

SOUTH EAST ENGLAND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

BOARD MEETING ON 10 SEPTEMBER 2009

ITEM 15

AGENCY REPORT

Recommendation

The Board is invited to **NOTE** the Agency Activity Report for August and September which represents a cross section of reports from within SEEDA organised according to the themes of SEEDA's Corporate Plan 2008-11.

GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

Global Markets programme

1. SEEDA has secured two inward investment successes since the last report, which will create 10 new jobs over the next three years.

Business Development events attended:

Harwell ESA Programme – Oxfordshire – 22 July

2. SEEDA participated in a two day space technologies symposium in support of the European Space Agency programme at the Harwell Innovation Campus. Prior to the symposium two events were held in Washington DC and LA to promote the programme to potential investors and partners. These events were attended by over 100 companies, which resulted in 40 US companies attending the Harwell European Space Agency Programme in the UK. There were also a number of European companies that attended the event. The programme has generated two Foreign Direct Investment projects as MDA (US company) and Magellium (French company) are planning to open their UK operations at the campus.

OSEO – Guildford – 2 July

3. SEEDA hosted a meeting in Guildford to introduce the sector consortia to the OSEO, the French equivalent of the UK's Technology Strategy Board. The meeting also included representatives of the Technology Strategy Board, Pôle Mer Bretagne and Pôle Mer PACA – two large marine clusters from France. The objective of the meeting was to share ideas and approaches to promoting cross-border activities supporting innovation; to present existing Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) innovation support policies in UK and France and to explore opportunities for supporting Anglo-French projects addressing socio-economic challenges in the maritime domain. Since the meeting the sector consortia have facilitated the introduction of innovative SMEs to the OSEO, who in turn are introducing them to large French companies to explore trade and other collaborative opportunities.

Research and Development Programme

National Aerospace Technology Strategy

MAPS (Multilateral Aircraft Positioning at Southampton airport)

4. Roke Manor Research presented the conclusion of their work, funded by SEEDA, into passive low level tracking of commercial aircraft to SEEDA at the end of July. Of the seven originally planned receiving stations, six are fully commissioned and operational. Roke have managed to use the data from the receivers to obtain accurate tracking information which is displayed in a three dimensional box reflecting an area of 400 square miles. This data will ultimately be used by Southampton airport to enhance existing radar systems and provide information on flight trajectories for airport ground staff both supporting airport logistics as well as noise abatement strategies. Roke are also well progressed in discussions with a partner company for full world wide commercial exploitation of the system.

Innovation and Creativity programme

South East Business Innovation and Growth Teams - appointment of two new Team Leaders

5. [REDACTED] has been appointed as Team Director for West Surrey and North East Hampshire Innovation and Growth Team. [REDACTED] has worked successfully for over 15 years, as a Director in business and commercial environments, specialising in product and service innovation, technology and knowledge transfer, economic development and business transformation.
6. [REDACTED] has been appointed to lead the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Innovation and Growth Team. [REDACTED] was previously Milton Keynes Enterprise Hub Director and in 2006 founded the sparc technology network which runs the highly successful Bright Sparc awards for technology led businesses. Prior to this, [REDACTED] was Director of the Central Innovation Network.

Manufacturing Advisory Service

7. The Manufacturing Advisory Service in the South East is currently over performing in all areas of its business plan at the end of the first quarter. The programme will benefit from two recent enhancements in funding from the Strategic Investment Fund following two recent announcements from BIS. These are in the areas of Low Carbon and Advanced Manufacturing, and will give the South East E Manufacturing Advisory Service in excess of £538k extra funding in the period until 31 March 2011.

Design

Launch of new South Coast Design Forum for Southampton

8. Over 100 people attended the launch of the new South Coast Design Forum Network for Southampton. SEEDA provided funding towards the cost of the event which was held on the new Queen Mary Ship at Southampton Docks. The event included a presentation on Designing Demand from [REDACTED], Deputy Chief Executive, Design Council, the designer of the Queen Mary, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], Business Southampton. The purpose

of the event was to expand the South Coast Design Forum Network into Southampton. Chaired by [REDACTED], one of the UK's leading designers, the South Coast Design Forum has created one of the UK's largest design networks with 350 members supporting and promoting the design community in the South East.

