



Bradford Core City Analysis and Benchmarking

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Bradford Core City Benchmarking



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Contents

1	Introduction	4
2	Bradford: a comparison	5
3	Advice on future trajectory and Implications.....	11
4	Implications for Bradford’s Regeneration Plan	17
A.1	Core City Benchmarking.....	19

1 Introduction

This report provides an analysis of Bradford's performance compared to the eight English 'core cities' against a range of indicators. The purpose of this analysis is to support a strategic reframing of Bradford's draft Regeneration and Growth Plan, positioning the city with a clear ambition to perform like a Core City and to define its future role within both the northern and national economy.

The analysis draws on a set of indicators covering **People, Productivity, and Place**, comparing Bradford's performance with the eight English 'Core Cities'.¹ These cities include:

- Birmingham
- Bristol
- Leeds
- Liverpool
- Manchester
- Newcastle
- Nottingham
- Sheffield

The benchmarking provides an evidence base to assess Bradford's current position and to enable Bradford to identify areas where targeted intervention could drive transformational change.

Using the benchmarking data, we explore the scale of change required for Bradford to align more closely with the performance of established Core Cities. This includes modelling potential improvements in key indicators such as employment, economic output (Gross Value Added), and the size and dynamism of the business base. The analysis highlights both the ambition and the opportunity for Bradford to accelerate its economic trajectory.

This work has been completed by GC insight, a purpose-driven social enterprise offering advisory, research and evaluation consultancy. We have over 20 years' experience of informing and supporting local economic growth through the application of our analysis and insight. We have a national presence with offices in London, Birmingham, Manchester, and Glasgow.

The remainder of the report is set out as follows:

- **Section 2: Bradford: a comparison:** sets out how Bradford compares to other core cities in terms of key economic indicators, and,
- **Section 3: advice on future trajectory and implications:** explores the potential trajectory for Bradford to become a core city, setting out evidence-based targets and providing measurable milestones.

Tables which contain more detailed data are contained in an Appendix.

¹ [Our Cities | Core Cities](#)

2 Bradford: a comparison

This section sets out how Bradford compares to the eight English core cities in terms of key economic indicators. It is structured around the three core themes of the draft Regeneration and Growth Plan, which are **People, Productivity** and **Place**. The data has been compiled at a local authority level for each of the eight English 'Core Cities'. A full set of statistics is presented at Appendix A.1.

People

Summary: Bradford is a significant conurbation and is comparable to other core cities in terms of the size of its population. However, across other core indicators relevant to this theme (such as health, income, and education indicators), Bradford performs less well. Despite being a major population centre in the north of over half a million people, it faces significant challenges, particularly around its labour market structure and around measures of income and educational attainment.

Rank	Total population	Working age population (16-64)	IMD 2025	Gross disposable household income	Children in relative poverty
1	Birmingham	Manchester	Bristol	Bristol	Bristol
2	Leeds	Bristol	Leeds	Leeds	Leeds
3	Manchester	Nottingham	Sheffield	Newcastle	Newcastle
4	Sheffield	Newcastle	Newcastle	Sheffield	Sheffield
5	Bradford	Liverpool	Nottingham	Liverpool	Liverpool
6	Liverpool	Leeds	Bradford	Manchester	Nottingham
7	Bristol	Sheffield	Liverpool	Birmingham	Manchester
8	Nottingham	Birmingham	Birmingham	Bradford	Birmingham
9	Newcastle	Bradford	Manchester	Nottingham	Bradford

Population

Bradford is a significant conurbation with a total population of **563,605 residents**, ranking 5th in comparison to other English core cities when looking at the local authority as a whole.² However, it has the lowest proportion of working-age residents (16–64) at **62.2%**. In this regard, it ranks 9th when compared to the core cities.

It also has the lowest share of young people (16–24) at **11.6%**, ranking 9th. Although Bradford is often described as having one of the youngest populations in the UK,³ this mainly reflects its high share of children aged 0 to 15 years (22.3%). The data shows that many 15–19-year-olds then leave the district, while core cities typically attract people at this age, most likely to study locally.⁴ Reflecting these trends, ONS projections indicate that the proportion of 16–24-year-olds will decline to 11.5% by 2035.⁵

² ONS Mid-year population estimates (2024)

³ [City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, Bradford District population update \(2025\)](#)

⁴ ONS Internal migration in England and Wales (2024)

⁵ ONS Subnational population projections: 2022 based

Bradford’s healthy life expectancy for males is **57.5 years**, placing it 7th among the core cities. For females, the figure is **58.1 years**, ranking 5th.⁶

Bradford has an average deprivation score of **36.7**,⁷ placing it **6th** among the core cities, indicating relatively high levels of deprivation. Its lowest-performing domain is Education, Skills and Training, highlighting particular challenges in this area compared with other core cities.

