

Leicestershire Innovation Festival launches at Space Park Leicester event

Leicestershire Innovation Festival launched with a raft of speakers at a packed event at Space Park Leicester.

A fortnight of events commenced with a morning themed around [innovation and sustainability](#).

Public sector, private sector and university leaders described the region's opportunities for positive change against the backdrop of Levelling Up and Net Zero.

Dr Nik Kotecha OBE, chair of the Leicester and Leicester Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) innovation board and founder of Morningside Pharmaceuticals in Loughborough, said innovation was open to businesses of all sizes – and [Leicester and Leicestershire's economy](#) was built largely upon SMEs.

He said: "That's really important because if we are talking about innovation then we need to look at our target audience.

"There's innovation going on on a daily basis and it's about how we message that."

Dr Kotecha, recently named chair of CBI East Midlands, talked about "beacons" – economic clusters in core local sectors – and their role in upskilling people to design and make the products of the future.

He also described the Government's interest in innovation as a means of improving productivity and global competitiveness.

He said: "Government has taken notice of innovation and we need to make sure that Leicester and Leicestershire are shouting about it so that we get some of the funding that's

available.”

Dr Kotecha concluded by setting out the innovation board’s priorities, which included defining innovation, signposting funding opportunities, removing barriers and collaboration between public, private and academic innovators to the benefit of all.

He said the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine was an example of what can be achieved when the three combine.

Julian Bowrey, regional manager at Innovate UK, described Leicester and Leicestershire as a “happy hunting ground” for his organisation in issuing awards to support innovation projects.

But he said the East Midlands was still not where Innovate UK thinks it could be in terms of projects being supported, adding, “R&D is at the heart of Levelling Up.”

Dennis Hayter, head of external affairs at Loughborough University spin-out Intelligent Energy, described how collaborations with the likes of Suzuki and London Taxi Co were developing and trialling world-leading projects in use of hydrogen fuel cells for transport.

This included cars, scooters and drones, with the next challenge being to find a way of making the technology ubiquitous in HGVs, larger aircraft, trains and other vehicles.

He said: “We will be here to help deliver the 2050 targets for Net Zero.”

It was a theme continued by Robert Evans, chief executive of Cenex, a consultancy for low carbon and fuel cell technologies which is also based on the Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park (LUSEP) campus.

His not-for-profit organisation formed in 2005 and works

between industry and customers in getting emerging fuel cell technology into general transport use.

Describing his take on the shared transport hubs of the future, he described how battery power needed to be used by almost all light vehicles by 2050, with hydrogen technology in at least half of HGVs and buses.

Peter Ware, who chairs the Midlands Engine's green growth board spoke next, pointing out that the Midlands' £250 billion economy was larger than that of Denmark.

He outlined its 10-point plan for growth, based on three themes of Place, Energy and Enablers.

Net Zero transport was again part of the plan, alongside sustainable buildings, low carbon, smart energy and nature recovery.

The next stages of the Green Growth strategy are to consider how and what green financing for businesses should look like, to form a Midlands investment portfolio, and launch a Green Growth Assembly for young people in the East Midlands.



The event concluded with a Q&A, led by Charlotte Horobin, the membership director for Make UK and operating board member of the Midlands Engine, who steered audience questions about cyber, skills and effective communications to a nine-strong panel.

The event speakers were joined on the panel by Will Wells, commercial director at the University of Leicester, Sue Tilley, the LLEP's head of business and innovation, and Business Gateway Growth Hub manager, Rachel York.

Describing work being done at De Montfort University, including as GCHQ's only accredited institute, Helen Donnellan talked about the importance of communication and making connections,

She said: "Innovation comes in all shapes and sizes and is across the board – we have this festival to celebrate that."

Leicestershire Innovation Festival runs until February 25. Events are both online and at venues across Leicester and Leicestershire. Anyone can register to attend at [by clicking](#)

[here.](#)

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