



Suffolk Business Board: Meeting 20 March 2025

Minutes & Actions

Attendees

Business Board Members

Name	Role & Organisation
Mark Pendlington	Chair
Cllr Andrew Mellen	Leader, Mid Suffolk District Council
Hannah Bloom	Director of Philanthropy and Engagement, Suffolk Community Foundation
John Dugmore	CEO, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
Kelly Boosey	Commercial Manager, Oxford Innovation
Leanne Gittins	Managing Director, LME Recruitment
Lisa Perkins (R)	Chair, Tech East
Marek Hornak	UoS Pro Vice-Chancellor, Commercial and Academic Partnerships
Cllr Neil MacDonald	Leader, Ipswich Borough Council
Nikos Savvas	CEO, Eastern Education Group
Oliver Paul	Director, Suffolk Food Hall
Cllr Richard Smith MVO	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills, Suffolk County Council

Apologies

Name	Role & Organisation
Cllr Matthew Hicks	Leader, Suffolk County Council
Doug Field	Former CEO, East of England Co-op
Ian Gallin	Chief Executive, West Suffolk Council
Paul Ager	Divisional Port Manager, ABP
Peter Brady	CEO, Orbital Group
Tom Ball	CFO, Ipswich Town FC

Guests

Name	Role & Organisation
Darren Horsman	Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer, Police and Crime Suffolk
Martin Collison	Chair of Norfolk & Suffolk Agri Food Industry Council
Nikki Mitcham	Head of Business Administration & Company Secretary CLAAS UK

Officer team

Name	Role & Organisation
Andrew Cook	Executive Director Growth, Highways and Infrastructure, Suffolk County Council
Hannah Brown (R)	Executive Assistant and Project Support, Suffolk County Council
Jai Raithatha	Head of Economic Development, Suffolk County Council
Julian Munson	Head of Innovation & Sectors, Suffolk County Council
Julie West	Programmes Coordinator, Suffolk County Council
Lisa Roberts	Head of Economic Strategy, Suffolk County Council
Michael Gray	Head of Skills, Suffolk County Council
Rob Hancock	Assistant Director, Suffolk County Council
Tom Gooding	Senior Communications Officer, Suffolk County Council

Actions
ACTION 3.1 Board members are encouraged to share and promote Suffolk economy content via their own platforms. Business Board Members.
ACTION 3.2 Business Board Members are asked for suggestions for potential advocates and interviewees to broaden the reach and impact of the comms strategy. Kelly Boosey has asked for support in conducting interviews with Board Members to discuss key aspects of the strategic plan and how it can be brought to life through different sectors and businesses. Business Board Members.
ACTION 3.3 More detailed Suffolk Showcase Plan to be developed. Lisa Roberts
ACTION 5.1. Board members requested clearer information as to progress and impact of interventions. A red/amber/green rating agreed as the start point, for next meeting. Officer team.
ACTION 5.2 Board Members are encouraged to submit feedback on Skills Bootcamps scope of courses to Michael Gray by 25 April 2025. Business Board Members.
ACTION 7.1 MP requested convening a small subgroup to draft a one-page document summarising key points and potential actions related to the agrifood presentation and Suffolk opportunities not captured in the Strategy. SCC Officers to facilitate.
ACTION 8.1 The Chamber of Commerce will host a business leaders dinner on 16th April. Board members interested in joining should inform MP. Business Board Members.
ACTION 8.2 Business Board Members to make MP or SCC Officers aware if they wish to attend the UK REIIF conference. Business Board Members. ACTION 8.3 Board members are reminded to fill in and return their Conflict of Interest forms and submit to the Suffolk Business Board email address. Business Board Members.
ACTION 8.4 Board Members are requested to respond to HBs poll regarding alternative May Business Board dates. Business Board Members.