SEEDA Designing Demand Immerse event - Design Council - 6 July 2009

9. The first 10 SE companies starting the new Designing Demand Immerse programme specifically designed to help companies facing difficulty and restructuring challenges were welcomed to the new programme by SEEDA at the Design Council, London on 6 July. Immerse is the Design Council's most intensive design programme designed to help companies deal successfully with major challenges facing their businesses and is delivered alongside the Generate and Innovate programmes funded by SEEDA and available to South East companies.

University of Oxford - Begbroke Science Park

10. Oxford Nanopores, one of the companies occupying space in the part-SEEDA funded Begbroke Science Park Centre of Innovation and Enterprise reports that it has grown from six employees in 2007 to 70 employees in 2009. Oxford Nanopores has developed technology that allows very small holes to be made in human cell tissue enabling the extraction of DNA quickly for gene sequencing.
11. The company partly attributes its success to the high quality of the start up laboratory space at Begbroke which continues to attract new young science companies to the facilities. The Begbroke laboratory facilities have remained almost fully occupied since they were completed in 2007 and have been particularly successful at attracting nanotechnology companies keen to exploit the knowledge at the Materials Department of Oxford University.

Cluster Mark

12. Department for Business Innovation and Skills has launched the Lord Mandelson 'Cluster Mark' awards initiative, in conjunction with the Devolved Administrations and Regional Development Agencies. It is aimed to boost manufacturing through the recognition of excellence in manufacturing related clusters. Regional winners will be able to display the 'Cluster Mark' logo and will be nominated for the National finals competition, culminating in winners awards being presented by a minister at a BIS dinner to be held in London early 2010.
13. Interest has already been expressed by the Cryogenics Cluster centred around Oxford. They are the leading cluster in the world in Cryogenics and they believe the Cluster Mark award would help bring them the wider recognition, opportunity and promotion they are seeking.

Sector Consortia

14. The SEEDA funded Farnborough Aerospace Consortium has been a key player in establishing the South East Aerospace Team. The Team brings together the main public sector support players for the aerospace and defence industry into one team. The aim is to share market intelligence, raise the visibility to companies and deliver a coherent offer to the sector covering innovation and product development advice, trade and export services, and networking and collaboration opportunities.

SMART GROWTH

Enterprise

Business Link – Integrated Brokerage

15. The skills brokerage service continues to deliver to targets and benefits of the integrated service are beginning to be seen. In the first four months of the year (April – July), there have been 2787 skills action plans developed and over 8000 employees have enrolled on training courses. The challenges to the skills landscape remain and SEEDA is working with the Learning and Skills Council both nationally and regionally to ensure that as much funding for business-relevant qualifications is available as possible. Between April and July 2009, employers have invested close to £1m developing their workforce to create increased productivity and competitiveness.

Business Link – Procurement (contract from April 2010)

16. SEEDA Board approved the recommendation for the preferred supplier (Serco) to deliver the Business Link service from April 2010. Since then, the SEEDA transition team has been working closely with the Serco transition team planning activity over the next few months. Good working relationships have been developed and a robust communications and stakeholder strategy is being developed.

Business Support Simplification Programme - Solutions for Business

17. Local Authorities and other key partners have played an important role in helping SEEDA to map the business support landscape in the South East, resulting in a comprehensive picture of support available in the region. To support the next phase of the process, SEEDA developed and issued guidance for funders and commissioners of business support – ‘Making the Transition in the South East: a guide for making the transition to the Solutions for Business Portfolio’. The guide is intended as a checklist to assist those responsible for the business support programmes in Local Authorities, SEEDA and other key partners to make the transition of relevant business support services/products to the Solutions for Business product portfolio.

Inclusive Enterprise

18. SEEDA is working with partners to produce an ‘Inclusive Enterprise Action Plan’ which addresses issues of access to enterprise for groups and individuals within the region who are currently under-represented in enterprise. SEEDA is working with an equality and diversity specialist from the SEEDA panel and focusing on the economic case for enterprise support for under represented groups. The plan will provide clear actions to be taken forward by regional stakeholders to raise awareness of the issues and barriers and to improve accessibility of appropriate business support available to under-represented groups.

