

Parliamentary and Scientific Committee

'Accelerating the UK bioeconomy: the scientific and economic case for investment'

A meeting held in partnership with the with the University of York

This evening we heard about the current developments and future plans for UK biosciences concentrated in the York and North Yorkshire area. George Freeman, Chair of the P&SC welcomed attendees, praising initiatives in the bioeconomy, helping the transition from fossil fuel-based industries into newer sustainable areas of biosciences; he remarked that the North Yorkshire and Teesside area is ideally placed for this.

The Government is keen to drive economic and scientific growth in any part of the country; Professor Sarah Thompson, PVC Research, University of York explained that this is just the kind of thing going on in the York area, especially providing new opportunities for the largely rural local economy. She outlined proposed new scientific assets in the York area, developing the Global Bioeconomy Institute, Sustainable Learning Centre and Living Lab, and the Fera Science hub. British companies should invest now in this leading area of integrated engineering biology research.

Bio Yorkshire was set up in 2020. Professor Ian Graham, Bio Yorkshire Academic Director, described their aims, to connect local chemical, biomanufacturing and agricultural organisations for profitable bio-based production of chemicals and other materials, net zero food production, and improved farming and land use. The Growth Plan would have many economic benefits for the area, making use of local specialisms. Those involved include Yuni, Fera, and Askham Bryan College. The intention is to look for natural products to replace existing chemicals, for example replacing nitrogen fertilizers. Small company start-ups will be assisted; initially it is expected small volume products will be produced. He empathised that it is very important for researchers to engage with the public when developing something like this.

Croda is a company founded over 100 years ago in Yorkshire; Damian Kelly, Croda Vice-President, Innovation & Technology Development, told us something of its history, explaining that it is not a well-known name as their products are usually supplied to other better-known manufacturers. They currently have a wide portfolio of activities encompassing drug delivery systems, health and hygiene, crop care technologies, sustainable feedstocks, environmental protection, and

improving sustainability. Supporting local biodiversity projects, they are in partnership and co-operation with the University of York, as part of the Bio Yorkshire Industry Forum.

North Yorkshire is quite a rural area away from most big cities, with good natural assets and a large food manufacturing sector. David Skaith, Mayor of York and North Yorkshire, described it as both a city region and a rural powerhouse, using innovation to achieve solutions for food insecurity, Net Zero carbon, and a greener economy. He described the area Growth Plan, showing us what the proposed York Central Innovation Hub site will look like when completed. The York and North Yorkshire area will be a leader in industrial biotechnology research, developing many small and micro businesses. Close collaborative links exist between the 3 Yorkshire Mayors and the Teesside Mayor, to the benefit of the whole region.

George Freeman praised networking and co-operation; government funding of research should be made easier. Q&A participants felt the UK needs more risk-taking investors even though it is accepted some ideas do fail; If funds are not forthcoming ideas will be taken overseas. The British practice of IP belonging to the company, not the inventor is also off putting. When new enterprises are set up, a good team is vital; a supply of suitable undergraduates is essential. There was a suggestion for a new 2-year MSc course, half to be spent in industry. How do we spot the best new research which would benefit the UK economy? We need respected research clusters, like the USA, so Yorkshire needs to be the best there is in the world in their speciality. A co-operative approach is good, with public/private collaboration. It costs a lot of money setting up new company infrastructure; it was suggested using shared facilities might reduce set-up costs.

*Sue Wharton
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investment'
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