

Sector Growth 2023 to 2024: Year 1 in Review



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Foreword

The first year of any initiative, programme, or project is crucial in establishing a strong foundation that future activity will build on – and the work on Sector Growth in 2023 and 2024 has been no different.

The impact of Ambitious Essex and Sector Growth’s engagement activity over the last 12 months has exceeded expectations and shows that by working hand in hand with our local businesses we can deliver real results.

A key focus of this work has been ‘community building’ for innovators and our key sectors, based on our understanding of best practice in successful innovation ecosystems. The evidence from hotspots like Silicon Valley highlights the importance of creating native clusters and communities as a crucial step in unlocking transformative growth – and that is our mission.

“ The impact of Ambitious Essex and Sector Growth’s engagement activity over the last 12 months has exceeded expectations. ”

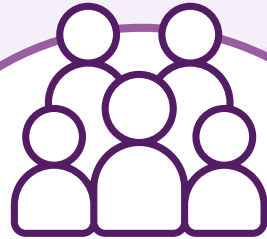
This best practice also places significant importance on raising our regional profile as a place known for innovation and thriving entrepreneurship. Through discussions with businesses we know that activity isn’t restricted by traditional local authority boundaries and, taken as a whole, the East of England has growth assets that rival anywhere in the UK. To that end, from 2024 to 2025 we are stepping up our regional collaboration to make the most of the funding, support, and networks that exist across the East of England and ensure that Greater Essex businesses get a slice of this pie.

Cllr Tony Ball
Education Excellence, Life Long Learning and Employability,
Essex County Council



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Last Year at a Glance



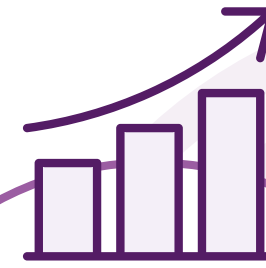
More than
650 attendees
came to our 8 events
(a 73% turnout rate).



We launched **2 new sector forums** with more than
150 businesses
joining.



We supported **more than 45 local businesses**
through direct
support programmes.

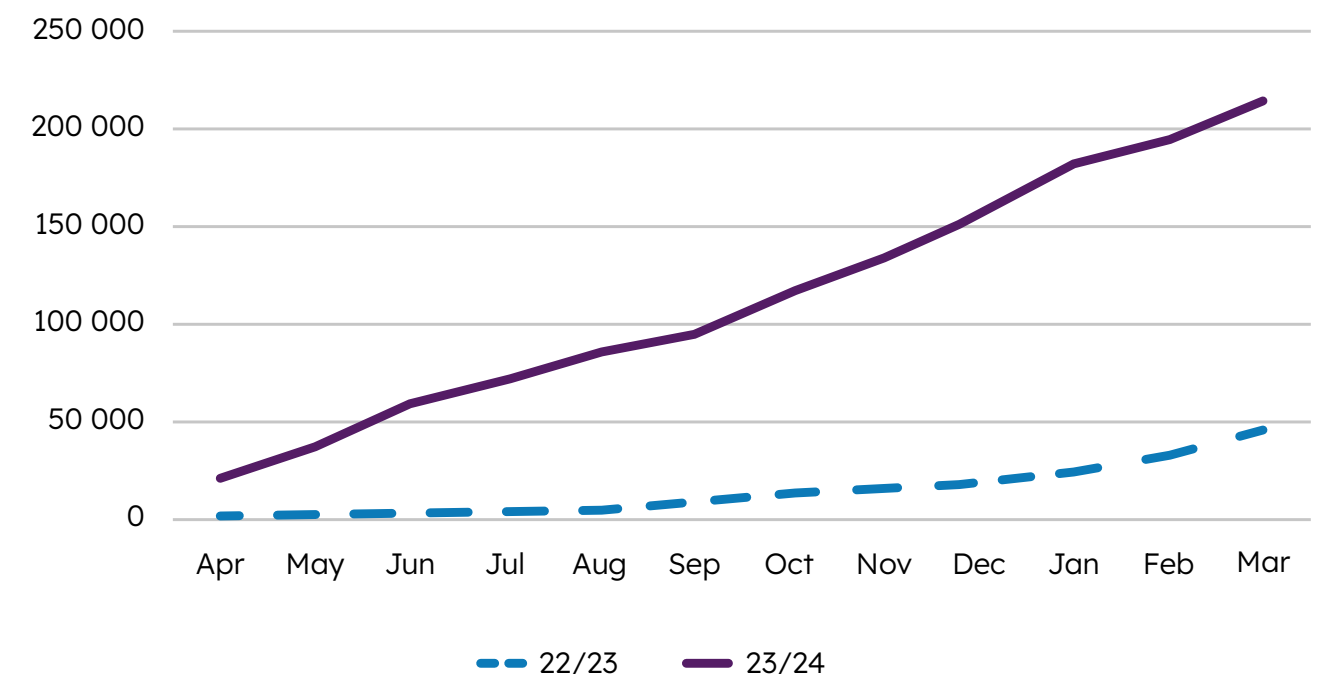


LinkedIn page secured 9,056 monthly impressions in February 2023. This figure was **19,252 in February 2024** (and 26,687 in January 2024). This shows our impressive year-on-year growth that looks set to continue into 2024 and 2025.



