INNOVATION COUNCIL MEETING • 10th February 2021

Introduction:

Guest academics attending the meeting:

Mark Gussey – Global Professor of Rural Health and Care
Simon Pearson – Director of Lincoln Institute for Agri-Food Technology (LIAT) / Professor of Agri-Food Technology
Sukhy Johal – Director of the Centre for Culture & Creativity
Heather Hughes – Professor of Cultural Heritage Studies
Duncan Botting – Visiting Professor (Energy, whole systems analysis) and Chair of GLLEP Energy Council

The meeting focused on the innovation ecosystem.

Innovation requires environment, capability, infrastructure, capital and talent.

What do we have and what are we missing as an ecosystem in Lincolnshire?

Successful innovation in Lincolnshire has mainly been in Agrifood and Rural Health.

What are the gaps?
• Reduced availability of funding.
• Lack of comprehensive data around ideas, business, R & D and SME activity in the LEP area.
• Low rank on productivity dashboard on new ideas – R & D spend per worker Investment in innovation Lincolnshire is the third lowest.
• Leadership and focus to drive innovation.
• Shortage of skills.

What needs to be done/has been done?
• Introduce innovators, SME's, corporates and academics – Fusion of sectors.
• Encourage inward investment in innovation.
• Improvement in connectivity within and between clusters – transport, digital and innovation – rural areas are different to major towns and cities.
• Promote Lincolnshire to Central Government (directly rather than through intermediaries) –local ambition is paramount, levelling up and rebalancing of the economy.
• Maximise the opportunity for support with oven-ready projects and regular updating of pipeline projects.
• Strong marketing campaign to promote sign up to innovation and productivity programmes.
• Focus on the benefits for businesses (Focus on the 6% that will innovate) and innovation-led start-ups.
• Better mapping of innovation.
• Showcase expertise in the green energy space to compete favourably with Teeside.
• Improve the visitor offer, year round attractions and increase the visitor spend.
• Sufficient lead time is required to show the impact of innovation support and interventions.
• The LIS is critical to pave the way forward. Focus and clarity is key.
• Encourage businesses to think beyond the immediate and the issues caused by Brexit and the pandemic. Use the speed of change and new ways of working to increase innovation & not revert to 'old' ways of working.
• How can we create critical mass and support the 6% so they don't feel like lone innovators?
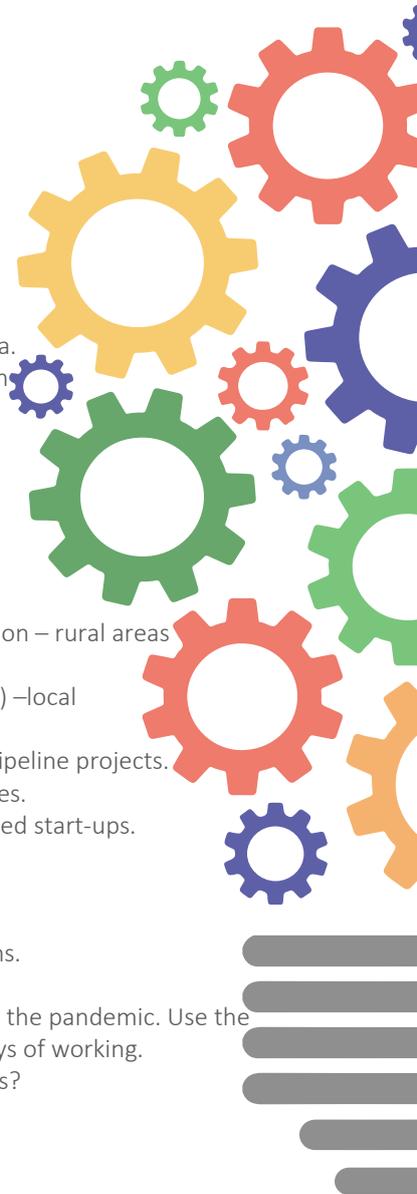
Discussion point 1: Human Capital (people)

