

Norfolk and Suffolk Agri-Food Industry Council Meeting

Date: 15 September 2020

Time: 0930 - 1130

Location and room: [Via Zoom](#)

Our vision: The future is a place where we make a telling contribution in growing the agri-food sector in Norfolk and Suffolk

Our vision is to be a shining beacon of how an LEP industry council supports its sector and businesses. As a result of our activities, the agri-food sector in Norfolk and Suffolk will become bigger, more prosperous and more economically and environmentally resilient.

Our mission: We will get there by maximising opportunities to generate economic prosperity

The Norfolk and Suffolk Agri-Food Industry Council's mission is to help our sector thrive and grow. Providing clear and demonstrable value, the Council will drive the delivery of the Industrial Strategy and Sector Deals, which will strengthen the agricultural and food sector in Norfolk and Suffolk, reinforce its economic prosperity, support its environmental objectives, and make it even more attractive to those who want to work, and invest, in the sector.

In Attendance

Philip Ainsworth, Suffolk Ag Assoc; **Briony Tuthill**, Anglian Water; **Jonathan Clarke**, JIC; **Martin Collison**, Collison and Associates; **Madeleine Coupe**, New Anglia LEP; **Kate De Vries**, Norfolk County Council; **Alex Dinsdale**, Agri-TechE; **Sam Fairs**, Hillfairs Farming Ltd; **Doug Field (Chair)**, New Anglia LEP; **Gary Ford**, NFU; **Viv Gillespie**, Suffolk New College; **Robert Gooch**, The Wild Meat Co; **Jasmine Joolia**, Suffolk County Council; **Corrienne Peasgood**, City College Norwich; **Greg Smith**, Royal Norfolk Agric Assoc; **Emma Taylor**, New Anglia LEP; **Ben Turner**, Ben Burgess and Co Ltd; **Clarke Willis**, Food Enterprise Park.

Apologies for absence

Belinda Clarke, Agri-TechE; **Nigel Davies**, Muntons; **Andrew Fearne**, UEA; **Andrew Francis**, Elveden Estate; **Sarah Lucas**, Brown and Co; **Nick Sandford**, CLA;

Minutes

1	Welcome from the Chair; apologies and roundtable introductions (<i>if needed</i>), minutes of the last meeting; approval and matters arising
	There were no comments on the minutes of the previous meeting or matters arising.
2	State of the nation: Norfolk and Suffolk farming and food update
	The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced new faces on the Council; Gary Ford, NFU; Briony Tuthill, Anglian Water and Nick Sandford, CLA.
	Poultry Factory Covid Outbreak An update was given on a recent outbreak of Covid-19 at a poultry processing factory. Council was told that the business involved had followed procedures and its management had acted properly & responsibly. The business is concerned that while it was closed temporarily some of the workforce may have sought employment elsewhere, which could potentially cause further difficulties for the factory upon reopening. The business is facing additional challenges owing to the shortfall in revenue from when the factory was closed and two weeks' of production was lost.
	New Anglia LEP and other stakeholders including NFU have raised with Government the need to consider a) compensation for birds culled while the factory was closed, b) finance to cover the cost of temporarily

sending staff home, and c) a loan to cover cashflow while sales were stopped. It seemed unlikely that this support would be forthcoming. New Anglia LEP is also working closely with other businesses in the sector in order to share information, best practice and to better understand areas of potential weakness, and how to address them.

The British Poultry Council & National Farmers' Union have particularly raised with Government the concern that without financial support to businesses which proactively manage Covid-19 outbreaks it will disincentivise co-operation and responsible behaviour from other food processing businesses in the event of a Covid-19 outbreak elsewhere. Accordingly, further additional efforts are being put into seeking Parliamentary support for the industry as a whole.

Education and Skills

Enrolments at Suffolk Rural are 15% up which the college is pleased with, especially considering that summer marketing opportunities were lost. The college is still to see how many apprenticeships in agriculture there will be but it's hoped that this sector won't be as badly affected as other sectors. Easton has seen an improvement in its financial circumstances and some high quality appointments have recently been made to staff. 60% of the City College Norwich students are in land-based studies, up from 50% pre-merger. The college is looking at initiatives to support apprentices and is working with employers to support the sector.

The New Anglia Skills Advisory Panel is compiling a list of CPD proficiency schemes across the region, but would be grateful for contributions in case it has missed, or is of unaware of, any. Please contact [Natasha Waller](#) at New Anglia LEP. In addition, there is a great deal of agri-food and countryside / environmental resources available for schools; the Panel is pulling together a comprehensive list of these resources for circulation amongst schools in Norfolk and Suffolk.

Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils

Norfolk County Farms reports that a small number of tenants have requested rent reductions owing to Covid-related marketing difficulties. The council is also launching (tonight Tuesday 15 September) the Norfolk and Suffolk Innovation Network, the largest public sector low-power wide-area network (LoRaWAN) deployment in the UK. The council also reminded members of RISE, a food and drink innovation event being held on Wednesday 23 September 2020. Suffolk County Council reported that its focus is on job support and addressing unemployment. Its new skills portal is now live as part of the New Anglia Growth Hub, which also covers investment, funding and training opportunities to support businesses. Both councils have specialist teams working to support apprenticeships and business.

Agricultural Show Associations

It was noted that the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland had signalled concerns about next years Highland Show, and that they're not alone amongst show societies, including Norfolk and Suffolk, options for whose 2021 shows are being considered. Education remains the primary objective of Suffolk Agricultural Association and it continues to develop its outreach programme for secondary schools, covering both agrifood careers and education and study options for students. Its primary outreach programme is due to start in mid-October; so far 70 primary schools have signed up. The programme covers a range of agricultural and related areas, including the environment, and is being developed in collaboration with partners including the British Association for Shooting and Conservation.

Agriculture

Challenges of the recent harvest, expected to be 40% down on average, caused by weather, were widely reported. In addition, flea beetle problems in OSR (although not as bad in Norfolk as further west) and sugar beet (virus yellows) were also highlighted. Rural crime persists, in particular theft of GPS units from machinery, and hare coursing. Brexit continues to cause significant levels of uncertainty. Covid lockdown problems remain, with a number of cold stores which are currently full of food (in particular chips and chicken meat) diverted from wholesale and foodservice when these markets closed in the spring. This product is costly to store and will at some point have to come to the market. In spite of low yields, harvest

was described as being 'cost effective' and has not been expensive, meaning that machinery businesses are looking at a positive outlook in sales terms.

Water

Water resources are currently at a normal level but showing a current downward trend on groundwater sources. Anglian Water is running a marketing campaign targeting reductions in domestic water use. The company also launched its [green recovery plan](#) this week, which outlines five key areas for post Covid recovery: carbon reduction; housing; skills and jobs; climate change; and nature recovery.

Food Enterprise Park

Enquiries from potential tenants at the FEP are continuing, with considerable interest in locating to the park. Discussions are ongoing to secure a vertical farm tenant on the site. The outcome of the grant application to support the Food Innovation Centre is still awaited, with design and planning work well underway.

John Innes Centre

The centre is currently researching the means to tackle flea beetle in OSR and virus yellows in sugar beet. In addition, research continues on peas and other vegetable proteins, including looking at optimising production and improving skills. Major research on the positive impacts of pea starch on type II diabetes is due to be published this month, which is expected add further value to the pea crop. The JIC is supporting the ongoing discussions which the FEP (above) is holding with salad and vertical farming businesses. The institute is back at operational level from a science perspective, with admin staff continuing to work at home.

Food production, processing and labour

Concerns exist around the impacts of a potential Covid outbreak in other food processing sites, not just poultry as described above. The shortage of labour in harvesting and processing remains a live issue and there is concern that Defra appears to have limited understanding of immediate problems and implications. Food trade – imports and exports – problems remain unresolved, and Defra have been unable to answer questions from business on technical and administrative matters. Price pressure continues as a proportion of food supply, previously going to wholesale and foodservice, has been redirected to retail, with competition and consumer demand driving prices down while risk and uncertainty (including driven by Brexit) continue to increase.

The Chair thanked Council members for their contributions which he reiterated continue to be of real value in informing New Anglia's representations to HMG.

<p>3 Norfolk and Suffolk Baseline Natural Capital study TO INFORM DEVELOPMENT OF CLEAN GROWTH ACTIVITIES IN DELIVERY PLAN</p>
<p>Professor Andrew Lovett from UEA's School of Environmental Sciences introduced the Natural Capital Evidence Compendium for Norfolk and Suffolk. The objective for this was to produce an evidence compendium of Norfolk and Suffolk natural capital assets with which to form the basis of a local 25 year environment plan, to complement Defra's 2018 25 year environment plan. An additional objective was to highlight to HMG Norfolk and Suffolk's World Class Environment, and to ensure that relevant funds were not diverted elsewhere in the face of the loss to rural areas of the Basic Farm Payment.</p> <p>The compendium provides an overview of different land types, landscapes, habitats, coastal and offshore natural assets throughout the two counties, and seeks to prioritise these assets according to their local (and national) importance to the economy, society and the environment. The compendium is currently in draft form and publication is expected soon.</p> <p>A series of workshops were held with local experts to help inform understanding of the pressures and ecosystem services at risks for each asset type. The compendium also includes a section on implications, specifically with reference to those natural capital assets for which Norfolk and Suffolk hold a relatively high proportion of the national total (i.e. over 10%). The findings described in the compendium illustrate the need</p>

