

Suffolk Business Board: Meeting 31 July 2025

Minutes & Actions

Business Board Members

Name	Role & Organisation
Mark Pendlington	Chair
Cllr Matthew Hicks	Leader, Suffolk County Council, and Vice-Chair
Paul Ager	Divisional Port Manager, ABP
Kelly Boosey	Commercial Manager, Oxford Innovation
Peter Brady	CEO, Orbital Group
John Dugmore	CEO, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
Leanne Gittins	Managing Director, LME Recruitment
Marek Hornak	UoS Pro Vice-Chancellor - Commercial and Academic Partnerships
Oliver Paul	Director, Suffolk Food Hall
Lisa Perkins	Chair, Tech East
Cllr Richard Smith MVO	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Economic Development and Skills, Suffolk County Council
Cllr Caroline Topping	Leader, East Suffolk District Council

Apologies

Name	Role & Organisation
Tom Ball	CFO, Ipswich Town FC
Alan Pease	Principal and Chief Executive Officer, Suffolk New College
Doug Field	Founder, Beacon Advantage
Hannah Bloom	Chief Executive, Suffolk Community Foundation
Cllr Neil MacDonald	Leader, Ipswich Borough Council
Andrew Cook	Executive Director Growth, Highways and Infrastructure, Suffolk County Council

Guests

Name	Role & Organisation
Matt Hullis	Head of Environment Strategy, Suffolk County Council
Molly Williams	Project Officer, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce
Ben Edginton-Thomas	Innovation Lead – Clusters, Plexal
Francesca Castelo	Innovation Consultant – Clusters, Plexal
Tim Robinson	Chief Operating Officer, Tech East
Paul Putland	Innovation Consultant, Tech East

Officer team

Name	Role & Organisation
Julian Munson	Head of Enterprise and Innovation, Suffolk County Council
Lisa Roberts	Head of Strategy and Operations, Suffolk County Council
Rob Hancock	Assistant Director, Suffolk County Council
Sophie Ward	Executive Assistant and Project Support, Suffolk County Council
Cleo Chalk	Communications and Engagement Executive, Suffolk County Council

Agenda

Item	Time	Topic	Lead	Paper / Verbal
1.	14:00	Agenda, apologies, conflicts of interest and last meeting minutes	Mark Pendlington	Verbal
2.	14.05 -14.15	Welcome from the University of Suffolk	Marek Hornak	Verbal
3.	14:15 – 15:05	Cluster Feasibility Study Interim Report	Plexal, Lisa Perkins, Tim Robinson	Paper
4.	15:05 – 15:20	Review of opportunities from Modern Industrial Strategy	Lisa Roberts	Paper
5.	15:20 – 15:45	Integrated Water Action Plan	Matt Hullis	Paper
6.	15:45 – 16:00	Suffolk Coordination Office	Molly Williams	Paper
7.	16:00 - 16:15	AOB and Forward Plan	Mark Pendlington	Verbal

Actions
ACTION 1.1 JM advised that follow-up required with Kevin Keable as regards engagement with GB Energy, action to remain open. (Action 3.1 from June) Julian Munson
ACTION 1.2 CC to review approach for Board members to receive updates and work collaboratively. Cleo Chalk
ACTION 1.3 PA continues to sit on the Orwell Bridge forums and Transport East, on behalf of the Board. Chair and PA to further consider if the Board should set out a specific public position on Orwell Bridge. Paul Ager & Mark Pendlington
ACTION 2.1 Board members to refer companies or challenges to the Business Solution Centre via MH. Business Board Members
ACTION 4.1 CC is leading on the development of a Board Engagement Plan which will provide a coordinated programme of opportunities over the year, which will be part of the Comms update in September. Cleo Chalk
ACTION 4.2 Business Board members to proactively flag opportunities / events / invites, to CC, where Suffolk should have a presence which they could support. Business Board Members

Decisions	
Decision 3.1	It was agreed that the direction of the Clusters work was on track, and therefore the supplier should proceed to develop the detailed recommendations.
Decision 5.1	It was agreed that the Water Action Plan work should proceed; work to be completed and reported by Spring 2025, with continued close working alongside the Business Water Group.

