

September 2024

Tech report: Norfolk and Suffolk

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Foreword

Norfolk and Suffolk are in an exciting position to be at the forefront of science, innovation and digital technologies in the UK. Our region is blessed with opportunity to leverage our unique sectoral strengths, our unrivalled place-based assets and our skilled talent pipeline from colleges and universities.

Our technology-based capabilities are highly significant with world-leading research and technology development relating to diverse areas such as marine science, offshore renewables, health, life sciences, agri-tech and telecommunications.

In addition to creating the UK's largest regional ecosystem of 27 innovation centres and hubs, via Connected Innovation, we are bringing together a range of dynamic cluster development activities and programmes from fintech, agri-tech and marine to advanced manufacturing, clean energy and space.

Business support and networking organisations are well established, including Tech East, Agri-TechE, EEEGR (energy), Space East, NAAME (manufacturing and engineering) and Freeport East. For these sectors, there are emerging opportunities around the application of digital technologies from AI and extended reality to quantum and satellite applications.

In addition to business support on offer through the Growth Hub, there are also specialist programmes such as the new Barclays Eagle Labs collaboration with Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, Innovation Labs and Akcela providing support to early-stage tech founders. An Innovation Grant Mentoring project is supporting funding applications and we have the dedicated inward investment service Norfolk and Suffolk Unlimited.

From pre-start and start-up to scale-up and global expansion, Norfolk and Suffolk is positioned to provide space, services and support to tech businesses that choose to do business here, whatever stage in their growth journey.



Rob Hancock
Suffolk County Council



Chris Starkie
Norfolk County Council

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Introduction from our sponsors



Joe Faulkner

Office Senior Partner – East Anglia, KPMG in the UK

Norfolk and Suffolk have a rich heritage of innovation and technological breakthroughs, with the combined counties having made major contributions towards developments as diverse as antibiotics, the hovercraft, radar and ready-meals.

Drawing on these roots, and bolstered by a strong ecosystem, businesses and pioneers across the counties are today rapidly scaling technology-driven innovations across a range of key sectors including banking and insurance; agriculture, food and drink; advanced manufacturing; sustainability; and life sciences/healthcare.

Increasingly we are seeing global VC investment being drawn to our innovation hubs and according to KPMG's latest Venture Pulse Report, using data supplied by PitchBook, more than £35.3M of VC investment was raised by fast-growth businesses in Norfolk and Suffolk during the first six months of this year.

The hubs housing these tech breakthroughs are geographically dispersed across multiple sites: fintech clusters in Norwich and Ipswich, the digital and ICT centre at Martlesham, the A11 Technology Corridor, three universities, and major research areas at Norwich Research Park and the Centre For Environment Fisheries & Aquaculture Science in Lowestoft.

This physical decentralisation, across some 9,000 square kilometres means that it is important for the region to have a clear and consistent voice and identity in order to share ideas, attract investment and harness the strongest talent. This a key reason we are so pleased to be supporting this report on Norfolk and Suffolk tech. The report's spotlight on Norfolk and Suffolk shines a clear light on the wide scope, huge contribution and endless opportunities for tech in the two wonderful counties.



Introduction from our sponsors



James Allen
Programme Manager,
Connected Innovation

Connected Innovation is joining the dots on Norfolk and Suffolk's innovation ecosystem and has created the largest regional network in England of 27 innovation hubs which are home to over 800 innovative companies involved in multiple tech sub sectors. Within our network, we also have key business innovation clusters such as our partner on this report Tech East, and our Finance and Investment Group focused on supporting the region.

We have been promoting the transformational way in which businesses can interact with specific technologies and the cross-sector benefits this brings. We have landed a number of important programmes in recent years to support Norfolk and Suffolk's tech sector and we are excited to see UKTN shine a spotlight on our region.

From Artificial Intelligence to Agri-Tech and Food Tech to FinTech to Gaming to Space Tech, this region is at the forefront of exciting developments. Connected Innovation is joining up all of these capabilities to drive cross-sector innovation and support a diverse and inclusive ecosystem, working closely with the inward investment team Norfolk & Suffolk Unlimited to attract high-growth and exciting tech companies.