Women's Business Service

19. SEEDA's Women's Business Services pilot (part of the Government's Enterprise Strategy) has recruited ten Women's Business Advisors across the region. They are employed by Business Link and have a focus on supporting women from disadvantaged and priority groups. This additional capacity will help Business Link absorb the demand to support more women into self employment and business development. The physical centre, based in Chatham, hosted a networking event for the Medway Women's Networking group. Over 40 people attended and future networking events will continue to be held at the centre.

Enterprising Britain

20. SEEDA's South East Enterprising Britain 2009 winner, Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust, had their national judging visit on 13 July. Prestigious restaurant owner, [REDACTED], known for creating The Cinnamon Club in London, visited the Historic Dockyard with observers from Make Your Mark who run the competition on behalf of the Department for Business Innovation and Skills. Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust highlighted their significant achievements in the regeneration and economic development of the site, which suffered over 7,000 redundancies when the Royal Navy moved out of the area 25 years ago. This included a recent collaborative SEEDA project, The Joiners Shop, which provides office space and business facilities for creative industry companies in the area. The UK winner will be announced at the Enterprising Britain awards ceremony which is due to take place in October.

Broadband in Diamonds for Investment and Growth

21. East England Development Agency's work with e-Hampshire, Basingstoke and Deane Council, BT and Openreach has resulted in BT announcing that they will be investing in new Fibre based superfast broadband in Basingstoke, with services over the new infrastructure by summer 2010. The SEEDA broadband speed survey data, with local data produced by e-Hampshire, has helped to identify Basingstoke as poorly served and therefore convince BT to make the investment. Dartford in Kent is another area that will benefit from this latest phase of superfast broadband investment.

Digital Britain and the Broadband Universal Service Commitment

22. An action from the Digital Britain report to set up the Network Design and Procurement Group is being progressed by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills and they are asking Regional Development Agencies for support. In particular, the Network Design and Procurement Group will wish to know where to target broadband provision to meet the Digital Britain Universal Service Commitment for all premises to have greater than 2Mb/s by 2012. The SEEDA broadband speed survey puts the South East in a good position to help with this process and local authorities are being encouraged to refine the data for their areas. We are working with East Sussex County Council to pilot this work.

Skills Strategy and Delivery

23. Employers in all the region's key strategic sectors, both large and small, say that what makes the difference is access to world class skills and talent. They also tell us that the skills system is too confusing and it is not clear to them what priorities prevail. Regional Development Agencies, led by SEEDA as national lead for skills, have recently been in discussion with Lord Mandelson about how the system could be simpler and more responsive to business and economic needs. Lord Mandelson wrote to our Chairman and the Learning and Skills Council on 31 July saying that, in the light of New Industry New Jobs, Regional Development Agencies' shared responsibility for single Integrated Regional Strategies, and the merger of business and skills into the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, he was considering modifying the existing plans for the creation of the Skills Funding Agency. His plan, which is subject to consultation within the Learning and Skills Council, is to make the RDAs the single body with responsibility for producing the regional skills strategy; removing this responsibility from the Skills Funding Agency. This strategy should form the basis of an investment plan which would be binding on the Skills Funding Agency to deliver against. RDAs believe that Lord Mandelson's proposals offer the opportunity to improve delivery for New Industry New Jobs and for skills activism, by strengthening the demand side of skills provision. Work is now underway between BIS, the LSC and Regional Development Agencies to develop the proposals with a view to putting shadow arrangements in place as soon as possible.

Gateway to SusCon Programme

24. The European Social Fund Panel has agreed to support a programme that will address the need for sustainable construction skills within the Thames Gateway. SEEDA match funding will enable the 'Gateway to SusCon' programme to act as a pre-cursor to SusCon – an Industry led Sustainable Construction Skills Academy. It will be delivered, initially, from The Bridge Science Park in North Dartford.
25. In conjunction with the Thames Gateway Institute for Sustainability, the programme will up-skill and re-skill at least 1,250 beneficiaries by December 2010. The programme aligns closely with the New Industry, New Jobs strategy, and will create the skills needed to underpin the development of environmental technologies and in areas such as energy efficiency and the retrofitting of homes.
26. The courses to be delivered will be substantially new, innovative, and industry-led – in some cases deriving from the Institute for Sustainability. The training will be at all levels, including Continuous Professional Development, and will complement existing initiatives such as the recently successful North Kent Future Jobs Fund bid.