	Item Description, Notes of Discussion and Actions Agreed	Action Lead
1	<p>Agenda, apologies, conflicts of interest and last meeting minutes – Mark Pendlington</p> <p>Welcome and Introductions:</p> <p>MP welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked MH for hosting and providing lunch and refreshments.</p> <p>MP introduced Cleo Chalk who has recently been appointed as Suffolk Economy Communications and Engagement Officer at SCC.</p> <p>MP also introduced the following guests: Molly Williams, Matt Hullis, Ben Edginton-Thomas, Francesca Castelo, Tim Robinson and Paul Putland</p> <p>Apologies:</p> <p>MP listed the apologies for today: Alan Pease, Doug Field, Hannah Bloom, Cllr Neil MacDonald and Andrew Cook.</p> <p>Conflicts of interest:</p> <p>MP reminded Board members to ensure conflict of interest forms are kept up to date and for any changes to be sent to SW.</p> <p>Minutes Approval:</p> <p>All Board members agreed the minutes from 5 June 2025 meeting.</p> <p>MP referenced the actions from 5 June 2025 meeting. Regarding action 3.1 from the previous meeting in relation to GB Energy, JM advised that a catch up is still required with Kevin Keable and to keep this action live in the meantime.</p> <p>Regarding action 5.1 from the previous meeting in relation to the Sub Board group, RH advised that this is operational with JD and DF involved in recent sessions.</p> <p>In relation to action 5.2 from the previous meeting regarding Suffolk Showcase, LR advised that this would form part of the comms update in September.</p> <p>Business Board Chairs Update July 2025:</p>	

	<p>MP referenced the Additional Document A – Business Board Chairs Update. MK emphasised the importance of capturing strategic initiatives between meetings, summarising key events, and ensuring board members are kept informed. OP, LP and KB all raised points regarding where it would be best to store these updates: a SharePoint area was suggested. MP discussed feedback mechanisms to manage information flow and provide a clear reference point for Board members.</p> <p>Orwell Bridge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PA discussed the recent Orwell Bridge Working Group that PA and OP attended, highlighting the involvement of key stakeholders such as the Regional Director of National Highways, MPs, the Chamber of Commerce, and Transport East, all working together to address issues related to the Orwell Bridge. • OP explained that the group has broken down the issues beyond just the risk of a single point of failure, including road traffic accidents, school closures, and mental health impacts from closures. • There was discussion about the maintenance program, with optimism about the westbound carriageway's condition but caution due to the rapid failure of the eastbound in the past. A five-year program with National Highways is in place. • The group is pushing for a clear roadmap involving all stakeholders to address alternatives to the current single point of failure, aiming for a memorandum of understanding and agreement on next steps before the Suffolk convention. • MP summarised that the Board members should have a view on the issue, not rushing to a binary debate about a bypass, but focusing on understanding short-, medium-, and long-term solutions. <p>ACTION 1.1 JM advised that a catch up is still required with Kevin Keable and to keep this action live. (Action 3.1 from June) Julian Munson</p> <p>ACTION 1.2: CC to propose refined approach for Board members to receive updates and work collaboratively Cleo Chalk</p> <p>ACTION 1.3 PA continues to sit on the Orwell Bridge forums and Transport East, on behalf of the Board. Chair and PA to further consider if the Board should set out a specific public position on Orwell Bridge. Paul Ager & Mark Pendlington</p>	
2	<p>Welcome from the University of Suffolk - Marek Hornak</p> <p>MH welcomed the Board members, highlighting the recent launch of the Business Solution Centre and its alignment with the Board's ambitions.</p>	

	<p>MH explained the Centre provides an access point for businesses to engage with university expertise, aiming to drive productivity through research, innovation, and workforce development.</p> <p>MH emphasised three priorities: (1) enhancing work-based education (apprenticeships, short courses); (2) supporting innovation and student-led projects for companies; and (3) collaborating with business clusters to better design educational programs that meet workforce needs.</p> <p>MH stressed the University's commitment to practical impact, measuring success by tangible results and industry engagement, and encouraged board support in spreading the word about these initiatives.</p> <p>MH invited Board members to refer companies or challenges to the Centre.</p> <p>ACTION 2.1 Board members to refer companies or challenges to the Business Solution Centre via MH.</p>	Business Board Members
3	<p>Cluster Feasibility Study Interim Report - Plexal, Lisa Perkins, Tim Robinson</p> <p>Introduction:</p> <p>LP introduced this item and advised that the purpose of this update is to bring Board members up to speed and to gauge an initial reaction from the Board members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The study aims to understand how to create, stimulate, and realise benefits from innovation-driven clusters across the region, leveraging local strengths and assets. • LP highlighted a partnership with Plexel, combining local expertise with national experience in cluster and innovation space development. • The interim report is a "temperature check" sharing research progress, insights from roundtables and one-on-ones, and initial proposals for focus areas where the region has strong differentiation and potential for economic growth. • The next phase will focus on implementation, defining how to realise value from clusters, with feedback from the board guiding direction. • The team (including Tim, Paul, Ben, and Fran) will present findings and seek Board input to refine priorities and move toward actionable steps. <p>Presentation from Cluster team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TR described the methodology: desk research on Suffolk's economic landscape, followed by sector-specific and cross-sector workshops and interviews to identify opportunities, challenges, and cross-cutting themes such as skills, talent, and access to finance. 	

