

President's Notes November 2014

Transport Challenges and opportunities in South Holland

Recently representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, The Fresh Food Consortium food producers and the Spalding logistics forum met with John Hayes MP, the Minister of Transport in Downing Street. This was to make him aware that our food processing businesses are at a "moment in time" when we must urgently find solutions to economically access product in/out of South Holland. At the meeting were Phil Scarlett, Chamber of Commerce; Jim Rogers, The Fresh Food Consortium; Justin Szymborski FESA; and Trevor Hyde, Produce Logistics,

It was an easy conversation as John Hayes knows the area well but perhaps hadn't appreciated the industry concerns. At the meeting he agreed to seriously consider dualling parts, if not all of the A16 between Spalding and Peterborough. He also asked that we set up a South Holland Logistics Summit in January.

The South Holland Logistic Forum, part of the Chamber of Commerce, is also initiating market research into the volumes of product both in and out of the area through the University of Lincoln and this data will be available to the Forum. At present we only have old data e.g., 28% of all processes food comes through South Holland (population of less than 100,000 and less than 300 square miles). This year we understand that "37% of all fresh products passes through the South Holland area".

Good and Bad News

Businesses in the food processing business in South Holland are set to grow substantially during the next few years. Logistic companies are also forecasting growth in excess of 25% year on year. This is despite profit warnings by the big supermarket chains which has been balanced by the growth of the discount supermarkets.

Why? Because South Holland has become a centre of excellence for food processors. There is now an excellent "support system" of allied services including packaging, tray washers, all the major chilled transport companies, and cost effective labour.

The University of Lincoln has the National Centre for Food Manufacturing in Holbeach which supports the industry. It is dedicated to helping food industry employees advance their careers and committed to helping the sector innovate.

So if that's the good news, what is the bad news? Access currently in and out of South Holland is reasonable compared to other area of the UK, and haulage companies are in a position to achieved timed deliveries to the regional distribution depots of the supermarket groups. The recently opened (4 years ago) A16 between Spalding and Peterborough has helped and the road was due to be a dual carriageway, but was reduced to a single road system under the last government. The A16 is now already at capacity and according to LEP is at times not fit for purpose.

The reality is that we have a "moment in time" to improve the transport infrastructure before the growth clogs up our roads and timed deliveries are not achieved and then the supermarkets and growers will establish operations elsewhere and our business will be strangled and die!

Discussions have also taken place with Mark Tinsley who is one of the Private Sector Board Members on the Greater Lincolnshire Lpcal EnterprisePartnership (LEP).

Mark is a farmer and grower based in South Lincolnshire with a wealth of experience in the agri-food sector. He is also Lincolnshire's representative on Defra's Rural Farming Network. He is extremely supportive of our call to improve the A16.

Additional information

1. The District Council has approve the building of 7,500 new homes in Spalding.
2. There are no plans for any transport improvements in the Spalding area other than the Western Relief Road and this is subject to funding by the house builders.
3. Lincolnshire appears to stop at Sleaford.
4. We have no Trunk Roads in Lincolnshire i.e. no central government funded roads.
5. LCC only have very limited available fund to spend on road improvements and this will primarily spent in Lincoln.

SOUTH HOLLAND THE KITCHEN FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM