

Suffolk Business Board – 31st July 2025

Agenda Item 3: Cluster Feasibility Study Interim Report

Purpose:

This paper, along with the accompanying slide deck, provides an update on the work completed to-date on the Suffolk Cluster Analysis and Feasibility Study. It also outlines a set of cross-cutting missions and identifies four strategic sectors—AgriFood and Drink, Clean Energy, ICT and Digital, Ports and Logistics—where targeted support will enable the delivery of the proposed recommendations.

The Board are invited to:

- Consider and approve the proposed missions which will guide the next phase of cluster development work.

Background:

The Suffolk Economic Strategy sets out a roadmap for delivering long-term sustainable growth across the county, positioning Suffolk as a national leader in powering, feeding and connecting the UK.

The Suffolk Economic Strategy recognises the value that strategic clusters can bring as enablers of Suffolk's economy. It also acknowledges the opportunities that technology convergence — particularly the integration of diverse technologies into established industry sectors — can offer to drive clean, productive economic growth.

Clusters are not just concentrations of companies but are built on a shared mission, with strong leadership and governance, clear ecosystem orchestration, long-term capital investment and integration of diverse actors including startups, corporates and industry bodies, academic institutions, infrastructure and local and national government and public policy.

To support the implementation of this strategy, Plexal and Tech East are now delivering a comprehensive cluster analysis and feasibility study. This work will identify, prioritise and provide actionable recommendations for sectoral cluster development in Suffolk.

Project Timeline and Outcomes

The project is structured around four key outcomes:

1. **Landscape Review:** Desk-based research assessing the current state of Suffolk's priority sectors using qualitative and quantitative data.
2. **Prioritisation and Recommendation:** Identification of priority sectors and cross-sector opportunities, informed by stakeholder engagement.
3. **Cluster Development Plans:** Design of development plans for prioritised clusters, including key stakeholders and orchestrators, ecosystem-building activities and potential projects.
4. **Execution Plan:** A roadmap for implementing the cluster development plans.

Project progress:

Outcome 1: Landscape Review

At the start of the project, the landscape review identified six sectors with potential for cluster development, based on a combination of factors, such as the presence of established and new firms, physical assets, skills infrastructure, historical foundations, regional links and alignment with national priorities. The six sectors identified are:

Advanced Manufacturing, Agri-Food and Drink, Clean Energy, Financial and Professional Services, ICT and Digital and Ports, Logistics and Maritime.

Each sector was analysed to identify opportunities and challenges, leading to the development of targeted hypotheses. These hypotheses articulate how Suffolk can carve out a distinctive and competitive position within each sector, leveraging its unique strengths and strategic advantages.

Outcome 2: Prioritisation and Recommendation

A series of stakeholder engagements were held to validate and discuss the findings, alongside the emerging hypotheses from the landscape review. The engagement, carried out through a combination of one-to-one meetings and group roundtables, were designed to offer a collaborative space to co-create and shape emerging ideas arising from the work.

In addition to the sector-specific hypotheses, the stakeholder engagements also identified opportunities for technology convergence where Suffolk can create a unique proposition by bringing together adjacent sectors. Through this work, a set of potential overarching missions for Suffolk was developed, with the aim guiding investment, fostering innovation and unifying ecosystem development across the different sectors. Discussion with stakeholders identified three key priority missions for Suffolk:

1. Powering the UK's green transition from the coast outwards:

Sector themes: Clean Energy x AI x Grid Infrastructure

Mission: Position Suffolk as the UK's clean energy engine by integrating offshore wind, nuclear, hydrogen and decentralised energy assets with AI-enabled grid optimisation, smart energy logistics, and next-generation O&M systems.

2. Leading the smart countryside revolution:

Sector themes: AgriTech x AI x Satellite x Immersive

Mission: Make Suffolk a national testbed for hi-tech, sustainable rural economies by converging AI, satellite monitoring, and immersive training to transform agriculture, land use, and water resilience.

3. Smart logistics, smarter places:

Sector themes: Logistics x Simulation x Connectivity

Mission: Transform Suffolk into the UK's most connected logistics corridor through use of Digital and ICT, electrified multimodal freight, and ports-based logistics innovation.

In order to support these three missions, targeted cluster support must be given to the following sectors:

- AgriFood and Drink
- Clean Energy
- ICT And Digital
- Ports and Logistics

Next steps:

Subject to Board approval of the priority sectors, the next phase will involve designing the cluster development plans. These will outline:

- Context - strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.
- Cluster building - identifying key orchestrators to lead and coordinate activity.
- Initiatives to support growth and innovation – skills and training, business and funding support, ecosystem building, branding and narrative, asset and infrastructure

Co-designing cluster development plans with stakeholders will be critical to ensure it is aligned to needs, priorities and ambitions of the local cluster. Therefore, strategic and targeted engagement with stakeholders will be conducted throughout the development of the plans. The work will continue to be an iterative and consultative process. We will re-engage with the sector stakeholders engaged so far. We welcome feedback and engagement from members of the Suffolk Business Board to ensure a strong and relevant cluster strategy for Suffolk.

The Board are invited to:

- Consider and approve the proposed missions which will guide the next phase of cluster development work.

Plexal and Tech East – Cluster Feasibility Study Delivery Team