- The team used a scorecard to assess clusters against criteria like governance, mission, talent, networks, capital, and evidence of innovation activity.
- Key sectors analysed: Agri-food and drink, ports and logistics, clean energy, ICT/digital, advanced manufacturing, and financial services. Each sector's strengths, gaps, and opportunities were discussed, with emphasis on technology adoption, coordination, and leveraging anchor organisations.
- Ben E-T presented a shortlist of three cross-sector "missions" for Suffolk: (1) Powering the green transition from the coast outwards (clean energy and tech); (2) Leading the smart countryside revolution (agritech and digital); and (3) Smart logistics, smarter places (coordinated, tech-enabled logistics across the region).
- These missions are powered by four strategic clusters: (1) agri-food; (2) clean energy; (3) ports/logistics; and (4) tech, with advanced manufacturing as an enabler.
- Suffolk's unique combination of these sectors and missions positions it distinctively compared to other UK regions, offering a strong case for investment and policy support.
- The team sought board feedback to validate these priorities and ensure alignment with Suffolk's economic ambitions.

Following the presentation, LP opened the discussion to Board members.

Feedback from Board members:

- The Board members found the presentation aligned with Suffolk's strategic direction, validating their focus on clean energy, agri-tech, and ports/logistics as key priorities.
- Members supported concentrating on a few distinctive missions to highlight Suffolk's uniqueness and avoid spreading efforts too thinly.
- The approach of convening clusters and stress-testing interventions was endorsed as the right way forward.
- Water scarcity was highlighted as a significant challenge for agri-tech and food/drink sectors, with a suggestion to frame such issues as "challenges" rather than "blockers" and to use them as opportunities for innovation.
- Clarification was requested on the term "smart logistics and smart places," with the explanation that it encompasses the broader regional impact of logistics, including electrification and grid effects.
- The overall sentiment was positive, with encouragement to continue refining the missions and clusters, and to consider collaboration with Norfolk and other regions for broader impact.

	<p>Decision 3.1 It was agreed that the direction of travel in the Clusters work was on track, and therefore the supplier should proceed to develop the detailed recommendations.</p>	
4	<p>Review of opportunities from Modern Industrial Strategy - Lisa Roberts</p> <p>Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Modern Industrial Strategy's main goal is to make the UK the world's most attractive investment destination in the world, but the definition of success is not clear. • It highlights eight high-growth sectors, seven foundational industries, and identifies frontier sub-sectors which those leading innovation. • Suffolk's Economic Strategy aligns closely with the national strategy, sharing aspirations for clean growth, inclusivity, and innovation, and recognises the importance of high-value sectors and clusters. • Suffolk's strategy goes one step further setting out the importance and aspirations to connect our clusters, with a focus on enabling cross sector innovation and harness technology convergence • There are opportunities for Suffolk but clear we will have to work harder as the focus is on city regions and MCAs in the North and Midlands. • Also received early proposals about aligning Suffolk Enterprise Zones with the new Industrial Strategy Zones framework. This could unlock new support – but also has governance and rate retention implications we need to carefully shape. • The paper sets out a call for action for the Business Board with a particular focus on continued advocacy for Suffolk's strengths and cross-sector work given it is vital for future investment and recognition. <p>Feedback from Board members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The framework is broadly supported and aligns with Suffolk's cluster work, but there is concern that focusing on only three sectors (energy, agri-food, logistics) may not fully resonate with government priorities, especially since only logistics is considered foundational. • Participants emphasised the need to position Suffolk's strengths in a way that matches government language and frameworks, while also maintaining a clear, differentiated local narrative. • There is a call for Suffolk to be more vocal and visible about its successes and unique assets, as it is perceived that the region does not "shout loudly enough" to national audiences. • Recent developments, such as the national AI hub's interest in Suffolk and significant infrastructure projects, 	