SUSTAINABLE PROSPERITY

Sustainable Communities Programme

Impact of the downturn on the Creative Industries

27. The Creative Economy Partnership, chaired by SEEDA, is working to address the issues raised in an Experian report regarding the effect of the recession on creative industries in the South East.
28. Experian estimates that the GVA of the creative sector in the region will be £9.1bn in 2009 and that 80% of this output will be derived from two key sub-sectors – software, computer games and electronic publishing (£6.3bn) and publishing (£855m). Over 350,000 people are forecast to work within the creative sector during 2009.
29. The sector faces a number of challenges in the short-term, including:
 - Severe lack of liquidity could prevent new ideas being brought to the market and this is likely to affect the sector more than others;
 - Difficult times for those running smaller, fledgling businesses who may be less experienced when it comes to making the tough business decisions required to survive in this climate;
 - Finding business models which work in the downturn – replacing advertising funded model with innovative alternatives.
30. There also remain a number of longer term issues; such as protecting Intellectual Property, competition with other creative clusters, and broadening the workforce demographic.
31. The full report can be found on the SEEDA website:
<http://www.seeda.co.uk/Publications/Research & Economics/Culture and Creative Industries/docs/impactDownturnCreativeIndustries09.pdf>

Low Carbon Programme

UK Low Carbon Transition Plan

32. The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan was published on 15 July alongside a number of related documents including the Renewable Energy Strategy, the UK Low Carbon Industrial Strategy and the Carbon Reduction Strategy for Transport. The strategies set out a clear leadership role for the regions which fits very well with SEEDA's new 'Green Economy' programme, including:
 - Development of energy and carbon reduction plans and targets;
 - Supporting regional partnerships;
 - Developing market-led technology clusters;
 - Supporting the development of new low carbon technologies;
 - Delivering low carbon business support and advice;
 - Developing innovative finance mechanisms and business models for low carbon investment.
33. SEEDA is working closely with regional partners to develop a comprehensive approach to delivery where the role and resources of each partner are clearly described and linked together to achieve maximum impact.

Vestas, Isle of Wight

34. Vestas' proposed Global Technology Research and Development Centre to develop the next generation of offshore wind turbine blades, to be built at West Medina Mills, continues to make progress. Following a successful bid to Department of Energy and Climate Change's Environmental Transformation Fund Offshore Wind Demonstration Programme, SEEDA has committed to match fund (within applicable State Aids limits) the grant Vestas has secured to support the development of testing and validation facilities for next generation turbine blades. These facilities will be an integral part of the Global Research & Development Centre, which will safeguard Vestas Technology's existing 120 jobs on the Isle of Wight, while offering the prospect of a further 200 jobs by 2011. For further information see also paragraph 47 (West Medina Mills site) and 58-60 (Newport factory closure).

European Regional Development Fund

35. The regional Project Selection Committee selected six projects for support, subject to negotiations, under the programme's second tendering round in July. In addition two £2m loan fund applications from Finance South East have been received and are being progressed. These would add significant value to the regional funding escalator and help to address the ongoing access to finance issues faced by businesses in the region.

Rural Communities

36. SEEDA is currently taking tender action to fully devolve responsibility for SEEDA's Small Rural Towns and Rural Access to Services Programmes, until September 2011. The SEEDA funded South East Rural Towns Partnership has responsibility for the future direction and policy for small rural towns across the region. Once the budgetary responsibility has been devolved through the new proposed contract, this will bring together, at the sub-regional level, policy development, service delivery, and financial management accountability. This objective takes account of the new role of local authorities to undertake an economic assessment of their area, and fits with the government's 'Total Place' initiative.
37. Full details of the tender can be found on the SEEDA website:
http://www.seeda.co.uk/Procurement/Current_Tenders/index.asp

Rural Development Programme for England

38. The Rural Development Programme for England awarded a grant of £748k to Barfoot Farms Ltd in West Sussex towards the construction of an anaerobic digester to convert the 28,000 tonnes of vegetable waste produced annually in into electricity and natural fertiliser. The plant is expected to produce 8,000 megawatts of electricity annually (enough to serve 2,000 homes) and will reduce the use of artificial fertiliser on the farm by nearly 300 tonnes per year. The project will also benefit 20 local farming businesses through utilisation of their wastage.
39. On the 11 August, [REDACTED] (SEEDA Rural Director) officially opened a new state-of-the-art fruit packing and cold storage facility at Nickle Farm near