Pay & Income

At **£17,784 per person**, Bradford ranks 8th overall compared to the core cities in terms of gross disposable household income, suggesting lower average household financial resilience and spending power compared to most other core cities.⁸ Bradford’s gross median weekly pay is **£560**, also ranking 8th overall.⁹

In addition, **44.2%** of children in Bradford live in households below the relative poverty threshold (before housing costs), the **highest rate** in comparison with the core cities.¹⁰

Education & Skills

Only **41.2%** of Bradford’s working-age population hold higher-level qualifications (e.g. degree or equivalent), placing it last (9th) when compared with the core cities.¹¹ **9.1%** of residents aged 16–64 have no formal qualifications, ranking 6th overall.¹²

Similarly, **68.2%** of young people in Bradford achieve a pass in English and Maths by age 19, ranking 8th out of all the core cities.¹³

Rank	L4+ quals.	No quals.	GCSEs in English and Maths
1	Bristol	Bristol	Birmingham
2	Newcastle	Leeds	Leeds
3	Nottingham	Liverpool	Bristol
4	Manchester	Manchester	Sheffield
5	Liverpool	Sheffield	Manchester
6	Birmingham	Bradford	Newcastle
7	Leeds	Nottingham	Liverpool
8	Sheffield	Newcastle	Bradford
9	Bradford	Birmingham	Nottingham

⁶ ONS Healthy life expectancy (2021–2023)

⁷ MHCLG English indices of deprivation 2025

⁸ ONS Gross disposable household income (2022)

⁹ ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (2025)

¹⁰ Department for Work and Pensions, Children in Low-Income Families Statistics (2023–24)

¹¹ ONS Annual Population Survey (Jan–Dec 2024)

¹² ONS Annual Population Survey (Jan–Dec 2024)

¹³ Department for Education, GCSE attainment by age 19 (2023/24)

Productivity

Summary: Bradford’s economy is characterised by relatively strong employment participation which is positive. The city also performs very well in keeping young people engaged, with the lowest proportion of 16–17-year-olds who are NEET among core cities. However, there are issues in terms of job availability and low levels of productivity. The city ranks lowest in terms of both total economic output and productivity indicators. In terms of the business base, Bradford is comparable to other core cities against the relative indicators but it has fewer businesses classified as high growth.

Employment

Rank	Total employment	Job density	Employment rate	Economic inactivity rate	Unemployment rate	Claimant rate	NEET rate
1	Birmingham	Manchester	Bristol	Bristol	Sheffield	Bristol	Bradford
2	Leeds	Newcastle	Sheffield	Nottingham	Leeds	Newcastle	Birmingham
3	Manchester	Bristol	Nottingham	Sheffield	Bristol	Sheffield	Nottingham
4	Bristol	Leeds	Leeds	Bradford	Bradford	Leeds	Leeds
5	Liverpool	Nottingham	Bradford	Manchester	Nottingham	Liverpool	Manchester
6	Sheffield	Liverpool	Liverpool	Birmingham	Liverpool	Nottingham	Liverpool
7	Nottingham	Birmingham	Birmingham	Leeds	Newcastle	Manchester	Bristol
8	Bradford	Sheffield	Manchester	Liverpool	Birmingham	Bradford	Sheffield
9	Newcastle	Bradford	Newcastle	Newcastle	Manchester	Birmingham	Newcastle

Bradford supports **204,000 jobs**, ranking 8th compared to the core cities.¹⁴ With a ratio of **0.65 jobs per working-age resident**, Bradford ranks last (9th).¹⁵ This indicates a shortage of local employment opportunities relative to the size of its working-age population.

At **69.1%**, Bradford’s employment rate ranks 5th.¹⁶ This suggests that, despite fewer jobs locally, many residents are engaged in employment, most likely outside of the district. Female employment, however, remains lower at **62.9%**, ranking 7th,¹⁷ suggesting barriers to participation for women.

Bradford’s economy is characterised by relatively strong employment participation which is positive. Around **27.4%** of working-age residents are not in employment and not actively seeking work, placing Bradford 4th¹⁸ compared to the core cities. Bradford’s unemployment rate stands at **4.9%**¹⁹, ranking 4th when compared with the core cities. Around **7.2%** of residents aged 16–64 are claiming unemployment-related benefits²⁰ (claimant rate), ranking 8th and the second highest after Birmingham.

The proportion of young people aged 16–17 not in education, employment or training (NEET) stands at **2.1%**,²¹ ranking 1st among the core cities, indicating strong post-16 participation. This is extremely positive.

¹⁴ ONS Business Register and Employment Survey (2024)

¹⁵ ONS Job Density (2023)

¹⁶ ONS Annual Population Survey (Jan–Dec 2024)

¹⁷ ONS Annual Population Survey (Jan–Dec 2024)

¹⁸ ONS Annual Population Survey (Jan–Dec 2024)

¹⁹ ONS Annual Population Survey (Jan–Dec 2024)

²⁰ ONS Claimant Count (2024)

²¹ DfE Participation in education, training and NEET age 16 to 17 by local authority, 2024/25

Productivity

Bradford’s economy generates **£11.7 billion GVA per annum** – the smallest economy in comparison to English core cities.²² At **£33.46 per hour worked**, Bradford again ranks last, indicating lower productivity levels compared to other cities²³. This metric captures the efficiency of the local economy and is influenced by factors such as sector mix, skills, and infrastructure.

