

EIP



West of England Local Enterprise Partnership: how low carbon and cleantech industries can boost growth

At a Low Carbon South West event in Bath, EIP were informed on the future plans of the Low Carbon Industries group within the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership.

In the United Kingdom “Local Enterprise Partnerships” (LEPs) were formed in 2011 by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. They were designed to replace some of the functions carried out by the disbanded Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), and are partnerships between local authorities and business. They decide what the priorities should be for investment in roads, buildings and facilities in the area.

The West of England LEP covers the local authorities of Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire. The West of England LEP aims to increase investment in the area and lay the foundations for a long-term sustainable economy. The West of England LEP is currently chaired by Colin Skellett OBE, a chemical engineer who is also executive chairman of Wessex Water. It is hoped that the large range of collective business experience held by the Board of the LEP will address some of the previous criticisms of the RDAs.

In the West, innovation and sustainable growth are key to the vision of the LEP. Environmental technologies and marine renewables are identified as a key sector for growth along with advanced engineering, aerospace and defence and micro-electronics and silicon design. EIP’s technical competences are well placed to serve these key sectors as well as helping innovative start-ups.

In the Low Carbon Southwest event Caroline Macdonald, who chairs the Low Carbon Industries group, explained how the low carbon and cleantech industries were seen as an engine of growth for the region. There were the dual aims of growing existing “green” businesses and “greening” presently “non-green” industries. Avonmouth in Bristol, at the moment a large brownfield site, presents particular challenges and opportunities for the group.

The LEPs have not been in existence long but already there has been much progress, if only to connect previously disparate private and public groups and to focus on specific achievable goals for the region. It is to be applauded that many of those assisting the LEP are giving their time for free to hopefully provide a more sustainable and happy future for upcoming generations in the West. We will be watching to see how these plans are implemented in the coming years.