Canterbury. The facility will dramatically improve the efficiency, energy usage and output of the current top and stone fruit processing operation owned by F W Mansfield and Son. The project has provided additional packing, grading and marketing facilities for over 30 growers who were affected by the sudden closure of another pack-house in Kent. The new facility will process approximately 30,000 tonnes of fruit per year and will greatly improve the competitiveness of fruit growing and marketing in the region; through extending the season for local fruit whilst enabling growers to better exploit markets and making it easier for them to manage their businesses in a volatile market place. The project will create 50 Full Time Equivalent jobs, achieve an estimated 140,000 reduction in food miles and enable the recycling of 22 millions gallons of water per annum. The grant of £1m contributed to the total project cost of £7.58m.

ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

Strategic Development Fund Programme

Hythe Marine Park

40. Planning applications will shortly be submitted to New Forest District Council for planning permission for new marine production units on the site, together with an improved slipway and other ancillary buildings. The new buildings will comprise a total area of approximately 5,000 m² (53,820 sq ft), together with starter units and project accommodation ancillary to the yacht refit facility. The buildings could suit from one to three occupiers depending on the size required by each business. Around a dozen businesses currently occupy the site employing a skilled workforce of up to 200 people.
41. SEEDA has appointed Yacht Project Associates to help run the 'Solent Refit' facility on the site. Solent Refit is a unique facility to the Solent area which enables yacht project managers, local yards and marine businesses to work on Superyachts undercover or alongside working berths. The slipway lift is capable of slipping yachts up to 70 metres in length and enable their refit and repair in serviced covered space. Further improvement work is taking place on the facility in order to aid establishing the market demand and seeking a long term partner.

East Cowes

42. Waitrose submitted their reserved matters application to the Isle of Wight Council in July 2009. It is anticipated this will be determined in September 2009. SEEDA continue to progress negotiations associated with the medical centre. Once these have been completed, relevant planning applications will be submitted to the Isle of Wight Council. Contractors, Clancy Docwra, hope to complete Phase 1 infrastructure works by the end of October 2009.

Cowes Outer Harbour

43. A successful public exhibition was held about the Cowes Outer Harbour proposals in early July 2009. The planning application and the marine consents were submitted to the relevant authorities in July 2009. It is anticipated that all the consents will be granted by the end of 2009.

Cowes Business Park

44. The sale of Plot 2 at Cowes Business Park was completed at the beginning of July by SEEDA to an expanding local business. The sale will enable the development of purpose built accommodation for the company's use.

Woolston

45. Commercial negotiations with both Crest Nicholson Regeneration and Palmer Johnson continue to progress. Contractors, BAM Nuttal, completed the remediation of the site at the end of July 2009.

Daedalus

46. The Project Team continues to progress with the drafting of two Supplementary Planning Documents. These will set out the planning policy for the site and form the basis on which future planning applications are determined.

West Medina Mills and Stag Lane

47. It is envisaged that the works on the Horsebridge Hill junction will be completed by the end of August 2009. It is hoped the reconstruction of Stag Lane will commence in autumn 2009. Vestas has submitted a reserved matters application in respect of the proposed Research and Development facility at West Medina Mills. It is anticipated this will be determined by the Isle of Wight Council at the end of September 2009.

Canterbury Innovation Centre

48. A topping out ceremony was held on 10 July generating local press coverage as part of the marketing of the centre. The building works remain on programme to be completed by the end of October and are on budget. A marketing plan is in place and the centre manager has been recruited. Thirty eight enquiries have been received from local businesses and eighteen viewings held to date. Three units have already been reserved in advance of the opening in November with strong interest in a number of others.

Infrastructure Programme

Support for Ports

Connect to Compete

49. A first claim for the Connect to Compete project for a total of €470,000 (50% EU-funded) was submitted to the Interreg secretariat in Lille for investments in

sustainable distribution of freight for ports. The project is on track of the projected spending profile.

