

Agenda Item 6: Sectors & Innovation Update

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Background

This update is provided in response to the request made at the meeting of the Norfolk Business Board held on 26th September for board members to receive an overview of those sectors which are key to the Norfolk economy.

This paper comprises of 2 elements:

- Background information on key sectors including data on the size of sector, number of businesses and employees and its contribution to Norfolk's GVA. Figures quoted have been taken from the evidence base for the Norfolk Economic Strategy.
- An update on the targeted work of the Sectors and Innovation team focussing on key programmes and initiatives.

Norfolk's competitive sectors make an important contribution to the local and national economy and provide substantial growth potential.

Norfolk has a strong and diverse economy with the following key sectors identified in the Norfolk Economic Strategy: clean energy, agri-tech and agri-food, life sciences, advanced manufacturing and engineering, financial services and insurance and digital tech. Foundational sectors for our economy include culture, heritage and the visitor economy, health and social care and construction.

An Overview of Norfolk Sectors

Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering

This sector includes industries involved in the use of cutting-edge technology to improve products and processes. It encompasses high-precision manufacturing, automation, robotics, and engineering to create innovative products and solutions.

Number of businesses: 2150

Number of jobs: 47582

Contribution to GVA of Norfolk: £2bn, (17%)

Challenges

- The announcements of rising labour costs through increased employer contributions to National Insurance could ultimately minimise job growth and potentially lead to local sector redundancies.
- It has been a quiet year for a lot of manufacturers (largely subcontract machine shops and injection moulding businesses) so the risk of redundancies in association with the rise of labour costs from April 2025 could be detrimental.
- There are still many examples where manufacturers and engineering companies do not know what 'T-Levels' are.
- There is a lack of level 2 technical training provision and welding/fabrication provision.

Opportunities

- The £1.2m Made Smarter Adoption East of England programme will commence from April 2025. Norfolk County Council will be the accountable body for this programme supporting the adoption of industrial digital technologies and the associated skills required.
- Reaction to the draft Industrial Strategy has been positive within the manufacturing community and from Make UK.
- The growth of the defence sector gives local businesses an opportunity to diversify their product offering and enter this sector. NAAME will continue to work with Make UK Defence and the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) to run events and raise awareness of upcoming opportunities.
- Aerospace and space sector growth offers organisation a small 'side-step' from current operations into new sectors. A partnership programme with The Welding Institute (TWI), called the ESA Technology Broker, offers a free business support programme to provide access to state-of-the-art facilities and research expertise to unlock new sector opportunities.
- There continue to be opportunities around the Apprenticeship Levy Transfer to fund costs of taking on apprenticeships.
- Businesses are tapping into sector relevant and sector agnostic funding calls from Innovate UK, such as the Agri-Tech and Food Tech Launchpad, with support from the Innovation Grant Mentoring Programme and NAAME.
- Offering sector specific T-Level student workplaces has yielded some great result for local labour pools – more promotion and case studies are required to raise awareness of t-levels and the value they offer.

[New Anglia Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering \(NAAME\)](#) is a network of seven manufacturing groups. These groups are free to attend and cover all of Norfolk and Suffolk. They provide a trusted forum for manufacturing and engineering businesses to connect, exchange knowledge, access expertise to help with new product development or innovation and discuss and resolve industry challenges. The NAAME Industry Council provide strategic leadership, oversight, and decision-making for this network.

Agri-Food & Agri-Tech

This sector involves the application of technology to agriculture and food production. It includes activities such as precision farming, biotechnology, food processing, supply chain management, and sustainable agriculture practices to improve productivity and efficiency in the food industry.

Number of businesses: 5086

Number of jobs: 42550

Contribution to GVA of Norfolk: £1.49bn (13%)

Challenges

- The Autumn statement has provided a number of challenges for local farmers and those working in the agricultural industry. This has been coupled with ongoing uncertainty around future regulation, government support and concerns around the access to basic infrastructure such as water.
- The omission of almost all of the Agri Food sector in the Government's Industrial Strategy has raised concerns regionally about their commitment to the sector, especially given its significance to the county.

