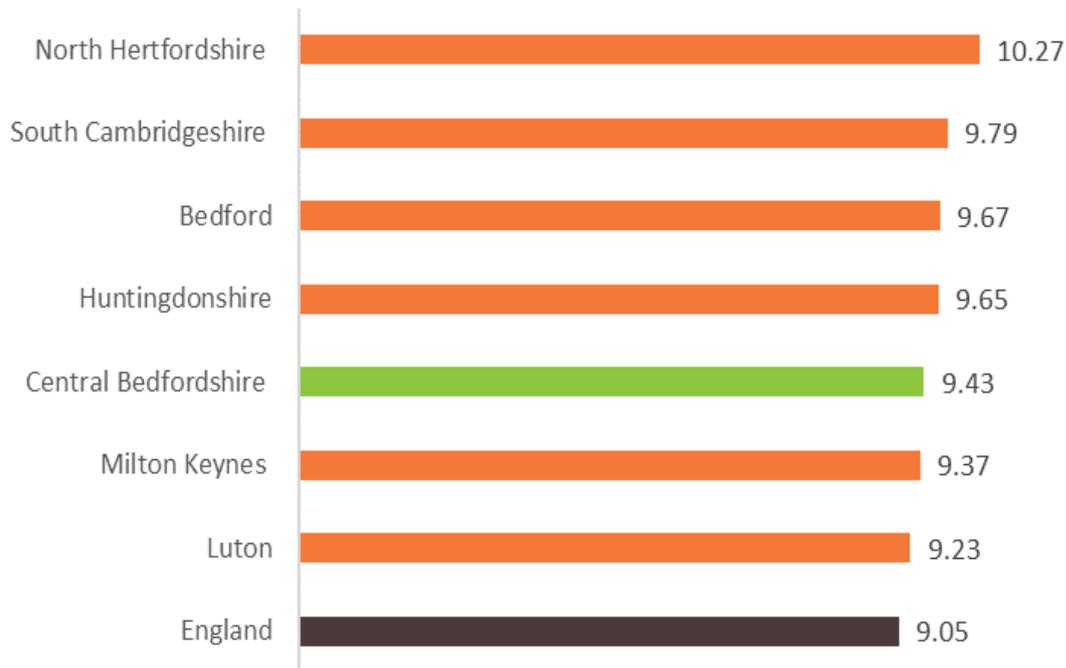
- The number of dwelling completions delivered in Central Bedfordshire has on the whole been increasing over time. In 2013, the local authority witnessed 966 completions, and this increased to 2,103 completions by 2018. This is equivalent to an increase of 118%.
- Between 2020 and 2021 however, there was a decline in dwelling completions. There were 487 fewer completions in 2021 compared to 2020.
- Between 2021 and 2022, there has been an increase in dwelling completions in Central Bedfordshire. There have been higher levels of completions in Cranfield, Harlington, Henlow, Langford, Houghton Regis, Arlesey and Stotfold.

## House prices over time



- The average median house price in Central Bedfordshire was £325,000 in 2022. This is well above the average for England (£270,000) and most other comparators. The only locations which have higher average median house prices were South Cambridgeshire (£385,000) and North Hertfordshire (£382,650).
- House prices in Central Bedfordshire and comparator areas have universally increased over time. Between 2013 and 2019, Central Bedfordshire experienced a steep increase in house prices (of 59%). Over the time period, house prices in Central Bedfordshire have been above the national average, with the differential increasing from 2016 onwards.

### Ratio of house price to residence-based earnings



- The ratio of house price to residence based earnings is a good indicator of the affordability of housing in central Bedfordshire.
- In 2021, Central Bedfordshire had a ratio of median house price to median residence-based earnings of 9.43, which is marginally higher than the national average (9.05). This suggests that houses are slightly less affordable in Central Bedfordshire compared to the national level.
- Across the comparator areas, North Hertfordshire had the highest ratio (10.27), with South Cambridgeshire having the second-highest (9.79). Central Bedfordshire's ratio was higher than that of Milton Keynes (9.37) and Luton (9.23).

## Employment Space & Town Centres

Vacancy rates and employment floorspace supply are important indicators for Central Bedfordshire as they are indicative of the health and attractiveness of the

area and whether businesses have access to the space they need to operate and grow.

## Employment Space & Town Centres Overview

### **Former B class uses have accounted for the highest proportion of non residential completions since 2015**

#### **Data Source**

Data used is from Central Bedfordshire Council Annual Monitoring information.

#### **Analysis**

- The analysis shows that in terms of non residential floorspace in Central Bedfordshire Council, former B class uses (B1, B2, B8) saw the greatest quantum of completions between 2015 and 2022. In the 2021/22 financial year, the area saw 81,256 sqm of floorspace completed.
- Former D class uses saw the next highest quantum of completions in 2022 at 15,144 sqm.
- In terms of town centre retail vacancies since 2015, levels were highest in May 2016 (9.1%). In 2022, vacancy levels increased to 8.7% in August, which is close to the highest level during that period. However, they fell to 7.4% in November that year.

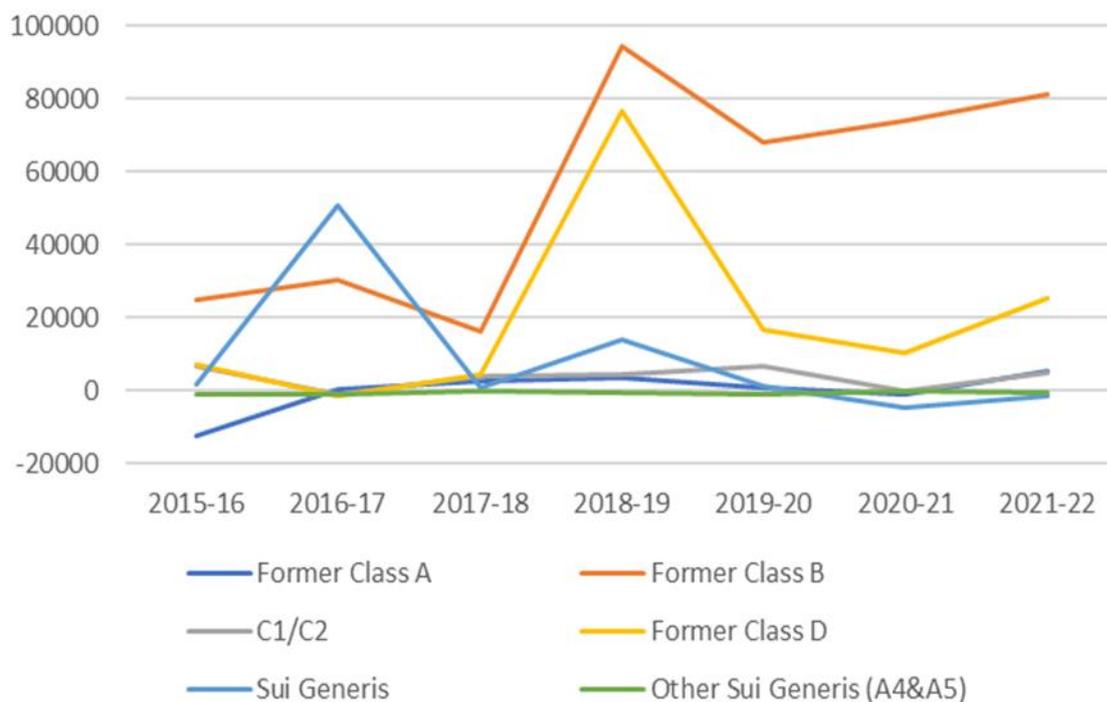
#### **Implications**

- This is important because... the provision of employment floorspace determines the type of economic activity which can take place locally. If there

is not sufficient new provision of space of the right quality and type, this can restrict development which takes place.

- In terms of retail town centre vacancy rates, a high vacancy rate indicates a low level of demand and is often tied to the strength of the economy at that time. An increase in online retail has impacted on demand for town centre units and it is important that this is monitored.

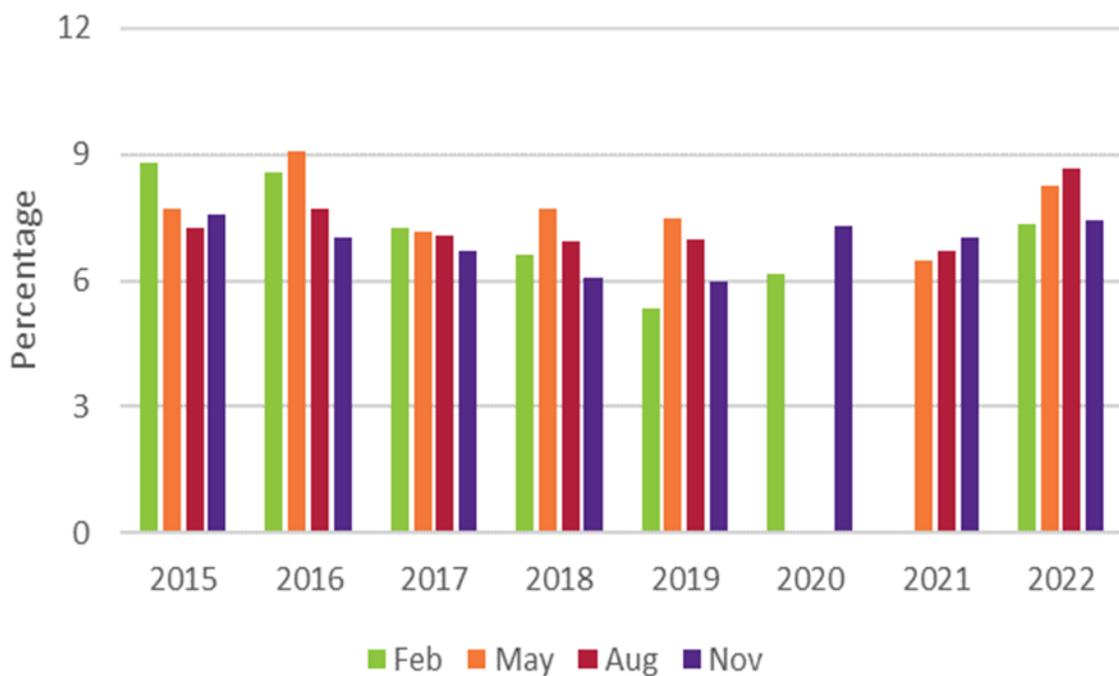
### Non-residential floorspace completions



- The completion of non residential floorspace in Central Bedfordshire has varied year on year since 2015.
- Former B class (B1, B2, B8) space has seen the greatest quantum of completions in terms of non residential floorspace. In 2022, 81,256 sqm of former B use class space was delivered compared to 74,300 sq m in 2021.

- Former Class D uses have accounted for the second highest amount of non residential space. This use class includes health/medical services, creche/daycare, sport and recreation uses and community halls. In 2022, this accounted for 25,346 sqm of space, which was an increase on 2021 (10,599 sqm) – for this class. This figures includes some non-employment generating uses.
- There was a loss of Sui Generis uses (theatre, laundrettes, fuel stations etc) of -1,400 sqm in 2022.

### Town Centre vacancy levels (Post-2015)



- The chart shows the proportion of vacant retail units in Central Bedfordshire between 2015 and 2022.
- Vacancy rates were the highest in May 2016, with 9.1% of retail units vacant. The vacancy rate was the lowest in February 2019 at 5.4%.

- In February 2022, the retail vacancy rate in Central Bedfordshire was 7.4%. This increased to 8.3% in May, with a 0.4 percentage point increase in August (8.7%), nearly reaching the highest levels over the period. However, the vacancy rate fell to 7.4% in November 2022.

## Travel

Modes of travel and transportation are important to local economies because they enable people to access goods, services, and opportunities. Access to transportation can also support economic growth and development by facilitating the movement of goods, people, and ideas.

## Travel

**Central Bedfordshire experienced the fourth highest volume of rail passengers after North Hertfordshire, Milton Keynes and Luton**

### Data Source

The data sources used are the Department for Transport Active Travel statistics on proportion of adults who walk and cycle in 2021. Data from Office of Rail and Road (ORR) on estimates of station usage in the years 2006 to 2021 was used.

Compound Annual Growth Rates (CAGR) have been used. The CAGR represents the average annual growth rate over a period, given that growth compounds year-on-year. It is calculated by taking the total percentage change over the period and raising it to the power of  $1/n$  where  $n$  is the number of years in period.

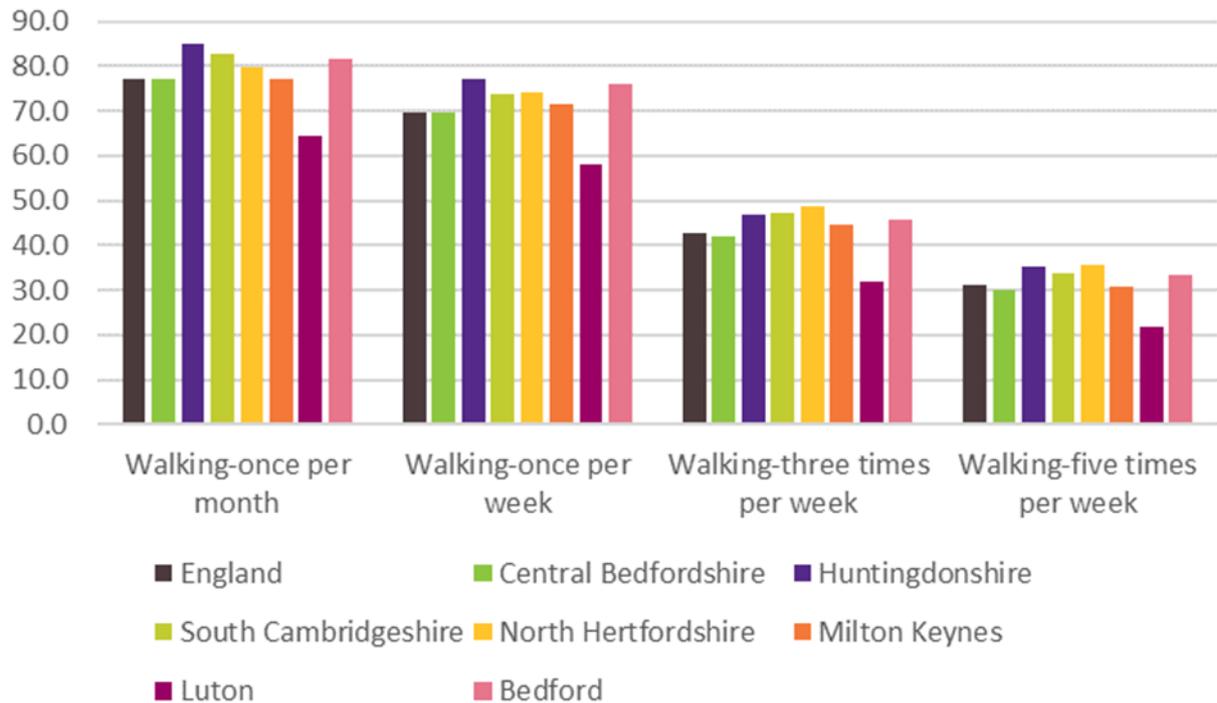
### Analysis

- The analysis shows that between 2006 and 2021, rail stations in Central Bedfordshire saw the fourth highest volume of entries and exits compared to benchmark areas. North Hertfordshire, Milton Keynes and Luton saw higher levels than the district. Within the local authority area, Leighton Buzzard experienced the highest volume of entries and exits followed by Flitwick and Biggleswade.
- The analysis shows that less than half (41%) of people in Central Bedfordshire walk three times a week, and only 30% walk at least five times a week. This is similar to the national average.
- Only 4.5% of people cycle three times a week in central Bedfordshire compared to 3.9% nationally . Around 1.4% of people cycle at least five times a week compared to 2.1% nationally.