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
1	Agenda, apologies and minutes – Mark Pendlington Welcome and Introductions: MP welcomed everyone and expressed gratitude for the support during his absence. He thanked Oli Paul for managing the responsibilities while he was away. MP acknowledged the board's decision to have him continue as Chair for the next few months for continuity. MP passed on this thanks to Claas for the informative tour and for hosting the board this afternoon. Apologies: Apologies were received from Cllr Matthew Hicks, Paul Ager, Peter Brady, Doug Field, Tom Ball and Ian Gallin. Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation: • RS provided an overview of the devolution process, including the upcoming mayoral election and the potential impact on strategic growth initiatives. • Discussion on the proposal for one unitary authority for Suffolk, highlighting potential savings and political debates. AM shared an alternative vision for having two or three smaller councils to provide more local focus and responsiveness. Police Department and Social Justice: MP welcomed Darren Horseman, the new Chief Executive from Suffolk Police, emphasising the importance of links between police, crime, social justice, and employment strategy. MP appreciated the efforts of John, Andrew, and Rob in successfully coordinating Suffolk's initiatives and mentioned the positive start to the joint working relationship with the Norfolk and Suffolk Business Board. Minutes Approval: MP asked the board to approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on January 16th. These was agreed. Review of Previous Actions: • Meetings with Suffolk MPs: Progressing well, with most meetings arranged except for one with Jenny Riddell-Carpenter and Suffolk Coastal. • Funding Processes Paper: Scheduled as an agenda item for today's meeting.	

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
	• Energy Gaps in Interventions: Ongoing discussions, with plans for it to be brought back to the board. • Water summit Business Plan: Kelly and Mark are involved in shaping the go-to-market offer, with a special presentation planned for April. • Advanced Manufacturing Centre Business Plan: Kelly and Mark agreed to further involvement in shaping the offer. • Performance Update of Interventions: Paper on this topic scheduled for today's meeting, with more substantial updates to come to the main board. • AI National Awards: Potential investment discussed, with a tentative date of 16th October at Adastral Park, subject to final funding.	
2	Feedback from Joint Board Meeting with Norfolk, 26th February MP mentioned the positive start to the joint working relationship between the Norfolk and Suffolk Business Board, highlighting its increasing importance in the coming months. Monthly meetings between the board, County Council, and the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce were planned to ensure effective coordination and synergy.	
3	Comms and Marketing Plan, Kelly Boosey & Lisa Roberts • Overview and Strategy: ○ The comms and marketing approach aims to build the audience by leveraging existing groups and platforms in Suffolk. ○ The strategy includes engaging with key stakeholders, membership groups, and other organisations to promote the Suffolk economy brand. • Key Activities: ○ A toolkit has been created for board members to help with sharing and promoting Suffolk economy messaging. ○ Plans to conduct talking head interviews with board members and young entrepreneurs to diversify the audience and content. ○ A quarterly newsletter is planned, with the possibility of increasing frequency based on content availability. • Future Plans: ○ A Suffolk Showcase event is being considered for the autumn to serve as a launch platform. ○ Sponsorship of Suffolk and international events is suggested to enhance brand visibility. • Resource Allocation:	

Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
○ Additional back-office support has been approved to assist with website activation and other key activities. ACTION 3.1 Board members are encouraged to share and promote Suffolk economy content on their platforms. Business Board Members. ACTION 3.2 Business Board Members are asked for suggestions for potential advocates and interviewees to broaden the reach and impact of the comms strategy. Kelly has asked for support in conducting interviews with board members to discuss key aspects of the strategic plan and how it can be brought to life through different sectors and businesses. Business Board Members. These interviews aim to create content that showcases the expertise and vision of the board members, helping to build the Suffolk economy brand. Suffolk Showcase Paper: The discussion focused on the proposal for a Suffolk Showcase event and toolkit to promote Suffolk's strengths and opportunities. • Toolkit: The toolkit aims to provide collateral for events and meetings, including professionally designed materials and a speaker bureau of Suffolk advocates. It will be accessible and easy to use, with a programme to support people in effectively utilising the package. • Suffolk Showcase Event: Proposed to be held in autumn, potentially aligned with the AI awards on 16th October. The event will feature satellite events across Suffolk's innovation centres, showcasing Suffolk food and celebrating achievements. It aims to connect businesses, organisations, education, and the volunteer community sector. • Next Steps: Develop plans further, secure sponsorship, and support the event. Conversations with potential sponsors like UKPN are ongoing. Kelly and Lisa emphasised the importance of building the audience and engaging stakeholders to promote Suffolk economy effectively. ACTION 3.3 More detailed Suffolk Showcase Plan to be developed. Lisa Roberts MP queried who is going to be the person or people who are going to focus on this and drive it with the Business Board's total support and queried what resources we will have to help drive this forward.	Business Board Members Business Board Members Lisa Roberts