	<p>are seen as opportunities to showcase the region's innovation and attract further investment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of coordinated communication and advocacy was highlighted. • Overall, while there are challenges and some scepticism about national alignment, the direction is supported and there is optimism about leveraging Suffolk's unique position. <p>LR confirmed that CC is leading on the development of a Board Engagement Plan which will provide a coordinated programme of opportunities over the year, which will be part of the coms update in September. LR and CC will work with each of the Board to identify where individual expertise and networks best align. Business Board members were asked to proactively flag opportunities where Suffolk should have a presence or voice.</p> <p>ACTION 4.1: CC is leading on the development of a Board Engagement Plan which will provide a coordinated programme of opportunities over the year, which will be part of the coms update in September. Cleo Chalk</p> <p>ACTION 4.2: Business Board members to proactively flag opportunities / events / invites, to CC, where Suffolk should have a presence which they could support. Business Borad Members</p>	<p>Lisa Roberts</p> <p>Business Board Members</p>
5	<p>Integrated Water Action Plan - Matt Hullis</p> <p>Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan addresses significant water resource challenges in Suffolk and Norfolk, driven by environmental requirements to keep more water in the environment, increased growth, and regulatory changes. • Water companies must invest in new storage, connectivity, and recycling, but are only required to supply households, not businesses, leading to constraints for commercial and agricultural users. • Local solutions include innovative projects like capturing and reusing high-flow water, with several copycat projects underway in Suffolk. • The action plan aims to clarify the current water position, identify responsibilities and opportunities, and develop business cases for investment, collaboration, and innovation. • The goal is to deliver a draft report within six months, ready for review and to inform the new mayor, providing a basis for lobbying and investment to support growth. <p>Feedback from Board members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The plan was recognised as a nationally significant example of good practice, with participants noting that Suffolk and Norfolk are already delivering innovative water management projects that should be more widely publicised. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was support for leveraging challenges as opportunities for innovation, such as using student and business competitions, to generate novel solutions for water issues. • Concerns were raised about regulatory barriers, especially abstraction licensing and planning permission difficulties for farmers wanting to build reservoirs, and the need for better integration of water supply considerations in housing development planning. • Participants emphasised the importance of collaboration among stakeholders (farmers, councils, water companies) and the need to ensure the plan is not derailed by statutory or organisational changes. • The plan was seen as an opportunity to position the region as a national leader and model for addressing agricultural and business water challenges. • Suggestions included increasing communication about available water-saving technologies and ongoing projects to the public and stakeholders. <p>Decision 5.1 It was agreed that the Water Action Plan work should proceed with work to be completed and reported by Spring 2025, with continued close working alongside the Business Water Group.</p>	
6	<p>Suffolk Coordination Office - Molly Williams</p> <p>Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Suffolk Coordination Office (SCO) was launched in February as a partnership-driven initiative to align with the Suffolk Economic Strategy and support the Business Board by coordinating lobbying and engagement with government and stakeholders. • Its main goal is to connect Suffolk's priorities with government action, focusing on evidence-based advocacy and active participation from businesses, local authorities, MPs, and infrastructure stakeholders. • The SCO operates through a framework of action-based government engagement (meetings with ministers, MPs, shadow ministers) and targeted economic "asks" (e.g., infrastructure, business bank, water, digital connectivity) that emerged from the Suffolk Convention and Economic Strategy. • Activities are tracked and reported monthly to ensure transparency and measure effectiveness, with a legislative calendar guiding lobbying efforts around key government events and reviews. • Outcomes include securing significant funding (e.g., £350 million British Business Bank scheme for East of England), developing a water trading scheme for non-household supply, and progressing projects on A14 disruption costs, 5G pilots, and Ely-Hawley rail lobbying. 	

	<p>Feedback from Board members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The work of the Suffolk Coordination Office was described as impactful, with participants noting that it is beginning to gain traction and elevate the business community's voice by coordinating messages across the Business Board, Chamber of Commerce, County Council, and local authorities. • There was a call for more business leaders to act as spokespeople, rather than relying solely on the Chamber, to strengthen advocacy and representation. • The importance of measuring and communicating the impact of activities (such as productivity improvements) was highlighted, along with the need for more people to step forward and support the coordination effort. • Questions were raised about the added value of certain government labels (e.g., AI growth zones), with some suggesting Suffolk should focus on its strengths and move forward regardless of official designations. 	
7	<p>AOB and Forward Plan - Mark Pendlington</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LP raised the importance of the digital ICT cluster, specifically mentioning Adastral Park and the need to protect and leverage key regional assets, with updates expected in September as part of the cluster work implementation. • RH confirmed that the topic of the digital ICT cluster will not be dropped and reminded participants about upcoming meeting invites, including a joint meeting with Norfolk scheduled for November, with the venue to be confirmed. 	