### **Implications**

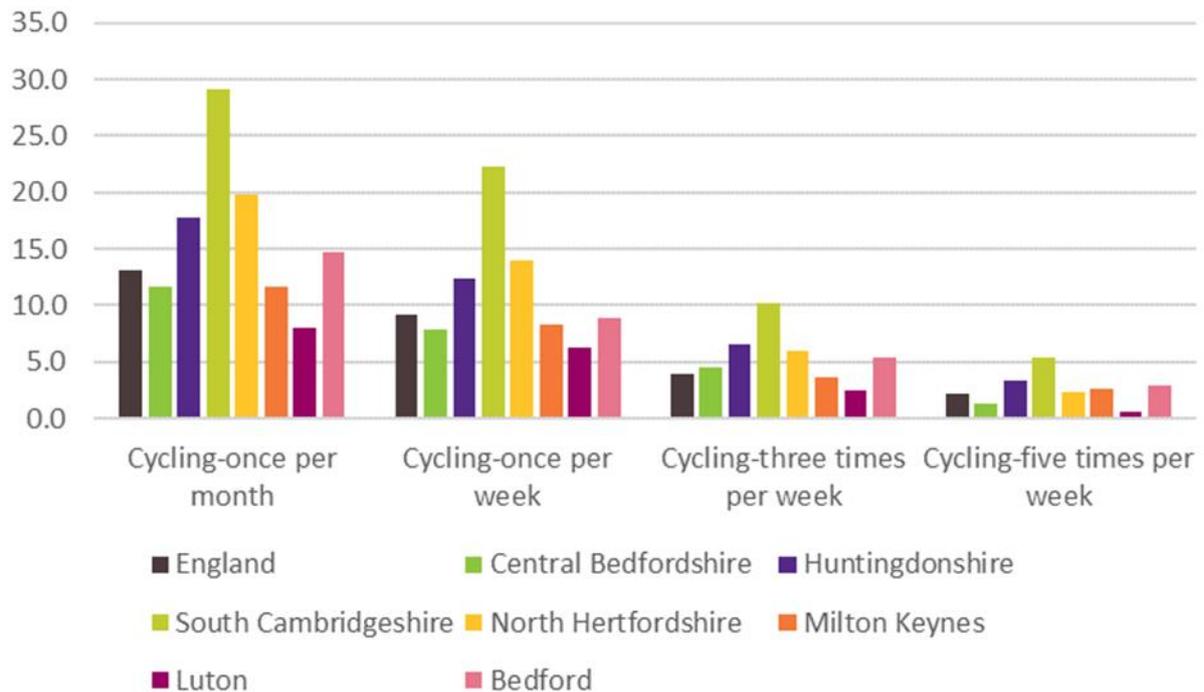
- This is important because... there is an increasing focus on active travel to support people's health and wellbeing. There is also an increased focus on supporting travel by public transport, as a more sustainable means of travel.

### **Walking**



- Active travel refers to walking and cycling as an alternative means to using the car for any journey.
- In 2021, 77.1% of adults in Central Bedfordshire walk at least once a month and 69.8% walk at least once a week. Less than half (42%) walk at least three times a week and only 30% walk at least five times a week. These percentages are close to the national averages.
- Amongst the comparator areas, Huntingdonshire has the highest proportion of adults who walk and Luton has the lowest.

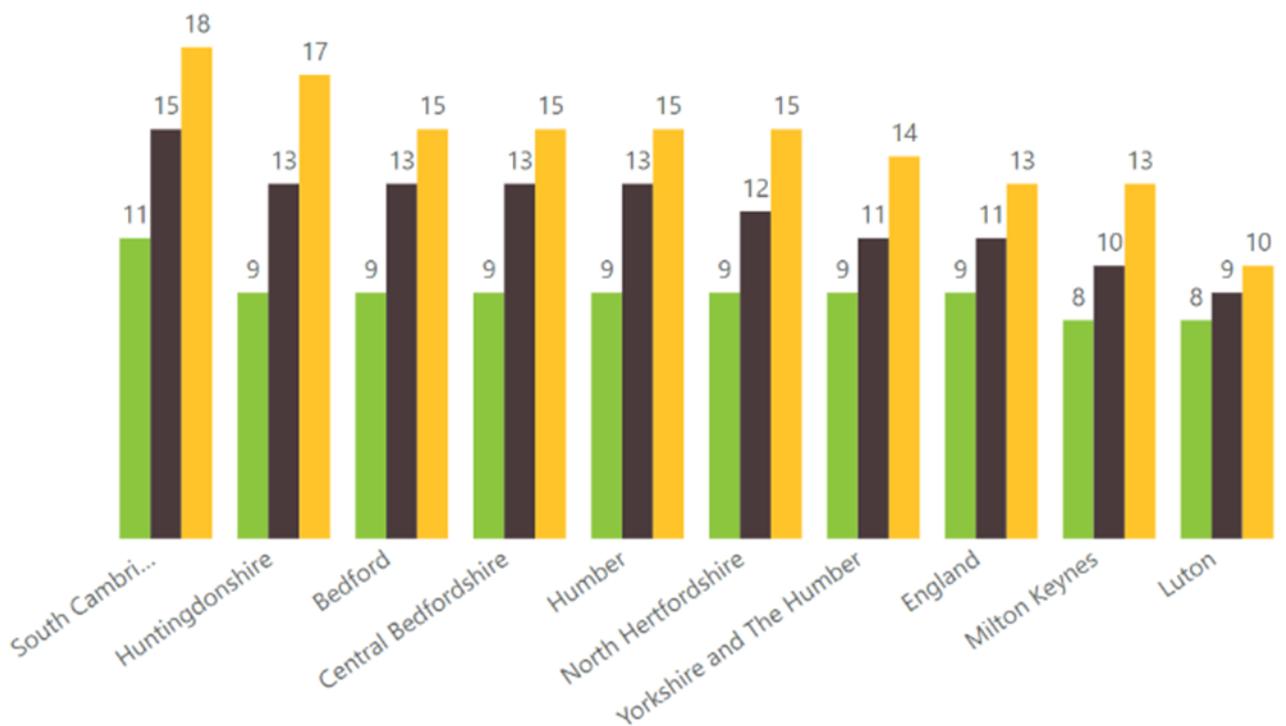
## Cycling



- In 2021, 11.7% of adults in Central Bedfordshire cycle at least once per month and 7.9% cycle once per week. Only 4.5% of people cycle three times per week, and 1.4% cycle at least five times a week.
- These values are mostly below the national average, with 13.1% of adults in England cycling once per month and 9.1% cycling at least once per week. Only 3.9% of people in England cycle three times per week, and 2.1% cycle at least five times per week.
- Amongst the comparator areas, South Cambridgeshire has the highest proportion of adults who cycle for any purpose and Luton has the smallest proportion of adults that cycle for any purpose.

## Journey times

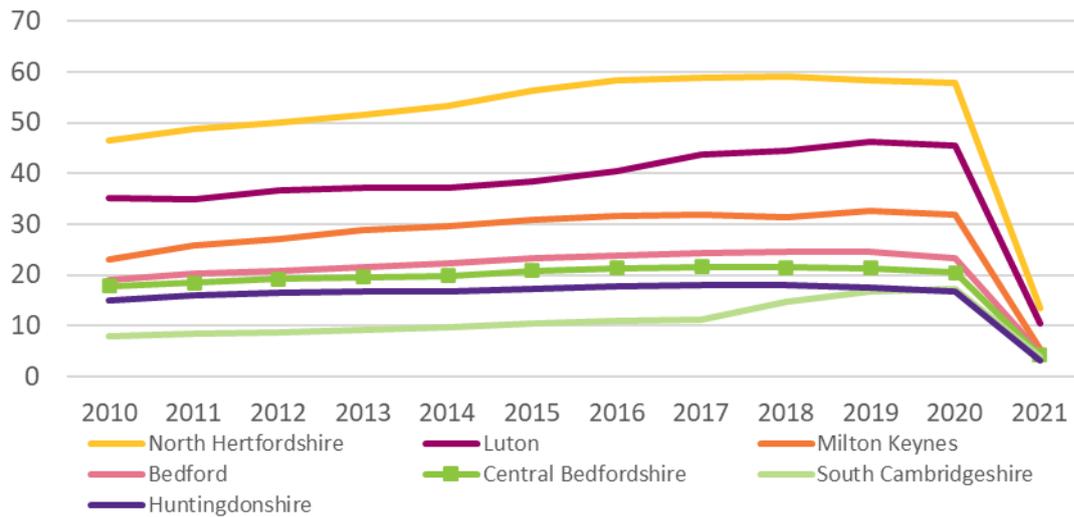
Travel Type ● Car ● Cycle ● Public Transport/Walk



- The adjacent chart shows the average time it takes to travel to an employment centre with at least 500 jobs, by different modes of travel in 2017 (the latest available data).
- It can be seen that, with the exception of South Cambridge, travel times by car are broadly similar across all areas.
- There is a larger range in the travel time to the nearest employment centre when travelling by bicycle. On this measure, Central Bedfordshire (13 minutes on average to the nearest employment centre with at least 500 jobs) performs worse than most comparator areas including England (11 minutes).
- When looking at times to the nearest employment centre by either public transport or walking (or both), Central Bedfordshire (15 minutes) performs better than the likes of South Cambridgeshire (18 minutes) and

Huntingdonshire (17 minutes) but worse than the national average / England (13 minutes).

### Rail Patronage by district



Area	2015 entries and exits	2020 entries and exits	5-year CAGR (2015-2020)
Central Bedfordshire	5,698,590	6,009,334	1.07%
Bedford	3,894,236	4,061,454	0.84%
Luton	8,197,256	9,695,924	3.42%
Milton Keynes	8,159,380	8,641,502	1.15%
North Hertfordshire	7,400,354	7,705,596	0.81%
South Cambridgeshire	1,601,594	2,783,076	11.68%
Huntingdonshire	3,041,854	2,984,752	-0.38%

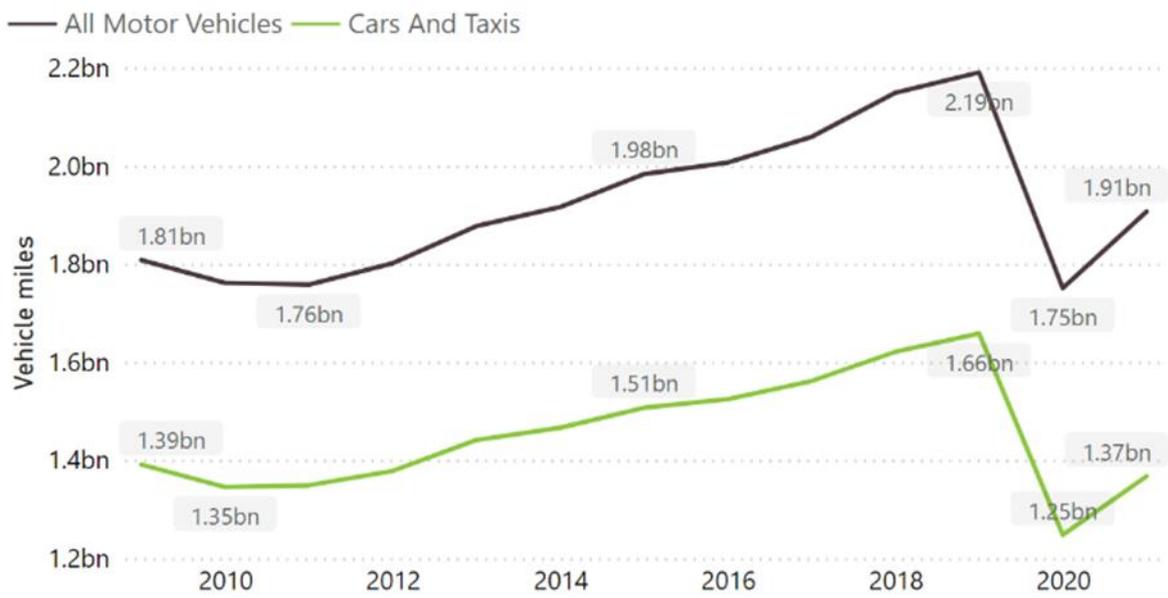
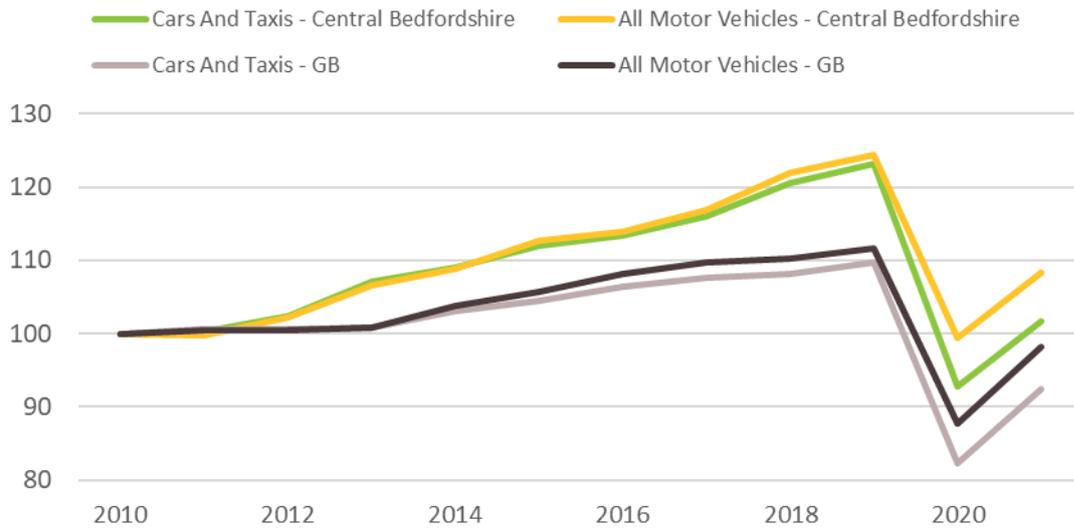
- The chart above shows train passenger entries and exit by district between 2006 and 2021. There was a clear decline in entries and exits in 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In terms of the overall volume, Central Bedfordshire experiences the fourth highest volume after North Hertfordshire, Milton Keynes and Luton.