Opportunities

- Working with regional partners NCC has secured £7.5m through the Innovate UK Agri Tech and Food Tech Launchpad competitions to support innovation projects across agricultural businesses, agri-tech firms, agri-biotech, food tech and aquaculture. This funding has supported fully-funded grants straight to companies and grants to boost collaborative R&D projects. The final round, which closed in November, saw 98 applications across the wider region. 13 of those companies were supported across Norfolk and Suffolk by the Innovation Grant Mentoring Project. County Leads for the Launchpad will continue to signpost support on offer to the sector across the next two years.
- The Norfolk & Suffolk Unlimited team continue to provide multiple opportunities for companies to exhibit at global food and drink events, whilst continuing to promote the inward investment opportunities available in the region.

The Norfolk and Suffolk Agri-Food Industry Council provides strategic leadership for the region's agri-food sector. The Council includes representatives from across the entire agri-food chain and its priorities include advocating to key Government departments and agencies, developing skills in the region, innovation support and driving investment in the region and international trade.

Energy

This sector includes industries involved in the production, distribution, and management of energy. It encompasses traditional energy sources as well as renewable energy sources such as wind, solar, hydroelectric, and geothermal power. Norfolk is a global leader for offshore wind with £39bn of clean energy investment forecasted over the next 20 years. The Southern North Sea offshore wind market is poised to increase significantly in both pace and scale to meet expectations around Net Zero. The Norfolk Offshore Wind Zone will produce clean power for over four million homes across the UK. Norfolk's energy sector has a GVA per head of £153.9k, which is the highest of all sectors.

Number of businesses: 397

Number of jobs: 3,611

Contribution to GVA of Norfolk: £0.56Bn (5%)

Challenges

- Norfolk and the East is and will remain a UK hub for clean energy growth with strong international links to Europe and beyond, however often is overlooked in Government's announcements related to Clean Energy as seen in the Modern Industrial Strategy.

- It is vital that the nationally significant infrastructure projects delivered in this region provide lasting legacy for communities and the economy – with highly skilled jobs and supply chain benefits.

Opportunities

- The region's pivotal role in the energy transition is exemplified by Bacton Terminal, which in recent times has handled up to 30% of the UK's gas supplies. Bacton Terminal has the potential to become a hub for the production of low-carbon hydrogen, enabled by carbon capture and storage, which could help decarbonise and businesses in the South East of England.
- With some of the world's biggest wind farms and a major Operations and Maintenance Campus, Great Yarmouth generates over £1.8bn GV
- This round brought promising advancements for the local offshore wind sector, with Ørsted's Hornsea Three and ScottishPower Renewables' East Anglia TWO and THREE projects securing contracts, adding over a gigawatt of capacity and marking a notable rebound from last year's AR5 which saw no awards. All three projects are set to come online between 2027-2029.
- Hydrogen East is pursuing projects related to alternative fuels across the East of England and is recognised nationally as one of the Hydrogen Clusters.
- The Connect Programme delivered by the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult and sponsored by Norfolk County Council, Suffolk County Council, Essex County Council and developers, will support entrants into the offshore renewable energy supply chain building on the opportunities above.

East Wind has become the East of England Energy Group's (EEEGR) recognised offshore wind sector council as well as the regions offshore wind cluster.

Life Sciences

This sector includes industries related to the study of living organisms and life processes. It encompasses biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, healthcare, and environmental sciences. It focuses on research, development, and the application of biological and medical knowledge to improve health and the environment.

Number of businesses: 618

Number of jobs: 7975

Contribution to GVA of Norfolk: £0.56bn (5%)

Challenges

- The region continues to look to establish its competitive 'offer' to life science and wider science-based businesses as they look to compete with science parks in Cambridge. Across the wider region there have been a few companies who have moved across after starting and growing their business in Norfolk and Suffolk.