Rank	Total size of economy (GVA)	GVA per hour worked
1	Leeds	Manchester
2	Manchester	Leeds
3	Birmingham	Liverpool
4	Bristol	Newcastle
5	Liverpool	Bristol
6	Sheffield	Sheffield
7	Nottingham	Birmingham
8	Newcastle	Nottingham
9	Bradford	Bradford

Business

Bradford is home to **16,800 businesses**, ranking 5th compared to the core cities.²⁴ With a ratio of **293 businesses per 10,000 residents**, Bradford ranks 6th,²⁵ indicating a low level of enterprise intensity.

In terms of the business demography, Bradford saw **12.5%** of businesses newly registered for VAT/PAYE in 2023²⁶, ranking 5th. This is a relatively strong performance and suggests a healthy level of entrepreneurial activity. **12.8%** of businesses ceased trading in 2023²⁷, ranking 7th. Bradford’s five-year survival rate stands at **41.2%**, ranking 4th and broadly in line with peer cities.²⁸ This indicates that, once established, businesses in Bradford have a reasonable likelihood of staying active over the medium term.

Only **3.9%** of businesses in Bradford are classified as **high growth** (i.e. growing employment by more than 20% annually over three years²⁹), ranking 8th.

Rank	Business count	Business density	Business births	Business deaths	5-year business survival	High growth businesses
1	Birmingham	Manchester	Birmingham	Bristol	Sheffield	Bristol
2	Leeds	Bristol	Liverpool	Nottingham	Bristol	Manchester
3	Manchester	Leeds	Manchester	Newcastle	Newcastle	Leeds
4	Bristol	Birmingham	Nottingham	Leeds	Bradford	Nottingham
5	Bradford	Nottingham	Bradford	Sheffield	Leeds	Liverpool
6	Sheffield	Bradford	Newcastle	Manchester	Nottingham	Newcastle
7	Liverpool	Sheffield	Leeds	Bradford	Liverpool	Sheffield

²² ONS Regional Accounts, Gross value added (balanced) at current basic prices (2023)

²³ ONS, Subregional Productivity Estimates (2023)

²⁴ ONS, UK Business Counts (2025)

²⁵ ONS, UK Business Counts (2024)

²⁶ ONS, Business Demography (2023)

²⁷ ONS, Business Demography (2023)

²⁸ ONS, Business Demography (2023)

²⁹ ONS, Business Structure Database (2023)

Rank	Business count	Business density	Business births	Business deaths	5-year business survival	High growth businesses
8	Nottingham	Liverpool	Bristol	Birmingham	Manchester	Bradford
9	Newcastle	Newcastle	Sheffield	Liverpool	Birmingham	Birmingham

Place

Summary: Bradford performs well on housing affordability and per capita CO₂ emissions, making it an attractive place to live from a cost and environmental perspective. However, the city’s slower housing development and below-average broadband coverage could point to challenges in meeting future growth, labour market and digital demands.

Rank	Net additions to the housing stock	Housing affordability	Gigabit capable broadband	GHG emissions
1	Nottingham	Liverpool	Nottingham	Bristol
2	Leeds	Bradford	Leeds	Liverpool
3	Manchester	Newcastle	Birmingham	Bradford
4	Birmingham	Sheffield	Bristol	Birmingham
5	Sheffield	Nottingham	Sheffield	Sheffield
6	Liverpool	Birmingham	Newcastle	Newcastle
7	Bristol	Leeds	Bradford	Nottingham
8	Bradford	Manchester	Liverpool	Manchester
9	Newcastle	Bristol	Manchester	Leeds

Housing

Bradford added **6 dwellings per 1,000 existing homes** in 2023–24³⁰, ranking 8th when compared to the core cities. This suggests a slower pace of housing development in comparison with English core cities; however, it may also reflect more complex local land and planning challenges such as topographical constraints and the viability of housing development.

With a **median affordability ratio of 5.1**, Bradford ranks 2nd, indicating that house prices are relatively low compared to local earnings³¹. This makes Bradford one of the more accessible locations in terms of home ownership or rental.

Connectivity

Approximately, **91.4%** of premises in Bradford have access to gigabit-speed internet (1,000 Mbps or more), placing the city 7th when compared to the core cities.³²

Although all core cities are classified as urban local authorities, Bradford has the highest share of residents living in rural Output Areas (7.8%)³³, which may help explain its relative position. Coverage for

³⁰ Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Housing Statistics (2023–24)

³¹ ONS, Housing Affordability in England and Wales (2024)

³² Ofcom, Connected Nations Report (2025)

³³ ONS, 2021 Rural Urban Classification

rural premises in Bradford is notably lower: only 54% have access to gigabit-speed broadband, the lowest among core cities with any rural population (Leeds, Newcastle and Sheffield).

Environment

Bradford's per capita emissions are **3.3 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent**³⁴, ranking 3rd in comparison with the core cities. Only Bristol and Liverpool have lower carbon emissions than Bradford.

³⁴ Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, Local Authority Carbon Emissions Estimates (2023)

3 Advice on future trajectory and Implications

Advice on Future Trajectory

Based on the benchmarking analysis in Section 2, this section provides an indication of the scale of change required for Bradford to reach core city performance by 2035 across a range of indicators.

For each indicator where Bradford currently lags behind its peers, the analysis considers what would be required to reach the following:

- Core cities average
- Core cities median
- Lowest core city value (NB the location will vary depending on the indicator)

These potential targets were then compared with historic trends to determine which outcomes are realistic and achievable, highlighting the effort needed to close the gap with the other core cities.