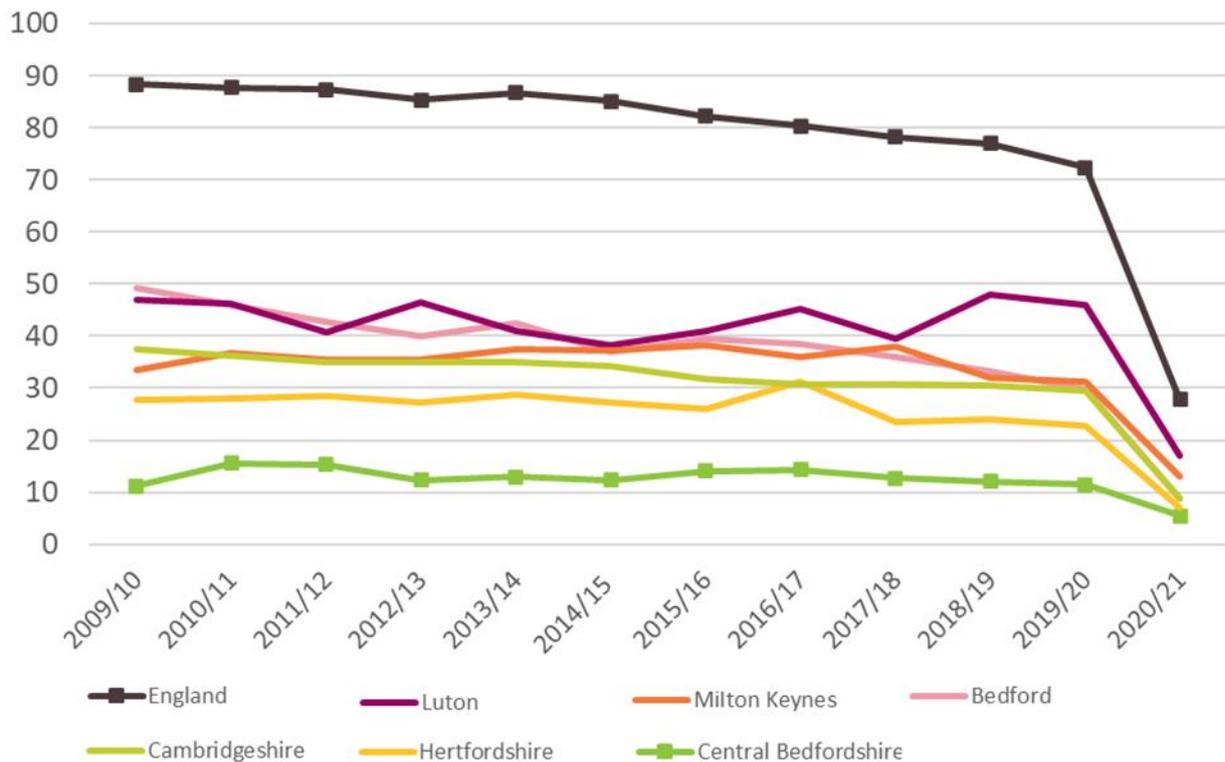
Area	5-year CAGR (2015-2020)
Arlesey	2.12%
Biggleswade	1.84%
Flitwick	1.40%
Harlington	0.57%
Leighton Buzzard	0.30%
Millbrook	-5.65%
Sandy	-0.25%

## Road Traffic

- The first chart shows the change in volume of traffic by year and vehicle type in Central Bedfordshire and Great Britain where 2010 is indexed to 100. This shows that over the last decade, Central Bedfordshire has consistently seen a stronger growth in the volume of traffic by all types of motor vehicles than Great Britain.
- The second chart shows the total volume of vehicle miles (in billions) measured over time by vehicle type in Central Bedfordshire. This shows that Central Bedfordshire experienced an approximate 20% drop in the volume of traffic between 2019 and 2020. This compares to 21% nationally. In 2021, the volume of traffic was up 9% in Central Bedfordshire, compared to 12% across Great Britain. This suggests that Central Bedfordshire roads are not returning to the pre-pandemic level at the same rate as the rest of Britain.



## Bus Patronage



- The adjacent chart shows the number of bus passenger journeys per capita by area over the past decade.
- Central Bedfordshire stands out from all comparator areas as having the consistently lowest prevalence of bus travel.
- Bus travel has been declining nationally prior to the onset of COVID-19 and decreased further as a result of lockdown travel restrictions. In England, journeys reduced from approximately 70 per capita in 2019/20 to below 30 in 2020/21. This is striking because at no point in the past decade, even as far back as 2009, has Central Bedfordshire recorded anywhere near 20 journeys per capita in a given year.
- Bus-travel in Central Bedfordshire has been consistently below other areas. This is partly a reflection of the nature of this rural area, in which bus operators consider it difficult to turn a profit, and as such offer fewer services.

# Broadband & Mobile Coverage

Broadband and mobile coverage refer to the availability and quality of connectivity in Central Bedfordshire. As a rural area, access to the internet and mobile phone services is essential for businesses and individuals to communicate, access resources and compete in the global market.

## Broadband & Mobile Coverage Overview

**Superfast broadband coverage in Central Bedfordshire is below comparator areas but this has been increasing**

### Data Source

Ofcom data on superfast broadband coverage in 2017 and 2022.

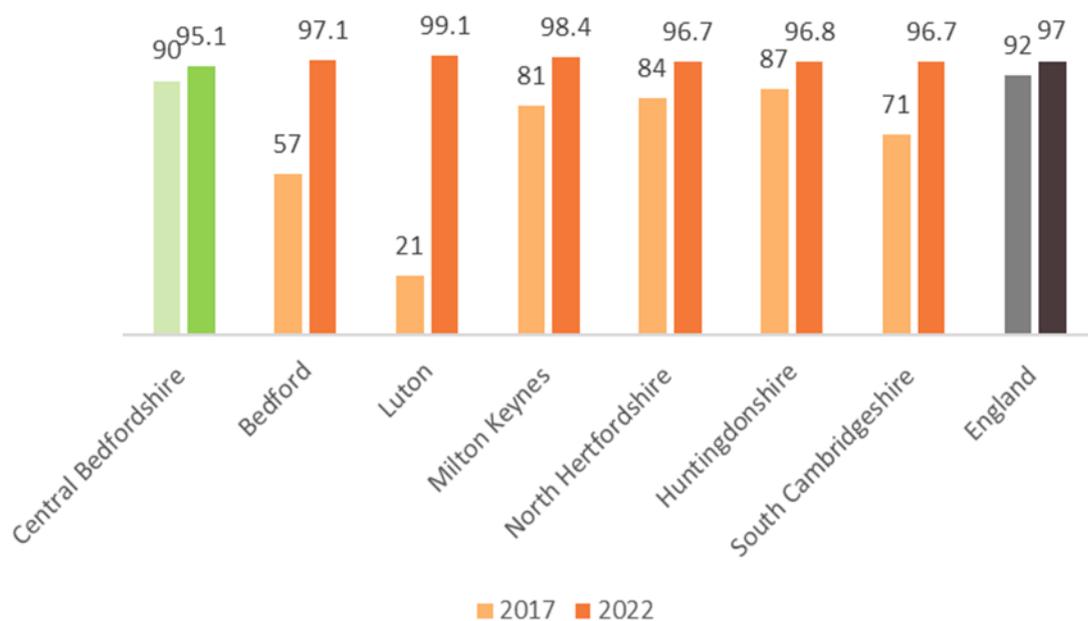
### Analysis

- The analysis shows that in 2022, 95.1% of Central Bedfordshire was connected to superfast broadband. This is below the national average (97%) and all comparator areas.

### Implications

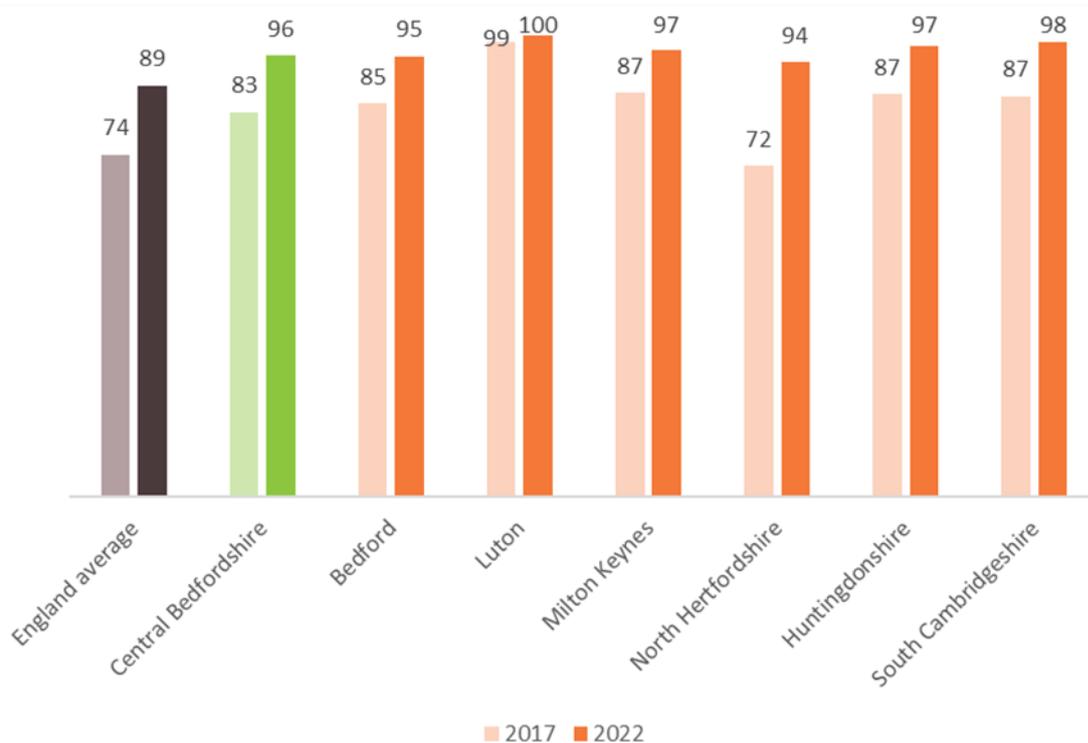
This is important because good access to superfast broadband is essential to secure a strong and successful business base.

## Broadband Speeds



- In 2022, 95.1% of Central Bedfordshire was connected to superfast broadband. This is below the national average (97%) and all comparator areas.
- Central Bedfordshire has experienced an increase in superfast broadband coverage over the past 5 years. In 2017, Central Bedfordshire had 90% superfast broadband coverage and this increased by 5.1 percentage points in 2022.
- Other areas such as Luton and Milton Keynes had higher levels of coverage in terms of superfast broadband, with 99.1% and 98.4% respectively in 2022.

## Mobile Coverage



- In 2022, 96% of outdoor areas in Central Bedfordshire have access to 4G services from at least 4 operators. This is greater than the national average of 89%.
- Central Bedfordshire has witnessed an increase in outdoor 4G coverage in the past five years. In 2017, the percentage was 83%.
- Luton, given its urban character, unsurprisingly has more superior levels of coverage. Central Bedfordshire is, however, far exceeding the national average in its covering – which bodes well for potentially isolated rural areas in the district, as technology progresses from 4g to 5g coverage.

## Sustainability

Sustainability is an important consideration for Central Bedfordshire's economy because it ensures that growth and development of the region can be achieved over the long term without negatively impacting the environment

## Sustainability Overview

**Per capita greenhouse gas emissions in Central Bedfordshire are below the England average and those for South Cambridgeshire**

### Data Source

The data sources used are GOV.UK Local Authority greenhouse gas emissions estimates 2018-2020. GOV.UK data on Live tables on Energy Performance of Building Certificates (EPC) in 2017-2022 was used. EPC shows how much energy a building will use and how much carbon it will emit each year. It indicates how energy efficient a property is. It ranges from a rating of A (very efficient) to G (least efficient). GOV.UK data on Publicly available electric vehicle charging devices at all speeds by local authority was also used.

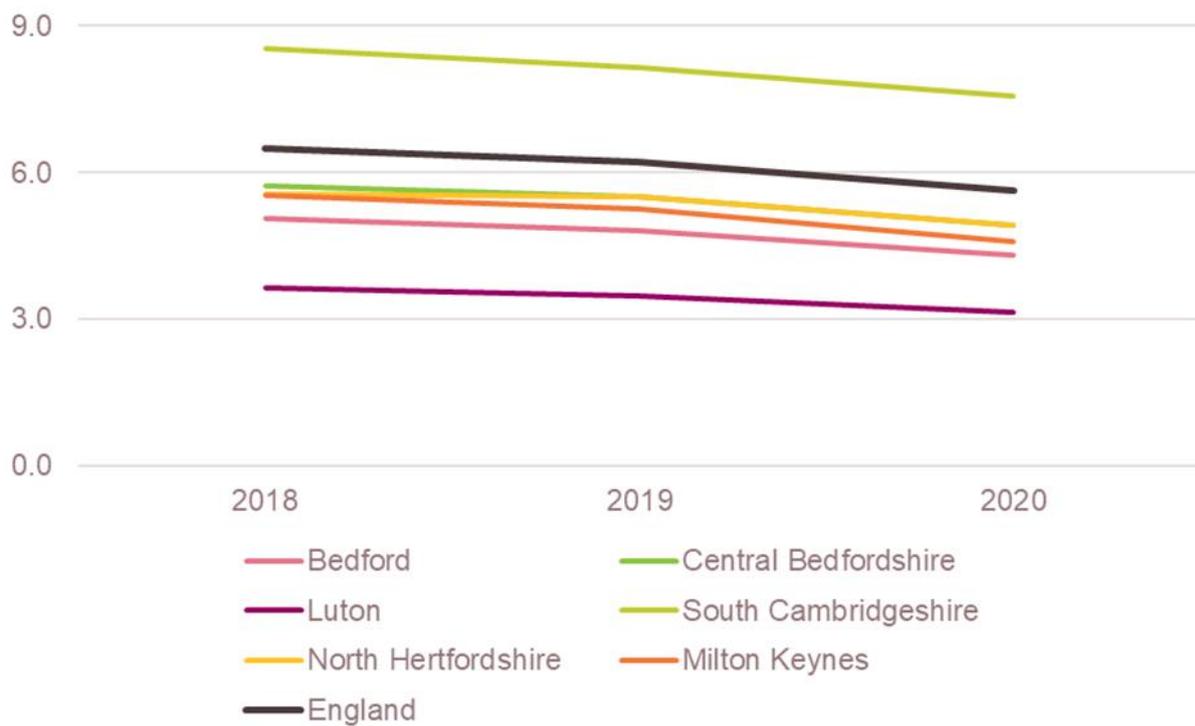
### Analysis

- The analysis shows that per capita greenhouse gas emissions in Central Bedfordshire in 2020 were 4.9 which is below that for England (5.6).
- Around 50% of EPCs in Central Bedfordshire issued in 2022 were above Grade C or above, which is higher than the England and Wales average.
- Central Bedfordshire performs less well against comparator areas in terms of the number of electrical vehicle charge points per 100,000 people. A figure of only 20 compares to 52 nationally.

### Implications

- This is important because there is a strong emphasis on sustainability issues locally, nationally and internationally. This is reflected in the Council's own Sustainability Plan 2020-2030, which commits to the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

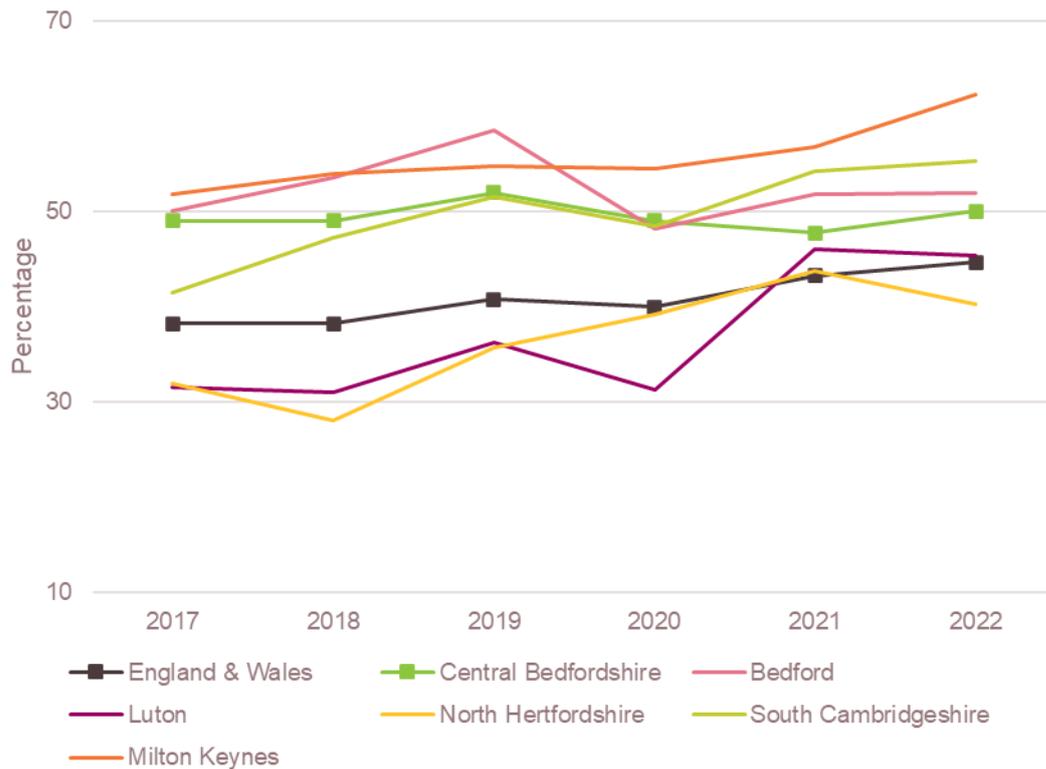
## Greenhouse Gases



- The chart shows the per capita greenhouse gas emissions (in tonnes per annum) in Central Bedfordshire and comparator areas between 2018 and 2020.
- In 2018, per capita greenhouse emissions in Central Bedfordshire were equivalent to 5.7. This value decreased to 4.9 in 2020, which is equivalent to a 14% decrease. These values are lower than those for England as a whole, which is positive. In 2018, per capita greenhouse emissions in England were 6.5 and this reduced to 5.6 in 2020.

- Amongst the comparator areas, Luton has the lowest overall per capita emissions over time. All areas have witnessed a decline in per capita greenhouse emissions between 2018 and 2020.

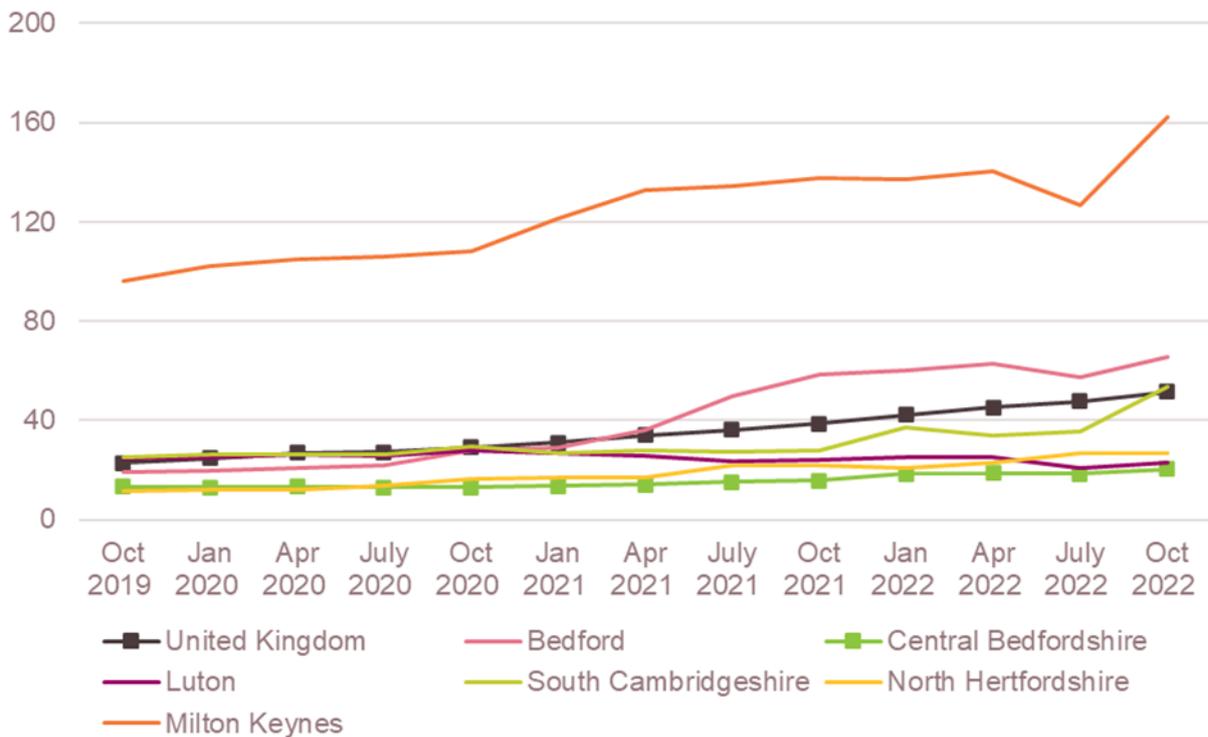
## Energy Performance of Buildings Certificates



- The chart shows the annual average energy performance certificates (EPC) issued at grade C or above in Central Bedfordshire and comparator areas between 2017 and 2022; Grade A being the most efficient and Grade D being the average rating. An EPC will be issued before a building is marketed for sale or rent
- In 2022, around 50% of EPCs issued in Central Bedfordshire were at grade C or above, which is higher than the England & Wales average (44.7%). This is positive since Grade A is the most efficient rating.

- Over the past five years, Central Bedfordshire's highest percentage was in 2019 at 52%, dropping to 47.8% in 2021, and then increasing again to 50% in 2022. However, such fluctuation can be accounted for on the basis that older properties, which had no EPC issued after construction, will have one issued if they come to market.
- In 2022, Milton Keynes has issued the highest proportion of EPCs at grade C or above (62.3%), followed by South Cambridgeshire (55.3%). The proportion was lower for Luton and North Hertfordshire (45.3% and 40.3% respectively).

### Electric vehicle charge points



- In October 2022, Central Bedfordshire had a total of 20 publicly available electric vehicle charge points per 100,000 people. This was significantly lower than the national average (52) and lower than comparator areas.

- Central Bedfordshire has experienced a substantial growth in charge points from 13 charge points per 100,000 people in 2019 to 20 in 2022, equivalent to a 54% increase.
- Amongst the comparator areas, Milton Keynes has had the highest number of charge points per 100,000 people. In 2022, there were 162 charge points per 100,000 people in Milton Keynes. The second highest was in Bedford, with 65 charge points per 100,000 people.

## Sub-district analysis

### Key Findings

This section examines data on economic performance at Lower Super-Output Area (LSOA) and Middle Super-Output Area (MSOA) levels to understand variations in the region.

- **Economic performance varies across Central Bedfordshire, with large areas in the North East seeing their economic output (GVA) stagnate or contract in the years 2014-19** (latest data). The contraction has been particularly severe in the rural areas to the north of Shefford and west of Stotfold.
- **Some areas have seen large increases in employment between 2016-21**, for instance near Dunstable and Biggleswade, while others have experienced contractions, most notably in the North East and South East of Central Bedfordshire.

- **Central Bedfordshire is experiencing a nearly uniform decrease in its working-age population**, though some areas are bucking this trend including Ampthill, Houghton Regis, and Dunstable.
- **There is a declining population of people aged 15 or below in a large rural area stretching from Woburn to Biggleswade**. These areas are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of an ageing population.
- **Central Bedfordshire's deprived areas are primarily concentrated around Houston Regis and Dunstable**, as ranked on the MHCLG's 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).
- **The vast majority of Central Bedfordshire's deprived areas are in the vicinity of Houghton Regis and Dunstable**, as ranked on the MHCLG's 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation of English LSOAs. There are also some pockets of significant rural deprivation which lie in the rural areas between Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable as well as north of Shefford.
- **Central Bedfordshire is characterised by emerging business clusters** around Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable and Houston Regis, all within the vicinity of Luton.

## Economy

Understanding economic growth across small areas within Central Bedfordshire provides insight into spatial differences within the local economy and can help to target economic development efforts.

### Economy – Headlines

**Central Bedfordshire's economic output and labour market performance varies, with the North East of the district performing less well.**

### **Data Source**

Data sources used: Regional Gross Value Added by Industry, ONS, 2022; Business Register and Employment Survey, ONS via Nomis, 2022

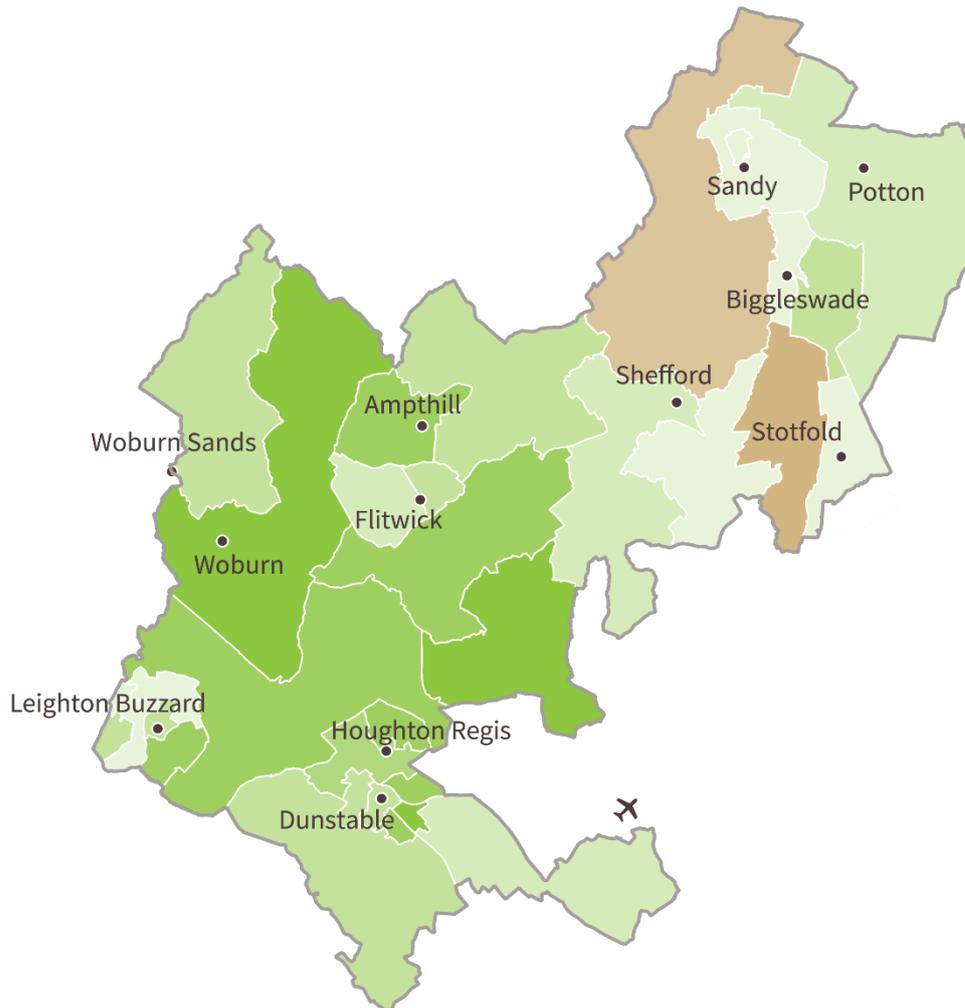
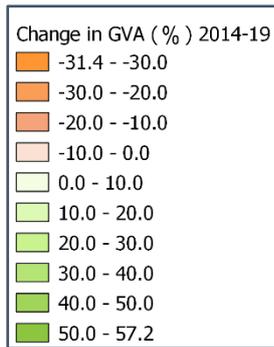
### **Analysis**

- The analysis shows that economic output in North-eastern parts of Central Bedfordshire have declined since 2015, whilst the rest of the district has seen strong growth. The North-East of the district has also seen more areas with declining employment.

### **Implications**

- This matters because... it is important to understand the key areas of growth and decline in order to direct support to respond to these issues.

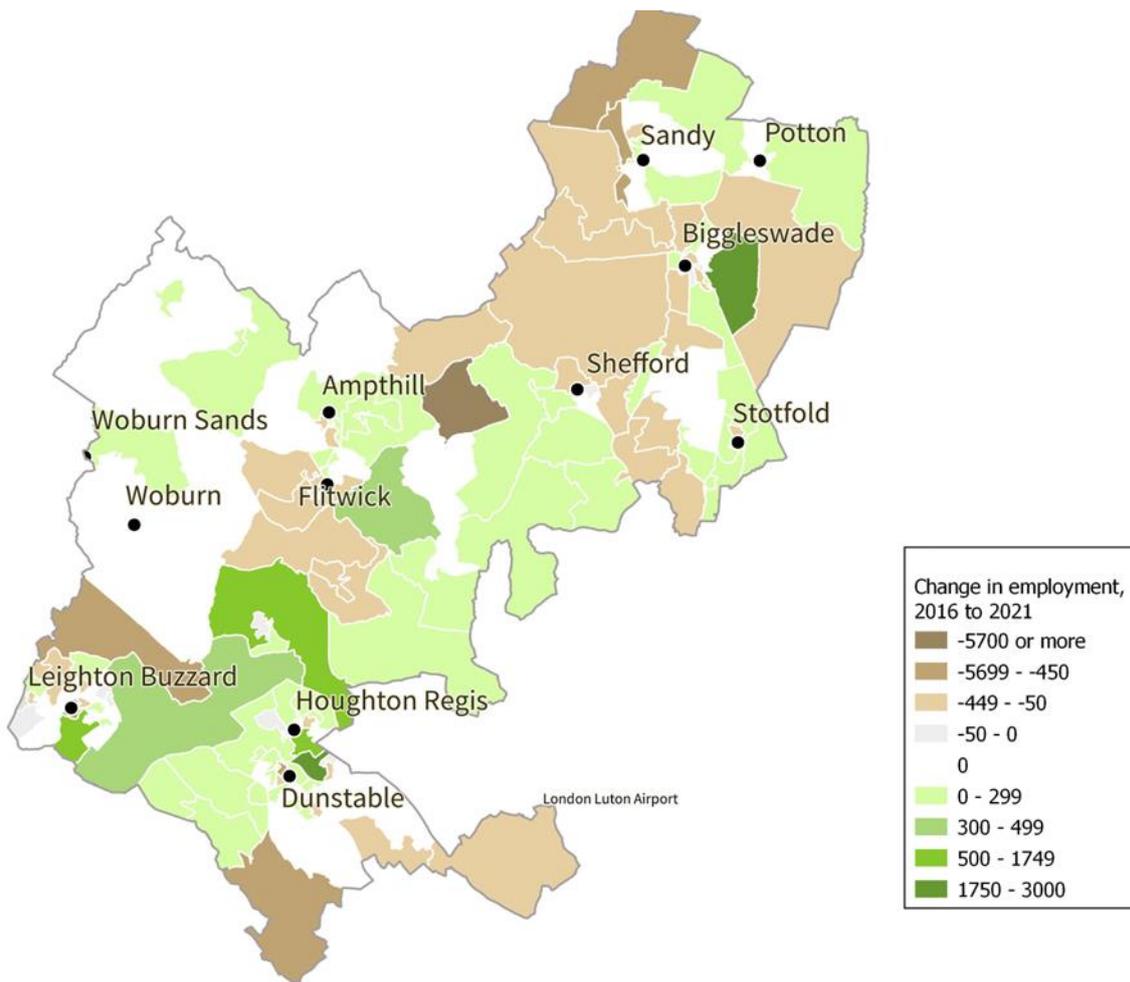
Gross Value Added (GVA)



- The adjacent map shows the change in GVA produced in Central Bedfordshire, Gross Value Added (GVA) is a measure of the value of goods and services produced in the local economy.
- Central Bedfordshire as a whole saw impressive GVA growth of 21% over this period, though there was significant variation within the district.

- Growth in the north east has been below average, with substantial declines of up to -31% seen in two rural MSOAs west of Sandy and Stotfold.
- The centre and west of Central Bedfordshire had particularly strong growth above 50%, most notably around Woburn and north of Luton.

## Change in Employment



- The district contains a mixture of both strongly growing and strongly declining areas of employment. Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable, and Ampthill have each seen LSOAs lose more than 150 jobs since 2016.

- One of Central Bedfordshire LSOAs (008E), which lies between Ampthill and Shefford and intersects several wards, lost four thousand jobs in one sector (82990: Other business support service activities not elsewhere classified) between 2016 and 2021.
- The North-Eastern part of Central Bedfordshire has several large rural areas that have lost substantial numbers of jobs, particularly in the vicinity of Sandy. Conversely, the rural belt in the lower middle part of the district (extending from the southern outskirts of Leighton Buzzard to Warden Hill), has seen buoyant growth.

## Population

Understanding the growth and characteristics of Central Bedfordshire's population across small areas provides insight into where resources are most needed and how best to address the differing needs of the district's communities.

### Population - Headlines

The population structure in Central Bedfordshire has been changing, with more evident change to the North East and South West of the district.

### Data Source

The ONS mid year population estimates, 2021 and Claimant Count, ONS via Nomis, 2022

### Analysis

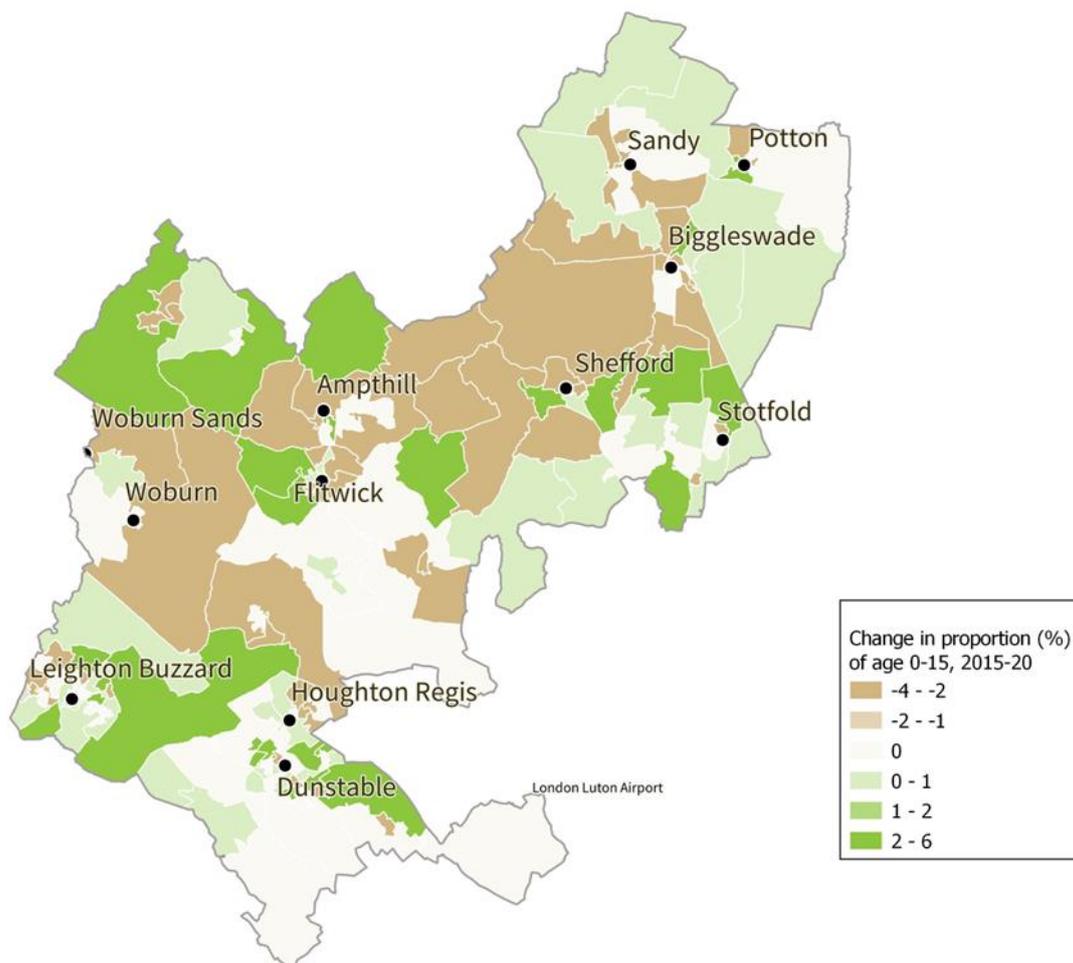
The analysis shows that across the district of Central Bedfordshire there has been strong growth in the elderly population. This has been particularly the case in the

North East. Additionally, the youth population has declined, mainly in the rural areas to the northeast of the district. In terms of the working age (16-64) population, there has also been a decrease, specifically in the southwest of the district.

### Implications

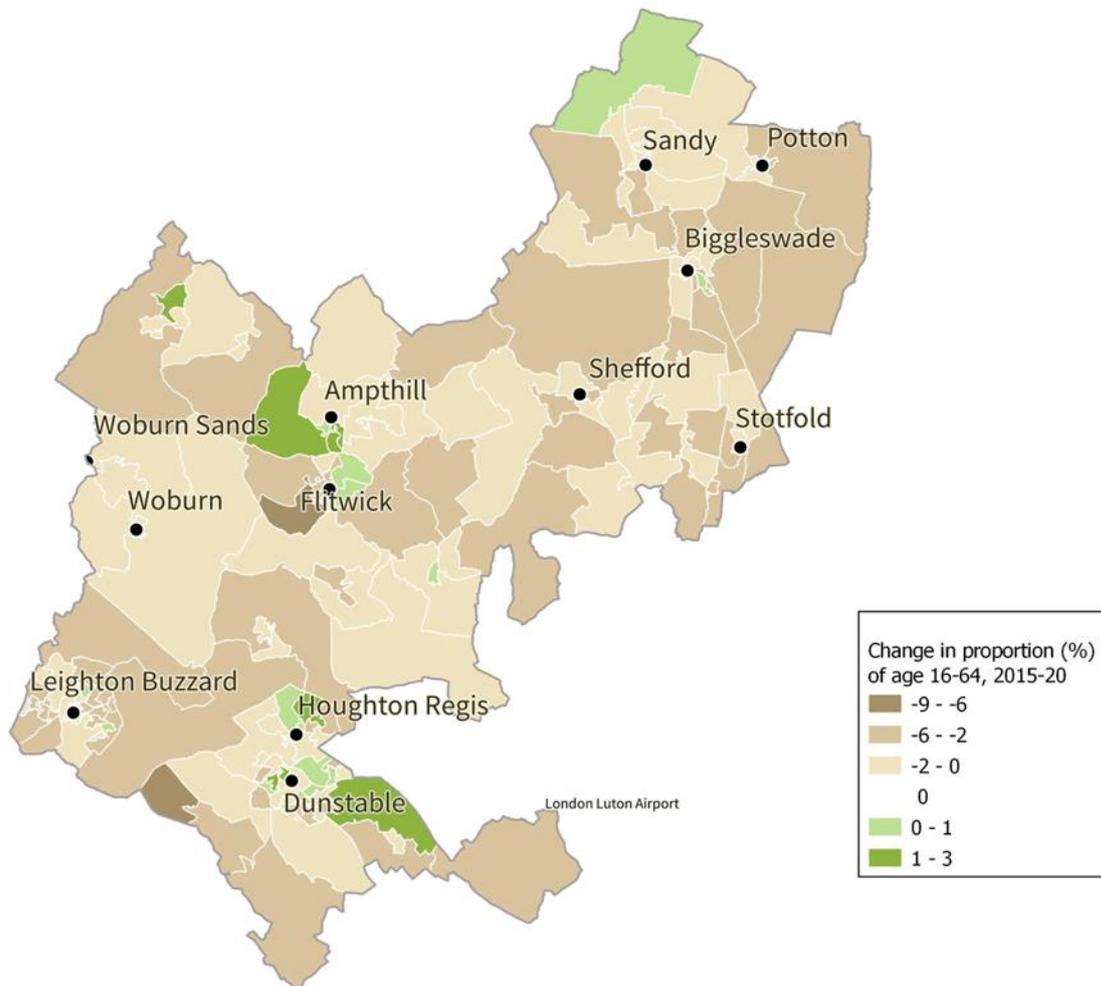
- This is important because.....a decline in the working age population could create skills shortages within the district and result in slowed economic growth. Furthermore, the increasing elderly population likely means a large burden of care for the local authorities as demand for healthcare will increase.

### Change in population aged 0 – 15



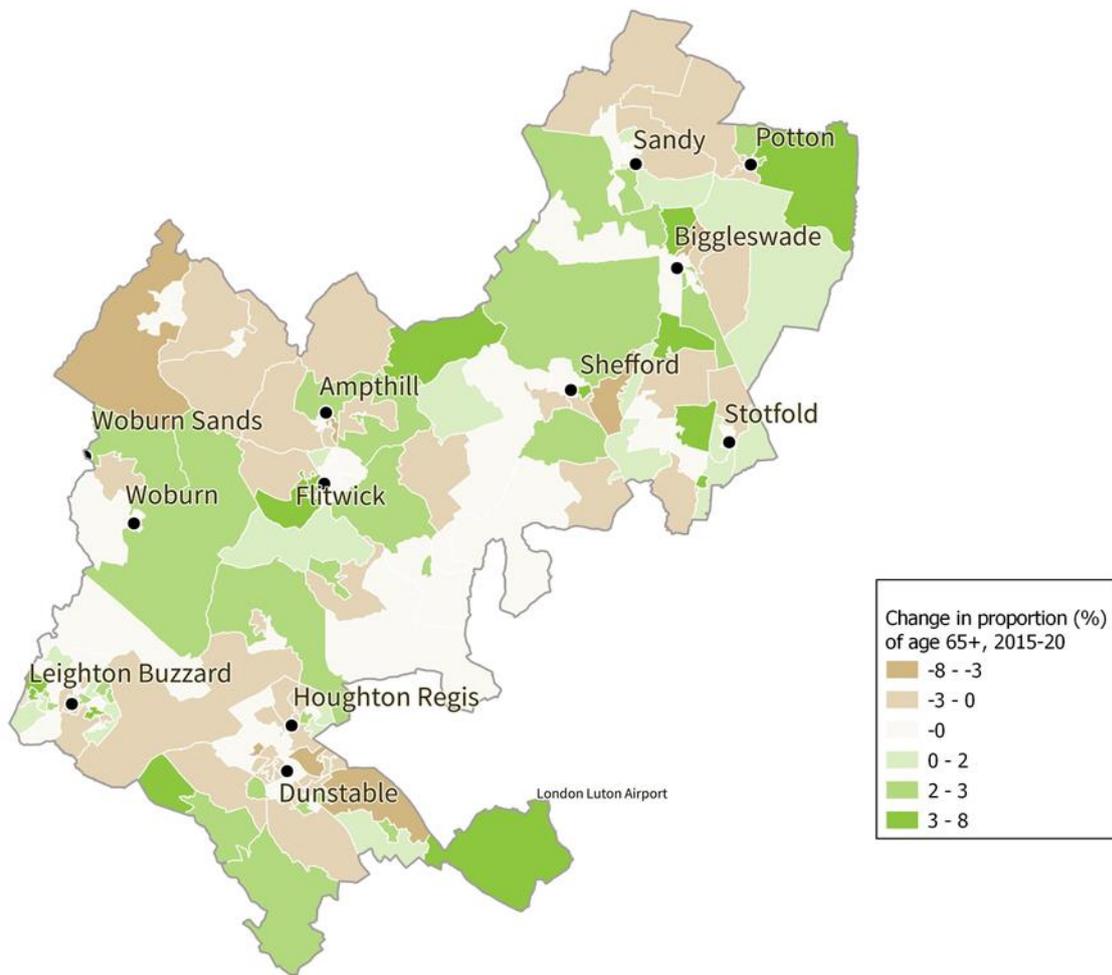
- The map shows fluctuating levels of growth within this age group across Bedfordshire.
- Significant parts of the district are experiencing a decline in the proportion of young people. This is especially the case in the rural areas around Shefford, Ampthill and Woburn.
- The areas mentioned above are all decreasing faster than the national rate (0% change over 5 years).
- At the same time, other parts of Central Bedfordshire, particularly around Dunstable and to the south and east of Leighton Buzzard, are seeing an increasing proportion of young people.

Change in population aged 16 – 64



- The map highlights that different parts of the borough have largely differing rates of growth in the older cohort, with large rural areas showing no change.
- Furthermore, the map shows that there has been a decrease in the working age population. This is evident to the east of Biggleswade and around Woburn Sands.
- Growth in the working age population has tended to be focused on Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Ampthill. Growth in these areas has been in-line or greater than the national growth rate of 1% over 5 years.

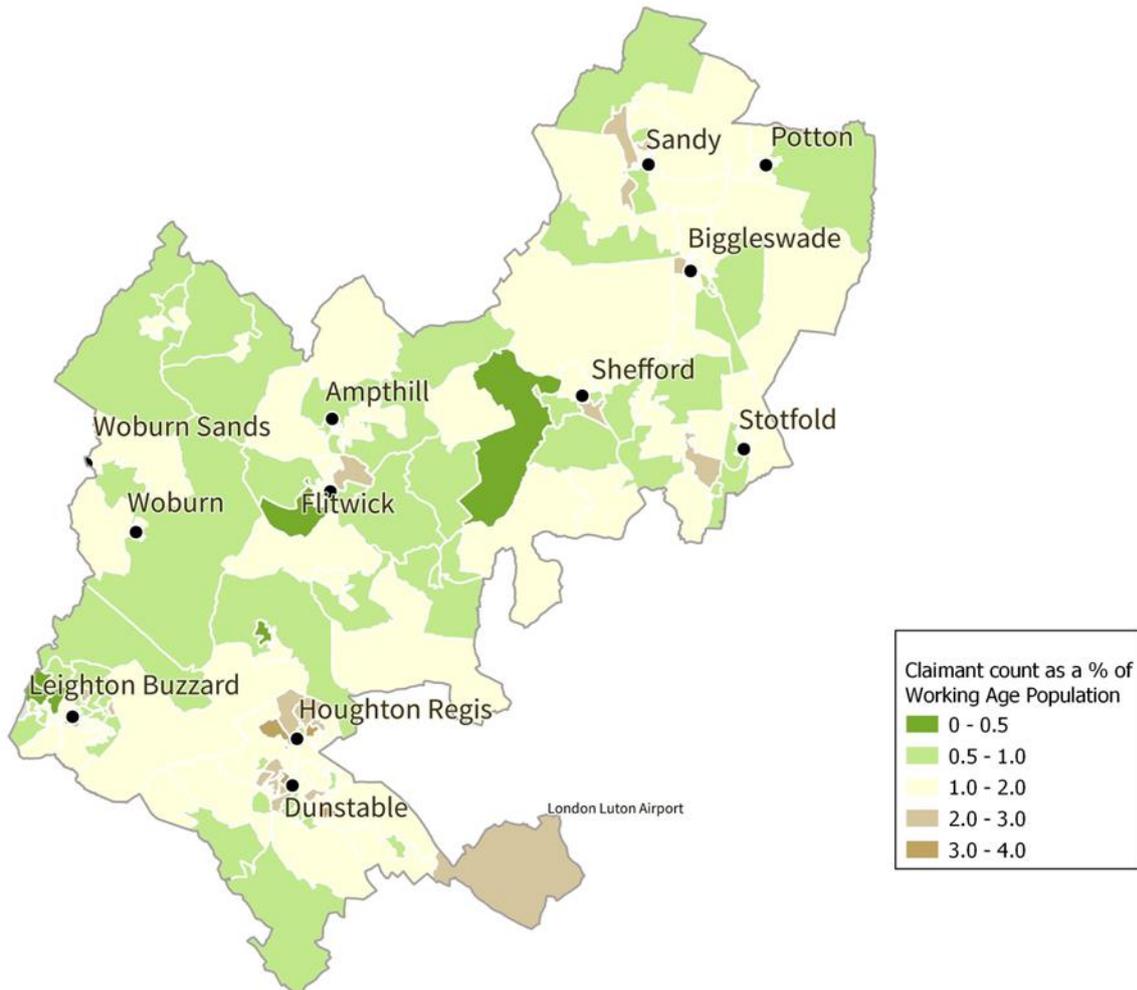
### Change in population aged 65+



- Over the timescale it is evident that different parts of the borough have had largely differing rates of growth in the elderly population.
- The proportion of elderly residents is declining in areas around Houghton Regis, Dunstable, and some northern and western parts of the district.
- Conversely, many rural areas across the district are seeing strong increases in this age cohort. This can be seen in areas around Shefford, and Woburn which have seen this age cohort grow by between 3% and 8%. This is far greater than the national trend which has seen a 1% proportional decrease in the 65+ age group.

- Central Bedfordshire has seen a 12% increase in the 65+ population which is higher than the national trend (7.7% increase) over the same time period.