Opportunities

- Norwich Research Park has recently announced a new long-term partnership with real estate investment partner Vengrove to construct new laboratory and office accommodation.
- Norwich Research Park is working together with UKRI as the John Innes Centre and the Sainsbury Laboratory are at the forefront of efforts to bring to life the Healthy Plants, Healthy People, Healthy Planet (HP3) vision for achieving a safer, healthier and more sustainable future through the power of plant and microbial science.
- The park hosted its latest Enterprise Tuesday event on 26th November with the final of the Innovation Hothouse Competition.

The Norfolk and Suffolk Innovation Board brings together senior leaders in innovation from across the region including research partners such as the NRP, innovation hubs, universities, [Innovate UK](#), and the [Connected Innovation](#) team.

Visitor Economy

This sector involves industries that support tourism and travel, including hospitality, accommodation, attractions, events, and services that cater to tourists and visitors. It plays a key role in regional economic development by attracting visitors and their spending.

Number of businesses: 5635

Number of jobs: 61842

Contribution to GVA of Norfolk: £1.15Bn (10%)

Challenges

- The increase in National Insurance employer contributions announced in the Budget coupled with the rise in the Living Wage will put further pressure on employers in this sector.
- The UK tourism sector remains highly competitive with areas needing to differentiate themselves and encourage repeat visitors. There is also the challenge of tempting overseas tourists to visit locations such as Norfolk rather than the traditional locations such as London and Cambridge.

Opportunities

- Norfolk has recently been granted Local Visitor Economy Partnership status by Visit England which can be capitalised on in order to make Norfolk an all-year, sustainable and accessible destination. This will drive increased job opportunities and retention in areas where they are most needed. NCC estimates that if the visitor economy grows at the same level as over the past decade - and with the help of government funding - that would create 9,700 further jobs connected to tourism.
- Collaboration with partner organisations, including local councils, the Broads Authority and Visit East of England, will be essential for the continued success of the sector. There is also the opportunity for further investment around under-utilised heritage assets (such as the Guildhall in King's Lynn) and in the upkeep of existing assets like the Winter Gardens in Great Yarmouth or Cromer Clifftop Gardens.
- Norfolk has welcomed a number of largescale film productions in recent years. Olsberg SPI research found that 26 locations hosted film and TV productions and it is estimated that activity such as this brings in £1.9 million annually to the local economy. There are significant opportunities to build on this, utilising the talent from local colleges and universities, and activity is underway to invest in the future of Norfolk's screen sector through the Norfolk Film Office pilot.

Digital Tech

This sector encompasses industries that develop and utilize digital technologies, including software development, IT services, cybersecurity, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and telecommunications. It focuses on the innovation and application of digital solutions.

Norfolk is home to a fast-growing digital tech economy with a current GVA of £450m and around 9,000 employees, increasingly important both across a range of sectors and in its own right.

Number of businesses: 1860

Number of jobs: 8778

Contribution to GVA of Norfolk: £0.45bn (4%)

Challenges

- Access to funding for early-stage tech founders and scaling tech businesses continues to be a challenge for Norfolk. There are no Venture Capital investment

firms with an office in the county for example, which is a major stumbling block for the success of the region's tech sector.

Opportunities

- The 'Future' programme supported by Norfolk County Council, Connected Innovation and Barclays Eagle Labs has sought to address the gap in early-stage support for digital tech businesses. This included access to start-up support, exited founders and a stipend / grant to help them grow the business.
- SyncTheCity takes place at the end of November bringing together both the emerging and existing tech communities together over a 54-hour event. This event has continued to drive Norwich's reputation as tech 'hub' and engage our future entrepreneurs and innovators.
- Nor(Dev):Con continues to be an ever-growing conference in terms of its reputation and attraction of speakers and attendees from around the UK. It takes place at the King's Centre on 27-28 February 2025. Norfolk County Council sponsor this event and Connected Innovation have been involved in recent years across panel discussions.
- Norwich City Council's planned development of Townshend House as a 'Digital Hub' offers the county a chance to continue to drive and scale the tech sector locally. This is planned to open in Spring 2025.