For simplicity, the analysis assumes no change in the performance of the other core cities. As such, the targets indicate what Bradford would need to achieve to close the gap to today’s core city levels by 2035.

Increasing the Working Age Population

To match the core city average for the working-age population (68%, similar to Liverpool and Newcastle), Bradford would need to raise its current rate by 6 percentage points. This implies an increase of around 9,500 additional working-age residents each year, with alternative scenarios suggesting smaller annual uplifts ranging from 4,100 to 9,400 people per year (41,000 to 94,000 over 10 years).

Current Performance	Target by 2035		
	Core Cities Average	Core Cities Median	Lowest Core City Value (Birmingham)
62.2% (350,274)	67.9% (+95,000)	67.9% (+94,000)	65.1% (+41,000)

The historic trend shows that Bradford’s working-age share has remained steady at 62% for the past decade. ONS projections indicate only a modest rise in the working-age population to 63% by 2035, reflecting a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 0.3%, which is below the historic 10-year trend of 0.5%. Nevertheless, the most recent three years have seen strong growth, with approximately 5,600 additional working-age residents per year, broadly in line with the annual growth required to reach Birmingham’s 65%, the lowest working-age proportion among core cities. On this basis, the **lowest** core city benchmark represents the most realistic trajectory for Bradford.

Raising Higher-Level Qualifications

To reach the average level of advanced qualifications in core cities (48%, the same as Nottingham), Bradford would need an increase of 7 percentage points in its current proportion of working-age residents with Level 4+ qualifications. This equates to around 5,700 additional people qualified at that level each year. Other scenarios assume smaller annual increases, ranging from 3,200 to 4,600 additional people per year.

Current Performance	Target by 2035		
	Core Cities Average	Core Cities Median	Lowest Core City Value (Sheffield)
41.2% (132,700)	48.5% (+57,000)	45.7% (+46,000)	42.1% (+32,000)

Reaching the **average** is considered realistic and achievable given Bradford’s significant progress over the past decade, with the proportion of working-age residents holding Level 4+ qualifications rising from 26% in 2014 to 41% in 2024. On average, an additional 4,890 people have gained Level 4+ qualifications each year over the last ten years, and 10,900 in the most recent year alone. If this trend continues, it is estimated that approximately half of Bradford’s working-age population could hold Level 4+ qualifications within the next ten years, representing an ambitious but plausible outcome.

Note: This assumes that the working-age population will grow to meet the lowest target of 65%. Based on the ONS forecast of 63% by 2035, achieving the core cities’ average of 48.5% would require an additional 43,000 working-age people with Level 4 qualifications by that year.

Boosting Employment

To reach the core cities’ average job density of 0.99 jobs per working-age resident (similar to Leeds and Nottingham), Bradford would need to increase its current level by 0.34 points. This equates to around 16,000 additional jobs per year, with alternative scenarios suggesting smaller annual increases ranging from 9,900 to 16,600 (or 99,000 to 166,000 over 10 years). These figures reflect a workplace-based measure, meaning they count jobs located in Bradford, regardless of where workers live.

Current Performance	Target by 2035		
	Core Cities Average	Core Cities Median	Lowest Core City Value (Sheffield)
0.65 (226,000)	0.99 (+160,000)	1.00 (+166,000)	0.83 (+99,000)

Historically, Bradford’s job density has been low. Its current level of 0.65 is the lowest in the past decade, with the figure generally remaining below 0.71. Some improvements were observed between 2015 and 2017, but the trend has been largely downward since then. Looking ahead, if the current trend continues, job density is expected to fall below 0.60 as the working-age population grows. Given that job growth has been very limited in recent years, achieving the **lowest** core city benchmark represents the most appropriate trajectory for Bradford. Even so, reaching this level would still require a significant acceleration, well above historic performance.

Note: This assumes that the working-age population will grow to meet the lowest target of 65%. Based on the ONS forecast of 63% by 2035, achieving the lowest core cities’ job density value of 0.83 would require an additional 76,000 jobs.

Increasing Productivity Levels

To reach the average productivity in core cities (£37.8 GVA per hour worked, similar to Liverpool), Bradford would need a 13% increase in its current productivity levels by 2035. This equates to an annual productivity growth of 1.2% CAGR, while the most conservative scenario assumes only 0.1% CAGR.

Current Performance	Target by 2035		
	Core Cities Average	Core Cities Median	Lowest Core City Value (Nottingham)
£33.5 GVA per hour	£37.8 (+13%)	£36.7 (+10%)	£33.9 (+1%)