The profile of our **'Ambitious Essex'** label for innovation and sector growth work has exploded, with LinkedIn followers **increasing by 1,750 (158%)** between March 2023 and March 2024.

Cumulative LinkedIn impressions for Ambitious Essex



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Forums

Essex Construction Alliance (ECA)

We established the Essex Construction Alliance this year to help boost the construction sector across the county.

It is led by Essex County Council (ECC) in partnership with the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) and the Federation of Master Builders (FMB).

The ECA is dedicated to fostering collaboration, sharing industry insights, and showcasing new local business opportunities. Launched at a showcase event in Harlow in September 2023 we have already recruited some of the industry's biggest names, such as Kier, Morgan Sindall, Chas Berger, ECTA, Rose Builders, Homes England, DWP, Chelmer Housing Partnership (CHP), and many more.

Members of the ECA can:

- connect with like-minded professionals, entrepreneurs, and businesses in construction
- be the first to hear about new opportunities in Essex, including exciting tender opportunities
- gain access to exclusive networking events, workshops, and industry insights

- showcase their expertise and contribute to meaningful discussions within our community
- help create content that will benefit the construction industry
- directly contribute to the growth and success of the sector

We also created the monthly ECA Bulletin to share construction news in Essex, celebrate successes, and direct to funding streams, training, and other opportunities alongside CITB, FMB, and Working Well Essex.

Our key achievements for the alliance so far include over 100 sign-ups to the alliance, and the 2 events we have hosted with more than 120 attendees (at the Civic Centre, Harlow, and Billericay Town Football Club, Billericay).

The ECA has also been invited to external events as an important part of sector. It was given a space at the head table at the Essex Construction Training Association (ECTA) awards, which celebrated new and young talent in the industry and their achievements. The ECA also attended the Hole Farm Local Supply Chain event, hosted by Lower Thames Crossing, where we were given access to early information on a nationally significant procurement opportunity and promoted the benefits of joining the alliance to industry.

CareTech

CareTech, technology that supports the health and wellbeing of individuals outside of clinical settings, is one of the fastest growing sectors in the global economy.

This is driven by demographical trends alongside advances in everyday technology that enable independent living. Investment in CareTech holds the power to reduce pressure on health budgets and support improved productivity in a labour-intensive sector.

Work to grow the CareTech sector in Essex has been underway since 2021 with key partners – the University of Essex; Colchester City Council; Suffolk and North East Essex ICB/ESNEFT; and Health Innovation East (HIE). In May 2023 we held a CareTech Summit in Colchester to launch 3 key initiatives to further this work:

The development of a CareTech Campus – to enable the testing and evaluation of technology solutions directly with commissioners, health partners, and care users. We are exploring how to deliver the Campus concept with partners, including ACL to include developing the skills of our workforce to work with greater levels of technology, to create a focal point for the development of a local caretech ecosystem.

A CareTech Forum – a regular focal point for discussions on challenges and opportunities between businesses, commissioners, and users and to advocate for the sector. A further CareTech Forum meeting was held in December 2023 at the Anglia Ruskin

University campus in Chelmsford, focusing on the breadth of support programmes available to innovators including the Arise ABOVE Innovation Support Grants. Attendees also heard from the head of the NHS Clinical Entrepreneurs programme about the opportunities available.

The launch of a CareTech Challenge Prize – to fund innovative solutions to challenges our care users face with initial funding (3x £8,000 finalists) followed by a £25,000 winning award. At an awards ceremony in February 2024, the CareTech Challenge Prize announced the winning innovators from the programme. From a list of 25 impressive applications, the expert judging panel agreed on three finalists. These were:

- **Jam Up** – a tool to support children on the autism spectrum to lead more independent lives
- **Cognitive Rehabilitation** – an app using Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Augmented Reality (AR) to deliver cognitive support
- **Supersense Care** – in-home technology providing real-time health insights

Each finalist was given 12 weeks to develop their products in co-production with care users and care providers, and Supersense Care was announced as the final winner receiving £25,000 to continue their product development. Jam Up also received £10,000 as a commended runner-up.

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Delivery Programmes

Alongside our network and relationship-building, we have also funded 3 programmes that have provided local businesses with best-in-class advice and support to help them thrive.

Innovation and Investment Readiness

A systemic challenge that we are trying to address is the lack of innovation funding for Essex businesses.

In April 2023 we commissioned PA Consulting to deliver a programme to boost applications for funding and increase innovation readiness of businesses in Greater Essex; and to take the first-hand insight from businesses who receive support to inform recommendations for future initiatives.

