

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

05 November 2019

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 STRENGTH IN PLACES FUND - GROWING KENT AND MEDWAY

This report gives information on the Growing Kent and Medway ‘Strength in Places’ Fund bid, led by NIAB EMR, which was submitted in September 2019.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The UK Government announced the Strength in Places Fund in the Industrial Strategy White Paper (2017). The White Paper highlighted the important role science, research, innovation and skills provision play in driving productivity and economic growth throughout the regions and nations of the UK. The UK Research and Innovation’s (UKRI) Strength in Places Fund therefore forms a key part of the activity undertaken that will be contributing to the UK Government’s target to reach 2.4% of GDP investment in R&D by 2027, and 3% in the longer term.

1.1.2 In March 2019, 24 projects - from pharmaceuticals to aerospace, and transport to the creative economy – were shortlisted following a highly competitive bidding process and received early-stage funding of £50,000 to develop full-stage bids that could lead to significant economic growth in places across the country. These bids were submitted to the UKRI in September 2019.

1.1.3 One of the 24 bids is ‘Growing Kent and Medway’ – a consortium bid led by NIAB EMR, which is focused on the region’s advanced horticultural production, fresh produce packaging, food and drink processing industries and the enabling technologies that drive innovation and growth.

1.2 Growing Kent and Medway

1.2.1 The ‘Growing Kent and Medway’ initiative aims to build on the existing regional strengths in innovative horticultural research as well as world-class excellence in biosciences and business studies by reaching out to business partners along the supply chain that are engaged in developing technologies that could support productivity gains. In order to achieve this, the four key objectives of the bid are to:

- Provide state-of-the-art infrastructure that gives access to innovation, demonstration and research facilities to help businesses and human capital grow.

- Raise investment in industry-driven Research and Innovation and stimulate the commercialisation of technologies for climate-smart food production and waste minimisation.
- Foster a vibrant and supportive environment in which businesses can innovate and thrive
- Develop a strategic framework for the upskilling and professionalisation of the sector.

1.2.2 The consortium bid, which is led by NIAB EMR comprises the following other partners:

- University of Greenwich
- University of Kent
- APS Salads (tomato grower with Kent base in Ash, near Canterbury)
- Berry Gardens Growers (head office in Five Oak Green)
- Chapel Down Plc (wine producer with head office in Ashford)
- Gusbourne Estate (wine producer with head office in Appledore)
- Richard Hochfield Group (fresh produce distributor with head office in Borough Green)
- Thanet Earth (salad grower based in Birchington)
- Worldwide Fruit (fruit distributor based in Whitstable)
- Geku (industrial automation company based in Strood)

The bid has also received backing from the Borough Council, Kent County Council, Kent & Medway Economic Partnership and Locate in Kent.

1.2.3 The total project cost is £33m over a five-year period, with a funding request from UKRI of £17.91m. Around £7.5m of the project relates to capital expenditure, particularly construction and equipment costs for a Green Tech Hub for advanced horticulture at East Malling, a food innovation lab (University of Greenwich) and a biotechnology hub for sustainable UK food and drink (University of Kent). The remaining revenue expenditure covers a wide range of activities, such as direct investment in research staff and grant programmes to help stimulate the commercialisation of innovation and supporting investment in Research.

1.2.4 In terms of wider local economic impact ('local' being Kent and Medway) it is envisaged that as a result of an uplift in research and development activity and resulting innovations, an extra 682 FTE jobs will be created in the region by 2025.

1.2.5 A decision from UKRI as to whether the bid is successful is expected in early 2020.

1.3 Legal Implications

1.3.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.4.1 There are no financial and value for money considerations arising from this report.

1.5 Risk Assessment

1.5.1 Not applicable.

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

1.6.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Background papers:

None

contact: Jeremy Whittaker,
Economic Regeneration
Manager