

Chemicals pathfinder project

A project led by the chemicals team in AMS in partnership with Tees Valley LEP, UKTI, BIS (YHNE) and local business organisations

The scope of the project

The Wilton chemical cluster at Teesside, North East England, has undergone structural change over time, but particularly in the last 2.5 years when a number of plants closed, though others have also opened there. This project is intended to assess and promote opportunities for attracting new investment to the Wilton site, involving a promotional prospectus (eg, highlighting important companies there, infrastructure advantages, technical skills available etc) that will be used by Posts to target particular types of chemical companies. It will also examine how to assist competitiveness of the sector nationally, supporting the wider growth agenda. The project is a collaborative partnership with the LEP, the main business organisation, NEPIC, UKTI, BIS (YHNE) and BIS chemicals team.

What are path finder projects?

Through a process of shared learning, path finder projects will help local enterprise partnerships maximise the benefits of working within the new local economic growth framework. Aims of the approach are to:

- Support partnerships to refine and sharpen their ambitions around their key economic objectives
- Understand better the capability of partnerships undertaking specific economic roles and help national policy leads better understand how LEPs can play a major role in economic development at the local level
- Share best practice

The timing of the project

The project started in May with a meeting of all the key partners at the Wilton site, and agreement to a number of specific actions which have already commenced and will carry on throughout the rest of 2011.

Progress so far

Tees Valley is providing local leadership to this work, ensuring that they prioritise local support for the chemical industry. They are also providing strategic input to BIS on how LEPs can support the chemical industry. One of these actions was to commission a study of the downstream market for some of the chemical derivative products that could be manufactured at Wilton, thus indicating opportunities for companies that make such products. That work is currently in hand and a report will be made available by the end of August. UKTI have commissioned the prospectus, which should also be available in August. The other actions (eg, using Posts to highlight investment opportunities at Wilton, getting different chemical clusters in the UK to develop a strategy for longer-term challenges and opportunities) will be progressed during 2011.

Lessons learned so far

- The importance of securing the buy-in of all the relevant local partners
- Identifying specific, practical actions that can be taken forward now, allowing scope for reviewing their effectiveness in a relatively short period of time
- Using the local partners to reflect on broader, strategic challenges and opportunities that have relevance for the chemical sector in other regions, tapping into the considerable sectoral knowledge and expertise that exists
- Helping one particular area to be proactive in addressing its own local economic challenges – articulating its needs, working collaboratively, sharing knowledge

For additional information about this project, please contact: Mark Turner at mark.turner@bis.gsi.gov.uk or Tom Smyth at tom.smyth@bis.gsi.gov.uk