The Council for Digital Tech provides strategic leadership for Norfolk and Suffolk's digital sector. It has representatives from the private sector, technology business incubators, universities and further education colleges and organisations like [SyncNorwich](#) and [Tech East](#).

The Council has a strategic focus on skills, inward investment, and innovation hubs and includes regular conversations around key tech sub-sectors for Norfolk and Suffolk including Artificial intelligence, financial technologies, Agricultural technologies, gaming and space technologies.

Financial Services and Insurance

This sector comprises industries that manage money, including banking, investment, insurance, real estate, and financial technology. It provides services such as lending, asset management, financial planning, and risk management.

Financial Services is a significant sector for Norfolk, with specialisms in insurance and Insurtech. Financial services and insurance represent Norfolk's second highest sector in terms of GVA per head at a value of £136.8k.

Number of businesses: 730

Number of jobs: 11978

Contribution to GVA of Norfolk: £1.64bn (14%)

Challenges

- The region has been overlooked nationally as a hub for Fintech companies and activity.

Opportunities

- In response to this, stakeholders including Tech East, Financial Industry Group (FIG) Norwich and Connected Innovation delivered the Fintech Futures project which was funded by the Norfolk Investment Framework (NIF) and led to the Norfolk FinTech Report in the summer of 2024, which showed Norfolk's niche in a strong InsurTech sub-sector.
- A steering group is currently exploring opportunities for FinTech across Norfolk and Suffolk to give a critical mass. It is also providing a voice into the national FinTech cluster network, so there is positive momentum.

The Financial Industry Group (FIG) Norwich is the sector group for financial services and insurance in Norfolk, meeting quarterly with strong representation from across the sector.

Creative Industries

This sector includes industries that focus on the creation and distribution of products and services that are rooted in cultural, artistic, and design-oriented creativity. It encompasses activities such as advertising, architecture, arts, crafts, design, fashion, film, music, performing arts, publishing, and software development.

Number of businesses: 1945

Number of jobs: 7429

Contribution to GVA of Norfolk: £0.3bn (3%)

Challenges

- Attracting finance remains a major challenge including a lack of awareness of the needs of the creative industries businesses from investors.
- The Create Growth Programme, funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, has supported the local investment readiness programme 'Creative East' supporting potentially high-growth companies to scale. However, there is a lack of support at the start-up end.

Opportunities

- The current Create Growth Programme is due to end in March 2025. However, the Autumn Statement announced an extension to the programme so Norfolk County Council (accountable body for Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire) is in discussions over what an extension will look like and how we can enhance the programme. An investor showcase event is planned for 25th February at Norwich City Football Club with companies across the four cohorts pitching to investors, with UK Business Angels Association involved.
- 3 Norfolk companies are part of the Games Anglia and Games London delegation that are attending Slush in Helsinki. The delegation has been supported by Connected Innovation and Norfolk and Suffolk Unlimited and will provide an opportunity for the companies to meet and pitch to global investors.
- Norfolk Screen has been delivering the pilot Norfolk Film Office for Norfolk County Council, working to land filming opportunities within Norfolk and the associated supply chain benefits to deliver impact for the region.
- Connected Innovation is mapping out the region's gaming cluster, with opportunities including the potential for a Norwich Games Hub as the epicentre for indie games businesses and to support the retention of talent out of Norwich University of the Arts.

Space Sector and Satellite Communications

Space is often viewed as a sub-sector which cuts across other key sectors.

Space East was formally launched in 2023, supported by the UK Space Agency (UKSA) and Satellite Applications Catapult. It has a regional remit to support the growth of the regional and national space sector, delivering the objectives set out in the UK Government's Space Strategy 2021. Space East is hosted by Suffolk County Council. Space technologies and satellite communications critically underpin the region's key sectors including agri-food and marine, shipping and logistics, offshore energy, telecoms and advanced manufacturing. Our strengths in Earth observation in relation to climatic and environmental research also place the region at the forefront of pioneering solutions to solve global challenges.

The East of England region is the 3rd largest in the UK in terms of income from space related activities and with world-class strengths across a range of converging sectors. The region has 228 sites (8% of UK total & 5th largest) delivering £1,524m of income (8% & 3rd largest) and employing 3,941 (8% & 4th highest).