Lisa Perkins
Chair,
Tech East

Norfolk & Suffolk contain one of the UK's highest potential ecosystems and Tech East has been proud to be the tech cluster organisation supporting a rapidly growing network of ambitious digital technology businesses since 2016.

This is a diverse region in terms of sectors, people and opportunities. From the UK's best-known 5G and telecoms research hub at Adastral Park Suffolk advancing the leading edge of cyber, quantum and AI to one of the UK's most exciting, emerging Fintech/Insurtech clusters in Norwich the region's tech verticals are varied. Major investments in clean, energy and climate tech in both industry and academia mean the opportunities around green tech bringing together major players including EDF, Vattenfall and Freeport East are some of the best in Europe.

We shine a light on the dynamic digital tech ecosystem in the East of England to make it easier for governments, investors and tech companies to connect and collaborate with our members. We are a community of startups, scaleups and late stage tech businesses, academia and the public sector. As a founding member of the UK Tech Cluster Group we welcome every opportunity to collaborate across the UK and beyond to magnetise investment and champion growth.

That's why we're pleased to be involved in this report which shows just what Norfolk & Suffolk's tech ecosystem has to offer to the wider world.

Ecosystem overview

Key tech hubs & specialisms

In Norfolk and Suffolk, there are several cities and towns with active and growing tech scenes. Among them is Norwich, which has positioned itself as a leading tech hub in the region and is home to a young community of digital and creative companies.

The city benefits from strong links with the University of East Anglia and Norwich University of the Arts, which supports innovation through research and talent development.

Research commissioned by Tech East found that Norwich, the largest city in Norfolk, is the main driver of economic and fintech growth in the county. Between 2010 and 2021, Norwich recorded the highest growth in real output per hour of all UK cities at 2.3%.

Suffolk's county town, Ipswich, also contains a growing digital sector supported by organisations including the University of Suffolk and Innovation Martlesham.



James Allen
Programme Manager,
Connected Innovation

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We have seen a strong growth in Norfolk and Suffolk's tech sector in recent years which has been epitomised by the growth in innovative companies and innovation hubs and incubators across Norfolk and Suffolk encompassing a diverse range of technology capabilities.

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While London still holds the title of the UK's biggest fintech hub, it's clear that there's growth outside of the capital that shouldn't be overlooked. Norfolk is currently home to 24 fintech firms which have collectively raised a total of £49 million in investment and are part of a wider East of England cluster estimated at over 80 fintech firms.

Experts predict that Norfolk's fintech sector could be worth £100 million by 2027, with the number of fintech enterprises doubling within the next three years, potentially ushering in over 600 new job opportunities across the region.

Insurtech, a mix of insurance and technology, is rising in the region with Norfolk establishing itself as home to the highest proportion of InsurTech firms in England, outside London, and also has the most concentrated insurance workforce outside the capital.

The crown jewel for tech in the region, however, is arguably agritech – technology supporting the farming industry. The region's historical strength in agriculture laid a perfect foundation for innovations in agricultural machinery, pest control and more.



Salvatore Di Maggio
Senior Manager of Growth Sector
– East Anglia, KPMG in the UK

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Norfolk and Suffolk boast a very complete ecosystem to support tech startups driven by a combination of innovation, collaboration, and strategic support from local corporates.

A strong business community, combined with three outstanding universities (University of East Anglia, Norwich University of the Arts, and University of Suffolk) play a significant role in fostering innovation through research and collaboration and provides a breeding ground for ideas.

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Ecosystem indicators



58,400
digital sector workforce in
Norfolk and Suffolk

Source: [DBT](#)



£1.4bn
value of the Norfolk and Suffolk
tech industry

Source: [Norfolk & Suffolk](#)
[Unlimited](#)



4000
tech businesses in Norfolk and
Suffolk

Source: [Norfolk & Suffolk](#)
[Unlimited](#)



Over 2,500
students studying tech
industry-relevant degrees in
Norfolk and Suffolk

Source: [DBT](#)

Funding landscape

Funding in Norfolk and Suffolk is diverse and does not rely on a single main avenue. Instead, it offers different opportunities for startups and growing businesses. This includes public sector support from local authorities such as Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils and Growth Hub Programs providing grants and advisory services to stimulate regional economic growth.

Regional investment funds like Anglia Capital Group offer equity investment to promising tech startups via their angel investor network. Further support to early-stage ventures, by providing capital and mentorship, is also on offer via various sector focused scale-up and investment readiness programmes.

Venture capital firms and crowdfunding platforms such as SyndicateRoom, Seedrs, and Crowdcube also contribute to the funding ecosystem, facilitating access to larger investments and diverse funding sources.



Patrick Molyneux
Partner – Acceleris, KPMG in the UK

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Private equity and corporate venture capital interest beyond angel and VC stage has historically been limited. However, this is gradually improving with exciting businesses such as Norwich-based digital health startup Evaro, announcing their \$1.5m seed funding earlier this year and AI-powered GamePLAI securing \$1.9m funding to help with the launch of new products in January.

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Building on this success, it is key for the region to continue developing a clear and consistent voice and narrative that is heard beyond the counties' borders to build the investor base.”



Insider perspectives



Insights: Tim Robinson, COO of Tech East

“One litmus test of how well an ecosystem works is whether there are successful exits and whether the exited founders stay on and reinvest in the cluster. Think of Skyscanner in Edinburgh. The harsh reality is that without noteworthy exits a cluster won’t get the industry’s attention.

The last decade has seen a steady improvement in this flywheel in both Norwich and Suffolk. For example, after the founders of Smart421 in Ipswich sold that business to KCOM they founded Inawisdom which grew rapidly in AI and Machine Learning and became a leading AWS partner before exiting to Cognizant in 2020. Foolproof’s exited founders have been driving forces and investors in Akcela, Norwich’s hottest incubator. When acquiring companies make acquisitions in the region they tend to grow the talent pool: FX Home was sold to Artlist who have grown a bigger team; Wiggly Amps exited to Boots and spawned new startups including Little Green Button.

It’s easy to get lost in the VC hype – the level of some of the biggest deals and trade sales in Norfolk and Suffolk are never disclosed – for example UEA spinout Spectral Edge exited to a mystery buyer. The reality today is that tech founders do not necessarily rush to follow an orthodox pathway to raise money from seed to Series A and beyond – the US style VC route. What matters is sustainable growth, the creation of high value jobs for the future and having meaningful tech businesses in Norfolk and Suffolk contributing year on year to the regional economy.

Nevertheless, the region would benefit from a wider range of sources of capital and the active involvement of more investors and funds. This is an area in which the British Business Bank has a key role to play and one which Tech East continues to advocate.

We predict an extremely exciting decade ahead with tech niches from insurtech, climate tech and bluetech (ports and logistics) progressing from the emerging to mature stage and the attraction of more both domestic and international investors to the region.”



Strengths, challenges & opportunities

UKTN surveyed Norfolk and Suffolk tech ecosystem stakeholders to explore their views on strengths, challenges, and opportunities.