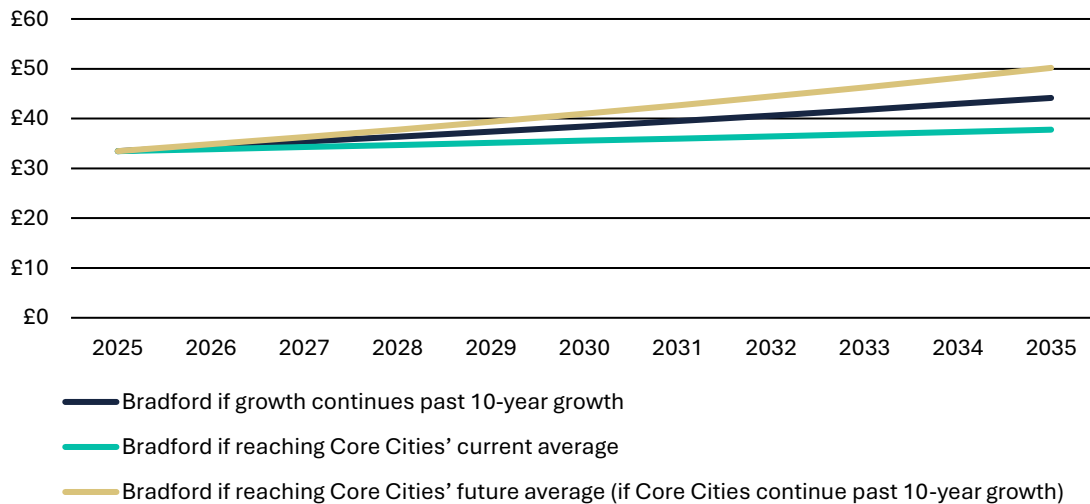
Reaching the **average** is considered realistic and achievable given Bradford’s significant progress over the past decade, with productivity rising from £25.4 in 2013 to £33.5 in 2023, a 32% increase, or 2.8% CAGR. Over the same period, average productivity across the core cities also grew by around 32%, meaning Bradford has kept pace with core city trends. If this historic trend continues, Bradford’s productivity could exceed the £37.8 GVA per hour target.

It is worth noting that the above analysis assumes that core cities’ productivity remains flat. If core cities continue to grow at a similar pace to the past decade, their average GVA per hour could reach around £50.2 by 2035, with the lowest performing city (Nottingham) projected at around £45.0. If Bradford continues at its historic rate of 2.8%, its productivity would reach £44.1, which is close to the **lowest** projected core city but still short of the average.

Current Performance	Target by 2035		
	Core Cities Average (expected growth)	Core Cities Median (expected growth)	Lowest Core City Value (expected growth)
£33.5 GVA per hour	£50.2 (+50%)	£48.7 (+46%)	£45.0 (+35%)

The chart below shows Bradford’s projected productivity under its historic trend versus the growth needed to match current or future core cities’ averages. To keep pace with future core city growth, Bradford would need to grow faster than its historic trend, at around 4.1% a year.

Bradford GVA per Hour Growth Projections 2025-2035



Source: GC Insight analysis using ONS data

Growing the Economy

To reach the average economic output of other core cities, Bradford would need to double its current GVA, requiring an additional £1.2 billion per year. If the aim were to match the lowest core city (Newcastle), this would require a 4% uplift, equivalent to around £48 million per year.

Current Performance	Target by 2035		
	Core Cities Average	Core Cities Median	Lowest Core City Value (Newcastle)
£11.7bn.	£23.7bn. (+102%)	£19.7bn. (+68%)	£12.2bn. (+4%)

Bradford has made strong progress over the past decade, with GVA rising from £8.4 billion in 2013 to £11.7 billion in 2023, indicating a CAGR of 3%. Growth was even stronger over the last five years (CAGR

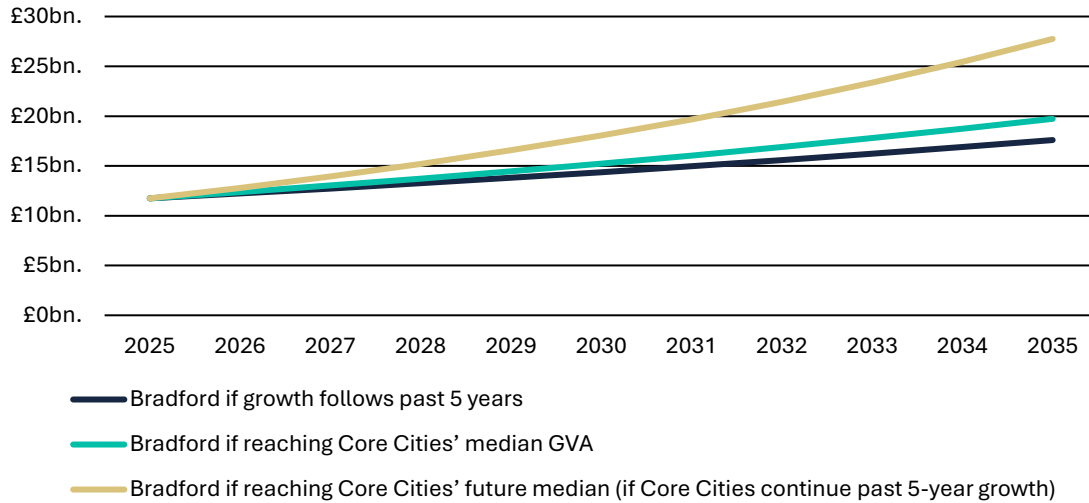
4%), equivalent to £430 million additional output per year and above the growth seen in the core cities' **median** (3.5% CAGR). If this trend continues, **Bradford's GVA could reach £17.6 billion by 2035**.