• Education might better describe what is needed – we need to support people to have aspirations and dreams, these things are required in order to innovate.
• Consider how we work with the new form of the LEP and the inclusion of the Humber area.
• Transport and places theme. Support of the point that place really matters
• Use of depilated buildings with good business clusters and good digital infrastructure.
• Culture & business networks are important.
• Innovation ecology is important. It is complex and needs analysing.
• Use the intelligence around people and places to identify key aspects of the ecosystem.
• What role do place and the people play in innovation?
• Attraction, retention and development of talent continues to be key.
• What is going to change regarding commuting and how people work as a result of the pandemic?
• What trends have been accelerated by the pandemic and what areas have been identified post pandemic in new areas?
• Diversity is also important; how do we include all communities in the innovation eco-system?
• Is creativity and entrepreneurship being supported post the pandemic?
• Automation versus head count and the need for profitability in business and thereafter the impact on the economy and people.
• Don't lose good people.
• Opportunity drives innovation. Careful planning in infrastructure will lead to improvements in outcomes.

Discussion point 2: Funding

• How do we increase investment and with whom?
• How do we get investment across our disparate area, money may be available but it is about knowing how to access it.
• Shared Prosperity Fund – some slow progress, there is less focus on LEPs delivering it, seems now to be more Nationally driven and we need to direct it to our areas of need and how we can best use it.
• Need to keep our focus on this area and how it can relate to innovation.
• The British Business Bank are looking at regional availability of funding and demand is an important factor alongside availability of investment.
• If we want to attract more venture capital investment we might need to consider how to de-risk investment in Greater Lincolnshire based businesses.
• Signposting for individual funding cases can be difficult. University of Lincoln is the 'go to place' for information.
• Can we learn from Healthcare Connect? Other activities in the NHS space?
• Scalability funding is a gap. USA is taking advantage of our UK innovation. Think about funding and innovation and keeping this within in the country.

Discussion point 3: Infrastructure

How do we improve our infrastructure and in what timescales?

- Building networks, people, digital, not just looking at capital assets.
- People are innovators, not physical buildings.
- Reimagine place, think about what infrastructure is required to make the most of 15 minute towns.
- Look at natural capital and social capital and not just capital returns per se.
- Place, we need to really think about this area, culture is something special and unique but we do need the sector to work together better than we have to date.
- Facilitate innovation – in a number of ways, networks are key.
- Opportunity drives innovation but there are multiple blockages in the eco-system that we need to be aware of.
- Businesses that haven't bid before appear to be disadvantaged. We need to look at ways to help them. Combination of technical and business support seems to be the most helpful. Partnership working is the key. Local authorities and LEP's have had good successes. Straightforward application and support has and will continue to work.

Discussion point 4: Demand

How do we increase productivity and better fuse across sectors?

- Cross sector issue even in Agrifood has not worked completely, working in a partnership approach within and in between sectors is where the future lies.
- We need to identify common themes and opportunities, mutually agreed between stakeholders.
- Covid is affecting demand for innovation – it draws people towards safe options and short-term thinking.
- We are moving to a level of maturity, building from, our core areas of strength.
- Stimulating demand for innovation can be enhanced by communities and citizens are integral to the process. Are we assuring ourselves that this is happening?
- Most SMEs start with simple problems and they are thought about in quite a linear way. It is important to find people with multi-disciplinary skills to move beyond these silos.
- The Quadruple Helix approach (incorporating university-industry-public-environment drivers) can be used to stimulate demand – in order to drive demand post-Covid we will need to mobilise all of these areas.

Discussion point 5: Culture & incentives

How can we continue to develop and change culture in GLLEP area to encourage innovation?

- Concept of the donut – 21st Century compass. Social foundation and environmental ceiling.
- How do we develop post Covid?
- Do we need to rebuild from a different perspective and accept that things have changed and moved ahead of others?
- We need a redefinition of what productivity means. Change the narrative and work with other institutions on the definition.
- GLEP has a system based problem. We have the aptitude but lack connectivity between the disciplines.
- Work and challenge new approaches. Leadership needs to be open to new ideas and contributions, beyond the usual suspects.
- Engage with young people. Have an inclusive approach.
- Wider approach to education and not a narrow approach to disciplines for young people.