Number of businesses: 40

Number of jobs: 595

Contribution to GVA of Norfolk: £0.03bn (0%)

Challenges

- The UK Space Agency is yet to clarify the funding position for space clusters beyond the end of this financial year. The main challenge at this moment is to secure follow-on funding post March 2025 to continue to fund and drive the regional opportunities / collaborative projects and support wider sectors. Without a regional space cluster, we were missing out on multiple funding calls from the UK Space Agency and Satellite Applications Catapult until Space East was established.

Opportunities

- Space East has grown to 208 members in just over 18 months and is delivering a varied programme of events exploring the downstream application of space technologies and the supply chain benefits of the space sector for manufacturing and engineering and the defence sector.
- Space East is involved in two cross-cluster project workshops: Aquaculture and Harmful Algal Blooms with Space Northern Ireland and Space Wales and an Agriculture project with Space Scotland.

Construction and Development

This sector includes industries involved in the planning, design, construction, and maintenance of buildings and infrastructure. It encompasses residential, commercial, industrial, and civil engineering projects, as well as real estate development.

The Construction sector is a key part of the Norfolk economy and is a regional specialism for the East of England. Growth is forecasted to be 12.7% between 2022 and 2033, the highest of any foundational sector.

Number of businesses: 1945

Number of jobs: 25361

Contribution to GVA of Norfolk: £1.36bn (12%)

Challenges

- The sector is facing high numbers of insolvencies with a fragile supply chain.
- Planning - Nutrient Neutrality still an issue in much of Norfolk and it is still preventing new housing from going ahead.
- There is a lack of degree courses in Norfolk or Suffolk in Construction Management, Quantity Surveying or Civil Engineering etc. Construction East has been set up and run by professionals such as architects, engineers and surveyors and is focussing on these issues.
- Future Homes & Building Standards are being revised in 2025. The industry broadly welcomes the movement in more sustainable standards but worry about the increase in build costs.
- The Government has set an ambitious target of building 1.5 million new homes in the next five years with mandatory targets for local authorities although it remains unclear how these will be delivered.

Opportunities

- Norfolk has some ambitious plans for housing growth with numerous planned developments in strategic locations. There is also a need for commercial space which includes suitable accommodation for key growth sectors such as clean energy, Agri-Food and advanced manufacturing. A-Grade office space, accessible rural workspace and coworking facilities are also required.
- The development of green construction skills and a local and sustainable materials supply chain are vital in the move to Net Zero. Sustainable new builds and retrofitted current stock will also play a central role in reducing carbon emissions in Norfolk.

The Building Growth Skills Network for Norfolk and Suffolk helps to equip the local construction workforce with the labour and skills required to maximise benefits as well as enable the shift to a sustainable and net zero future.

Health and Social Work

This sector includes industries that provide medical care, health services, and social support. It encompasses hospitals, clinics, healthcare professionals, social workers, and organizations that offer support for mental health, elderly care, and community services. With an aging population demand in this sector will increase over the next 10 years.

Number of businesses: 2095

Number of jobs: 61399

Contribution to GVA of Norfolk: £1.66bn (14%)

Challenges

- Healthcare is a challenging market, and innovations can take 7-8 years to get through often due to regulatory challenges.

Opportunities

- Norwich Research Park has hosted two conference this year looking at the healthcare sector and the roles of academic institutions in the development of technology and nutrition.
- The UEA has established HealthUEA which brings together and builds upon the long-standing history of high-quality research in health across UEA and the wider Norwich Research Park.

Sectors and Innovation Team Delivery Update

Norfolk County Council's Innovation & Sectors team cover a wide range of key programmes and sectors, supporting economic development in Norfolk and the wider East of England region and working closely with colleagues from Suffolk County Council.

This report provides an update on the targeted programmes which support economic growth.