However, if core cities continue to grow at a similar pace to the past five years, their median GVA could reach around £27.7 billion by 2035, with the lowest performing city (Newcastle) projected at around £16.4 billion. If Bradford continues at its historic rate of 4.1%, its GVA would exceed the **lowest** projected core city but still short of the median.

Current Performance	Target by 2035		
	Core Cities Average (expected growth)	Core Cities Median (expected growth)	Lowest Core City Value (expected growth)
£11.7bn.	£32.7bn. (+178%)	£27.7bn. (+136%)	£16.4bn. (+40%)

The chart below shows Bradford's projected GVA based on its historic growth, compared with the level required to match the current and future core cities median (£19.7 billion and £27.7 billion, respectively). This shows that achieving future core city growth would require accelerated growth (9% CAGR), contingent on both the productivity and the employment targets being met.

Bradford GVA Growth Projections 2025-2035



Source: GC Insight analysis using ONS data

Expanding Business Base and Business Density

Closing the gap to the average business density would require Bradford to reach 319 businesses per 10,000 people, implying around 300 additional businesses per year to keep pace with population growth. If the target were to match the lowest core city (Nottingham), this would require a smaller increase of around 100 businesses per year.

Current Performance	Target by 2035		
	Core Cities Average	Core Cities Median	Lowest Core City Value (Nottingham/Bristol)
293 business density	319	305	296
16,800 businesses	19,800	17,400	18,000

Historically, Bradford has performed below the average and median core city benchmarks but exceeded the lowest business density between 2021 and 2023. Business density has risen from 245 in 2014 to 293 in 2024, representing a 20% increase. Growth in the number of businesses has been more modest,

averaging a 1% CAGR (around 100 units per year) over the last five years, though higher over the longer term (around 300 units per year over the last decade). If Bradford continues along these trends, it should be able to reach the core cities' **median** business density of 305 businesses per 10,000 residents by 2035. Achieving this would require expanding Bradford's business base by approximately 2,000 to reach 18,400 by 2035—equivalent to around 200 additional businesses per year. This would also position Bradford among the core cities in terms of business base, surpassing the **lowest** value (Bristol) at 18,000.

Note: This assumes that the population will grow to meet the lowest target of 65% aged 16–64. Based on the ONS population forecast for 2035, achieving the median core cities' business density of 305 would require an additional 1,000 businesses.

Supporting High-Growth Businesses

To reach the average proportion of high-growth businesses in core cities (5.1%, the same as Liverpool), Bradford would need to increase its current level by 1 percentage point. This would require around 90 businesses achieving employment growth of more than 20% per year over a three-year period by 2035. By comparison, reaching the lowest core city value (Sheffield) would only require 5 additional high-growth businesses.

Current Performance	Target by 2035		
	Core Cities Average	Core Cities Median	Lowest Core City Value (Sheffield)
3.9 (70)	5.1 (+20)	5.2 (+25)	4.0 (+5)

Although the number of high-growth businesses in Bradford declined over the past five years, 2023 saw a modest recovery, with 10 additional businesses achieving high-growth status. Given the historical volatility of this metric, the **lowest** target represents the most achievable outcome, while still encouraging growth and support for scaling local firms. Achieving the lowest value would require just 5 more high-growth businesses, totalling around 75, a level Bradford has previously exceeded in 2018.

Increasing Housing Supply

To reach the core cities' average rate of 9.7 net additions per 1,000 dwellings (similar to Sheffield), Bradford would need to increase its current rate by around 3 units. This means raising the number of net additional homes from 1,396 in 2023 to 2,390 per year.

Current Performance	Target by 2035		
	Core Cities Average	Core Cities Median	Lowest Core City Value (Bristol)
6.3 (1,396)	9.7 (2,390 per annum)	10.0 (2,470 per annum)	6.6 (1,590 per annum)

Bradford's delivery has been below expected levels in recent years. Although Bradford's Housing Strategy³⁵ sets a target of 1,703 net new homes per year between 2020 and 2037, this has not been met to date, with delivery averaging 1,119 per year since 2020. Given this historic trend and Bradford's position relative to core cities, the **lowest** core city benchmark (6.6 net additions per 1,000 dwellings, or 1,590 net additions per year) represents the most realistic trajectory. However, even at this level, the district would still fall short of the need for 250,319 homes by 2037 according to its Housing Strategy, reaching an estimated 240,000 dwellings by 2035.

³⁵ [Bradford Housing Strategy 2020 to 2030](#)

Expanding Broadband Coverage

To reach the average level of gigabit capability in core cities (93%, the same as Sheffield), Bradford would need an increase of 2 percentage points on its current proportion. This equates to around 2,200 additional premises gaining gigabit availability each year. Using the median of core cities suggests a slightly higher requirement (2,400 premises per year) as it is pulled up by several cities with stronger rollout levels, such as Nottingham and Leeds.