Subsector strengths

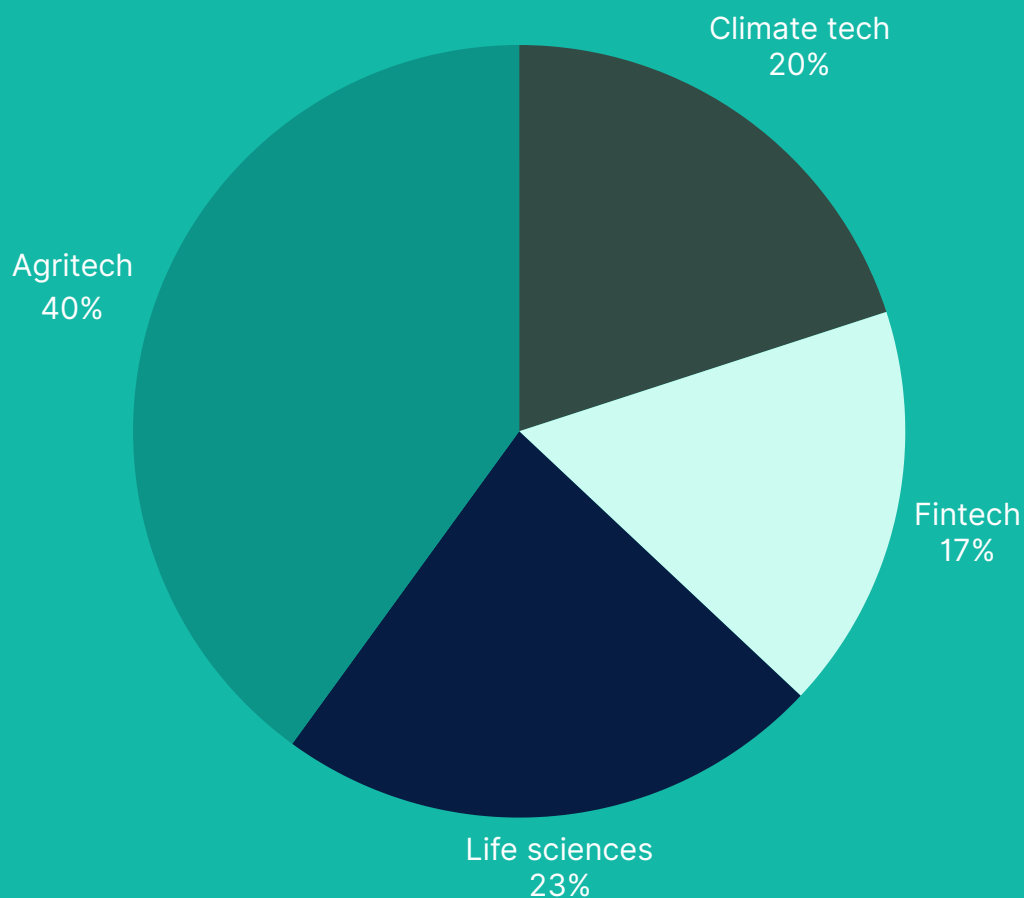
For those in the Norfolk and Suffolk tech industry, Agritech was by far considered the region's strongest sub-sector.

The region's rich agricultural heritage, supported by institutions like the Earlham Institute, the John Innes Centre and the Sainsbury Laboratory, as well as the numerous major universities, has supported the development of a cutting-edge agritech sector.

The land in East Anglia is famously among the UK's most fertile, so it's natural in the digital age the region would emphasise the importance of this technology.

Respondents also highlighted life sciences, climate tech and fintech as regional strengths, with climate tech in particular being highlighted as a subsector anticipated to grow rapidly over the next five years.

Subsector strengths in Norfolk and Suffolk





James Allen
Programme Manager,
Connected Innovation

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Norfolk and Suffolk are particularly exposed to the effects of climate change in the UK as the driest region, so the tech specialism around cleantech, agritech, space tech and aqua tech, combined with local world-leading research from our universities and research institutes, have a particularly strong role to play nationally and globally.

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Infrastructure & support

For those in Norfolk, the Norwich-based business incubator Akcela was the most frequently referenced support organisation for tech startups in the region.

Akcela offers flexible workspaces for startups and provides expert support from experienced entrepreneurs. The Akcela incubator hosts startups for 18 to 24 months providing office space and mentoring in exchange for equity stakes. The incubator also supports its startups in securing pre-seed and seed funding.

New Anglia Growth Hub, which operates in both Norfolk and Suffolk, was also highlighted as a prominent support organisation for local tech alongside MENTA, Norwich Research Park and Innovation Labs.