The programme was a pilot initiative to identify organisations that want to become 'innovation ready' but haven't been able to do so and develop practical support for them that can be rolled out on a wider scale in the future. It was designed to reach all parts of Essex and focussed on five growth sectors.

30 business applied and 10 were taken through the programme. The output and enthusiastic feedback highlighted appetite for this style of business support and the potential for local authorities to have huge impact on the innovation journeys of local businesses.

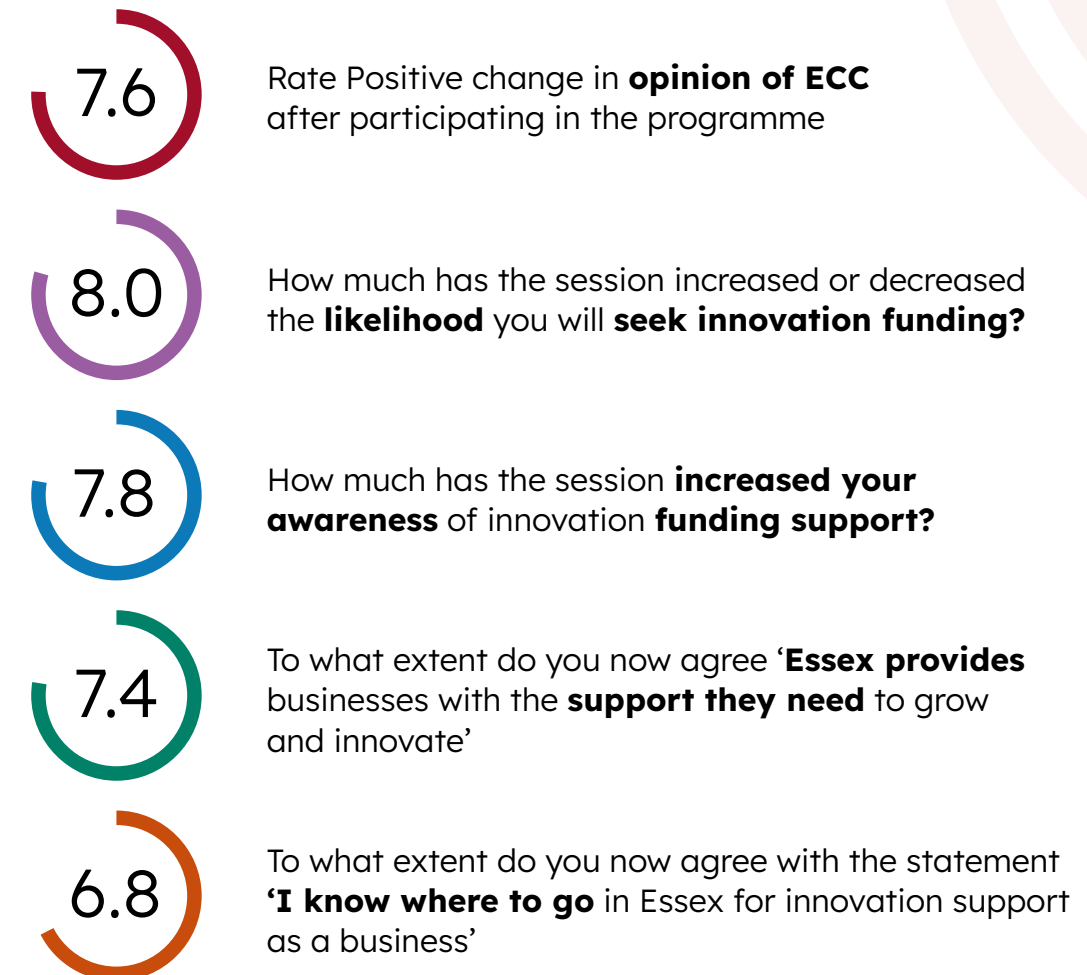
The Innovation and Investment Readiness Programme culminated in a full day session at the PA Global Innovation and Technology Centre (GITC) near Cambridge and included practical activities, testing, and reflective learning structured in hour long slots.

All participants valued the content beyond traditional funding advice, highlighting the need for support to be wider and touch on wider aspects of innovation.

The final report into the outcomes of the programme by PA Consulting, including recommendations for future innovation support, will inform our delivery planning moving forwards.

100 Day Survey: Summary of results

On a scale of 0 to 10...



Did the programme change your perception of innovation, and what it means for your business?

Respondents said...

"Yes - I didn't even think of the company as an innovator beforehand, and we 100% are. Thinking, products on the site, everything, innovation is at the heart of what we do. Innovation and wellbeing!"

"Absolutely, it changed my perception. I thought it was just for tech but it really opened my eyes what else it could be used for. For my business if the idea gets taken up it will be life changing for me and the business."

Startup Accelerator

Tailored specifically for pre-startup companies, we launched an accelerator programme with Medilink Midlands to provide the foundational support needed to navigate the initial and often most challenging phase of business development.

The programme provides:

- **Expert Mentorship** – Invaluable insights and guidance from industry leaders and successful entrepreneurs who understand the journey from concept to market
- **Tailored Workshops** – Designed to refine a business idea, develop a business model, and build a robust go-to-market strategy
- **Networking Opportunities** – A vibrant community of like-minded individuals, potential co-founders, and investors, fostering the relationships that can propel businesses forward

- **Funding Advice** – Guidance on securing early-stage funding, including pitch preparation and introductions to potential investors
- **Tech & Market Validation** – Expert resources to validate technology and market assumptions, ensuring the business idea has the potential to succeed

15 exciting, innovative businesses have graduated the first cohort of the programme and the 2nd cohort of 17 businesses completed the programme on June 19th. A celebration event hosted at the ARU Arise centre in Chelmsford brought together all the businesses who have taken part in the programme as an opportunity to discuss how both we and they can support each other to make their innovations thrive.



Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult

In 2023 Essex County Council were approached, along with Norfolk and Suffolk Council Council’s and renewable energy developer RWE, to support a programme for businesses from the 3 counties in the offshore renewable energy and sustainability sector.

After a rigorous selection process 3 businesses were selected from each county to go onto the programme.

Support Modules included topics such as

- IP Module & Workshop Accounting
- Value Proposition
- Legal Advice
- Export Opportunities
- Investor Readiness
- Business Case Analysis
- Engineering Assessment

The programme delivered the following outputs, with the Essex cohort businesses accounted for the majority of the Investment, Grants, Employees and Patents:



Investment:
£2,500,000



Grants £:
£586,787



Grants Number:
10



Employees:
9



Products:
13



Patents:
102



Locations:
1

The Essex Businesses were:



1. Mission Zero Technologies - transforming the CO2 supply chain through affordable direct air capture

Mission Zero Technologies is leading the charge in the UK's carbon removal industry, aiming to accelerate critical Net Zero pathways with its Direct Air Capture (DAC) technology. Its innovative approach is not only affordable but also scalable to any size, enabling it to recover carbon dioxide directly from the atmosphere anywhere in the world for permanent removal or sustainable use.

Since the programme Mission Zero Technologies have partnered with University of Sheffield to develop SAF (Sustainable Aviation Fuel) from Carbon Capture CO2 and Green Hydrogen and are currently seeking a location to set up their first pilot operational plant.



2. Front Technologies – Using engineering excellence to transform wind turbine inspections

Front Technologies is developing an inspection tool tailored for on-site wind turbine blade inspections. The new robotic maintenance system differs from current techniques used to inspect wind turbines and it will deliver improved efficiency, reliability, safety, and applicability across both onshore and offshore wind farms.

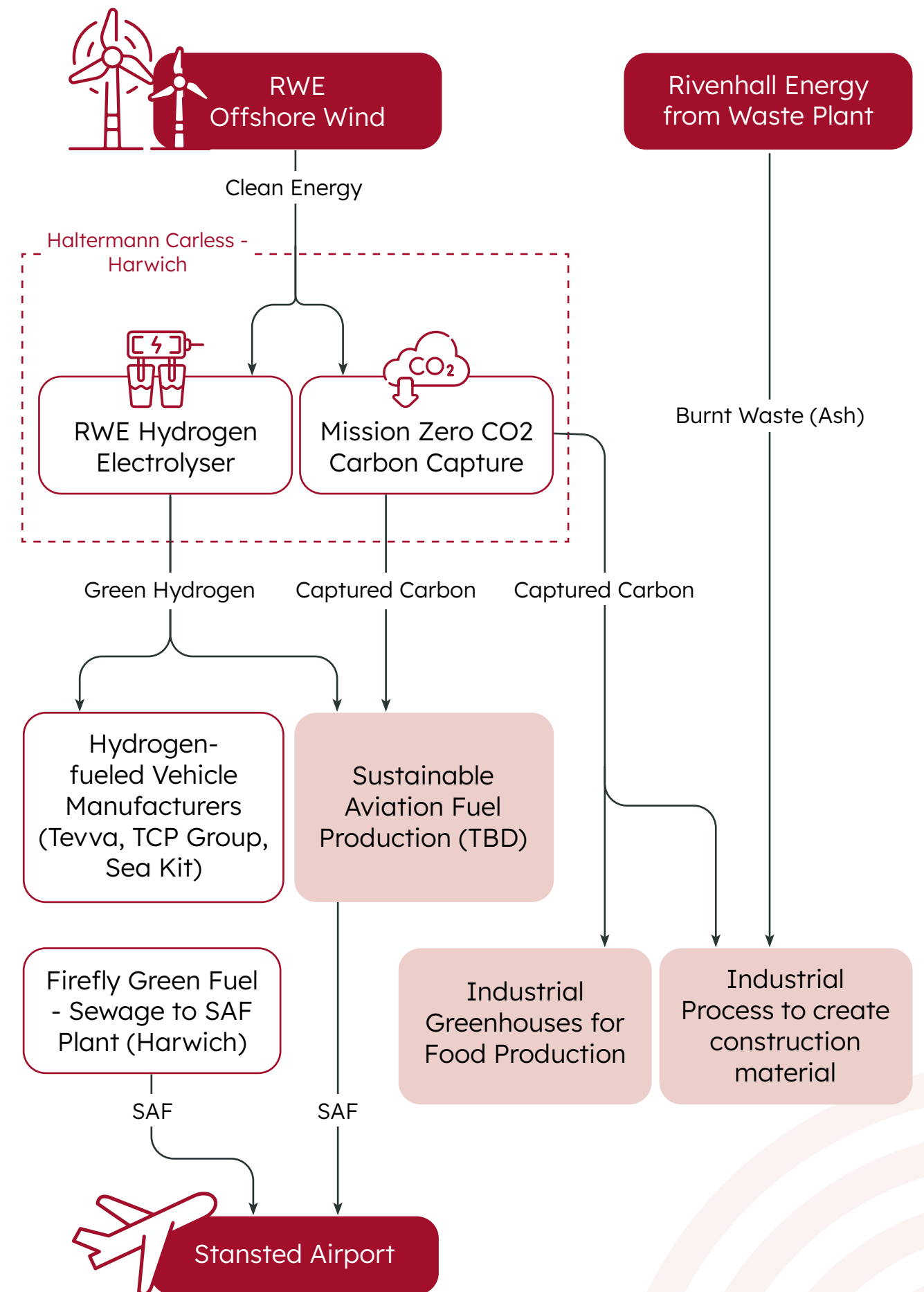
Front Technologies have partnered with ORE Catapult in a £600,000 Grant application to further develop their technological solution.



