

# Delivering for Suffolk

A Business Blueprint for Opportunity, Jobs and Growth



Suffolk  
Chamber of  
Commerce  
The Ultimate Business Network

# A strong relationship

between business and local partners

## Pulling together

Whichever political party forms the next government it will face a number of fundamental challenges: tackling the legacy of the deepest recession in decades, nurturing economic growth whilst curbing public spending, and identifying future sources of economic growth and jobs whilst giving people the skills to work successfully in these jobs.

All the major parties are stressing the importance of local economies and the need for all the stakeholders at that level to work together. The Chamber prides itself on playing its role as a constructive partner in many initiatives and partnerships in the County and our members recognise that we cannot simply expect local government and other public-funded bodies to nurture a rejuvenated economy without our input. We will play our part, as wealth creators and innovators, to nurture Suffolk's economic recovery.

## Rebuilding Suffolk's economy

The British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) Quarterly Economic Survey - Britain's biggest and most authoritative business survey - has demonstrated that in recent months there has been a cautious growth in confidence; however, a broad and robust recovery is by no means assured. Whilst Suffolk has not seen the deepest effects of the recession and is now showing healthy signs of economic recovery this does not mean that businesses, large and small, will not continue to face difficult trading conditions, nor that they will, necessarily, have help on hand e.g. there continue to be challenges accessing finance from banks. Even where business is performing resiliently in growing and key sectors such as ICT, biotechnology, renewable energy, ports/logistics, food/drink and tourism there is a need to provide an economic environment that provides a solid foundation for business growth. This manifesto sets out three areas - **infrastructure, human capital and a business friendly environment** - where we will urge action from government, be it local, regional or national to increase confidence and deliver growth.

## Championing the County of Suffolk

The Chamber is keen to champion the cause of Suffolk and its economy. The track record of the County is good and businesses in Suffolk have played their part in ensuring that the East of England is one of only three regions in England that is a net contributor to the UK economy. Disappointingly that success is not reflected in the level of investment received from the public purse in recent years. We will work with our partners to urge central government to invest in success, particularly in infrastructure - road, rail, power generation and distribution and, more than ever, 'next generation' broadband.

We have companies capable of trading successfully in global markets and, working with the new regional provider, EEIDB Ltd, we will seek to support exporters. Similarly, as an Accredited Chamber, we are members of a global network of Chambers and can use our links with markets elsewhere to the benefit of local firms.



# Providing the infrastructure

to nurture business and the economy



Suffolk's economic success is being inhibited and put at risk by the inadequacies of its infrastructure. We recognise that the country faces a tremendous squeeze upon public spending but severe cuts to infrastructure projects will damage the already fragile economic growth in the immediate future.

## Transport

**On roads:** we need improvements to major road arteries in the County such as the A12 north of Ipswich, the A14 generally and specifically at the Orwell Bridge, the A11 dualling, as well as the A120 link to Stansted and the A140 to Norwich.

**On rail:** we would like to improve the passenger rail services between Norwich and London, bringing faster, more reliable and more frequent trains into service. We want the amenities at stations and on trains to be more business-friendly (for instance on the east-west route to Cambridge); to this end, having lobbied for it, we welcome the initiative to ensure wi-fi access on trains but we still want to see improved car parking and facilities at stations.

**On gateways:** the Haven Ports are major international gateways for the UK and they have positive impacts upon Suffolk's economy but they also place great pressure upon the road and rail networks. We wish to see the work to upgrade the Felixstowe to Nuneaton railway line completed which will provide more capacity on the railway network and take container traffic off major arterial road routes such as the A14 and A12.

Stansted airport is not in Suffolk, but the Chamber supports its continued development to bring more visitors and investors to this

region, alongside its provision of routes to the world's major markets.

## Utilities

Once the economy picks up, indigenous new businesses and inward investors will be looking to expand existing premises or to develop new sites; the county is also expected to absorb tremendous housing growth in the next decade; all of which will put pressure on the utilities. The Chamber welcomes government plans for two nuclear power stations in the region, including one at Sizewell, not least because they will bring jobs and procurement opportunities for small business; **but** we are also concerned that the capacity of the electricity distribution network in a number of areas will be brought into question by any new build of houses and/or business premises. These 'capacity cold spots' need to be tackled. Similarly, if the climate changes as is predicted, water resources will be at a premium and the County needs to plan for effective collection and storage.



## Broadband infrastructure

Firms across Suffolk, whether based in towns or rural areas, require access to the 'next generation' broadband with its greater speed of transactions and capacity to carry large streams of data. Not only will this maintain Suffolk's economic competitiveness in an increasingly digital world but it will lead to more home working, less requirement for physical movements and lower carbon emissions. The concern is that a government that leaves the infrastructure to market forces will sell rural areas short, so we will argue for government intervention in rural areas. The Chamber will continue to promote the innovative use of relevant technologies and social networks through the Digital Suffolk initiative so that companies are best placed to exploit improved broadband infrastructure.

## Coastal erosion

If climate change leads to rising sea levels as predicted, then the East of England has the coastline most vulnerable to being breached. The human cost of flooding is more than the damage or destruction of their homes; it also has to do with whether their workplace can function or whether they can get to their workplace. The Chamber is keen to see Suffolk's coastal and flood defences strengthened.

