
INNOVATION COUNCIL MEETING • 1st September 2021

Introduction:

The meeting focused on the Innovation Districts

- Greater Lincolnshire contains several innovation hubs, but there is no clear, instantly recognizable 'shining beacon' which is the flagship innovation hub for the region.
- There needs to be a shared (i.e. at the LEP / Council / district level) understanding of what innovation and success in GL might look like, and how it might have changed post-pandemic.
- We should not assume that Greater Lincolnshire's innovation hubs have all the answers - SME themselves are a critical part of the region's innovation asset base.
- Post-Covid, opportunities have opened up for people to move away from cities like London and into less-urban areas that offer a higher quality of life. Greater Lincolnshire stands to benefit from the opportunity if it can present itself as an attractive and exciting place for innovators. There is potential to develop an innovation prospectus / pitch book which would highlight Greater Lincolnshire's offer.
- Greater Lincolnshire needs to take advantage of the moment. The number of innovation awards that have gone to Greater Lincolnshire companies is positive. Since 2009 this has been a positive growth story.

The Innovation Ecosystem

- We need to look beyond old ways of thinking – e.g. sectors and productivity – and take into account wider factors that could promote new types of innovation. Need to make sure our thinking is 'now' and present.
- There is an important point around business networks. They are so important to Cambridge but missing in Greater Lincolnshire. What is the role of large businesses and those who are innovating in creating peer to peer networks and attracting private investment?
- The session has focused on the 'Power of Three' model but it's also very important to consider individual businesses and how innovation occurs in them. The work Metro Dynamics is doing should reflect this important consideration.

Innovation Districts: Discussion

How can we build the critical mass of our innovation hubs and create more effective spaces for ideas and innovation to happen?

- The critical mass of innovation hubs is a good starting point. It would be helpful to outline the assets Greater Lincolnshire already has that could be classed as innovation hubs.
- In a geographically dispersed place like Greater Lincolnshire innovation hubs may not have to be physical places – there is also a role for virtual spaces.
- Greater Lincolnshire contains several innovation hubs, but there is no clear, instantly recognisable 'shining beacon' asset to be the flagship innovation hub for the region.
- There has been some scepticism over whether putting a building in a 'pretty place' really helps stimulate innovation. However North Bank does seem to have stimulated businesses to do well and collaborate. Physical space can really help, and the Digital Space model has also been very successful.
- Greater Lincolnshire is currently missing some of the physical innovation spaces for meetings. Virtual spaces are useful, but it does miss those physical spaces.
- There is quite a lot in the MD presentation about 'success'. There needs to be a shared (i.e. at the LEP / Council level) understanding of what innovation and success in Greater Lincolnshire might look like, and how it might have changed post-pandemic. The LEP should provide some leadership around what this might involve, possibly aligning it to the Power of 3 model.



- There is a more specific point around innovation districts and hubs, as well as the intersection between issues such as skills and the labour market and what this should look like. The strategy needs to be about looking forwards, not backwards.
- Greater Lincolnshire is trying to move forwards in a new direction. The actual 'how' and what it looks like is very different to even 3 years ago.

What are the key assets and localities that we should focus intervention on?

- It feels like North East Lincolnshire is getting on with things itself and success here could be harnessed more to support the SME network. Greater Lincolnshire is structured around a series of market towns, and spreading the approach across places in a 'lots of little' model could be effective.
- Greater Lincolnshire should be encouraging people to leave the region, pick up new skills and expertise, but then very importantly be able to attract them back to the area.
- MyEnergi is an example of an innovative firm that has expanded within Greater Lincolnshire.
- In the introduction it was rightly stated how important and powerful the role of the university is. As an Innovation Council it will be fascinating to see the direction the university goes in, how it balances the importance of moving up the research rankings and translating this to generating innovation. It is important that the university continues and increases the extent to which it puts work into translating research as well as creating research.
- It is more important than ever that progress happens at speed. Speed and longevity are both very important.
- There shouldn't be an assumption that Greater Lincolnshire's universities and innovation hubs have all the answers for SMEs: the SMEs themselves are part of Greater Lincolnshire's critical asset base and may also have some of the answers and ideas.
- Also conscious that the nature of funding can become quite siloed around single company interventions. There is a question around how Greater Lincolnshire can work best across SMEs and supply chains.

What are the immediate and longer-term interventions required to make this happen? And which stakeholders need to lead on these?

- Thinking about MyEnergi, is there a 'template' that can be used to inspire other companies / entrepreneurs? How can they make that leap from being a small start up to having warehouses and scaling up.
- North Lincolnshire / North East Lincolnshire have many businesses doing great things, but their work does not attract much attention. It could use a space where small businesses / entrepreneurs can meet up with people from some of the larger or more successful innovative businesses to share ideas and collaborate.
- There are questions around what innovation could look like beyond the hubs Greater Lincolnshire already have, and how innovation can be spread beyond where it is already occurring.
- The opportunity following Covid-19 is that people are looking to live in nicer, often more rural, places and to move away from big cities. There needs to be a prospectus or a pitch book advocating for Greater Lincolnshire, showing where the hubs are, what is happening in Greater Lincolnshire and what the offer is, in order to attract these people to Greater Lincolnshire
- Agri-food, Energy and Defence in particular are the good news stories, but they are not well known enough. There is not currently a coherent narrative developed or a pitch around what is needed next for these industries.
- Nationally Lincoln is seen as a place centred around the diffusion of innovation. It needs to build a coherent offer that is ambitious for the place and demonstrates how Lincoln can help firms and government achieve their innovation goals. Building on the Strategic Review and the Government's work around Growth Hubs will be important in doing this.

How can we support inclusive innovation beyond our primary innovation hubs?

- It is for the LEP to get the space between innovation, skills and business support right. The focus should not be so much on the minority of apprentices or businesses in hub based companies, but on mainstreaming innovative activity through skills based interventions. If Lincoln can do this through schools, Further Education and training providers it could have an edge over other places.
- Greater Lincolnshire needs to take advantage of the moment. The number of innovation awards that have gone to Lincolnshire companies is positive. Since 2009 this has been a positive growth story.



Innovation Ecosystems: Discussion

What are the opportunities for change and scale that we should collectively target and promote?

- Greater Lincolnshire could concentrate on promoting a sector, one that isn't too large, e.g. defence which is an unusual sector which is very specialised. There is a question around whether there is budget, collectively within the university or LEP, to promote a sector and give it specialist help?
- Also important is finding a niche within very broad sectors. For example, Greater Lincolnshire works within a very specific part of the defence industry rather than across the whole industry.
- The slides in the presentation on location quotients and productivity frame the discussion in quite an old, pre-pandemic way. For example, does productivity still have the same significance as it did prior to the pandemic?
- Having the required infrastructure in place, along with hybrid working and investing in talent, might be as significant a strategy as a sector-niche focused strategy.
- The key point is to look beyond sectors and productivity to a wider basket of material that could promote new types of innovation. We need to make sure our thinking is 'now' and present.

What interventions should we prioritise in the coming year to encourage innovation?

- There is an important point around business networks. They are so important to Cambridge but are missing in Greater Lincolnshire. We need to determine what the role is of large businesses and those who are innovating in creating peer to peer networks and attracting private investment.
- This relationship is a two way street: it is also important to know what businesses can do, not just what can be done for businesses.
- It would be good to have a discussion with skills counterparts in the LEP around the interface of future skills and the opportunity around the way innovation is delivered. This should include peer to peer networks - creating groups of people who can learn from each other and spread the word. It should also link to the existing Team Lincolnshire network.

What interventions should we target over the longer term?

- Often in technology businesses the greatest innovation is seen when people are encouraged to apply their existing skills to something new. Hacker networks are one example within the technology industry, it is about getting people to apply what they already know to a different situation.
- It is important to use The Medical School and do so in a way that is appropriate to Lincolnshire's community and demography, so for example, not just focused on hospitals and intensive care. We should also use Agri-Food and Energy in way that aligns with the themes that emerge from COP26 in November.
- The session has focused on the 'Power of Three' model but it's also very important to consider individual businesses and how innovation occurs in them. The work Metro Dynamics is doing should reflect this important consideration.

