

## **Harnessing Technology & Innovation - Mick McLoughlin, Regional Director, BT**

We have already heard from Chris about the need for better educated people, people skilled in new technology, IT literate to operate in a global market.

Mary has spoken about businesses not always thinking about expanding into overseas markets and also about building a healthy public and private business relationship to drive initiative for economic growth.

And Richard has highlighted amongst other things infrastructure, escalating transport costs, and the need for bold and ambitious proposals that consider the long- term future.

I think we have a number of challenges.

But I am not going to suggest we boil the ocean.

I agree that a limited , focussed action plan with flagship type activities will take us forward and help position Leicestershire as a forward looking, innovative and progressive County that will attract and retain talent for the future.

Just imagine if businesses, residents, visitors and those passing through our county were able to transact, connect and gather or disseminate information wherever they were, whenever they wanted.

Is this a vision for tomorrow?

No it is a possibility today.

But it is not available either here in Leicestershire or fully anywhere else because amongst other reasons it requires collaboration, vision and a willingness to be a leader.

Whether a business is local, or global, embracing and harnessing technology will help drive down costs and drive up productivity. Did you know that ICT has been shown to be responsible for 73% of process innovation and 37% of product innovation?

In a fast moving business world adapting to change is essential if today's winners want to avoid being tomorrow's losers.

We know from recent surveys carried out by EMDA that take up and use of existing ICT from small businesses is at best patchy. There is a huge need to improve support and educate businesses so that they understand how ICT can help them to raise productivity and reduce transaction costs.

At the same time we need to remove the worries that come because people are wary of change, or frightened to try new methods of working, preferring to stick with what they know.

Already the EMDA led Business Links activity across the East Midlands is shaping up to that challenge, as are companies like BT who offer ICT support , particularly to small businesses who want to hand off that activity to IT Specialists. Remember the " F" word and Gordon Ramsey, he knows that cooking is his strength not IT.

Ask people what Leicestershire stands for and you might hear back, " Red Leicester Cheese, Stilton, great Indian food, Socks and Knitwear and possibly The Jet engine. Great as these are, our profile needs raising.

I agree with Richard that we must think big and bold. When people look at cities and counties they tend to focus only on the flagship projects. Take the Leicester Space Centre for example. But also we have to ensure we maintain that high profile or else the "gloss benefit" soon disappears.

But let's not scatter our money like rainspots on a pavement, lets be bold and consider leading edge projects.

I would like to propose we make Leicestershire the first fully WIRELESS COUNTY in this country.

We already have nearly 100% Broadband availability but by going wireless we take it a step further.

Having access to your customers, employees, markets & contacts whenever and wherever you are in Leicestershire would set us apart. Imagine being able to complete a deal where you are without going back to the office and at the same time using Wi Fi calling to seriously reduce phone costs.

Employers being bold, allowing people more flexibility in their working lives, can help to reduce unnecessary travel and avoiding some of the congestion and transport problems already referred to.

The availability of this technology will encourage innovators to look for new ways to use the facilities, generating new jobs, new wealth and tomorrow's companies which will make Leicestershire great again.

But there is a serious problem.

Businesses, like BT, can take some action, but it needs full Local Authority support. We need to overcome the LA fear of collaborating with companies who are out to make a profit or create wealth.

We really need the City and County Councils to work with the wealth creators because without this we will lose the ability to drive the flagship initiatives that put LEICESTERSHIRE on the map.

We have to work together, trusting each other but also taking due regard to costs, need and competition.

Having the facilities is one step forward. Embracing and using them, ensuring training is available from our schools, universities and business support facilities is vital.

Businesses sharing and helping each other across our County and across industries is essential.

It is a global economy. We must embrace new technology