Current Performance	Target by 2035		
	Core Cities Average	Core Cities Median	Lowest Core City Value (Newcastle)
91.4% (207,440)	93.0% (+22,000)	93.6% (+24,000)	91.9% (+20,000)

Reaching the average is considered realistic and achievable given Bradford’s significant progress over the past five years, with the proportion of premises with gigabit availability rising from 77% in 2020 to 91% in 2024. On average, an additional 11,100 premises gained gigabit capability each year over this period. This, however, reflects an exceptional phase of rapid national and regional rollout. As coverage reaches very high levels, the remaining premises without gigabit-capable broadband are typically harder to connect. Achieving the core cities’ **average** of 93% within the next ten years is therefore a more realistic and plausible outcome.

4 Implications for Bradford's Regeneration Plan

Current Strengths and Weaknesses

Bradford clearly **performs well** against other core cities against some metrics:

- Bradford is a **significant conurbation** with a total population of **563,605 residents**, ranking 5th in comparison to the English core cities when looking at the local authority as a whole.
- A relatively high share of Bradford's population are **aged 0-15 years** (22.3%) and there is an opportunity for Bradford to harness this talent and ensure that this younger population remains locally.
- Bradford's economy is characterised by relatively **strong levels of employment participation** with an employment rate of 69.1% which is comparable to other core cities. The city also performs very well in keeping young people engaged, with the lowest proportion of 16–17-year-olds who are NEET relative to the core cities.
- In 2023, Bradford saw a relatively high proportion of business births, which suggests a healthy level of **entrepreneurial activity**. Bradford's five-year survival rate (**41.2%**) is also broadly in line with peer cities, which is also positive.
- Bradford performs well on **housing affordability** and **per capita CO₂ emissions**, making it an **attractive** place to live from a cost and environmental perspective.

Despite all of these strengths, there are some **issues**, which need to be addressed:

- There is a need to **create more jobs**, with a ratio of 0.65 jobs per working-age resident in Bradford, lower than the other core cities. This indicates a shortage of local employment opportunities relative to the size of its working-age population.
- There are also **low levels of productivity**. Bradford's economy generates £11.7 billion GVA per annum, the smallest economy in comparison to English core cities. At £33.46 per hour worked, Bradford ranks last, indicating lower productivity levels compared to other cities.
- Linked to this, a **low proportion** of businesses in Bradford (**3.9%**) are classified as **high growth** (i.e. growing employment by more than 20% annually over three years), ranking 8th relative to the core cities. Furthermore, there is a need for more well-paid jobs with **low** levels of **gross disposable household income** relative to the core cities.
- All of this justifies Bradford Council's position in providing a strong focus on **higher value opportunities** and attracting more **productive sectors** to Bradford.
- A **holistic approach** which seeks to improve **skills** and qualification levels and creates a more attractive **place** to live as proposed through the Regeneration Plan will help to address the issues which exist.

Tackling some of these weaknesses will help to address other social factors particularly high levels of deprivation, low levels of gross disposable household income and high levels of children in Bradford living below the poverty threshold.

The Opportunity

Economic output and productivity are key measures of the strength of the economy.

Levels of **productivity** in Bradford have risen at the same rate as the average across the core cities over the last 10 years (32%). If Bradford continues this trend, levels of productivity could exceed the current average for the core cities reaching an estimated £44 GVA per hour (similar to the current average of £37.8).

Bradford contributed £11.7 billion **Gross Value Added (GVA)** to the UK economy in 2023, with significant growth experienced over the last 5 years. If this trend continues, Bradford's GVA could reach **£17.6 billion by 2035**, surpassing current levels of economic output for Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield.

Whilst Bradford is performing well and keeping pace with historic growth experienced by other core cities, a significant uplift will be required in order to maintain levels of productivity and GVA growth in line with that expected for the core cities in the future. Within the Regeneration Plan, Bradford Council introduces 7 game changer projects alongside other initiatives which will be expected to help close the gap between Bradford and the other core cities even further.

A.1 Core City Benchmarking

People Indicators

Indicator	Bradford	B'ham	Bristol	Leeds	L'pool	Mcr	Newc	N'ham	Sheffield
POPULATION									
Population (total, 000s) <i>Mid-year estimate of the total population, 2024</i>	564	1,184	494	845	509	590	321	331	582
Working age population (16-64) <i>Percentage of the population aged 16 to 64, 2024</i>	62.2	65.1	70.8	65.8	67.5	70.8	68.2	69.7	65.5
Young population (16-24) <i>Percentage of the population aged 16 to 24, 2024</i>	11.6	15.1	17.1	14.8	17.3	19.4	19.8	22.9	15.1
Healthy life expectancy (men) <i>Average years expected to be lived in good health for males born during year, 2021-23</i>	57.5	57.6	60.4	60.7	55.7	57.6	58.6	57.2	58.1
Healthy life expectancy (women) <i>Average years expected to be lived in good health for females born during year, 2021-23</i>	58.1	57.2	60.3	61.5	56.1	58.5	59.5	56.8	58.1
Index of multiple deprivation <i>Weighted average score of the seven IMD domains, 2025</i>	36.7	38.1	22.5	24.1	37.1	38.7	28.8	33.7	27.6
PAY & INCOME									
Gross disposable household income <i>Average income per person (£, 000s) after taxes and direct benefits, 2022</i>	£17.8	£18.3	£24.7	£21.7	£19.0	£18.9	£19.7	£16.8	£19.5
Gross median weekly pay <i>Average weekly pay based on where people live, 2025/26</i>	£560	£601	£671	£611	£605	£589	£576	£531	£607
Children in relative poverty <i>Percentage of children aged 0 to 15 living in relative low-income families Before Housing Costs (BHC), 2023-24</i>	44.2	41.7	23.0	28.8	33.0	40.7	30.5	38.8	31.2
EDUCATION & SKILLS									
Level 4 or above qualifications <i>Percentage of the population aged 16 to 64 with Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) level 4+ qualifications, Jan-Dec 2024</i>	41.2	44.4	66.3	43.6	45.1	46.3	51.7	48.4	42.1
No qualifications <i>Percentage of the population aged 16 to 64 with no qualifications, Jan-Dec 2024</i>	9.1	11.8	4.0	6.1	7.1	7.4	11.2	9.4	8.0