3. Haven Dredging - A nature-based approach to maintenance dredging

Haven Dredging joined Launch Academy East of England with an eco-friendly and cost-effective dredging solution that could reduce harmful emissions by up to 90%. It harnesses the power of tides and currents, minimising disruptions to marine ecosystems.

Haven Dredging, an offshoot of Harwich Haven Authority have filed 94 patents worldwide and are already in negotiations with different bodies across the world to use their innovative low carbon dredging solution.



Example of a Clean Energy economy ecosystem that could be developed in Greater Essex

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Events

Overview

This year we have delivered **13 events** across a wide range of themes, including: Sustainability, CareTech, DigiTech, Construction, Creative tech, Food & Drink, Space, Clean Energy, Hydrogen.

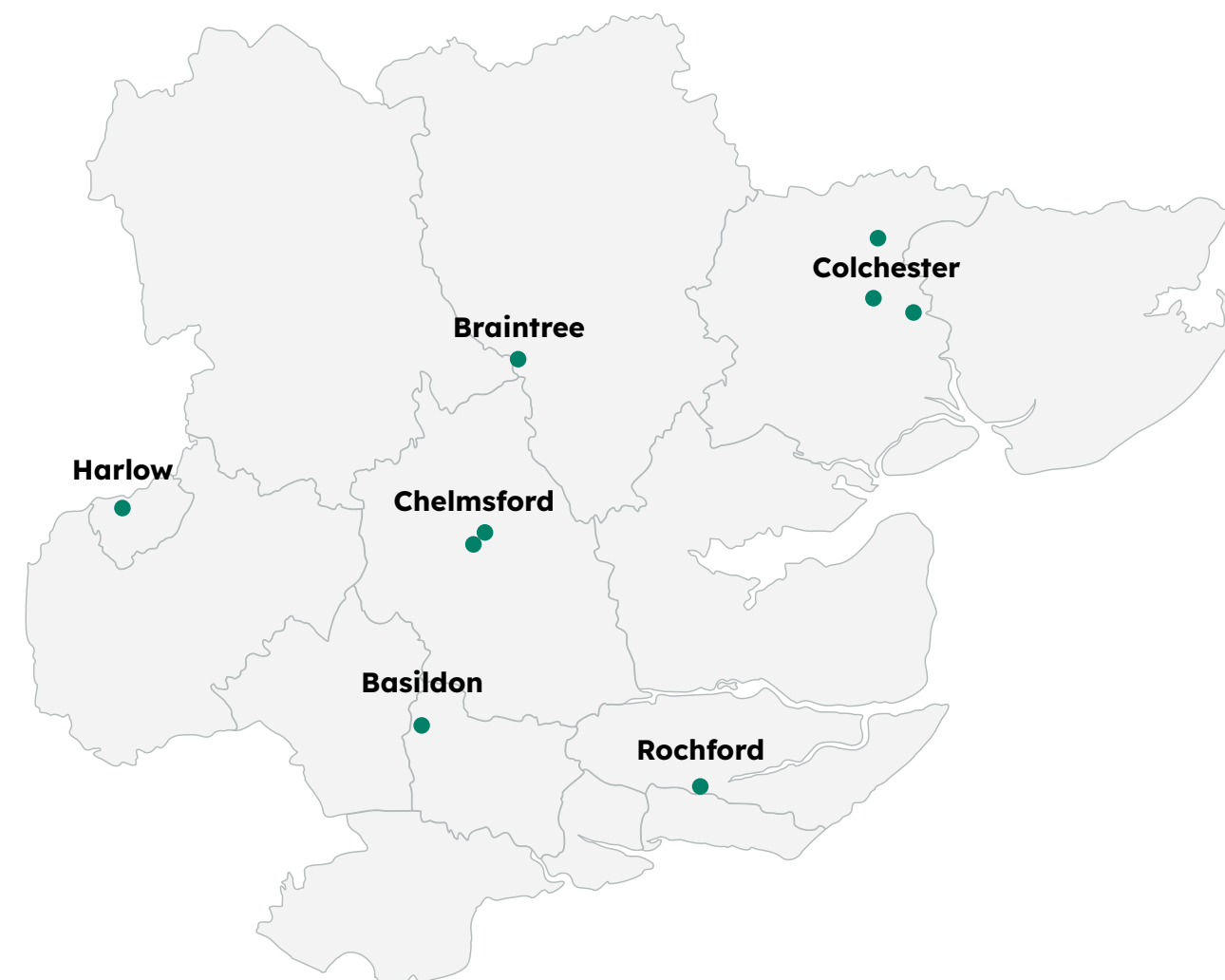


More than
650
attendees
came to our events
(from 895 Sign ups,
73% turnout).

Our events took place across a wide range of venues in Greater Essex:

- **Braintree** – The Plaza, Enterprise and Innovation Centre
- **Colchester** – Innovation Centre, Knowledge Gateway
- **Rochford** – The Launchpad, Southend
- **Harlow** – The Civic Centre
- **Colchester** – The Mercury Theatre
- **Chelmsford** – The County Hotel
- **Basildon** – Billericay Town Football Club
- **Colchester** – Colchester Rugby Club
- **Chelmsford** – Arise Innovation Hub

We secured a number of notable speakers, including: Robert Halfon MP (Harlow), Tim Robinson (Tech East), Stuart Catchpole (Space East), Doctor Trevor Cross (Concurrent Technologies), Colin Smithers (PlexTek), Dan Chilcott (Create South East)



Innovation in... Events

Our Ambitious Essex “Innovation in...” series have been a particular high point. They are designed to bring together local business with inspiring innovators to highlight the success stories and support opportunities out there.



Event details:

Innovation Summit 27th January 2023 – The Plaza

Speakers: Colin Smithers from Plextek, Fernando Centeno from Innovate UK EDGE, Holly Leonard from University of Essex, Julian Gibbs from Anglia Ruskin University, Karen Boakes from Innovate UK EDGE, Louise Fitton from ECC, Marc Jones from AntoBot, Marcus Watson from Ground Control, Mark Doran from ECC, Nigel Walker from Innovate UK, Piers Collins from Hundo, and Tim Middleton from Writtle University College