## Benefit Claimants



- The adjacent map shows the estimated rate of people claiming universal credit amongst the working age population (those aged 16 – 64) in Central Bedfordshire. The claimant count figures are from October 2022, however, the latest working age population figures at the LSOA-level are for the year 2020. As such, the rate is an estimate based on the best data available.
- High rates (4.5%+) can be seen particularly around urban centres such as Houghton Regis, Dunstable, Flitwick and Leighton Buzzard. These all exceed

the national average (Great Britain) claimant rate of 3.9% as of October 2022.

However, the likes of Shefford and Stotfold buck the trend of high rates in urban areas, with these areas showing rates of 3% or below.

- Large portions of Central Bedfordshire, particularly the pockets of white you can see mapped, have a very low incidence of working age people claiming benefits as of October 2022.

## Deprivation

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) classify the relative deprivation of small areas, providing insight into where levels of poverty and other forms of deprivation are greatest across Central Bedfordshire.

### Deprivation Overview

**There are concentrations of deprivation in parts of the district, particularly around Houghton Regis and Dunstable.**

### Data Source

English Indices of Deprivation from the Department of Levelling Up, Communities and Local Government (2019). The Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks every small area in England from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived area). It is common to describe how relatively deprived a small area is by saying whether it falls among the most deprived 10 per cent, 20 per cent, 30 per cent, etc. of small areas in England. To help with this, deprivation 'deciles' are published alongside ranks.

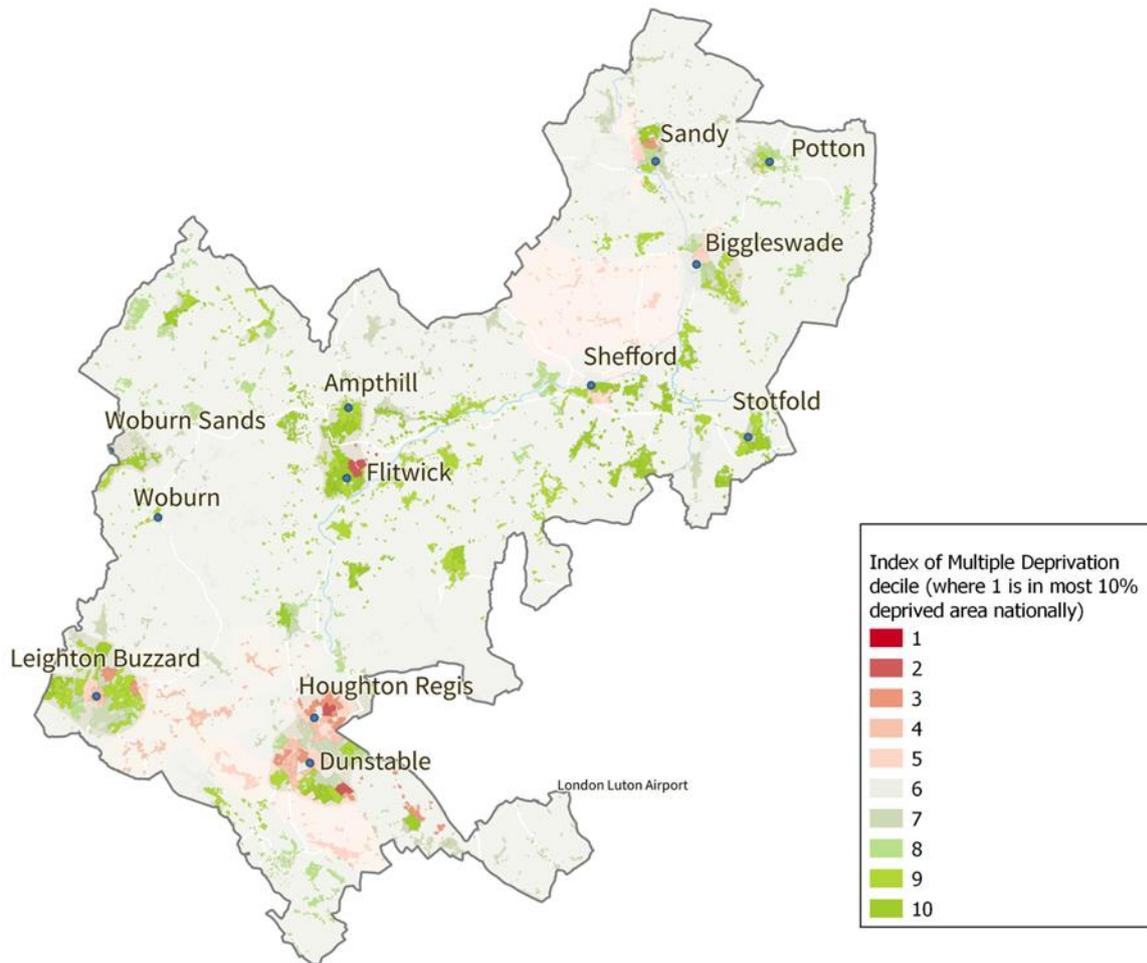
### Analysis

- The analysis shows that the highest levels of deprivation in the district are concentrated in Houghton Regis, and to a slightly lesser extent around Dunstable.
- Other more urban areas such as Ampthill and Biggleswade are much less deprived and are within the 40% least deprived areas nationally. There are low levels of deprivation around Flitwick, with the exception of the northeast part of the town. Leighton Buzzard also has varied levels of deprivation, with higher levels within the more central area.

### **Implications**

- This is important because, the data highlights particular concentrations of deprivation which can be masked by affluence overall across a district. It enables local authorities to understand which areas have the greatest need.

### **Index of Multiple Deprivation**



- The map shows the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) in Central Bedfordshire using data from 2019.
- The map shows that deprivation is concentrated within the most urban parts of the district, particularly in the Southwest, around Houghton Regis and Dunstable.
- With the exception of the northeast of Flitwick, the other urban areas of the district fall within the least deprived areas nationally.
- The map has been produced using a building layer which imposes the deprivation data specifically onto buildings within the LSOA highlighting the

concentration of population. The layer allows for more accurate observations of deprivation across the district.

## Sectoral Analysis

Understanding variations in economic sectoral strength across Central Bedfordshire allows informed decisions to be made about how to allocate resources and support economic development.

### Sectoral analysis – Headlines

**There are concentrations of business in more urban parts of Central Bedfordshire, particularly around Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton Buzzard**

#### **Data Source**

Companies House data product, September 2022

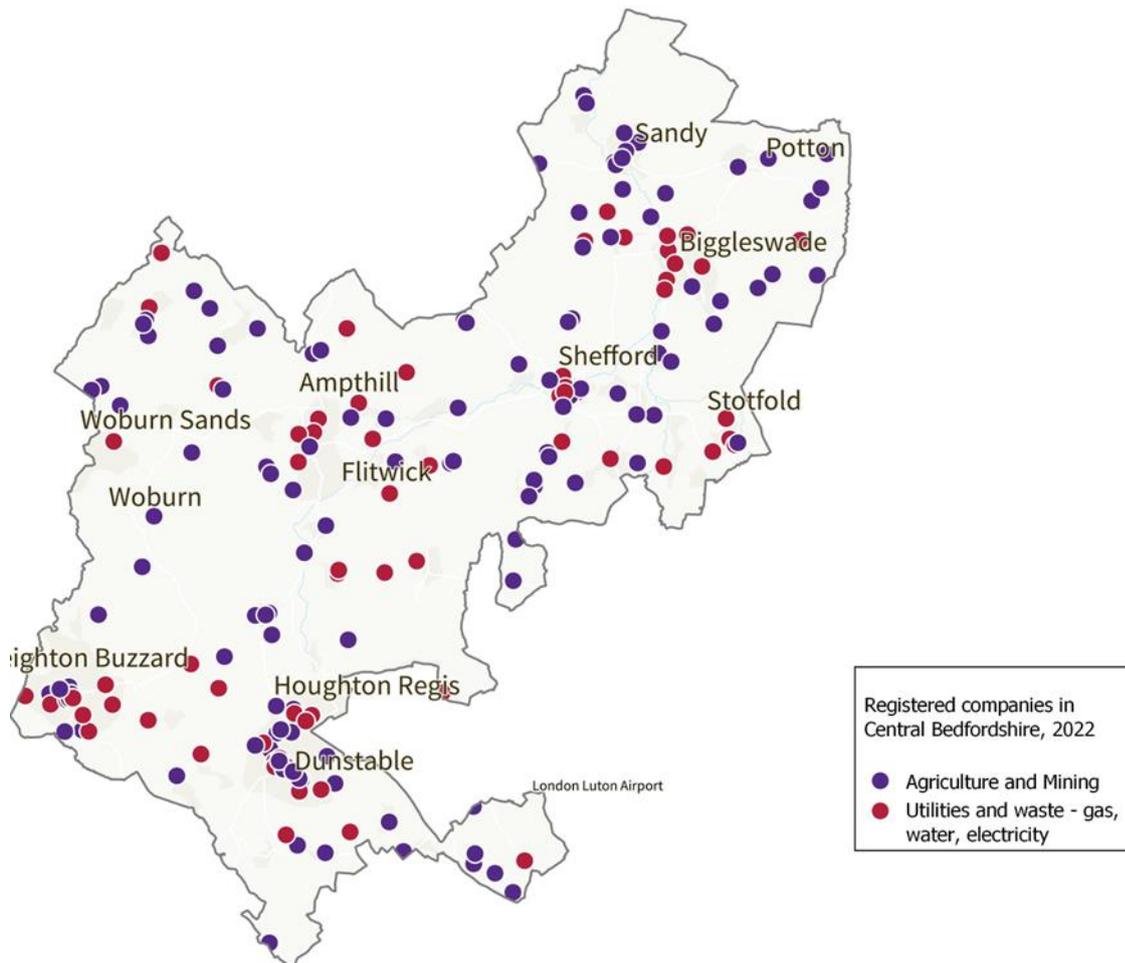
#### **Analysis**

- The analysis shows that in terms of Central Bedfordshire's priority sectors, companies within the creative and cultural sectors are concentrated in more urban areas throughout the district but particularly to the south. Construction and business and other services are notably for a somewhat more balanced density across rural and urban areas of Central Bedfordshire
- The High-tech Engineering and Advanced Logistics sectors are more sparsely distributed across the district and have relatively speaking far greater concentrations around Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Leighton Buzzard.

#### **Implications**

- This matters because... it is important to understand where particular businesses and sectors are located in order to ensure that there are sufficient sites and a suitably skilled workforce to ensure their growth.

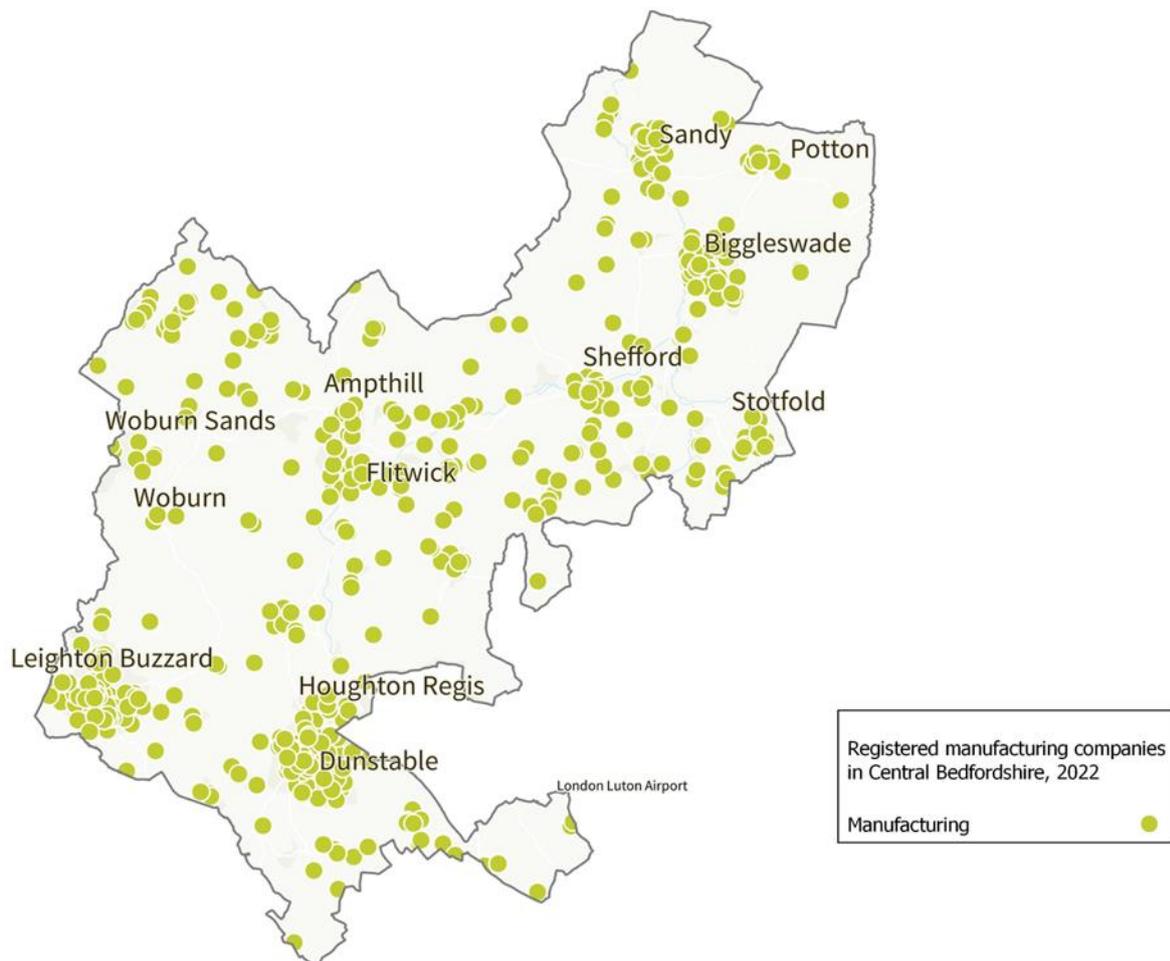
## Agriculture and Utilities Companies



- Within Central Bedfordshire as a whole, there are 157 registered companies within the Agriculture and Mining sector, with 955 employees. Over the last 5 years there has been a 26% increase in employees.
- There are 103 registered companies within the Utilities and waste sector in Central Bedfordshire, with 220 employees. Over the last 5 years there has been a 27% decrease in employees.

- The map opposite shows registered companies in Central Bedfordshire, within the Agriculture, Utilities and Waste sector.
- There is a good spread of companies across Central Bedfordshire but some clustering in more urban areas such as Houghton Regis, Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard.