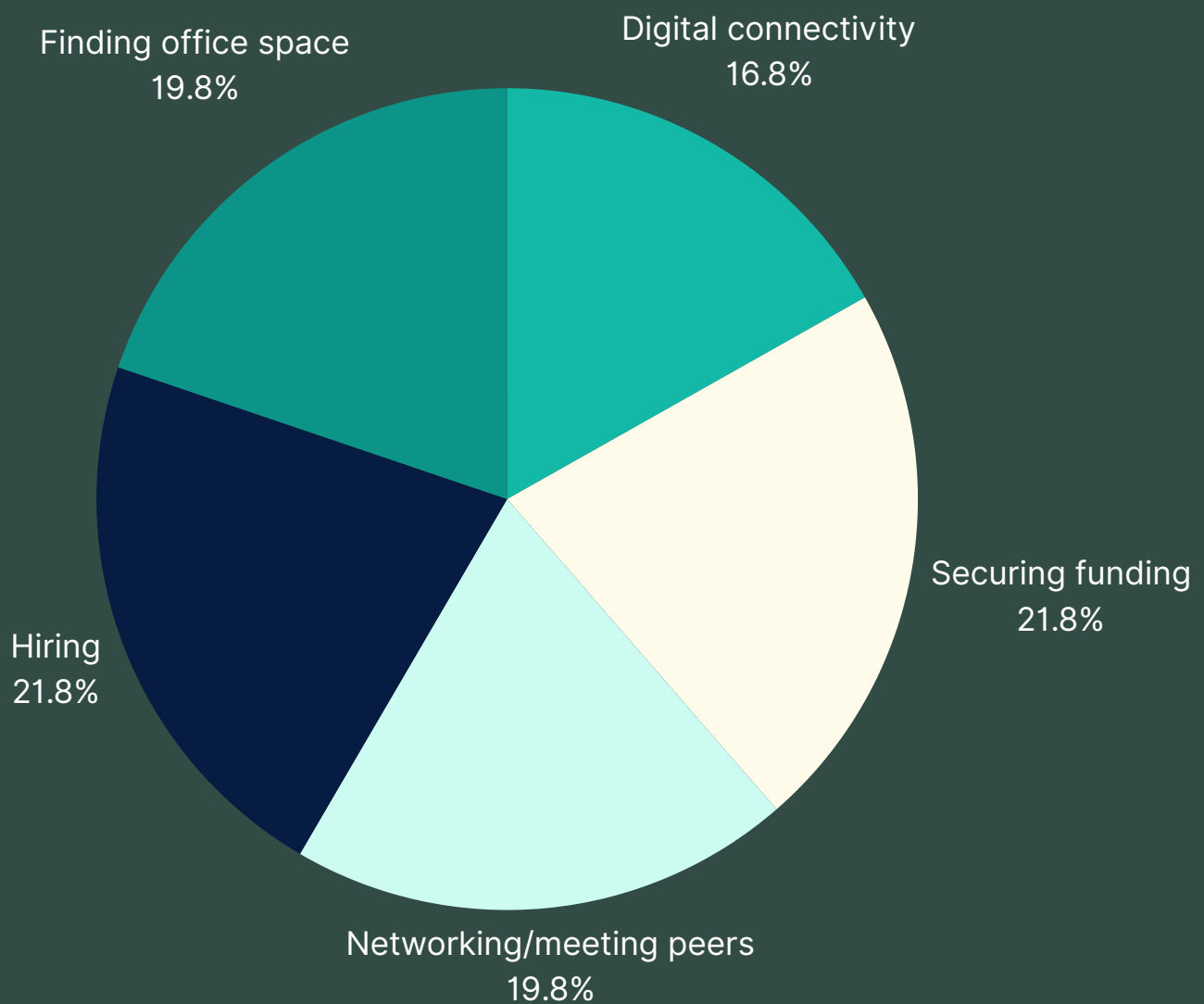
Business challenges

According to the survey, securing funding is one of the biggest challenges for tech firms in Norfolk and Suffolk, a consistent challenge across much of the UK.

Hiring was also highlighted as a significant concern. The availability of digitally skilled workers is also something faced UK-wide, however, this issue is more prevalent in rural areas.