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
	RH confirmed that it will be a collective effort involving the officers and business board members. Specific asks for help include business board members contributing to interviews and content creation. There is already a lot of collateral available, and the officers will do some work behind the scenes. The expectation is that the business board members will also contribute. The plan is to start talking about the Suffolk economy and giving people permission to use the brand. The website and messaging need to be finalised first. After discussing resources, the following questions were asked: • Coordination with the East of England Investment Prospectus activity and ensuring a unified signal voice. • LP queried if we are planning on Feedback to people who attended the workshops and leveraging different networks across Suffolk. Confirmed that this action is underway. Ensuring the decision-making process is thorough and considering the challenges of launching and maintaining initiatives.	
4	Finance and investment update, Rob Hancock • Funding Overview: The paper outlines the funding available, including £8.5 million inherited from the LEP, which is intended to deliver the economic strategy and leverage private money at a 4:1 ratio. Other specific funds include the skills boot camp funding and high growth funding. • Commercial Funding: There are commercial and pseudo-commercial funding options, such as the UK Business Bank, which is being lobbied for an East of England fund. • Decision Making: RS, the County Council portfolio holder, ensures that the work done by the business board is value for money, transparent, and compliant. The business board can make decisions regarding projects and programme resourcing in line with the agreed economic strategy. • Steering Programmes: The business board is responsible for steering former LEP programmes to ensure they deliver the right outcomes. The finance and investment update paper was discussed, highlighting the funding available for Suffolk economy and Business Board, including specific funding for skills bootcamps and high growth SMEs. MP raised a query about the UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UK REIIF). He asked if there is funding available from global financial private sector markets and whether they are plugged into it through UK REIIF or other local	

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
	funds. He also inquired about the specific prospectus to provide to an investor interested in investing in Suffolk, questioning if it should be the economic development plan or another document. MP emphasised the need for a clear investment-ready document to present to potential investors. • There was a discussion about the need for a structured budget and the potential impact of devolution on future financial decisions. • The importance of continuing to build traction and deliver results was emphasised, despite uncertainties related to devolution.	
5	Update on Economic Strategy Interventions for 25/26 - Richard Smith Economic Strategy Interventions: RS emphasised the importance of monitoring the functions and progress of the released tasks from the new economic strategy. He mentioned that regular updates about the programs and their progress are crucial, suggesting that these updates should occur approximately four times a year. RS then passed the discussion to JM for more detailed information. Julian's Update on Interventions: • Space East: Received £100,000 from counties in East of England (Norfolk, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire) to support the space sector. Awaiting decision on a bid to the new space agency. • Energy Sector: Ongoing work with Norfolk and Essex to generate programme, finalising details on £30,000 contribution from each county for marketing and investment efforts under the generate brand. • Startup Tech Programme: Successful programme with early-stage tech businesses and entrepreneurs. Continuing the programme without Barclays support, scaling back until further funding is confirmed. • High Growth Business Support: Confirmed £311,000 funding from the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy for continuation of business support. Scaling up the high growth business support service, working closely with local authorities and organisations like Suffolk Chamber of Commerce and MENTA. • Suffolk Economy Grant Programme: Launching on 1st April with £1,000,000 reallocated from legacy funds. Over 100 businesses registered interest in the new grants programme. ACTION 5.1. Board members requested clearer information as to progress and impact of interventions. A red/amber/green rating agreed as the start point, for next meeting. Officer team	Officer team

