

## Hethel Engineering Centre

**Supporting people and companies in engineering and manufacturing**

### Summary

The EEDA-backed Hethel Engineering Centre in Norwich helps the region's high-tech businesses – established and new – by providing a base, equipment, training and other much-needed support to help them grow. The Centre is a base where people in engineering and manufacturing can work, exchange ideas and share their knowledge and experience.

<b>County:</b>	Norfolk
<b>Theme:</b>	Science, innovation and high-level skills
<b>Date:</b>	April 2008

### Main messages

- EEDA funding helped Norfolk County Council set up the Hethel Engineering Centre
- Giving start-up businesses an incentive to stay in the region by providing a base
- Offering access to the most advanced technology and specialist skills training
- Encouraging knowledge sharing and mutual support between companies
- Forming a successful partnership between the private and public sectors.

### Case study

#### A launch pad for new companies

Paul Spinks is managing director of Active Technologies, a Norfolk design consultancy that specialises in mechanical engineering. The company recently won a contract to supply engine components for Ford's new racing cars, but when Paul and business partner Kevin Whitefield started the company in 2005 their first challenge was more mundane – finding a location for the business. “We didn't want a traditional factory set-up,” said Paul. “We wanted to be close to our possible customers and to other engineers with whom we could discuss problems and, potentially, share solutions.”

The Hethel Engineering Centre sounded ideal, and they watched its development with great interest. A contact from their days together at Lotus encouraged them to enter the annual

“Launchpad” competition sponsored by the Centre in association with the *Eastern Daily Press*. When they discovered that the prize included a year's free accommodation at the Centre they needed no more urging, and their application form convinced the judges that Active Technologies would benefit from a move to the Centre. They could also see the company would be an asset to the Centre, because it had already made great progress in its first year of business by developing an innovative product and finding a market.

Unlike a traditional factory, Hethel Engineering Centre encourages networking and the sharing of ideas and resources by occupants. Paul also finds it a good source of potential new business, because it attracts many commercial visitors, in addition to the wide range of companies that attend training courses.

Since moving into the Centre, Active Technologies has grown from a team of three to 12, and annual turnover has increased by 300 per cent. Indeed, it has been so successful that it will soon have to make way for a new occupant in greater need of the Centre's services. Paul is keen to stay close, however, and hopes it may one day grow into a business park focused on the core Centre. “There's nowhere else I would want to site the company now. We realise that the purpose of the Centre is to help smaller businesses grow, but we don't want to lose the networking opportunities that come with being part of a community. And our experience and contacts could help newer companies coming to the Centre, too.”

### **A centre of excellence for the whole region**

EEDA contributed £500,000 to the construction of the Hethel Engineering Centre, which is a wholly owned business of Norfolk County Council. EEDA has worked with the Council, the Lotus Group, South Norfolk Council, and Business Link to establish a centre of excellence to support the local engineering sector. Further grants towards equipment and the presentation of the Centre mean that EEDA's total contribution to date has been £910,580.

Although the Centre's main purpose is to support new and smaller businesses, it also focuses on ensuring that businesses in the East of England have access to the best training and expertise available. Richard Ellis, EEDA's chair, believes the Centre will continue to benefit the region as a whole: “It provides yet another focal point for the region's small, knowledge-based businesses to gain access to high-quality innovation support and facilities. By fostering links with larger organisations and higher education, and allowing tenant companies to share their experience and best practice, it will help them develop, succeed, and ultimately grow the region's economy.”

The Centre began trading in February 2006 and by the end of its first seven months was already slightly ahead of its first year's target of 35 per cent occupancy. As applications for tenancy continue to multiply, a selection process has been adopted to ensure that applications are accepted only from companies that demonstrate a genuine interest in participating in a community – by adding to as well as benefiting from the interaction between tenants. This selection policy has meant that more businesses have been turned down than have been accepted. The Centre is going from strength to strength and is nearly at capacity – some two years earlier than the original target.

### **Conclusion**

EEDA's funding of the Hethel Engineering Centre has helped create an environment in which dynamic young engineering businesses have quick and easy access to a range of in-depth expertise. At the same time, companies can exploit the Centre's networking opportunities to build relationships that will bring long-term benefits.

### **Financial facts and figures**

- EEDA contributed £500,000 to the construction of the Hethel Engineering Centre
- Further grants had taken EEDA's total contribution to £910,580 by July 2007.

### **Extra quotes**

#### **Rachel Bosworth, executive director of communications and enterprise, EEDA**

"We can provide general business incubation units in most parts of the region, where businesses can access general advice on accounting or marketing and so forth. Where appropriate, we also help those businesses connect into the more specialist expertise available at centres like Hethel."

#### **Roger Putnam, president of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders**

"Engineering is a core industry for the British economy and one in which the region has a proud history. The Hethel Engineering Centre will be a powerful central point of inspiration and support for dynamic businesses of the future."

## Additional information

The Hethel Engineering Centre is one of 11 enterprise hubs in the region covering key industry sectors. Each hub is managed by a commercially-minded CEO and run by boards with a business focus. The other hubs are:

- Babraham BioConcepts Research Campus (Cambridgeshire)
- Building Research Establishment (Watford)
- Centre for Sustainable Engineering (Peterborough)
- Colworth Science Park (Bedfordshire)
- East of England Production Innovation Centre (Norwich)
- Health Enterprise East (a virtual cross-regional hub)
- Hertfordshire Business Incubation Centre (Stevenage)
- Luton Innovation Business Base (Butterfield)
- Norwich Research Park Enterprise (Norfolk)
- St John's Innovation Centre (Cambridge).

For more information about Hethel Engineering Centre, please visit [www.hethelcentre.com](http://www.hethelcentre.com)

## Contact details

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