TRANSMANCHE METRO

50. A first macro-economic business case has been commissioned to identify and quantify the benefits of the 'Transmanche Metro' services, which propose to introduce a cross-channel commuter service between Stratford (East London), Ebbsfleet, Ashford, Calais and Lille, utilising the CTRL link and the Tunnel.

Berkshire Transport Prioritisation

51. SEEDA has led the development of a transport investment prioritisation mechanism jointly with Berkshire Strategic Transport Forum partners, Government Office for the South East and the Department for Transport. A shortlist of strategic interventions, such as a new rail link from Slough to Heathrow Terminal 5, further capacity enhancement on the M4 corridor, a rapid transit system utilising innovative bus guidance systems, and a cross regional strategic coach network have all be identified to be of top priority, in addition to the Cross Rail extension to Reading and High Speed Network 2 (HS2) work. The recent announcement of the full electrification of the Great Western Rail Line is essential to improve access to Heathrow Airport from the Thames Valley. The joint approach between SEEDA, Thames Valley Economic Partnership and the Forum was endorsed at the July meeting of the Regional Transport Board.

Southampton to Midlands Rail Freight Route

52. SEEDA has completed the contractual arrangements with Advantage West Midlands and Network Rail to unlock the first stage payment of this £70m investment programme to develop the UK's second most important rail freight corridor.

Thames Gateway Economic Development Investment Plan – Greater South East Connect

53. SEEDA, jointly with the London Development Agency and East of England Development Agency has commissioned Buchanan's and Partners to carry out a scoping and mapping study for transport investment in the Thames Gateway. This work is aimed at developing an atlas which will profile in detail the various transport schemes across the whole Gateway.
54. SEEDA has also tendered work to develop a sustainable freight framework for the Gateway and to identify three pilot implementation projects aimed at providing rail freight access to ports and wharf facilities.

STRATEGIC INFLUENCE

Area Teams

Surrey and Berkshire Area Team

Monitoring the Economic Downturn

55. SEEDA facilitated a session on economic recovery with Berkshire Economic Strategy Board and has drafted an action plan as a result which outlines key areas for action over the next twelve months. The action plan has been distributed to key partners for feedback and will be agreed at the September Board meeting.

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Area Team

Linde, Basingstoke

56. In June 2009, Linde Material Handling announced that they will be closing their manufacturing plant in Basingstoke with the loss of over 350 jobs. Since this announcement SEEDA has worked closely with the company, in order to fully understand the implications of closure both on the workforce and the wider Basingstoke economy.
57. SEEDA initiated and chairs a 'task group' of public sector partners and providers to devise the support programme for Linde staff. The support programme will include an all staff event (to be held in October) providing information and advice on support available, 1-2-1 advice sessions, on site training, advice sessions and courses all focused on helping individuals secure alternative employment.

Vestas Blades, Isle of Wight and Southampton

58. Vestas concluded its consultation on the future of its blades manufacturing operations on 12 August with the decision to end volume production of blades on the Isle of Wight and in Southampton. The decision resulted in a total of 425 redundancies. SEEDA, throughout the consultation, has worked with the company and a multi-agency taskforce to retain as many jobs as possible, support employees with advice and training, and to identify alternative jobs for and match people to job opportunities.
59. The SEEDA-led taskforce introduced several companies to Vestas and held two recruitment days for employees to meet potential employers. Twelve companies attended, some of which have recruited or are in the process of recruiting former Vestas employees. In total we identified around 100 current job opportunities, which would make best use of existing skills on the Isle of Wight and mainland and we are exploring over 100 other opportunities. The taskforce will continue to seek comparable job-match opportunities for employees.
60. During the consultation Vestas announced it will establish a prototype facility at its site at St Cross on the Isle of Wight to test blades and has recruited 40 employees from the blades manufacturing plant to manage the prototype work.

