Innovate Lancashire Web Resource

Summary

This paper sets out a proposal for a one-stop web resource – an interactive map that can display innovation assets and company clusters in Lancashire as well as an innovation dashboard, web feed of opportunities and best practice insights into technology and markets.

Background

The Lancashire Innovation Plan recommended the setting up of an Observatory described in the following extract from the report:

Develop Lancashire Technology and Market Foresight Observatory	• Lancashire should be driving and shaping market and tech change	• Lancashire stakeholders are informed of market trajectory and tech changes	• Reports and insights easily accessible and available for Lancashire stakeholders	• Lancashire is on the front foot in driving, shaping, and implementing change

In addition at the most recent meeting of the Innovation Board members discussed the need to understand what innovative companies and assets we had at a more granular level and for this to be more widely accessible for all stakeholders.

Following the feedback from the Innovation Festival it was noted that companies wished to know which local companies were operating in which fields and to be able to network around opportunities. It was also observed it would be beneficial to put this into context with opportunities such as funding and challenge programmes and emerging best practice nationally and globally.

Context

Work on the Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) highlighted priority areas of industrial strength and the need for more detail on opportunities to draw together these strands while the LEP Strategic framework identified the sectoral pillars and cross cutting themes for stakeholders.

Meanwhile the Covid crisis served to accelerate existing trends such as digitalisation and highlight how stakeholders can drive the response to societal challenges and harness them with joined-up innovative responses.

The urgent need and willingness of organisations to diversify and adapt has placed a greater emphasis on clustering and horizon scanning and brought the Observatory recommendation into even sharper focus.

Considerations

Historically the concept of an "observatory" in economic development terms, has taken on a number of forms depending on the aims, the intended target audience and their use of such functions over time.

They can be loosely categorised as follows:

- Local economic data repositories – usually in sub-regional form and run by local Government, these seek to curate local and national reports typically for internal purposes and for other intermediary bodies.
- Policy driven – usually Governmental in outlook with a broad set of aims they might be seen as politically driven looking at companies and assets with a policy and dissemination objective.
- Technically specific database driven – usually targeted at a particular sector or technology and run by Universities or sector bodies they often provide detailed databases of information for narrow applications.
- Consultancy driven – usually seeking to assess selected markets to engage interest from companies to their services with more detailed input being at cost to meet consultancy ambitions.

The above approaches tend to be producer driven rather than link companies in context and derive benefits and insights.

Discussions with stakeholders indicated they would seek a practical interactive function that would collect and make sense of key information in the right context for clusters of companies.

Following this analysis it is recommended that:

- The resource proposed should have at its core a searchable mapping function relevant to users of the information and centered more on the needs of SMEs.
- The ability for stakeholders to easily populate the database as well as the use of appropriate feeds could greatly simplify its use and keep it relevant and timely
- The functions should point to responsible domain knowledge holders not to lower level capability details that are subject to regular changes not critical to context.

Proposal

This paper proposes a proactive model of Observatory in line with the original recommendations in the Innovation Plan and the practical considerations from the scoping considerations above.

It is proposed that the purpose of the Innovation Observatory is to curate in one place, with easy searchable access from a home page, the following functions:

- A searchable map of our assets and clusters of innovative companies which can be interrogated against multiple criteria
- An innovation dashboard to set into context for all stakeholders where we are in Lancashire and where we aim to be collectively

- A feed of opportunities relevant to our strategic priorities and the clusters in terms of funding, challenges and projects
- Relevant webinars on technologies, markets and best practice tuned to the clusters and provided by academia, businesses etc

It is proposed that the site is simple to use and highly focused on key criteria encouraging users to match need and supply, identify trends and opportunities and encourage clustering and potential investments.

Target Audience

The resource will be highly relevant to the following groups:

- Innovative companies in Lancashire through owners and senior managers with a strategic and innovation related responsibility
- Representatives of governmental and intermediary organisations with an economic development and innovation remit such as IUK, DIT, LEP etc
- Senior representatives of organisations anywhere in the world with supply chains in Lancashire or interest in investing in the county
- Business, technology and academic networks locally, regionally and nationally wishing to collaborate

Project Group, Budget and Timeline

A wider team is proposed to involve the LEP, LCC and a web builder to scope the platform in detail once approved by the Innovation Board.

There is a budget within the Innovation Plan at Lancashire County Council and an allocation has been earmarked for this work alongside related marketing work promoting innovation in the county.

As a tailored site with database driven functions it is anticipated the project would follow the steps below and would take 6 months lapsed time to deploy:

- Consultation on content
- Appointment of contractor
- Detailed scoping of content
- Information Gathering
- Planning and Design
- Content Writing and Assembly
- Coding
- Testing, Review and Launch