

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

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Major Fenland employer urges other businesses to grab benefits of free service

One of Fenland's major employers has urged others to access the free support and funding advice on offer in the district to businesses.

Operations Director Richard Hall, of Chatteris firm Suncrop Produce Ltd, a salad supplier to major retailers that employs up to 170 people in peak seasons, said the firm has gained massive benefits from working with Fenland District Council's Fenland for Business.

The free service has supported him to develop a long-term plan to combat business-threatening energy price hikes, in diversifying the use of his firm's Chatteris premises and to put into action ambitions to work with harder-to-reach employees, such as those with disabilities.

Richard said: "I had no idea this service was out there, within the public sector – and it's free!

"For me it has opened the door massively. We now have serious potential of getting grants from the Government for very legitimate reasons.

"It has enabled us as a business to deal with adversity in the marketplace, turn a corner on energy costs and to get help where it was needed. I've recommended Fenland for Business to so many other businesses already."

Fenland for Business is a free service providing help and information to businesses across Fenland to help them to access Government funding, establish beneficial networks and thrive in the district.

Cllr Ian Benney, Fenland District Council portfolio holder for economic growth, said: "The partnership between Suncrop and Fenland for Business is a perfect demonstration of the power and importance of the service our economic growth team offers.

"It's all about showing the extensive benefits of establishing and growing a business in Fenland.

"Thriving businesses in the district bring endless benefits to our local communities in terms of employment and career opportunities, investment in the area and overall prosperity.

"The work we've already done alongside Suncrop is a perfect example of how we can signpost and support businesses to become stronger and more sustainable and we look forward to continuing to work with them and many others to keep building on these achievements."

How Fenland for Business has supported SunCrop

Access to green energy and Government grants

As a high energy user, Suncrop faced huge challenges when energy prices began to spiral.

It researched solar energy, but the costs were prohibitive for the business at that time. Fenland for Business connected him with a Cambridgeshire based, solar co-operative called Big Solar with a

business model that made the prospect viable and plans are now in place for installation of panels this summer.

SunCrop is also being supported through the application process to access Government grants to support the installation of further green energy systems.

Staff recruitment

With staff recruitment challenges, Richard was keen to offer opportunities to people who struggle to get into employment, including people with disabilities.

Fenland for Business linked him with community interest company Switch Now, which provides supported training and work experience for young adults with learning difficulties / disabilities, to develop employability skills.

It's a partnership he now cherishes and which has allowed him to bring people into the firm who have proven huge assets.

On the advice of Fenland for Business, Suncrop is now recognised as a Disability Confident employer and has signed the Armed Forces Covenant to show its commitment to ex-military personnel.

Thanks to Fenland for Business, Suncrop has also forged strong links with the Department for Work and Pensions and local Jobcentres, which aids with finding potential employees and clearing barriers to them gaining employment, such as highlighting schemes to help with initial transport and training costs.

Valuable introductions

Fenland for Business also introduced Richard to business-support partner organisation Growth Works, which is also proving a powerful support to Suncrop with grant identification and application, Internships and apprentice schemes.

In addition, Fenland for Business has worked with Suncrop to promote Fenland & Cambridgeshire as a place for businesses to consider. Working with Growth Works Inward Investment, Fenland for Business has introduced Suncrop to a South American produce-linked firm that is now interested in creating a base in Chatteris in part of Suncrop's premises.

The relationship between Fenland for Business and Suncrop continues as the company explores the introduction of robotics. Suncrop has worked with innovation agency Innovate UK and agricultural and environmental consultancy ADAS on the development of new tomato packing technology.

Fenland for Business has introduced Suncrop to the Cambridgeshire-based Smart Manufacturing Alliance. The alliance opens new opportunities for manufacturers to unlock innovation and research and development projects, power new collaborations, and strengthen its competitive edge.

- Find out more about Fenland for Business at: www.fenlandforbusiness.co.uk

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Photos:

Richard Hall, operations director, Suncrop