Innovation in Sustainability 21st April 2023 – Innovation Centre

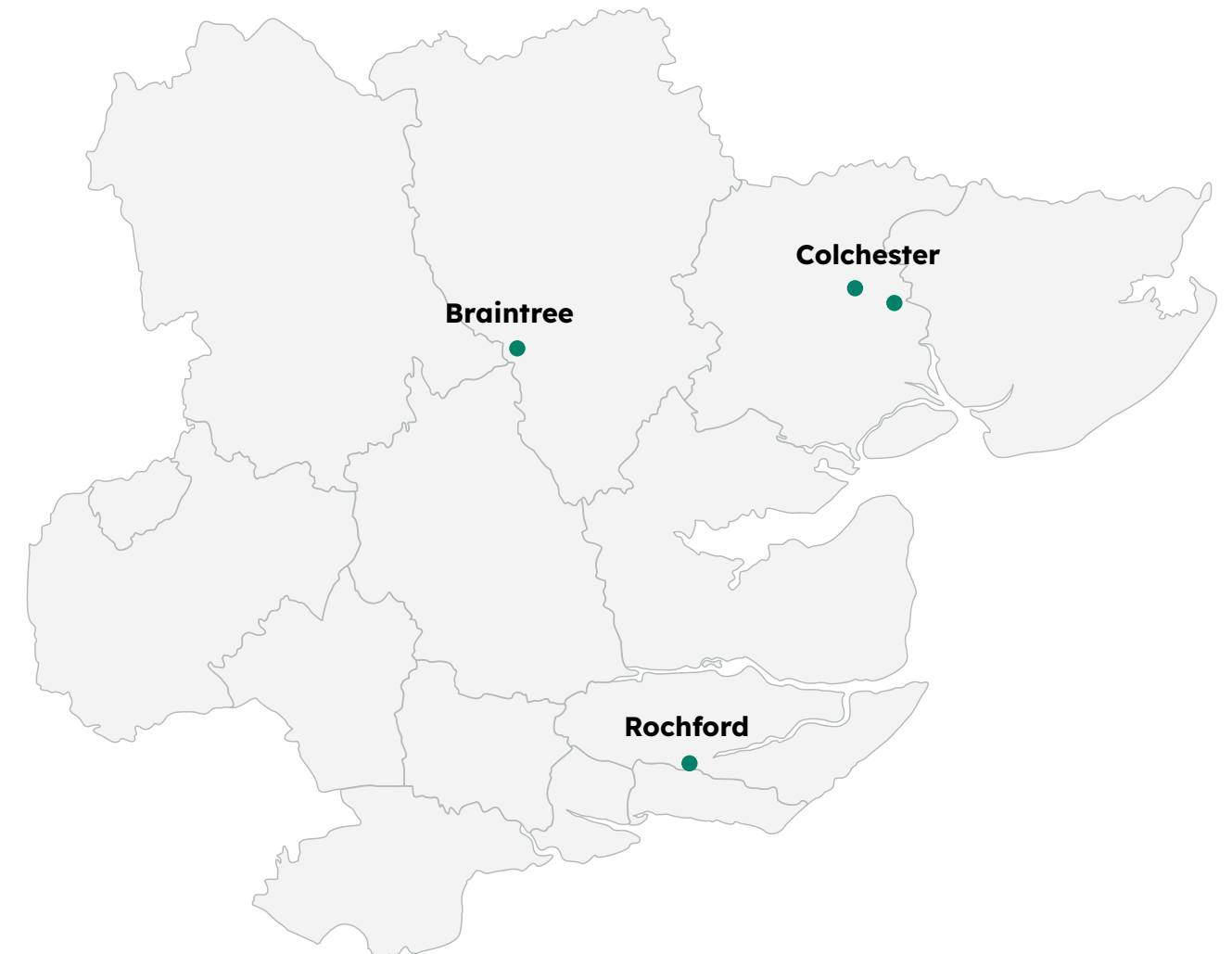
Speakers: Fernando Centeno from Innovate UK EDGE, Linda Blanchette from Consciously Clothed, Becky Baines from The Ink Bin, and Elise Clitheroe from Reco Store

Innovation in Digitech 7th July 2023 – The Launchpad

Speakers: Tim Robinson from TechEast, Caitie Glover from Syper Education, and Beth May from Ziggy May

Createch Summit 17th October 2023 – Mercury Theatre

Speakers: Eve Calderbank from ECC/ Ambitious Women in Essex, Carol Raynor from the Mercury Theatre, Anna Pool from Creative Colchester Partnership, Dan Chilcott from Create South East, and Dave Norton from Limbotech



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Partnerships

A priority for our first year of delivery has been to build collaborative relationships with key players in innovation across Greater Essex and beyond.

Working with our Universities

We have provided letters of support and acted as a key 'Civic Partner' for several significant bids by our higher education institutions, including:

- University of Essex, Anglia Ruskin University, and the University of Suffolk to bid for £5m bid from the Connecting Capabilities Fund for COSMIC: Collaborative Opportunities for Space-Sector Maturation, Innovation and Commercialisation in the East of England
- University of Essex and Anglia Ruskin University's application for £4m PBIAA funding for emerging clusters to create CHARM: Cluster for Health and Robotics in MedTech Essex
- Anglia Ruskin University, University of Suffolk, Cranfield University, and others for £4m PBIAA funding for emerging clusters to create ECOLOGIC: Environmentally Conscious Logistics and Supply Innovation Cluster

- Anglia Ruskin University to bid into the STFC Public Engagement Spark Awards for a programme to attract more young people to choose STEM careers.

