

Agenda Item 3: Space East: Unlocking Growth and Opportunity for Norfolk and the East of England

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1. Introduction

Launched in March 2023 and created out of the former Norfolk & Suffolk supported New Anglia LEP, Space East is the official space cluster for the East of England. Funded by the UK Space Agency (UKSA), hosted by Suffolk County Council with support from Norfolk County Council, Essex County Council, Hertfordshire Futures & Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority, it is one of only 14 recognised UK clusters, making Norfolk and Suffolk part of the national space ecosystem.

Space East's mission is to connect businesses, academia, government, and investors to:

- Grow the regional space economy
- Harness satellite and space technologies to drive innovation in agriculture, health, defence, energy, coastal and marine, and digital sectors

In just over two years, the cluster has transformed from a 17-member steering group into a nationally recognised community of more than 280 organisations, embedded in growth strategies, and respected for delivering tangible outcomes. It is the fastest growing of the UK Space Clusters and now positioning itself for further growth through a regionally representative steering group tasked with delivering a new East of England Space strategy.

2. The Global and National Context

Global Market Trends

- The global space economy is projected to double in the next decade, from \$476bn in 2024 to around \$1tn by 2034 (7–8% annual growth).
- The UK Strategic Defence Review foresees a \$1.8tn global economy by 2035, underpinned by commercial demand.

This rapid expansion represents a major opportunity for regions like Norfolk, with its strengths in agriculture, maritime, energy, advanced engineering, and digital innovation.

UK National Priorities

- National Space Strategy (2021): Ambition for the UK to become one of the world's most innovative and attractive space economies.
- Industrial Strategy (2025 update): Focus on satellite communications, Earth Observation, PNT, in-orbit servicing, and space domain awareness.
- Strategic Defence Review (2025): Recognises space as a core operational domain; highlights risks of satellite disruption (e.g. £1bn/day losses if GPS failed).

For Norfolk, this alignment translates into clear opportunities in dual-use innovation, coastal monitoring, precision agriculture, energy, and defence.

3. Space East – Growth and Development

Early Development (2023–2024)

- Launched in March 2023 with 17 founding members, including the NRP and UEA; membership exceeded 200 by March 2024.
- Supported the £4m Quantum & Optical Discovery Lab at Adastral Park, a national testbed for quantum and optical communications.
- Space recognised within the Norfolk and Suffolk Growth Strategies.
- Norfolk delegates participated in a cross-cluster agri project with Space Scotland, exploring EO for crop monitoring and soil health.

Expansion, National Recognition & Cross-cluster projects (2024–2025)

- Membership grew to 258 by March 2025 and 280+ by mid-2025.
- Delivered over 1,000 engagements and 322 business introductions, sparking collaborations across the region.
- Secured financial contributions from 5 of 6 county councils, embedding space within local strategies. Local Authority reps, including Roberta Willner from NCC, sit alongside private and academic colleagues.
- Achievements included:
 - Collaboration with Anglian Water on flood resilience.
 - Launch of the Space Enabled Health Region with Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital, UKSA, and Health Innovation East.
 - Projects on marine monitoring (algal bloom, seaweed farming) with direct coastal relevance - Northern Ireland & Wales; agricultural challenges – Scotland.
 - Strong links into the region, including support for the Eastern Region Defence & Security Cluster.

4. Advocacy and Profile Raising

Space East has acted as a bridge between local businesses, national strategy, and global opportunities, raising Norfolk's profile through:

Major Industry Events

- Space-Comm Expo (London & Glasgow): Engaged 200+ exhibitors, 5,000 attendees.
- Ignite Space (Norwich): Panels on strengthening businesses through local partnerships.
- Defence Space Conference 2024: Showcased Norfolk's role in space-defence.
- ISAM Conference 2025: Positioned East of England capabilities in in-orbit servicing and manufacturing.

Regional Engagements

- Collaborative cluster events: NAAME, AgriTech-E, Offshore Renewables Catapult
- Norfolk Landscapes Event: Earth Observation for agriculture and environment.
- UEA Earth Observation Forum (Sept 2025): Discussions on climate resilience and coastal monitoring.
- Future Networks at Adastral Park: Satellite-enabled next-generation communications.

Visibility

- Hosted a cluster stand at Farnborough 2024, giving Norfolk businesses global exposure.
- Showcased local firms at Westminster APPG on Space and in Stormont (NI) cross-cluster sessions.

5. Evidence of Impact

- Membership: From 17 to 280+ members in two years.
- Introductions: Over 350 B2B and consortia connections facilitated.
- Projects: Partners in 7 successful project bids, with representation on all Catapult governance boards.
- Events: 38 delivered and 85 attended since launch, maximising impact with minimal budget.
- Support Secured: Commitment from 5/6 county councils and 46 letters of support from public, private, and academic stakeholders.
- Skills: Active engagement with schools, universities, and innovation hubs; developing a pipeline of local STEM talent.

6. Future Opportunities for Norfolk (2025–2027)

Space East is not about “space for space’s sake.” It is about applying space technologies to regional strengths:

- Agriculture & Food Security: EO for soil monitoring, precision irrigation, and crop resilience.
- Marine & Coastal Economy: Monitoring algal blooms, aquaculture, and offshore renewables.
- Health & Life Sciences: Extending the Space Enabled Health Region for diagnostics and med-tech.
- Defence & Security: Leveraging Norfolk’s military bases and engineering for ISR and resilience.
- Advanced Engineering: Norfolk SMEs joining national satellite supply chains. Upstream start-ups. Scottow, a potential location for space businesses.
- Energy: Offshore wind, hydrogen, and renewables supported by space-enabled logistics.
- Ports & Logistics: Satellite tools for Great Yarmouth and King’s Lynn—tracking, supply chains, efficiency.
- Skills & Careers: Expanding STEM outreach, embedding space into local workforce planning.

7. Conclusion

Space East has already exceeded expectations: building a thriving community, delivering projects across Norfolk’s key sectors, and securing recognition on the national stage. The next phase represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to leverage space technologies to strengthen Norfolk’s economy, resilience, and workforce.

It has put Norfolk and Suffolk firmly on the UK space map and delivered cross-sector projects directly relevant to Norfolk’s agri-food, coastal, health, defence, energy, engineering, and logistics sectors.

It has given Norfolk businesses access to national and international platforms and embedded itself in the UK-wide ecosystem as one of just 14 recognised clusters, uniquely represented on all Satellite Applications Catapult governance boards.

With the global space economy heading toward US\$1–1.8 trillion by 2035, and UK government priorities aligned with space growth in both Industrial Strategy and Defence Review, Norfolk is uniquely positioned to capture investment, jobs, and innovation in the years ahead.

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