

FUSION Innovation Centre

Questions for discussion with businesses

Briefing note

[SQW](#) and [Oxford Innovation](#) have been commissioned by Coast to Capital LEP, Crawley Borough Council and Thales to develop the business case for the proposed FUSION Innovation Centre (FUSION IC). SQW is a leading economic development consultancy and its sister division, Oxford Innovation (OI), is the UK's largest operator of innovation centres.

In this context, we are looking to speak to businesses that might have some interest in the new facility. These have been identified on the basis of connections to either Thales or Crawley, or in terms of their sectoral specialisms. They span SME and larger business communities.

What will the discussion involve?

The discussions will involve a 30 minute telephone or video call with an experienced consultant from SQW or OI (and a Research Consultant who will take notes from the discussion). There is nothing to prepare in advance – other than reading through the short introduction to the proposed FUSION IC concept which is attached.

The discussions will be used to develop the FUSION IC concept to meet the needs and interests of businesses which may want to engage with the facility, its stakeholders and services. They will also help partners to understand the support and spaces it should provide.

Data privacy and protection

In order to develop the FUSION IC concept, a Non-Disclosure Agreement is in place between the main partners (Thales, Crawley Borough Council, Coast to Capital LEP and SQW/OI). We will share a list of consultees with the funding partners, so that they know the range of organisations we have spoken. This list will not appear in any document that is subsequently shared more widely.

We will not share specific details from any individual discussions. Evidence from all discussions will be presented 'in the round' and comments made will not be attributed to any individual/organisation. We may use direct quotations in our reporting but these will be anonymised.

In terms of mechanics, SQW/OI will take notes and may record the call if consultees give informed consent. The notes and recordings will be saved on our secure portal and will be accessible only to members of the team. All personal data held by SQW will be deleted by 31st December 2021.

Next steps

A member of the consultancy team will be in touch shortly to arrange a consultation if you are happy to take part on this basis.

Further Information

If you have any further questions about this request, please contact: Toni Harrison, Strategic Partnerships Manager, Oxford Innovation on t.harrison@oxin.co.uk

Thank you in anticipation of your help.

FUSION Innovation Centre – Draft Synopsis

Introduction to FUSION Innovation Centre

Situated at the heart of one of the UK's major knowledge-based business hubs (including Elekta, Ceres Power, Boeing, Unilever, Thales etc.) – and adjacent to the UK's second busiest international airport and within easy reach of central London – FUSION Innovation Centre (FUSION IC) is bringing together entrepreneurs, innovators and researchers in a ground-breaking new venture.

The concept behind FUSION IC was originally initiated by Thales – one of Europe's major defence and aerospace companies – together with the Coast to Capital LEP and Crawley Council. FUSION IC aims to drive technological advancement and change within a number of key growth sectors. It will provide a highly creative environment to focus collaborative research and innovation for commercial purposes. This will span traditional disciplinary boundaries although three specialisms will define its core:

- *transportation systems solutions*
- *green power systems*
- *advanced manufacturing and engineering technologies*

In addition, it will:

- *develop digital twin, AI, autonomy and big data technologies and exploit cyber security, data handling and AR within these contexts*
- *“pull through” technology from defence to civil environments and applications, and vice versa*

Potentially working alongside Thales and other major primes located on the Manor Royal business park, FUSION IC will equip entrepreneurs, innovators and researchers with the tools, equipment and support to tackle major technological challenges, and to secure commercial and competitive advantage in the process. The transition to Net Zero and the quest for autonomous transport solutions will define economic change in the post-COVID era, and FUSION IC will be at the forefront.

FUSION IC will provide an environment for collaboration, co-operation and exploration which is equally attuned to the ambitions of small businesses as it is to industry primes. It will particularly welcome supply chain partners which will have the opportunity to discover new ways of collaborating and ‘doing business’. In part this will be fuelled and curated by the specialist innovation support which will be provided through formal and informal channels. It will reflect FUSION IC's ethos as a learning environment – and university collaborators will be a core part of the wider community.

In physical terms, FUSION IC will include provision for workshops, laboratories and private office space alongside collaborative workspace and social environments. These will be ‘spaces’ where

individuals and groups from different businesses can mix and both generate and exchange ideas and know-how. Some will establish their businesses in FUSION IC and will call it 'home'. Others will be frequent visitors, but still very much part of the wider community.