We expected feedback in the coming months on these bids, and there will be opportunities to support future bids as a result of our work to build productive relationships with the universities.



Working across our Region

The private sector doesn't recognise local authority administrative borders – so we have built productive regional partnerships across the East of England bring opportunities to our businesses.

On 22nd April we delivered a Freeport East Innovation Event in partnership with University of Essex and Freeport East with more than 40 businesses attending. We are continuing work with different partners to maximise Freeport East opportunities in Greater Essex, including a joint submission to the Freeport East Skills and Innovation Fund, as well as working with Tendring District Council and partners to develop a Skills & Innovation Centre at Harwich linked to the Freeport. As the only county with 2 Freeports we are also

engaging Thames Freeport closely through our partnership with South Essex Councils and the Thames Estuary Growth Board.

Over the course of 2023 to 2024 we also developed a strong working relationship with the New Anglia LEP and their business support initiatives such as the New Anglia Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering network (NAAME) and Connected Innovation programme. With the announcement that LEPs would be disbanded from April 2024, we have worked hard to ensure not only continuity in our work with partners in Norfolk and Suffolk through that organisational change, but to take that cross-border collaboration to even greater levels. Essex businesses will have the opportunity to reap the rewards of that collaboration in 2024 to 2025.

Working with Innovation Leaders

This year we established the Essex Innovation Leaders Forum, bringing together local economic policy makers, academics, and key national players like Innovate UK to share information and discuss how we can align support programmes.