Key Programmes

Connected Innovation

[Connected Innovation](#) links together 27 of Norfolk and Suffolk's leading innovation hubs, business incubators, universities and research institutes into one of the UK's most collaborative regional innovation clusters. The network, launched in 2021, encompasses a number of technology capabilities and sectors such as AI, robotics, 5G connectivity, digital tech, agri-tech, gaming, fintech, environmental and marine science, health tech and life science to drive innovation-led economic growth in key sectors including agri-food, health, offshore renewables, manufacturing and engineering and financial services. In addition to drawing together these physical assets, Connected Innovation provides a platform for innovative companies to understand local, regional and national innovation support on offer to them – including finance, events and start-up and scale-up programmes.

The programme has successfully leveraged funding across several sectors including £7.5m for innovation funds in the Agri-food Foot Tech sector, £1.275m through the Create Growth programme and £110k from Barclays Eagle Labs for the start up / high growth programme. The Made Smarter Programme is in the pipeline and will come online in April 2025

The brand has been recognised by the UK's national innovation agency, Innovate UK, with strong commitments for engagement set out in the [Innovate UK Local Action Plan for Norfolk & Suffolk](#) and the Connected Innovation team have strong relationships with Innovate UK's various teams (including [Business Growth](#), [Business Connect](#) and the [Catapult Network](#)).

Innovate UK partnered with Connected Innovation for the Innovate UK Local: East of England event at Norwich Research Park in September 2024 to showcase business innovation journeys across different company sizes and sectors and the support on offer for innovative companies to start, scale and collaborate with local and regional universities and research institutes. At this event, Connected Innovation launched the latest version of the [Connected Innovation Prospectus](#).

Connected Innovation network meetings take place quarterly with representatives from across the 27 physical sites, cluster networks and support agencies with a rotating chair from Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, providing updates to the Norfolk & Suffolk Innovation Board.

Appendix A provides an overview of the Connected Innovation map across the region.

Finance and investment continue to be a major challenge for our innovation ecosystem and in response, Connected Innovation set up a sub-group focused on this subject with

representatives from the British Business Bank, Anglia Capital Group, Innovate UK Business Growth, Fleximize, Inngot, New Anglia Growth Hub and also meets quarterly to highlight opportunities for the region to go after and secure further investment opportunities.

The Innovation Grant Mentoring Programme is supporting innovative companies across Norfolk & Suffolk with their applications for innovation grant funding and is significant shifting the dial on successful applications to Innovate UK competitions. To date 91 business have registered to receive innovation advice around their area of development of which 38 have progressed to receive 1:1 support with their application.

Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering

The New Anglia Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering (NAAME) Cluster oversees the Industry Council for Norfolk and Suffolk and seven manufacturing groups covering district level – linking together companies at a local level to showcase their activities and to signpost the most up to date support on offer.

Our convening strengths have been recognised as Norfolk County Council has been appointed the accountable body for the expanded Made Smarter Adoption East of England Programme, leading the delivery for the £1.2m programme across six counties from April 2025 supporting manufacturers with the adoption of industrial digital technologies.

There have been two cohorts delivered under the NAAME Skills Bootcamp at East Coast College, in partnership with the East Coast Manufacturing Group.

Clean Energy

Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex County Councils are supporting the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult's Connect Supply Chain Programme, with additional support from offshore renewables developers. This is a unique 6-month programme, which will engage over 30 companies from across the supply chain and provide more than 30 days of specialist support to 3 supply chain companies with bespoke support for their specific needs.

Industry experts and leaders gathered in the East of England for a major conference hosted by EastWind to analyse the latest Contracts for Difference (CfD) Allocation Round 6 (AR6). This round brought promising advancements for the local offshore wind sector, with Ørsted's Hornsea Three and ScottishPower Renewables' East Anglia TWO and THREE projects securing contracts, adding over a gigawatt of capacity and marking a notable rebound from last year's AR5, which saw no awards due to low strike prices. All three projects are set to come online between 2027 and 2029.

The team works closely with colleagues across Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex to support the offshore renewables sector with key programmes such as the Launch Academy and Connect Programme with the Offshore Renewable Energy Sector.