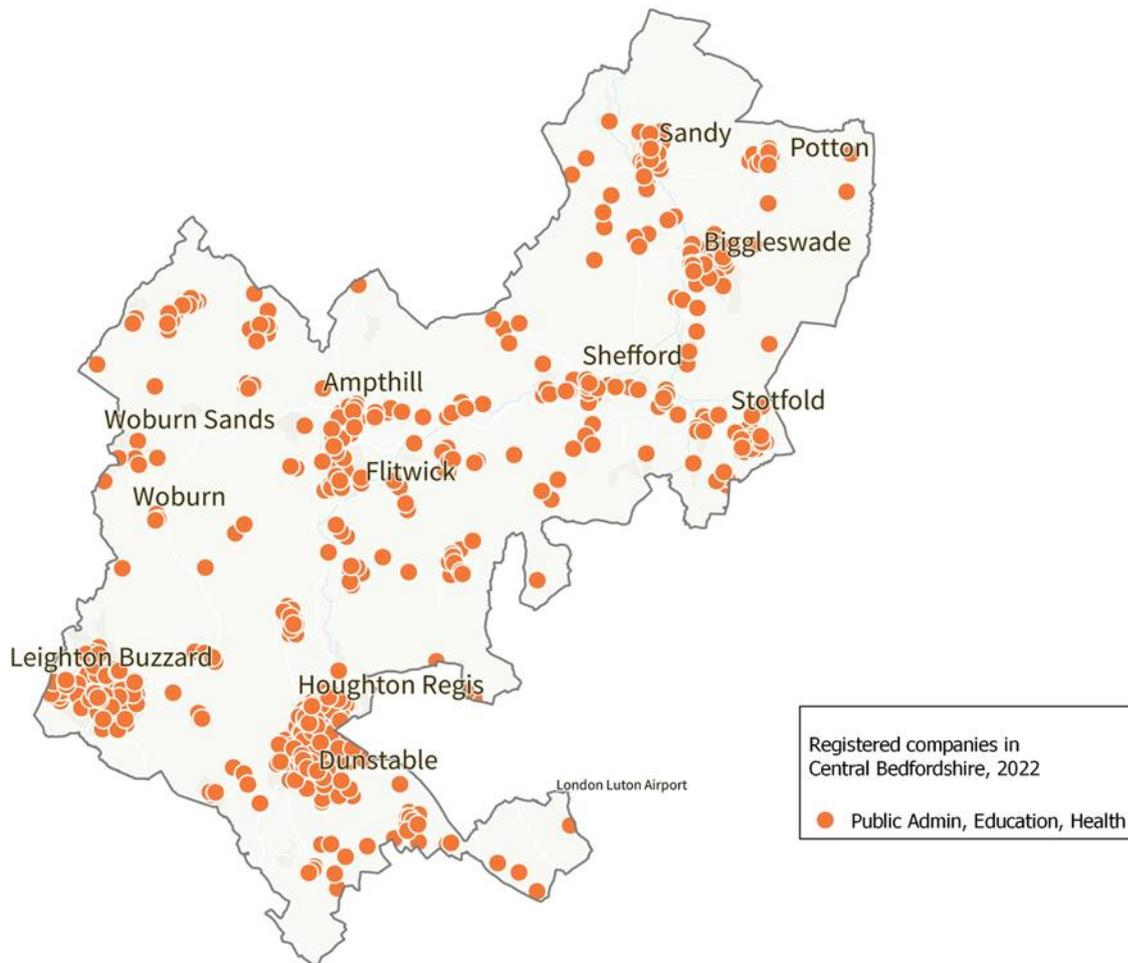
## Manufacturing Companies



- Within the manufacturing sector in Central Bedfordshire, there are 945 registered companies, with 10,830 employees. Over the last 5 years there has been a 5% decrease (490 jobs) in employees.
- The map shows registered Manufacturing companies in Central Bedfordshire

- As the map highlights there are higher concentrations of manufacturing companies in the south of the district particularly near Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable and Houghton-Regis.
- Concentrations are also evident around Flitwick and Biggleswade.

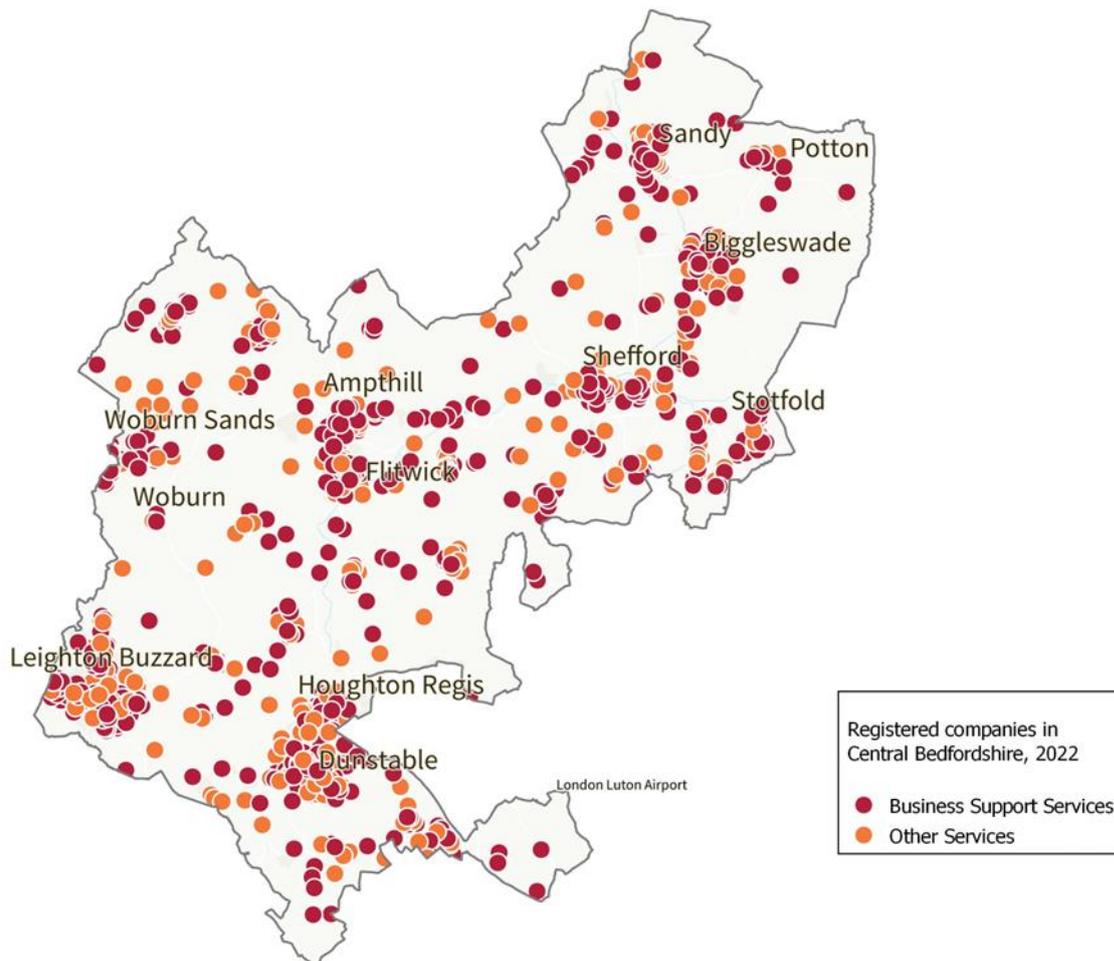
## Public Administration, Education and Health Companies



- Within the Public Admin, Education and Health sector, there are 910 registered companies in Central Bedfordshire, with 22,070 employees. This sector has seen a 14% increase (2,705 jobs) in employment over the last 5 years.

- The map shows registered companies within the Public Admin, Education and Health sector in Central Bedfordshire.
- These companies are largely located around the urban areas of Bedfordshire, specifically near Leighton Buzzard and Dunstable and the south of district.

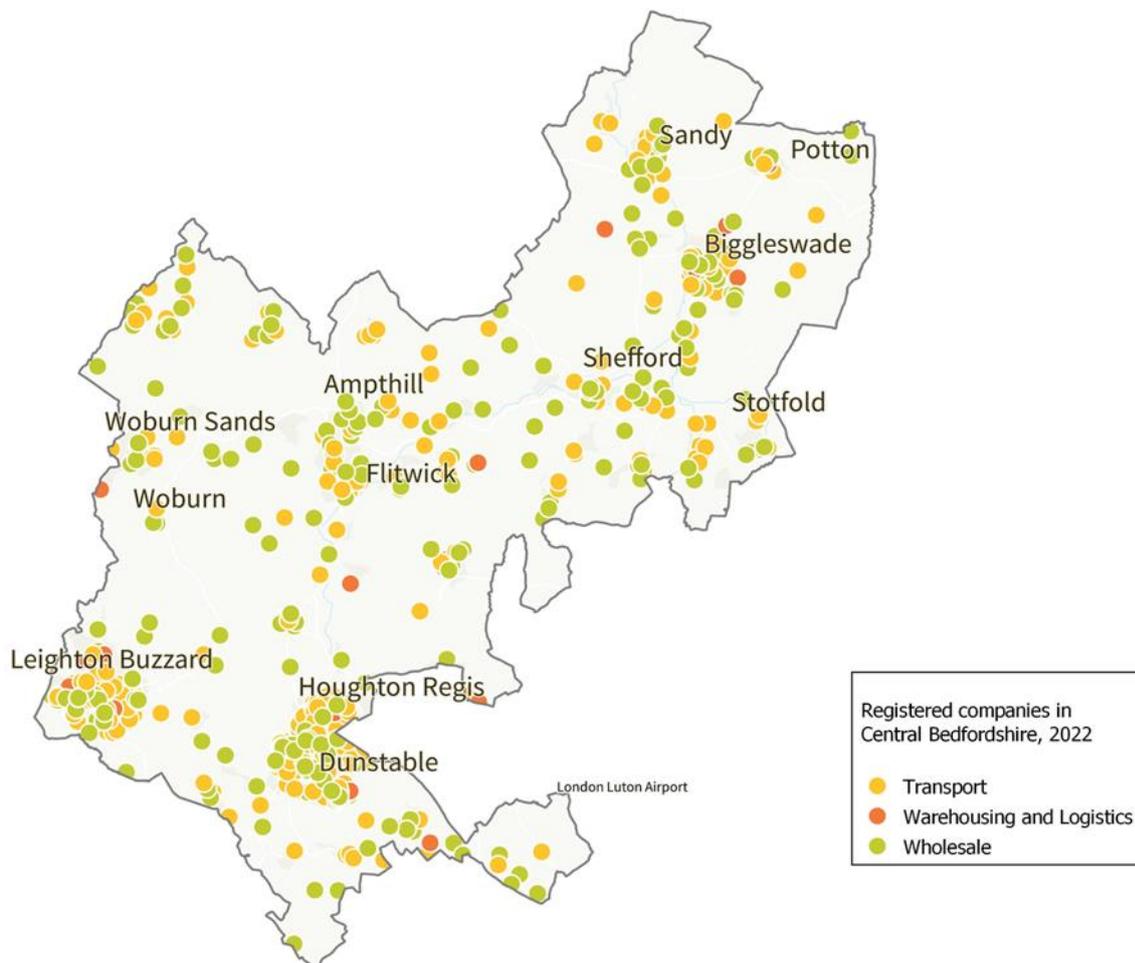
## Business Support Services and Other services Companies



- The map opposite shows registered companies in Central Bedfordshire, within the Business Support Services and Other Services sector.
- There are 1,293 registered companies within the business support services sector, employing 7,330 people. Over the last 5 years, there has been a 32% decrease in employees (3,465 jobs) .

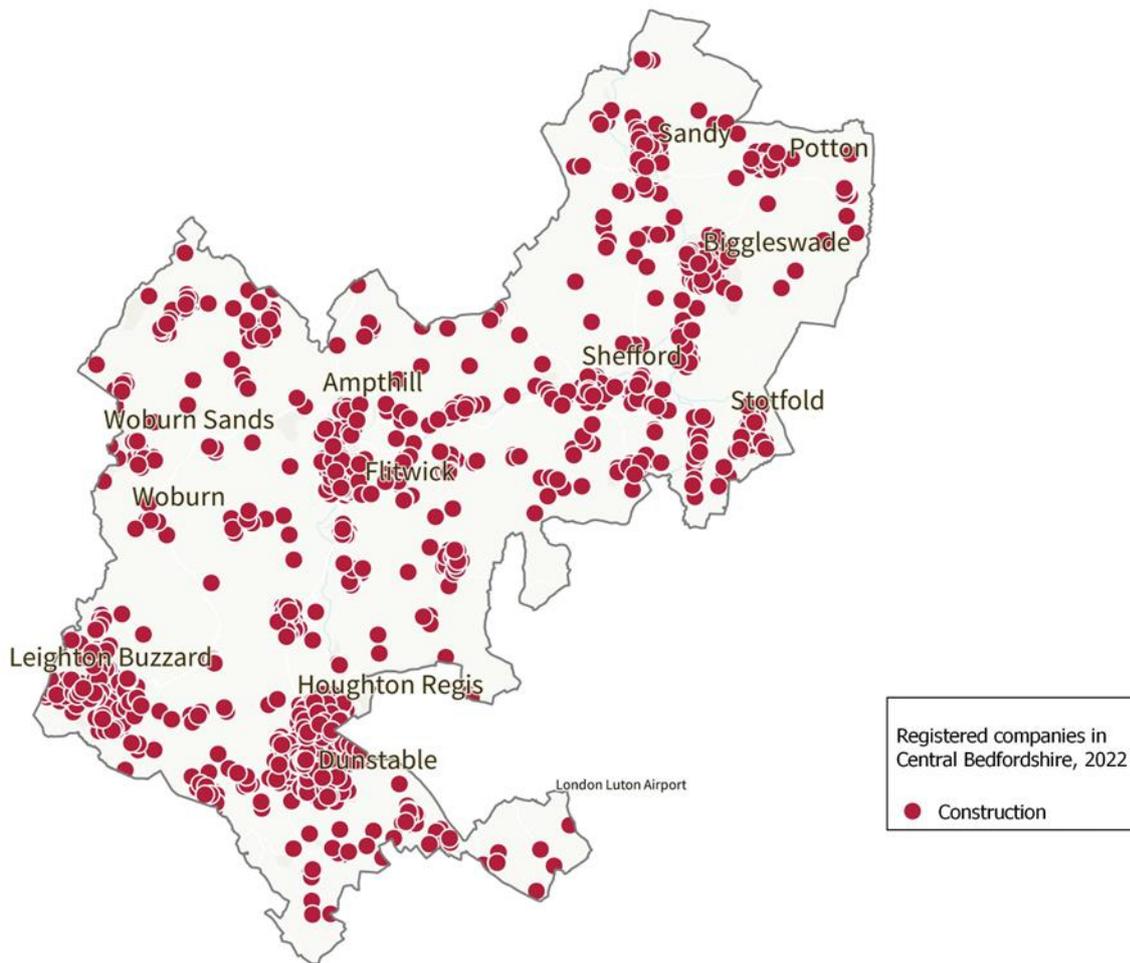
- In the Other services sector, there are 822 companies employing 2,805 people. There has been a 2% increase in employees in this sector over the last 5 years. Other service companies represent an eclectic mix of a number of service such as renting and leasing cars/equipment and hairdressing with other beauty treatments.
- There is a good spread of companies within this sector across the district but again, there are strong concentrations in more urban areas such as Houghton Regis, Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard.