GCSEs in English and Maths <i>GCSEs (and equivalent) in English and maths by age 19, 2023/24</i>	68.2	74.6	72.6	74.0	69.4	70.5	70.3	65.9	70.5
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Economy Indicators

Indicator	Bradford	B'ham	Bristol	Leeds	L'pool	Mcr	Newc	N'ham	Sheffield
EMPLOYMENT									
Total employment <i>Employment includes employees plus the number of working owners. The survey records a job at the location of an employee's workplace, 2024 ('000s)</i>	204	568	316	511	291	457	202	216	272
Job density <i>The numbers of jobs per resident aged 16-64, 2023</i>	0.65	0.86	1.02	1.00	0.91	1.21	1.06	1.00	0.83
Employment rate <i>Percentage of people aged 16 to 64 in employment, Jan-Dec 2024</i>	69.1	66.3	79.3	69.5	66.7	65.8	65.1	71.4	72.1
Female employment rate <i>Percentage of females aged 16 to 64 in employment, Jan-Dec 2024</i>	62.9	61.5	77.5	66.2	63.9	61.4	65.1	72.6	69.0
Economic inactivity rate <i>Percentage of people aged 16 to 64 who are not in employment and are not actively seeking work, Jan-Dec 2024</i>	27.4	27.8	17.2	28.8	28.8	27.7	30.4	24.1	26.4
Unemployment rate <i>Modelled percentage of economically active people aged 16 years and over without a job and actively seeking work, Jan-Dec 2024</i>	4.9	8.0	4.2	2.3	6.2	8.8	6.4	5.8	2.3
Claimant rate <i>Percentage of people aged 16 to 64 who are claiming unemployment-related benefits, 2024</i>	7.2	10.4	3.7	4.6	5.6	6.2	4.2	6.1	4.5
NEET rate <i>Proportion of young people aged 16-17 not in education, employment or training (NEET)</i>	2.1	3.2	6.0	4.9	5.9	5.3	6.9	3.4	6.1
PRODUCTIVITY									
Total size of the economy (Gross Value Added) <i>Gross value added (balanced) at current basic prices, (£ billion) 2023</i>	£11.7	£35.4	£21.0	£36.6	£18.4	£35.9	£12.2	£12.9	£17.3
Gross value added per hour worked <i>Estimated value of goods and services produced per hour worked, 2023</i>	£33.46	£35.14	£36.57	£41.47	£37.48	£44.77	£36.78	£33.88	£36.08
BUSINESS									

Bradford Core City Benchmarking

Business count <i>Total number of businesses (in 1000s), 2025</i>	16.8	37.8	18.0	29.3	14.5	23.7	8.9	9.6	16.8
Business density <i>Number of businesses per 10,000 people, 2024</i>	293	315	371	343	282	388	272	296	288
Business births <i>Percentage of businesses newly registered for VAT and/or PAYE, 2023</i>	12.5	14.2	11.2	11.7	14.0	14.0	12.1	12.5	10.9
Business deaths <i>Percentage of businesses ceasing activity, 2023</i>	12.8	13.7	10.7	11.7	13.9	12.4	11.5	11.2	12.2
5-Year business survival <i>Percentage of enterprises established in 2018 that remain active in 2023</i>	41.2	25.0	43.9	38.5	29.4	28.9	42.7	33.7	44.6
High growth businesses <i>Percentage of businesses with an average growth in employment of greater than 20% per year over a three-year period, 2023</i>	3.9	3.8	6.1	5.4	5.1	5.8	5.0	5.3	4.0

Place Indicators

Indicator	Bradford	B'ham	Bristol	Leeds	L'pool	Mcr	Newc	N'ham	Sheffield
HOUSING									
Net additions to the housing stock <i>Net additions to the stock of dwellings per 1,000 dwellings, 2023-24</i>	6	10	7	12	8	11	5	15	10
Housing affordability <i>Median housing affordability ratio, 2024</i>	5.1	6.0	8.6	6.4	4.4	6.5	5.4	5.7	5.6
CONNECTIVITY									
Gigabit capable broadband <i>Percentage of premises that have coverage from a gigabit-capable service (download speeds of 1,000 Mbps or more), 2025</i>	91.4	94.5	94.1	95.1	90.8	89.0	91.9	95.8	93.0
ENVIRONMENT									
Greenhouse gas emissions <i>Greenhouse gas emissions (tCO2e) per capita, 2023</i>	3.3	3.5	3.0	4.3	3.3	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.7