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
	Update on Skills Bootcamps from Michael Gray: • Suffolk received up to £4.1 million in funding for skills bootcamps for the next academic year. • Skills bootcamps are modular programmes aimed at training adults in areas directly aligned with business needs. • Suffolk has successfully run several waves of bootcamps, currently in wave five, with 18 providers and on track to achieve target starts. • The plan is to extend contracts of successful wave five providers and start a new procurement exercise in May for additional provision starting in September. • Focus areas for new bootcamps include those recommended in the proposal submitted last summer. ACTION 5.2 Board Members are encouraged to submit feedback on Skills Bootcamps scope of courses to Michael Gray by 25 April 2025. Business Board Members. RS expressed concerns about the collaborative working on initiatives between Suffolk and Norfolk, questioning if there were any tensions or issues that should be known. JM responded, assuring that there were no significant issues and that the collaborative efforts were running smoothly. He highlighted the good governance in place and the seamless continuation of programmes such as Connected Innovation and the Industry Councils, which involve both Suffolk and Norfolk representatives. Update on the Skills, Employment and Lifelong Development Board: • Purpose: The board aims to address the gap in strategic discussions around skills and employment, ensuring cohesive collaboration among key stakeholders. • Immediate Actions: ○ Development of the "Get Suffolk Working" paper, contributing to the national ambition to raise employment rates from 25% to 20%. ○ Coordination of several projects, including the Connect to Work initiative and Skills Boot Camps. • Need for Coordination: The board will bring together various stakeholders to ensure a cohesive approach to skills and employment development.	

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
6	Guest presentation, Martin Collison, Chair of Norfolk & Suffolk Agri Food Industry Council Martin Collison joined the board and gave the following presentation on the AgriFood sector and the potential within Suffolk. Global Agrifood Sector: • The agrifood sector is enormous, with significant global output and employment. • Food prices have risen sharply, with UK-sourced food prices increasing less than globally sourced food. • Climate change is impacting agriculture, with significant droughts and water shortages. • The global workforce in agriculture is decreasing, necessitating increased productivity through technology. International Approaches: • The US aims to increase output by 40% while halving environmental impact, focusing on sustainable intensification. • Lincolnshire has focused on automation, low carbon, and health and diet, leading to significant investment and growth. • The Midlands and Great Southwest have ambitious plans for agrifood growth, focusing on adding value and specific regional strengths. Norfolk and Suffolk Agrifood Council: • The council prioritises business-led growth, aiming to increase food processing within the counties to add value. • Emphasis on productivity growth through automation and digital solutions, addressing labour and skill shortages. • Opportunities in water management, renewable energy, and reducing emissions. Suffolk Recommendations: • Potential to add value to food production and imports, leveraging transport infrastructure like the A14 and rail links. • Embrace low carbon initiatives and address water challenges as opportunities.	

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
	- Focus on cross-sector links, integrating agrifood with digital, energy, and logistics sectors. Future Directions: - Collaboration is key, with a focus on commercialising agritech solutions that farmers need. - Suffolk should consider forming a super cluster with Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, and Lincolnshire to drive growth at scale. - Attracting foreign direct investment requires a comprehensive offer, including workforce supply, sustainable resources, and innovation clusters. Conclusion: - Suffolk has significant potential in agrifood, with opportunities in adding value, leveraging infrastructure, addressing water and energy challenges, and forming cross-sector links.	
7	Agri-Food opportunity discussion - Oliver Paul and Martin Collison Queries raised on Agrifood: Investment in Electric and Hybrid Trucks: Query: Concerns about the high cost of investment in electric and hybrid trucks for agrifood logistics. Answer: Adoption at scale is needed to reduce costs. Dutch trucks are already using hydrogen, but the UK lacks charging infrastructure. Biomethane tractors are being trialled, and EVs face weight penalties and downtime issues. Collaboration with Universities: Query: Offer to collaborate with universities for cross-disciplinary projects in agrifood. Answer: Martin welcomed the offer and highlighted the importance of engaging students early to attract them to the agritech sector. Suffolk's Agrifood Cluster: Query: Identification of Suffolk's agrifood cluster and its focus. Answer: The cluster feasibility work is in progress, with results expected by the end of September. Potential of Agritech and AI:	