### Transport, Warehousing and Wholesale Companies



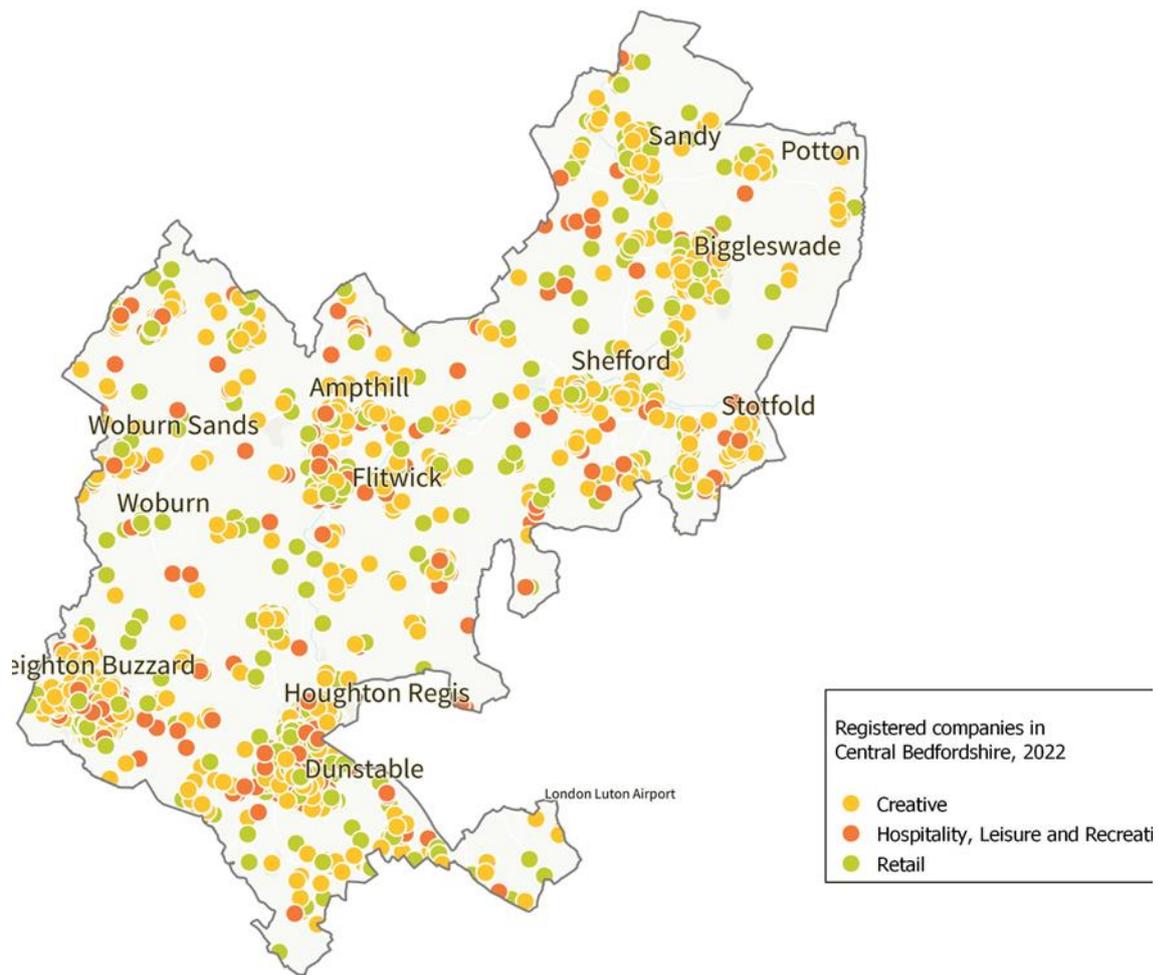
- The map shows registered companies within the Transport, Warehousing and Logistics as well as Wholesale sectors in Central Bedfordshire.
- There are 588 registered companies in the transport sector in central Bedfordshire, with 2,590 employees. Over the last 5 years there has been a 27% decrease in jobs in the sector.
- In the warehousing and logistics sector, there are 67 companies, with 6,820 employees. Over the last 5 years, there has been a 60% increase (2,560 jobs) in employees.
- There are 516 registered companies in the wholesale sector, with 6,275 employees. Over the last 5 years, there has been a 44% increase (1,910 jobs) in employees.
- It is evident from the map that there is a high concentration of companies in the south of district, specifically around Leighton Buzzard, Houghton-Regis and Dunstable. To a lesser extent there are concentrations around Biggleswade and Flitwick.

## Construction Companies



- The map shows registered Construction companies in Central Bedfordshire
- Construction is one of the most important industries in Central Bedfordshire. There are 2,528 registered companies employing 6,900 people. Over the last 5 years the sector has grown by 13% (790 jobs).
- As the map highlights, there is a higher concentration of construction companies in the south of the district particularly near Leighton Buzzard, Dunstable and Houghton-Regis.
- That being said, there is still a significant number of companies in the north of the district, but these are less concentrated.

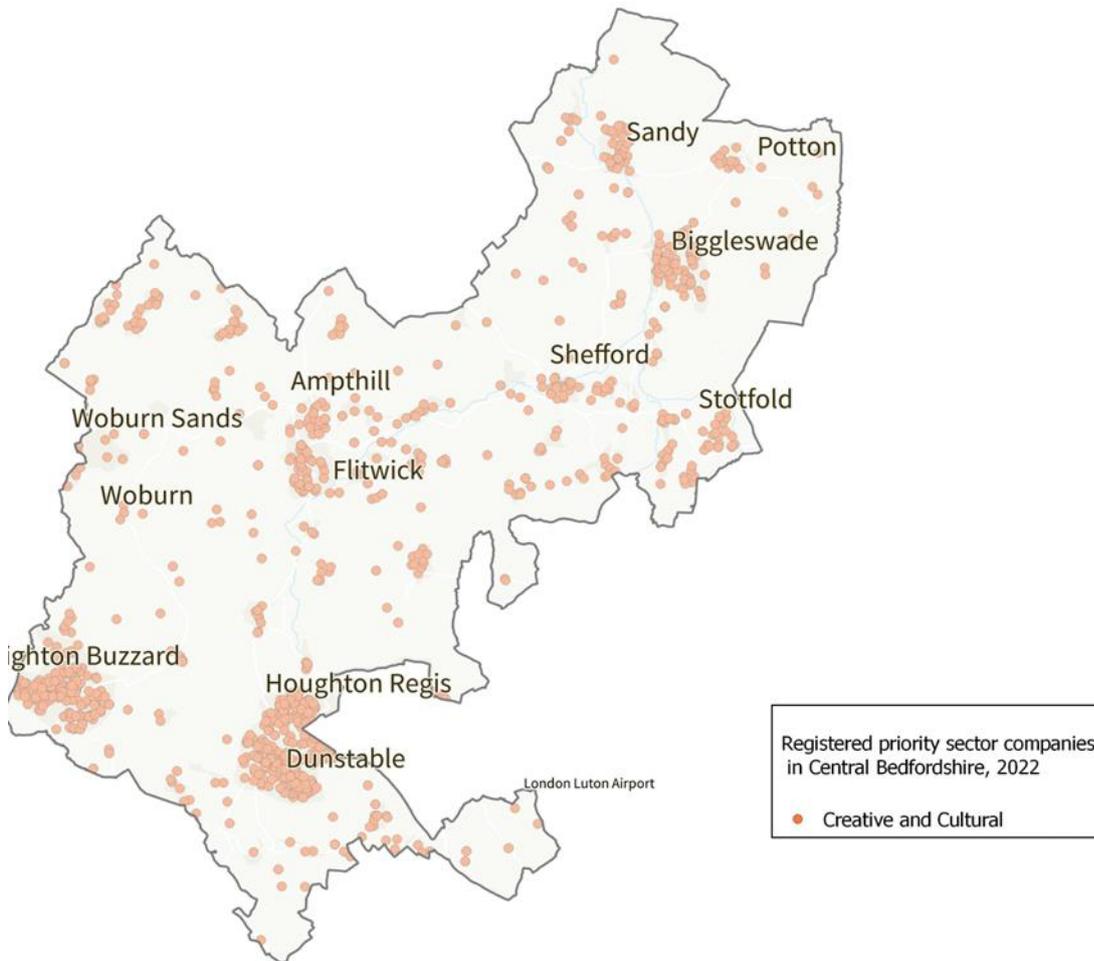
## Creative, Hospitality and Retail Companies



- The map shows registered companies in Central Bedfordshire, in the Hospitality, Leisure and Recreation, Retail and Creative sectors.
- Within the creative sector, there are 2,196 companies which employ 4,035 people. Over the last 5 years, the sector has seen a 17% increase in employment.
- Within the hospitality, leisure and recreation sectors, there are 970 registered companies and 11,750 employees. Over a 5-year period there has been a 1% increase in employment within the sector.

- There are 1,539 registered companies within the retail sector, which employ 11,695 people. Over the last 5 years there has been an 8% increase in employment (875 jobs).
- There is a relatively even distribution of companies across Central Bedfordshire. There are however higher concentrations of employment around the urban areas of Biggleswade and Flitwick as well as the south of the district.

### Creative and Cultural Companies

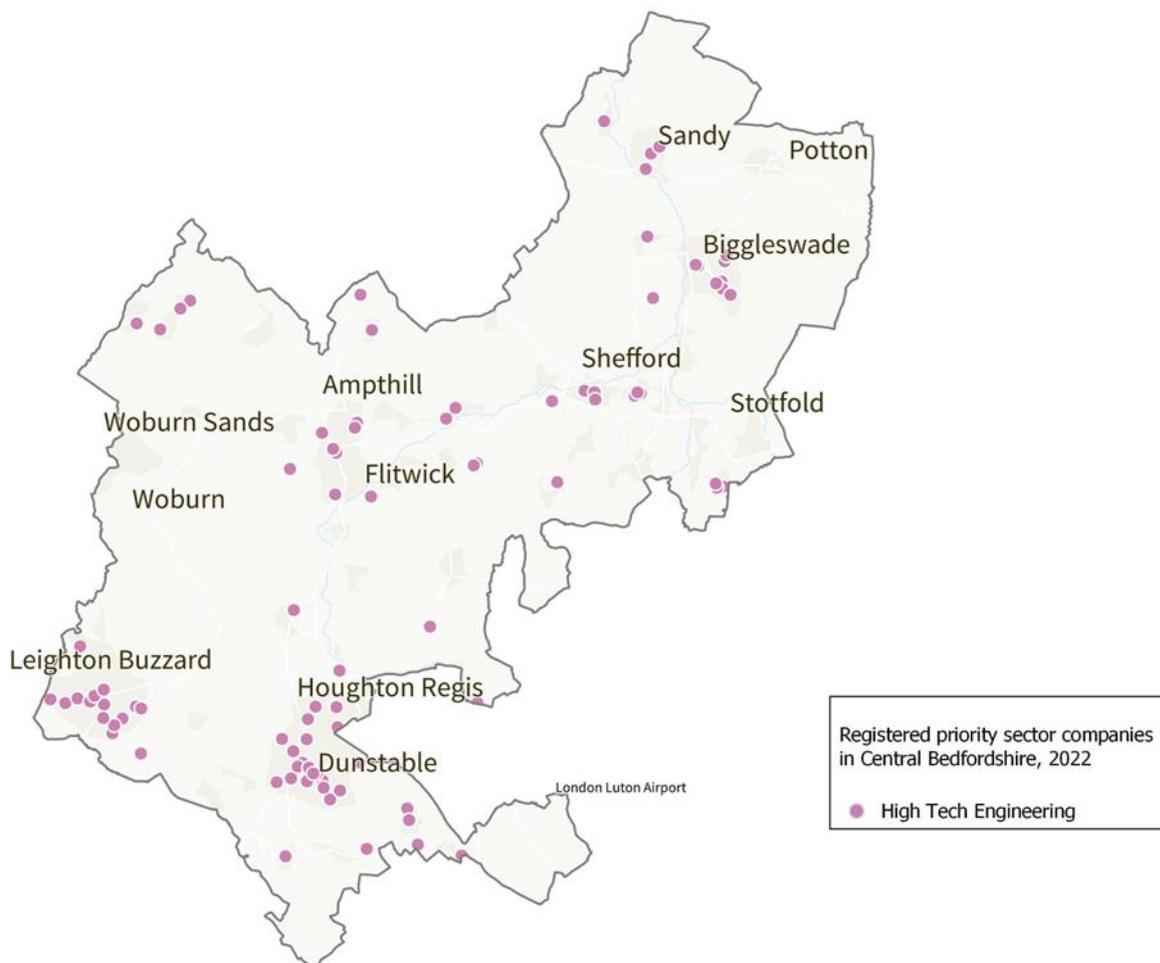


- The creative and cultural sector has been identified as a priority sector for Central Bedfordshire. Within this sector, there are 1,210 registered

companies, employing 3,000 people. Over the last 5 years there has been a 20% increase in the number of employees.

- The Creative and Cultural sectors in Central Bedfordshire are heavily concentrated around the urban areas. This can be seen in the south of the district around Leighton Buzzard, Houghton Regis and Dunstable. There are less obvious concentrations in other parts of the district.

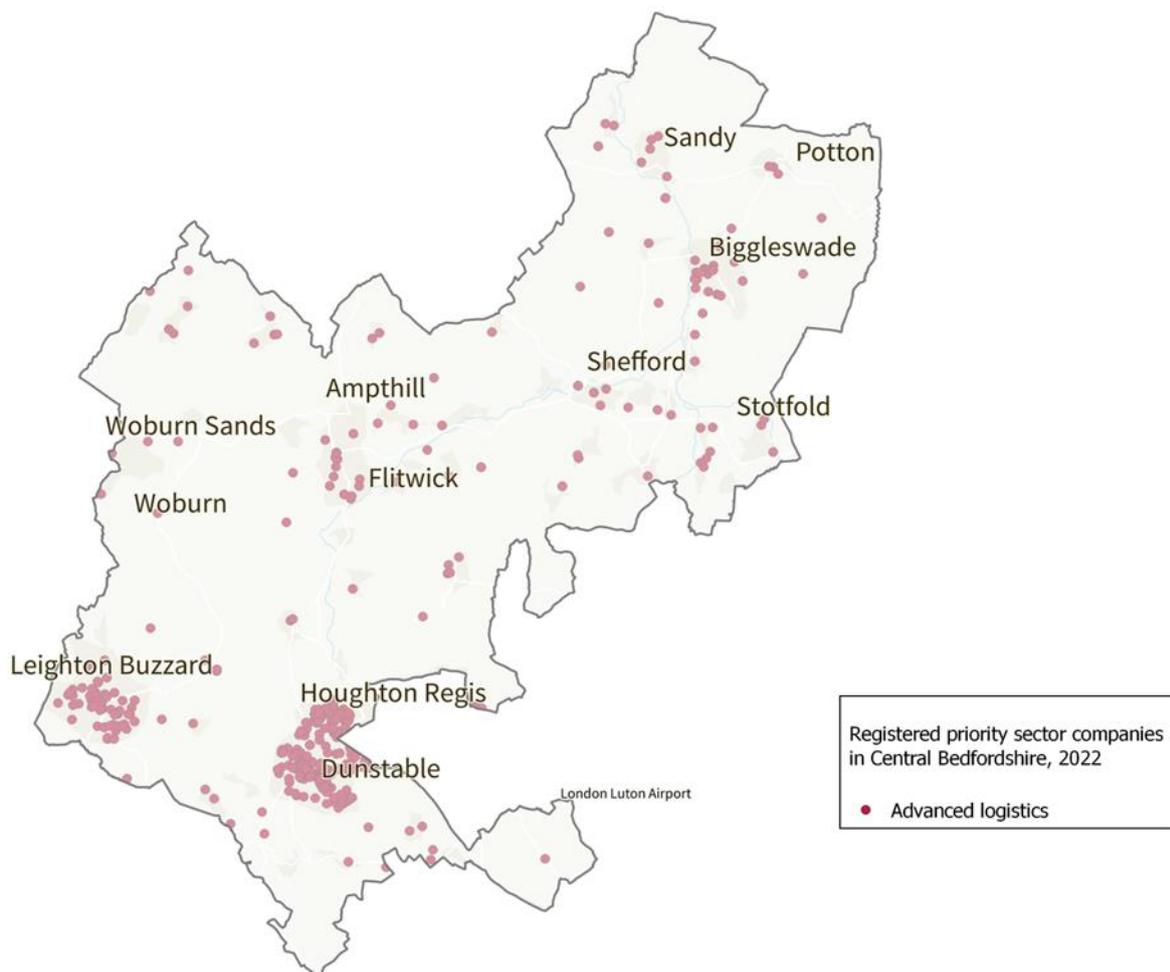
## High Tech engineering Companies



- The High-Tech Engineering sector comprises of higher value manufacturing activities alongside engineering and research activities.

- Within Central Bedfordshire, there are 503 registered companies, with 5,000 employees. Over the last 5 years the sector has not grown (0%).
- The majority of the High-Tech engineering sector companies are located in the south of the district and are scarcely distributed across the middle and north.

### Advanced logistics Companies



- The Advanced Logistics sector has been identified as a priority for Central Bedfordshire.

- There are 541 registered companies within the sector in Central Bedfordshire, employing 9,000 people. Over the last 5 years the sector has seen a 29% increase in employees (2,000 jobs).
- Similar to the Creative and Cultural sectors, the Advanced logistics companies in Central Bedfordshire are heavily concentrated around the urban areas and in close proximity to major transport routes. This is visible in the south of the district around Leighton Buzzard, Houghton Regis and Dunstable.

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