Connected Innovation has joined Hydrogen East's steering group with access to regular updates for Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils and the development of projects to support multiple sectors including agriculture, manufacturing and engineering, transport, etc. Hydrogen East is recognised nationally as one of the key hydrogen clusters.

Agri-Food, Agri-Tech and Food & Drink

Following the successful inaugural Norfolk Rural Business Awards, the 2025 awards will be launched at the Norfolk Farming Conference on 11th February.

Norfolk County Council hosts the Agri-Food Industry Council for Norfolk and Suffolk which draws together key representatives from across the farming, food and drink sectors (including major farming estates, food processing companies and local artisans); cluster networks (Tastebuds Collective, Food Enterprise Park, NAAME and Space East); further and higher education representatives to look at the skills requirements for the sector; and key innovation ecosystem partners such as Norwich Research Park, Agri-TechE and Connected Innovation. This sector group meets quarterly to develop key projects, government responses and areas of focus for the region (including working with neighbouring counties).

The Connected Innovation team led a successful bid to the Innovate UK £7.5m Launchpad Programme for Agri-Tech, Food Tech, Agri-Biotech and Aquaculture across Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Greater Lincolnshire. This secured three rounds of innovation grant funding competitions for companies in the sector and in addition, funding towards four county leads (Norfolk's is James Allen) and central resource to promote regional, national and international support for the sector moving forward. The final funding round closed in November 2024.

Connected Innovation also supported the Agri-TechE REAP Conference in November, sponsoring the technology exhibition.

Digital Tech and Creative Industries

Connected Innovation, together with Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, secured funding from Barclays Eagle Labs to provide incubation and stipend support to early-stage founders from Norfolk and Suffolk's tech sector (delivered by Akcela Ventures in Norfolk and Innovation Labs Group in Suffolk). The programme runs until the end of March 2025.

Connected Innovation led a successful bid to DCMS' Create Growth Programme for £1.275m to deliver a local scale-up and investment readiness programme for potentially high-growth creative industries across Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. This has delivered four cohorts across Norwich, Ipswich, Cambridge and Peterborough. In addition to the local support delivered by Creative East (UEA), this secured three rounds of Innovate UK grant funding competitions locked off for Create Growth regions. This programme is due to finish in March 2025, however following the positive Autumn Statement announcement for an annual extension to this programme Norfolk County Council is in discussions with DCMS over what the extension will look like.

Connected Innovation, together with KPMG and Tech East, sponsored a [UKTN Tech Report on Norfolk and Suffolk](#) to profile the region's tech sector showcasing opportunities and challenges for growth. This was published in September 2024, with a follow-up [event focused on 'unlocking the tech potential for Norfolk and Suffolk' at Norwich University of the Arts on 4th December](#).

Based on the successes we have seen through the Create Growth Programme, with a vibrant indie games scene in the region, Connected Innovation has funded a series of events to explore the games education scene (with industry accredited courses delivered by Norwich University of the Arts); the needs of games developers; and how we can maximise opportunities for the gaming cluster with policymakers, including through the gamification (using immersive tech) of our key sectors. A number of high-

profile successes have been seen from start-ups linked to the incubators and innovation hubs in Norwich. Connected Innovation has now supported a delegation to Barclays Game Frenzy in London and to Slush in Helsinki (together with Norfolk & Suffolk Unlimited) to link these companies with the investor community.

Norfolk Screen has been delivering the pilot Norfolk Film Office for Norfolk County Council, working to land filming opportunities within Norfolk and the associated supply chain benefits to deliver impact for the region. There are a number of exciting enquiries, opportunities and projects currently being pursued.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to:

1. Receive the Sectors and Innovation Update
2. Engage with Connected Innovation events, where relevant to sector specialisms, such as the Norwich AI Summit on 21st January and the investor showcase for the Create Growth Programme is planned for 25th February at Norwich City Football Club.
3. Support development of programmes to leverage funding and use the Connected Innovation Programme as a vehicle to implement strategy and connect with wider innovation/ cluster growth initiatives/ partners.