# Developing a workforce

respected for its high levels of skills and flexibility



**Developing economies, such as India and China, have emerged from the global recession more quickly than the developed countries, including the UK. Businesses in Suffolk cannot hope to compete in terms of low labour costs, but it is essential that they remain ahead in terms of knowledge base, skills and capacity to deploy people to greatest economic impact.**

The skills and training infrastructure in this country has been subject to a number of structural upheavals in recent years; the new model being easily the most complex and least well understood approach yet! We need a stable and focussed approach over a number of years where both the demand and supply side work in balance. The Chamber's 'Year of Skills 2009' initiative was very well received and effective; its momentum must be maintained for years to come; the strong partnership first developed with University Campus Suffolk, Suffolk New College, the LSC and Archant must also be refreshed with the new skills agencies post LSC. Above all, it is vital that both the customers and providers of education and training work in close harmony to provide the highly skilled workforce the County will require.

## Preparing young people for the workplace

Clearly the business community wants the education sector to prepare young people to the highest standard of general education, but our companies also want to see young people emerging from school with a positive attitude and work-related competences eg. team-working and presentation skills. Schools have available too little curriculum time and resource dedicated to preparing youngsters for the workplace; we would like to see this trend reversed. The Chamber would be pleased to contribute to this approach; for instance, by extending the reach of the 'Young Chamber' model in the County's schools.

We wish to promote apprenticeships amongst young people. The Chamber will work with partners to encourage young people to see 'apprenticeship' provision as a robust platform on which to build a working life.

## Nurturing adults in work

Most adults in work today will be in work in 2020; the certainty is that work will be both different and demanding; the uncertainty lies in knowing how best to prepare for it.

The Chamber is aware that the new 'skills' infrastructure is locally-focussed; it is essential that private sector employers have a voice in requisitioning the training provision in the years to come. We want Train to Gain to be retained by the next government, but we also want it to be more flexible, particularly in terms of supporting working people seeking higher level skills. 'Upskilling workforces' is a business development issue and Chamber members welcome the skills brokerage component now to be integrated into the 'Business Link' model.

## Flexibility in the labour market

The next government must ensure that forthcoming EU directives e.g. 'agency workers' are implemented in a way that does not hamstring the labour market. The Chamber does not want, for example, changes to working time regulations to prevent businesses from recruiting and retaining the workers that drive productivity and growth. Unemployment in the UK during the recession has remained more stable than was first thought would be the case; this is down to the flexibility of the workforce e.g. employer/employee agreement to accept shorter working hours rather than forcing redundancies. That same adaptability will be required during the recovery.





# A supportive environment

in which business can flourish

Business accepts the inevitability of being taxed, including at the local level, and understands the importance of regulation of company practice and behaviour. However, companies dislike being taxed only to see little or no return to the local economy from that charge against them; similarly they resent and oppose petty regulation imposed to little effect but, often, great cost. BCC's Burdens Barometer demonstrated that regulations cost UK businesses £76.8bn between 1998 and 2009. The next government needs to simplify regulation and reduce its cost to business, leaving companies free to grow and create jobs.

## Local taxation

Small business rate relief and rural rate relief are now available (from April 1st 2010) to a greater number of companies, but surely the onus should be on authorities to charge the eligible companies, not upon companies to seek relief. Similarly, the Chamber welcomes the raising of the threshold for exemption from empty property rates; however, any tax upon empty properties jeopardises economic recovery because unoccupied premises will continue to be demolished to avoid the tax just at the point when they may be brought back into service.

Any revenues raised from business rates should be invested in the local economy so that companies see a return on the sum they have contributed. Similarly, charges such as Community Infrastructure Fund and any future congestion charging/road pricing scheme should be hypothecated back into the local infrastructure.

Local firms should be consulted on all charging arrangements.

## Regulatory environment

All recent governments have promised to have fewer and better regulations and, indeed, there have been genuine measures taken to meet that objective; but so far the overall goal remains elusive. We would like to see a moratorium on new employment law for the lifetime of the next Parliament and Chambers, nationally, will press the next government to campaign in Brussels for an EU freeze on further regulation. Existing regulations are often monitored and enforced locally and our members would like to see sensible rather than slavish enforcement. We also offer to work in partnership with regulatory bodies to ensure that our member companies are well-informed about their obligations under existing laws and regulations.



## Fewer planning restrictions

The next government must retain the new Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) and National Policy Statements, - which have real potential to speed up infrastructure delivery for major projects - and remove local planning barriers that prevent business growth.



**Cathy Arbon**

President, Suffolk Chamber of Commerce



**John Dugmore**

Chief Executive

“ As the Accredited Chamber of Commerce for the County, Suffolk Chamber is in a privileged position to support and represent local business interests. Suffolk Chamber has an agreed goal to help its member companies to compete successfully in the UK and world markets and is committed to its vision:

- to be the first choice for business support and representation across the County
- to be a major influencer and contributor to the economic development of Suffolk on behalf of its members and the wider business community
- to be the recognised voice of business in Suffolk
- to achieve excellence in everything it undertakes. ”

### **About the Chamber**

Suffolk Chamber is the largest private sector forum in the County, representing the views of member companies and the wider business community. The Chamber has a head office in Ipswich and Town Chamber offices in Lowestoft, Haverhill, Stowmarket and Newmarket, ensuring that the grassroots voice of business is listened to and represented by the Chamber.

The Chamber offers a range of business services, provides support for companies trading internationally, offers training provision and, as an Accredited Chamber, forms part of the British Chambers of Commerce network, which means it has the ability and resources to lobby and have representation at the highest levels of government, as well as regionally and locally. The Chamber is also a robust and constructive partner to other key economic players in the County.