Kent and Medway Area Team

Ashford Learning Campus

61. In April 2009 Ministers agreed to consider proposals for a merger between South Kent College and West Kent College and these will be submitted to the Secretary of State in January 2010. However, in view of recent announcements on the Learning and Skills Council's capital funding, it is now clear that even if the merger goes ahead, capital funding for the Ashford Learning Campus will not be available within the current Comprehensive Spending Review period.
62. The need for improved further and higher education opportunities in Ashford remains urgent. Members of the Ashford's Future Partnership, including SEEDA, have therefore agreed to develop an alternative approach to improving the higher education offer.
63. Initial discussions have focused on a collaborative proposal with a number of learning partners, who agree to respond to the changing needs of the economy by offering courses according to their relative strengths, possibly similar to the approach adopted at the Universities at Medway.
64. In terms of the capital required, partners will explore the scope for rationalising and improving the existing college buildings, or acquiring and refurbishing an alternative commercial building in a central location. Such a project is likely to be significantly less costly than a new-build and more likely to be affordable by partners.

North Kent Multi-Area Agreement

65. A formal response from the Government on the North Kent MAA was received on the 3 August. The Secretary of State wishes to recognise the success of concluding the agreement with a signing ceremony in September.

Sussex Area Team

Gatwick Diamond

66. The Gatwick Diamond has set itself the target of being a world leading high growth airport region by 2016 and set out a strategy to achieve this in 2008 in the Gatwick Diamond Future Plan. The new Business Plan sets out the actions required to deliver it. Higher education standards and skills levels are seen as essential to attract employers especially in high value added, innovative businesses. Key areas for consideration include: a full university campus, a host of transport projects and a superfast broadband infrastructure within an economic framework attractive to high growth businesses are just some of the aims of the Gatwick Diamond Business plan.

Innovation and Growth Teams

67. The Two Innovation and Growth teams, West Sussex and East Surrey, and Brighton and Hove and East Sussex are continue to develop and build their propositions and have recently submitted their final business plans.

West Sussex

68. The area team is working closely with West Sussex County Council to consider a new model for the sub-regional partnership. This model will recognize the West Sussex Economic Skills and Enterprise Board as the sub regional

partnership and will enable SEEDA funding to be directed towards the business led Boards of the Gatwick Diamond and the Coastal West Sussex Partnership

69. The area team is working with partners to ensure the Coastal West Sussex Partnership is a dynamic private / public sector alliance, capable of driving sustainable economic development and growth. In particular ensuring investments in education and skills in this part of the coast are jointly planned and result in a coherent offer to business and the community.

Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Area Team

National Enterprise Academy

70. The SEEDA funded Pilot has ended successfully with all 28 students graduating - 12 are going onto the next stage of learning at the NEA and 16 are either starting their own businesses or going into employment. Recruitment is currently underway for the next intake of young people and delivery starts on 14th September. The Learning and Skills Council has agreed to provide £3m revenue funding for delivery and will also contribute £5.9m for the capital development of the Academy's headquarters. The Peter Jones Foundation is currently investigating a site in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire (under discussion and negotiation) and SEEDA is supporting this process.

Milton Keynes World Cup Bid 2018

71. SEEDA is supportive of Milton Keynes' ambition to become a host city for the England Football World Cup in 2018/2022.
72. A range of partners have come together across the City in support of the bid, led by Milton Keynes Council and supported by the SEEDA funded Sub Regional Partnership, Milton Keynes Economic & Learning Partnership. The SEEDA research team has been gathering the economic evidence needed to support the proposal. SEEDA is working with local partners to ensure the World Cup bid complements the economic vision for Milton Keynes.

Oxfordshire - Science Vale UK

73. Following a Science Vale UK Board meeting in June an Interim Project Director, funded by SEEDA, has been appointed. The Director is developing an action plan that will be agreed in September. The key areas of focus will be: (i) developing Science Vale UK as an attractive & thriving place; (ii) attracting necessary infrastructure & investment; (iii) promoting it for Inward Investment opportunities, and (iv) providing businesses with the best skilled workforce.
74. SEEDA has worked with the Project Director to facilitate meetings with Business Link to plan business focussed events on business parks for tenants and also interested parties in enhancing the quality of science and technology skills in the area. A draft memorandum of understanding for the Science Vale UK Partnership has been produced and an approach for a new Chair of the Board is in progress.

Ecotowns

75. On 16 July North West Bicester was announced as one of the Governments Eco-towns which, subject to planning, will provide exemplar green developments designed to meet the highest standards of sustainability, including low and zero carbon technologies and good public transport.

76. SEEDA has been supporting Cherwell District Council in their submission of an eco-extension of Bicester that could add economic value to the area, specifically linking the potential to the environmental technologies sector.