	<p>for landscape-scale approaches to tackle environmental problems, especially considering the widespread locations of natural capital assets and the fact that they are not concentrated solely in designated areas (e.g. AONBs).</p> <p>From Council's perspective, the next steps are to use the compendium, when published in the coming weeks, to inform the development of specific natural capital projects.</p> <p>A comment was made regarding the importance of the link between the natural environment, visitors and tourism, and the wider local economy, together with the key role, and opportunities, for farmers and landowners, especially around food production and sales.</p>
4	<p>Covid-19 Recovery: Transformational Projects TO COLLECT FEEDBACK and SUGGESTIONS FOR PROJECTS TO ENGAGE VOLUNTEERS TO DEVELOP IDEAS FURTHER</p>
	<p>Transformational projects</p> <p>The reasoning behind New Anglia LEP's investment plan – to have 'shovel ready' projects ready and waiting for when funding opportunities arise, in the current volatile funding landscape – was explained. This includes projects requiring revenue, as well as capital funding.</p> <p>A number of ideas for potential 'transformational projects' – projects which could be suitable for inclusion in the investment plan owing to their having LEP-wide impacts – were described.</p> <p>A comment was made about the need for a joined-up approach between and within central government and local authorities, including DCMS and DEFRA, regarding exercise and fitness activities in rural areas. Additional comments were made regarding the need to cover decarbonising the food chain and the need for appropriate levels of supply of connectivity to renewable energy.</p> <p><i>A request was made for volunteers to get involved, via a subgroup, to further develop the transformational projects. Thank you to Greg Smith, Jasmine Joolia, Kate de Vries, Gary Ford and Briony Tuthill for stepping forward; if anyone else wishes to support this then please let Alex know.</i></p> <p><i>A request was also made for further suggestions of potential projects; please send these to Alex.</i></p>
5	<p>Delivery Plan Update and progress report TO UPDATE COUNCIL ON DELIVERY PLAN ACTIVITIES and PROGRESS</p>
	<p>Delivery Plan</p> <p>A brief update on the Council's delivery plan was given, relating to the progress report which accompanied the meeting agenda. It was explained that the plan aligns with the interventions listed in the Local Industrial Strategy and as it develops, advice and input will be sought from Council members on prioritising interventions. The plan will also be further refreshed to align with New Anglia's restart recovery and developing recovery plans. Furthermore, as the projects referred to above are developed these will also be incorporated into the delivery plan.</p> <p>It was noted that Council members contributed to the Agri-Food Sector Report published in August. Further reports will be published from this Autumn and circulated more widely than the first edition.</p>
6	<p>ANY OTHER BUSINESS; DATE OF NEXT MEETING TUESDAY DECEMBER 15, 0930 – 1130 via Zoom</p>
	<p>AOB</p> <p>The RISE food and drink business recovery conference, and the LEP AGM, were mentioned, and details of these events were circulated shortly after the meeting.</p>

The business intelligence subgroup, which was active in the spring, is to be reactivated. The purpose of the group, which Jonathan Clarke has agreed to continue to chair, is to gather information from businesses, especially those involved in food processing, as to what are the barriers and challenges to investing in Norfolk and Suffolk. **Alongside Jonathan Clarke, Jasmine Joolia (or a SCC colleague) have agreed to sit on this group, and we would welcome other volunteers. Please let Alex know if you can help.**

Council members confirmed that they are happy for their names and email addresses to be shared within the Council, further to earlier email conversations. Please find attached a list of names and email addresses. Please do not share these outside of the Council.

FEED UK is an initiative from the Knowledge Transfer Network and the Food and Drink Sector Council, working with major retailers, aiming to make 'the UK Food and Drink system the most robust and innovative globally.' New Anglia LEP will follow its development and you can find out more [here](#).

Finally, the chair explained that his tenure on both the LEP board and this Council are to end next week. He told Council members that he had really enjoyed his time in the position, explaining that the chairmanship of the Council was to pass to another LEP board member, Corienne Peasgood. Finally, he thanked Council members for their support, and Council members thanked him for his time and efforts while in the chair.

Members' attention was drawn to the forthcoming [Agri-Tech Week](#), taking place in November. Members were also apprised of the launch of [Norfolk and Suffolk's Innovation Network](#) which supports IOT (Internet of Things).

Actions from Norfolk and Suffolk Agri-Food Industry Council meetings

Date	Item	Action	Update	Actioned by	Target date
19/06/2020	Item 5: Agri Food Sector 'Voice': Our approach to recovery and growth	Circulate draft report for comment and input	Completed	ET	By September meeting
19/06/2020	AOB	Establish subgroup to develop agrifood sector response further		ET	By September meeting
15/09/2020	Items 3 and 4	Establish subgroup, and begin to develop transformational projects covering business recovery and growth, and environment and natural capital		AD	By December meeting
15/09/2020	AOB	Recruit volunteers for business intelligence subgroup and begin collecting and collating feedback from business.		AD	By December meeting
15/09/2020	AOB	Circulate names and email addresses of members around the Council		AD	By December meeting