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
	a. Martin emphasised the significant potential for Suffolk in agritech, particularly leveraging the digital cluster around Martlesham and BT. b. Agritech solutions need to be commercially viable and address farmers' needs, with a focus on rapid adoption and scaling. 2. Collaboration with Universities: a. An offer was made to collaborate with universities for cross-disciplinary projects, engaging students early to attract them to the agritech sector. 3. Cluster Feasibility Work: a. The cluster feasibility work is currently in progress, with results expected by the end of September. This will help identify Suffolk's agritech focus and potential. 4. Cross-Sector Links: a. Emphasis on integrating agritech with other sectors such as digital, energy, and logistics to drive growth. Discussion on Workforce within Agrifood: 1. Labour Supply Challenges: a. Concerns were raised about the future supply of lower-paid, lower-skilled jobs in agriculture, especially given the difficulties in importing labour. 2. Automation and Robotics: a. Martin highlighted the importance of automation and robotics as a long-term solution to labour shortages. Examples include robots for planting and harvesting crops, which significantly increase productivity. 3. Higher-Skilled Jobs: a. The transition to automation will create higher-paid, higher-skilled jobs, making the sector more attractive to workers. 4. Government Support: a. The government has agreed to a five-year migration scheme to temporarily address labour shortages, but this is not seen as a sustainable long-term solution. ACTION 7.1 MP requested convening a small subgroup to draft a one-page document summarising key points and potential actions related to agrifood and Suffolk. SCC Officers to facilitate. This document should include: ○ Exploring the link between Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, and Lincolnshire.	SCC Officers

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
	○ Campaigning on infrastructure, including the A14 and rail corridors. ○ Addressing water issues. ○ Developing a curriculum involving universities and industry partners like Sizewell.	
8	AOB and Forward Plan – Mark Pendlington MP raised the following AOB points: • Consultation Call: There is a consultation call tomorrow organised by Norfolk, chaired by Mark, regarding the small business status. • Suffolk Convention: The next meeting of the Suffolk Convention is scheduled for Friday, 24th October. • Business Leaders Dinner: ACTION 8.1 The Chamber of Commerce will host a business leaders dinner on 16th April. Board members interested in joining should inform MP. Business Board Members. • UK REIIF Showcase: A national/international real estate investment showcase in Leeds on 19th and 20th May. Mark will attend and invites other board members to join. ACTION 8.2 Business Board Members to make Mark or SCC Officers aware if they wish to attend the UK REIIF conference. Business Board Members. • Arts and Culture Sector: MP noted that he has been lobbied by the arts and culture sector for better engagement. He seeks a board member to champion this sector. • Conflict of Interest Forms: ACTION 8.3 Board members are reminded to fill in and return their conflict of interest forms to the Suffolk Business Board email address. Business Board Members. • District and Borough Council Representatives: Review of district and borough council representations on the board is due, NM confirmed that he will stay on as the Ipswich representative and that discussions are ongoing regarding who will fill the second District board member seat. RH raised the following AOB point: • The next board meeting, originally scheduled for May 23rd, unfortunately needs to be moved due to diary conflicts with the UK REIIF conference and County Council meeting. HB will reach out to suggest alternative dates.	Business Board Members Business Board Members

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
	ACTION 8.4 Board Members are requested to respond to HBs poll regarding alternative May Business Board dates. Business Board Members.	Business Board Members.