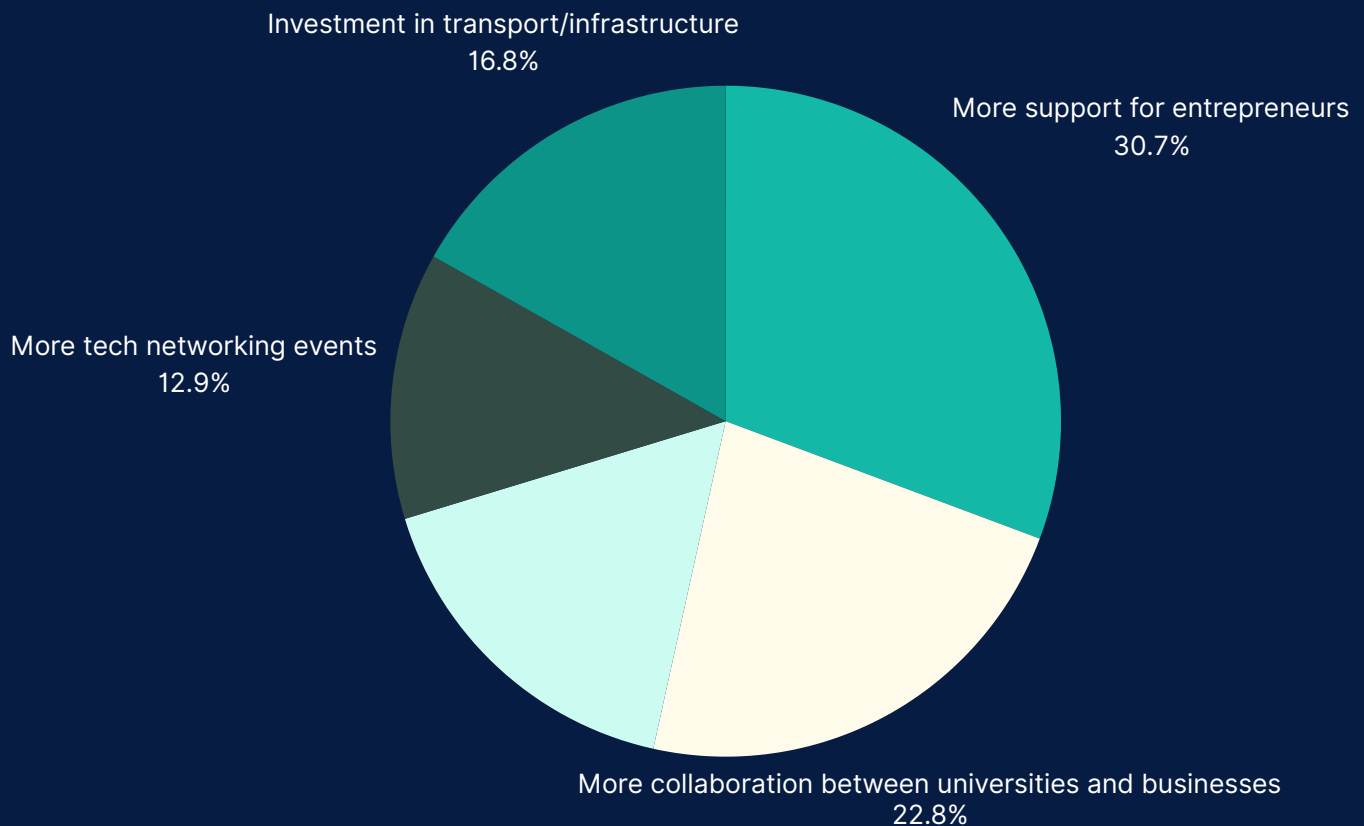
This has also created a challenge of networking and meeting peers, an essential element of growing a tech hub. Additionally, respondents said they face issues in finding suitable office spaces and digital connectivity.

Business challenges in Norfolk and Suffolk



Growth opportunities

Growth opportunities in Norfolk and Suffolk



The most commonly cited opportunity for growth in Norfolk and Suffolk was a greater level of support being given to entrepreneurs.

The local councils in cities like Norwich and Ipswich do offer some degree of business support programmes, however, there is a clear appetite for more. Greater collaboration between universities and businesses was one solution suggested to further cultivate successful new research and IP-based companies.

Tech representatives in the region also called for more specialised tech working hubs, more industry networking events and greater investment in transportation.

Tech decision-maker views

Though there are plenty of challenges in the region, that has not hindered the confidence of those in Norfolk and Suffolk tech. Just under 90% of respondents said they would recommend the region as a place to do business.

A slim but solid majority (52%) said the region had become more attractive as a place to start a tech business in the last five years and 68% said the region's tech sector will grow rapidly in the next five years.

The local tech representatives are realistic, however, with over 90% admitting they had faced business challenges due to being based in the region, and almost all of them felt the region's tech sector does not get the recognition it deserves.



