

Business leaders doorstep Whitehall to back region

by John Fenton

Business and local authority leaders were at Westminster on Tuesday to champion the interests of economic growth in the East of England.

Steve Sharratt, chair of the East of England Space for Ideas Forum of business leaders, spearheaded a large contingent of business representatives and local authority and community leaders, who joined many of the region's MPs at the launch of 'Blueprint for Growth', an action plan for economic recovery first covered exclusively in Business Weekly.

Sharratt outlined what the region needed to increase its contribution to the UK economy to £10 billion a year. He called on government to target help, support and encouragement to where the biggest returns were to be made, saying that government needed 'to work with the East of England, not to ignore it.'

He said: "Today, we throw the spotlight on the realities and priorities of the new world. Recovery from recession. Tackling the massive deficit. Cutting spending. Targeting resources to those who need them most."

"Generating the wealth to pay for all this, and for the sake of jobs and investment, securing the place of the East of England in UK, EU and world markets."

"That is why all of the region is taking its tough message for tough times to the heart of

Westminster. We are ready and willing to play our part, and to take on the toughest challenges - and win. But we can't do it alone.

"We call on the Government to support us in generating the money and attracting the investment that will support our recovering economy and continue to make the East a great place to live, work and do business."

"Our region contributes £6bn every year to UK plc - one of only three regions to make a net contribution to the Exchequer; but in the last year the East saw the largest contraction in employment of all the regions."

"Companies across the globe want to locate and invest in the East, such as Microsoft, GSK, Siemens, BT, Ford and Lotus; but nearly 200,000 employees have a chronic skills gap."

"Our economy is worth £110 billion; but over 40 per cent more people are claiming unemployment benefit in our region than in the North East [this is in absolute numbers only]."

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Siemens, BT, Ford and Lotus; but nearly 200,000 employees have a chronic skills gap.

"Our region is one of the fastest growing in the UK. But until congestion is tackled the UK economy will be deprived of up to £2 billion a year; and inadequate road and rail links to the our gateways will prevent up to 55,000 additional jobs coming to the East."

"And how can it be that our region has the 8th lowest broadband speed in the UK; a higher fall in exports in the past year than the UK average; and is under-performing in sectors like agriculture, energy and business services."

"The national insurance contribution 'holiday' will cost businesses in the East up to £140 million of benefit. Surely the answer to a sustainable UK economy is a balanced approach that brings all regions up to the level of the strongest, and not discriminate against those like us, who want to help deliver more than their fair share for the benefit of all."

"To attempt to put suitcases full of cash on trains from Stevenage is not the answer. To nurture the success we have in encouraging world-class industry and talent to stay here and work hard; to target investment at projects and initiatives that will deliver money and growth; and to say to the private sector, our expectations of you are extremely high, but we are right there behind you, giving you the right tools to do the job."

"This must be the best way to help all regions have the strength and resilience to survive,



Laying it on the line for Whitehall - Steve Sharratt

recover and prosper. That is what the action plan at the heart of our Blueprint for Growth is all about - and that is why 80,000 businesses, organisations and individuals across the East have signed-up to it.

"And why, for the first time, business and local government have agreed to work together in an unprecedented way to fight for the future of the East of England."

"It's an action plan not a discussion document. We are rolling up our sleeves to get on with the job, and our commitment is total. And if we ALL work together the prize by 2015 could be as much as £10 billion a year to UK plc."

"So we say, don't kill the goose that is laying the golden egg, make it a bigger egg! We're all in this together."

Babraham specialists take their research to royal expo

SCIENTISTS from the Babraham Institute presented their research at the Royal Society's annual Summer Science Exhibition at the Royal Festival Hall.

Babraham's exhibit - "Calcium signalling; getting to the heart of the matter" - explained how the heart works, what happens when biochemical signalling goes wrong leading to serious medical conditions like irregular heart beats and ultimately heart failure.

Calcium ions play a critical role in regulating the activity of heart cells; this key chemical signal drives muscle contraction and is needed for every heart beat.

The research bridges the gap between clinical diagnoses of heart problems and understanding what has gone wrong at the level of individual cells.

Dr Martin Bootman, a group leader at Babraham and formerly a Royal Society University Research Fellow explained: "We believe that understanding how heart cells handle calcium may lead us to novel targets for new medicines. Over the past years we have developed an expertise in observing the fine detail of calcium signalling in heart cells."

"We can tell where, when and why calcium signals occur and in particular we can see when they occur in the wrong place at the wrong time and the unwanted effect this has on cells."

Professor Sir Michael Berridge FRS, Emeritus Fellow at The Babraham Institute, added: "Understanding how calcium regulates the heart may provide clues for the development of novel preventative drugs for cardiovascular disease, the cause of around



100,000 deaths annually in the UK."

The Babraham Institute is internationally renowned for its cell signalling research. Calcium ions are important chemical messengers for many other cell processes including fertilisation and neural activity.



Dr Claire Cockcroft

Problems with calcium levels in the body underlie numerous health problems including high blood pressure, heart failure, cancer and bipolar disorders. Babraham scientists are studying how calcium levels affect cardiovascular cells and how it can negatively impact on heart rhythm and the genes controlling heart size, leading to pathological conditions like hypertrophy - thickening of the chambers of the heart.

The Babraham team was on hand at the exhibition to talk to visitors about their research and the innovative techniques used to see where molecules are found in cells.

Dr Claire Cockcroft, Babraham's head of external relations who organised the exhibit said: "The Royal Society's Summer Science Exhibition gave us a unique opportunity to meet a much wider audience to talk about science and explain the relevance of our work in discovering how and why diseases arise."

"For younger visitors we had an exciting 'hands-on' display, interactive 'touch-screens' as well as the chance to find out about a day in the life of real scientists, which we hope may inspire a new generation of scientists."

Councils unite to save £2.65m on insurance costs

COUNCILS in the East of England have collaborated to save £2.65 million on annual insurance costs.

Twelve local authorities in the region formed a consortium to procure insurance contracts signed last month with backing from Improvement East. The collaboration achieved savings of £2.65 million over three years and is on track to save a minimum of 16 per cent on the current contract value, with one council saving as much as 50 per cent on its premium.

Improvement East supported the process by inviting councils together under its partnership approach and funding the specialist risk management support to help the authorities collaborate.

Councillor Richard Stay, chairman of Improvement East and deputy leader at Central Bedfordshire said: "With all public service costs under pressure, better procurement provides an opportunity to make significant savings that don't cut into front line services."

"Improvement East and local authorities across the East of England are working with determination to find new ways of saving money while also seeking to improve services."

Liz Watts, chief finance officer, St Edmundsbury Borough Council, said: "The sheer leg work of co-ordinating an already complex tender process with 11 other authorities was daunting. But the financial support from Improvement East enabled us to overcome this problem, with the use of external experts."

"The savings delivered are impressive, and there is certainly recognition amongst finance directors that there is still great scope for further joint working."

The councils that collaborated on the project were the borough councils of St Edmundsbury, Chelmsford, Great Yarmouth and Luton, and the district councils of Braintree, Epping Forest, Forest Heath, North Norfolk, Rochford, South Holland, South Norfolk and West Lindsey.