A crucial piece of work we have begun is to use a best-in-class 'innovation ecosystem' model to understand the assets and behaviours that have made places like Silicon Valley succeed and what that means for Greater Essex.

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Ambitious Essex Tech 50

Digitech was recognised in Sector Development Strategy as a key growth sector in Essex.

The Ambitious Essex Tech 50 (AET50) celebrates the local tech businesses at the heart of that growth, based on: turnover, growth potential, innovation, investment and funding secured, local and global reach, social value, and approach to skills and training.

Social Media Comms targets:

- ✓ **1,500 Impressions on LinkedIn within a month** – Surpassed this within a week. Currently **over 6,000** on initial post with additional spread across other re-posts
- ✓ **30 Clicks on post and 10 mentions** – Original post has 50 likes, 13 comments, and 21 reposts
- ✓ **Drive 400 visitors to Digital Essex page** – Over 475 have visited so far



We identified 50 businesses, across every district (inc. Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock), each unique in their own respect, flourishing in a specific tech niche. The AET50 enables us to engage with innovative businesses and form tech-based communities within Essex, whilst also promoting Essex as a viable place for tech investment due to its growing infrastructure and available support.

Other comms achievements:

- ✓ Became the top performing post on Ambitious Essex between January 2023 to January 2024, despite being released on January 29th 2024
- ✓ Tech Balance founder Ryan Bell was announced as a speaker at the Young Entrepreneurs Southend (YES) & Ambitious Young People in Essex event. Business on Sea (Southend based business community) **announced this on LinkedIn** and referenced the Ambitious Essex Tech 50 in the post



External articles and website posts from participating businesses:

- [Pinnaca Retail Solutions](#)
- [Tevva](#)
- [Federation of Small Businesses](#)
- [Alcove](#)

Requests:

- Tevva invited us to their London (Tilbury) production facility.
- 3D Fila Print have asked how and if they could be added to a future list. They have been put on a shortlist for the next years considerations
- Acticheck have enquired about a direct partnership with ECC to promote and actively use their technologies
- ECOedge requested further information about the AET50 and asked if there are likely to be AET50 events, where they may be able to speak to selected businesses to collaborate and to gain insights or new tools

What's next:

On the 13th June, the AET50 was presented to all district EDO's with the aim of getting them to analyse their local tech sector and participate in nominating their 'tech champions' each year. This will not only increase relations with both businesses and districts throughout Greater Essex, but will also allow us to uncover businesses we may not have found through Beahurst, Google, or our own knowledge. The next iteration will likely be published around the same time as the initial launch (January 2025) with other variations being created to address other sectors.

There is ambition to host an Ambitious Essex event based around tech, and utilising the tech 50 list would be an excellent way to get all our county's leading talents into one room.

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Looking Forward – 2024 to 2025

Over the next year Essex businesses can look forward to greater opportunities to access regional programmes and funding, particularly for two of our key Growth Sectors.

Advanced Manufacturing

We will launch an Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Sector Forum, which will closely link with our ongoing work with district partners and regional colleagues to secure a Department for Business and Trade ‘Made Smarter’ manufacturing support programme for the East of England.

There is the potential to secure circa £800,000 for this programme in year 1 (from April 2025). The outcome expected in October.

We are working closely with the Defence and Security Accelerator (DASA) to bring a Regional Defence and Security Cluster (RDSC) to the East of England. A successful initial meeting to discuss the opportunity took place on the 9th July at the prestigious PA Consulting Global Innovation and Technology Centre, with more than 20 major businesses from across the region attending and committing to be part of the group moving forwards. The ambition (already demonstrated by other RDSC’s in the UK) is to transform the level of investment into our region via increased use of local supply chains by Prime contractors and better integration of our academic institutions to boost commercialisation of research.



Clean Energy

Next year will be a particularly strong one in terms of support of our burgeoning clean energy sector:

- Essex will become a member of ‘Generate’, a partnership of regional business and the public sector leading the way for future investment and development of the energy sector across the East of England
- we have joined Suffolk in a bid to Freeport East Innovation & Skills fund to support the transition 10 Essex businesses into benefiting from the emerging hydrogen economy.
- we are working with Norfolk & Suffolk and the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult to develop a follow on to the successful Launch Academy programme for 2024
- from November 2024, we are looking to include Essex into an extant MOU for collaboration on Offshore Wind & Energy matters with the Government of Virginia Beach, VA that they currently hold with Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils



Digital and Creative

Building on the work from the Essex Culture & Green Spaces team and the success of the Ambitious Essex Tech 50, we have ambitions to establish a ‘Top 30 Creatives’ to highlight a lesser recognised yet highly lucrative sector of businesses in the cultural sector.

Support Programmes

Following our Innovation and Investment Readiness and Start-up support programmes, we will deliver direct support to local businesses through a new programme focussing on companies at seed-funding stage and helping them find a pathway to growth.

This information is issued by:
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