Key Players

Ecosystem players



Tech East is a leading organisation dedicated to supporting the growth and development of the tech sector in the East of England, including Norfolk and Suffolk. They provide networking opportunities, resources, and advocacy for tech companies.

Focus Areas: Networking, Business Support, Advocacy, Events.



Bringing together the region's innovation ecosystem joining up the innovation hubs, universities and cluster networks to drive cross-sector innovation and simplify the innovation support landscape.

Focus Areas: Advocacy, Innovation Support, Funding & Investment, Cross-Sector Innovation Events.



CAMBRIDGE NORWICH
TECH CORRIDOR

This initiative aims to promote the region between Cambridge and Norwich as a leading tech corridor in the UK. It focuses on infrastructure development and investment attraction.

Focus Areas: Infrastructure, Investment, Innovation, Regional Development.



Agri-TechE brings together organisations from across agriculture, technology and science into one unique community that articulates challenges, explores research and seeks innovations to support a sustainable agri-food system.

Focus Areas: Business Support, Networking and Events, Innovation, Investment.

Company spotlights

Epos Now

Founded in Norwich in 2011 by Jacyn Heavens, Epos Now launched without external funding as a startup developing software for businesses.

Before founding the company, Heavens made a decent living selling phones. After opening a bar, his first business, Heavens realised that while helpful for small companies, electronic point-of-sale systems were far too expensive.

Epos Now was launched to provide a lower-cost system for small and medium-sized enterprises. Since its launch, the company has been recognised as one of Europe's fastest-growing tech businesses by the likes of the Financial Times and Deloitte.

Epos Now currently boasts a customer base of over 64,000 business locations and has expanded to international markets including in the US and Germany.

And in its most recent financial accounts, the UK entity reported an annual profit of over £2m with a turnover of more than £38m. Company-wide, turnover was £59.8m.

Speaking to BBC News, Heavens said he has received many offers for the company, at one point turning down a £50m cash offer.

"I don't do this for the money, I do it because it is fun. I enjoy the negotiations, the deal-making." In 2024, Heavens joined the prominent Tech Nation Future Fifty programme as a mentor.



Company spotlights

BT Research

Located in Martlesham, near Ipswich, BT Research is the R&D arm of the telecoms giant BT.

The group began operating in Suffolk at the opening of Adastral Park, its base of operations, in 1975 in a ceremony featuring Queen Elizabeth II.

BT's Suffolk team has been responsible for a number of innovations from the company, including the development of the first commercial single mode fibre system in 1983.

BT employs almost 3,000 staff in its Suffolk-based subsidiary, though in 2023, the company said it would consider reducing its presence somewhat over the next two years.

BT, however, insisted it was "committed to Adastral Park for the long-term" and that it would "continue to invest in our facilities there as a number of our core operations, research and security functions will remain on-site".

The Adastral Park site is the global headquarters of BT Group's research and development but has also been established as a major tech cluster within the region.

As well as being home to BT-owned subsidiaries, Adastral Park also contains more than 150 tech companies, bringing massive economic and technological benefits to Suffolk.

Firms based in Adastral Park range from startups to global technology brands including Huawei, Cisco, Fujitsu and O2.



Startups & scaleups to watch



Homemove provides online property valuations based on analysis of visual conditions.

HQ: Norwich | Founded: 2022 | Funding:
£1.7m |
Subsector: Proptech



Pikl was founded to fill the gap in the insurance industry of firms not covering shared assets such as homes on Airbnb.

HQ: Norwich | Founded: 2016 | Funding:
£7.3m |
Subsector: Insurtech



A provider of predictive health technology that helps organisations improve the future health of employees.

HQ: Ipswich | Founded: 2017 | Funding:
Undisclosed | Subsector: Health



Adande's platform specialises in making industrial ventilation, refrigeration, and air conditioning products for the food service, offshore oil, gas, and petrochemical industries.

HQ: Lowestoft | Founded: 2017 | Funding:
Undisclosed |
Subsector: Manufacturing

Looking ahead

What's next for the region's tech sector?

There is plenty of optimism for the future in the region, even if some tech stakeholders in Norfolk and Suffolk have expressed frustration at being overshadowed in tech by its neighbours in Cambridgeshire.