FUSION IC will drive economic change, and it will deliver wider environmental and societal benefits. It will provide a unique environment in which ambitious and innovative businesses will thrive and grow.

Questions for discussion

Understanding your business:

1. When, why and how was your business formed, and at formation, what did it set out to do?
2. What has been its growth narrative to date – and how big is it now?
3. Over the last two years, has your business invested in innovation (specifically from the list below)?
 - **Research and Development** – i.e. creative work undertaken within your business that increases knowledge for developing new and improved goods or services and processes
 - **Acquisition of Research and Development** – same activities as above, performed by companies, including other businesses within your group, or by public or private research organisations and purchased by your business
 - **Acquisition of advanced machinery, equipment and software to support innovation**
 - **Acquisition of existing knowledge** – i.e. purchase or licensing of patents and non-patented inventions, know-how and other types of knowledge from other businesses or organisations
 - **Training for innovative activities** – i.e. internal or external training for your personnel, specifically for the development and/or introduction of innovations
 - **Design** – i.e. design activities for the development or implementation of new or improved goods, services and processes
 - **Market introduction of innovations** – i.e. market research, changes to marketing methods, advertising, etc.
4. Looking ahead, what in broad terms are the plans for your business?

Exploring the scope and potential of FUSION IC:

Thales is central to the thinking behind FUSION IC. In this context, the following technologies have been identified as particularly important:

- **Transportation systems solutions** – focusing on connected, integrated, sustainable and resilience systems including logistics and passenger management solutions
- **Green power systems** – connected and secure systems (focused especially on road, rail, air, etc.) and including the use of big data that can be gathered, stored, secured and used
- **Advanced manufacturing and engineering technologies** – with widespread application, including in aerospace

5. FUSION IC is aiming to create an environment focused on **research and innovation** in these specialisms.
 - Are any of these specialisms of interest to your business (and/or your partners) currently?
 - Could they be relevant in the future?
 - To what extent do you have clients/customers with an interest in these fields?
6. Which of the following might be of interest to your business?
 - the opportunity to meet with researchers (whether from a university or industry)?
 - the opportunity to work alongside prime contractors?

- the opportunity to work alongside specialist SMEs?
- the opportunity to benefit from specialist technological advice and support?
- the opportunity to benefit from specialist business development advice and support?
- the opportunity to use specialist equipment? (If so, what?)
- other?

7. Why would these opportunities interest you?

- Scope to contribute to cutting-edge research programmes
- Scope to be part of a rapid response to technological need
- Scope to learn from experts who are versed in the technical aspects of the above disciplines' thinking
- Scope to develop a clear revenue stream
- Scope to make use of specialist equipment and systems that could have relevance to other parts of my business
- Scope to diversify a product range
- Scope to further develop an early concept
- Scope to develop joint venture / partnership working with other primes / SMEs

8. For FUSION IC to be as relevant as possible for your business in terms of research and innovation:

- which other organisations would you like to see within it?
- to what extent do you collaborate with these organisations currently?

9. FUSION IC is also intended to provide a **learning environment** – whether through facilitating apprenticeships or something less formal. What would it need to provide to be useful for your business?

10. In relation to both research and innovation, and skills and learning, **what physical space would make sense for the new facility?** What should be the balance between:

- collaboration space (i.e. informal breakout/networking spaces or project rooms)
- rooms for teaching/learning
- workshop space
- office space
- laboratory space
- exhibition / showcasing space

- other

11. Based on what you know, how might you see yourself using the new facility:

- as an occasional visitor – perhaps meeting collaborators and/or attending events
- occupying space within FUSION IC on a project basis (perhaps for a few months)
- relocating to FUSION IC – either in whole or in part
- not at all

12. Has your experience of the pandemic changed the way in which you might want to use a facility like FUSION IC?

- Yes/No/Don't know (if yes, please explain)

13. Do you have any other comments about what is proposed?

- What would persuade you to consider it seriously?
- What would really put you off it?
- Which other companies/organisations do you think might be interested in it?

14. Would you mind answering some questions on your current status / location / accommodation provision?

- Where is your current accommodation located?
- What type and size of accommodation do you currently occupy?
- And on what basis (tenure etc)?
- Are you up to capacity, in terms of available floorspace, or do you have room to expand?
- If leasehold – would you mind sharing current rental level details?
- How long does your current lease have to run?