Despite this, the sense of ambition remains high, with key players in the region determined to make their mark.

Funding and availability of skills will continue to be a challenge, however, for those in the region, the momentum feels strong.

Investment in education and upskilling will be important to the region's success in the long term, ensuring that businesses have access to the talent they need to innovate and grow. However, respondents from the region are largely confident the talent is already present and are more concerned with visibility.

The presence of operations from massive global firms has done a lot to give confidence that Norfolk and Suffolk are good places to run digital businesses, however, the future growth is by no means a done deal.



Transportation infrastructure will be critical to addressing this to encourage greater collaboration with other tech hubs.

There is a sense that with the right kind of investment into transportation and infrastructure, as well as a handful of major exits to help cement its place on the map of UK tech hubs, Norfolk and Suffolk will have every chance to draw more money, more talent and ultimately drive even more economic and technological growth.

Improvements to rail and road links would significantly enhance connectivity between the region and other major tech clusters, making it easier for companies to collaborate and for talent to move freely.



Joe Faulkner
Office Senior Partner – East Anglia,
KPMG in the UK

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Better connectivity with London and the wider East of England is important going forward. Steps are being made, for example, to increase tech collaboration between Cambridge and Norwich which aims to create a thriving environment for startups by leveraging the strengths of both cities, including their research institutions and growing business networks

We also believe that there is the potential for a high-profile tech unicorn and/or major tech sector IPO from a Norfolk or Suffolk business. This would have a positive halo effect for both counties and other tech entrepreneurs within them.

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KPMG is a leading professional services firm. It operates from 20 offices across the UK with approximately 17,000 partners and staff and is part of a global network across 140+ countries. We employ over 150 colleagues across our East of England practice, working across audit, tax, legal services, risk management and M&A - alongside technology, digital, data & AI and operational consulting.

Whether it's steering a business through early-stage funding and investment, sharing guidance on governance responsibilities, making introductions to industry specialists from across our global firm, or helping to tackle the inevitable challenges that come with growth – we help our clients overcome challenges big and small. We can walk businesses through tried and tested means of getting to the end destination, while exploring alternative routes for businesses that are anything but ordinary. Find out more at kpmg.com/uk.



[Connected Innovation](#) links together 27 innovation hubs, incubators, universities, research institutes, and business clusters across Norfolk and Suffolk. The Connected Innovation team join the dots across Norfolk and Suffolk's innovation ecosystem, working closely with wider partners in the East to simplify innovation support for companies and land new opportunities for entrepreneurs from start-up to scale-up and established tech businesses.

This network of 27 hubs is home to +800 innovative companies, encompassing a wide range of research and technology capabilities such as Artificial Intelligence, robotics, 5G connectivity, FinTech, Agri-Tech, MedTech, AquaTech and Gaming driving cross-sector innovation.

Connected Innovation is the one-stop shop brand for innovation across Norfolk and Suffolk, with strong buy-in from Innovate UK (including a Local Action Plan for Norfolk and Suffolk), the Catapult Network and Government Departments. The [Connected Innovation website](#) is the place to go for innovation funding calls, events and support available to our innovation ecosystem, whilst promoting the capabilities within the region through a Prospectus, map of the network and clusters we are promoting.

Thank you to our sponsors



Tech East is a tech cluster organisation, network and advocacy group founded in 2016. We engage with over 1,500 digital tech businesses and ecosystem organisations in the East of England, championing the digital tech sector. Sitting at the intersection of business, academia and the public sector we give voice to startups, scaleups and late stage businesses from Norfolk and Suffolk on a local, regional, national and international stage.

We actively campaign on behalf of tech businesses and engage with local and national government policy makers in talent and skills, access to finance and investment, infrastructure, innovation and business support. Recent work has included the Local Skills Improvement Plan working closely with Chambers of Commerce and skills providers, the 2024 Norwich and Norfolk FinTech report, tech trade missions to Mobile World Congress and Web Summit and the ongoing development of the 5G and Digitisation High Potential Opportunity in partners with the Department for Business and Trade and Invest Norfolk & Suffolk. Tech East is a founding member of the UK Tech Cluster Group and we played an active role in developing the Ecosystems of Innovation report published in 2024.

