

Initial Observations – Winchester as an R&D Location and the Bushfield Camp Site

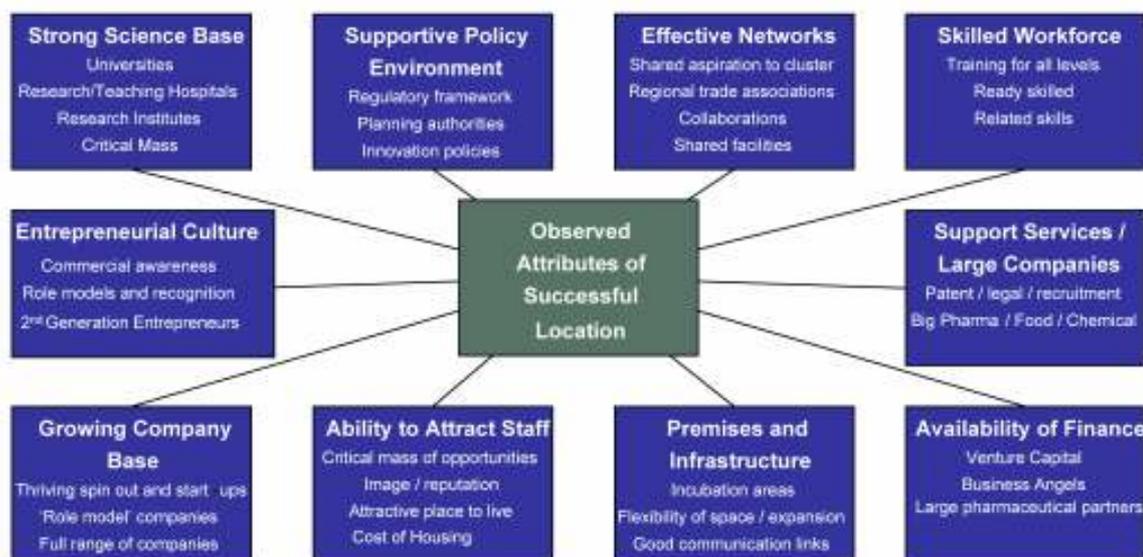
Introduction

This note sets out my views and observations on the viability of Winchester as a potential R&D location and whether Bushfield Camp could become the focal point for this activity.

Context

It is perhaps worth noting some typical characteristics that are evident from observing other successful R&D locations around the world and in the UK. This might be a useful reference point for the attractiveness and viability of providing accommodation for this sector in or around Winchester:

- A strong tendency to cluster. Perhaps more than any other sector, R&D companies rely on constant interaction with other entities from the private, academic and public sectors. The diagram below illustrates all the other factors that are important.
- Successful R&D clusters are typically centered around affluent towns or cities with excellent housing stock, schools and local amenities. For example, San Diego, Boston/Cambridge and San Francisco in USA, Munich, Berlin, Basle etc in Europe and Cambridge, Oxford and Edinburgh in UK.



Source: CB Richard Ellis Life Sciences Group

Winchester as an R&D Location

Winchester displays many of the characteristics of well established R&D clusters. The city sits along a main communication route (M3/A34) between two nearby hubs of substantial R&D activity - the Oxford/Abingdon area to the north and Southampton/Portsmouth to the south. In addition there are numerous other spots of scientific activity in between and to the east and west.

A very full range of sciences is covered throughout this area – for example:

Physics (RAL/Diamond,), Nuclear, (Aldermaston, Harwell, Culham), Energy (Fusion at Culham, Southampton University, Vestas R&D in Cowes), Health (HPA at Porton and

Harwell, MRC, Southampton University Medical School), Pharmaceutical (Lilly, Shire, Merck etc), Biotech, (well represented at Milton Park, SSP and elsewhere) Oceanographics, (NOC Southampton), Marine (Southampton Uni, Portsmouth Naval Dockyard, VT etc) IT (Langstone Tech Park, IBM Hursley,), Defence (Qinetiq Farnborough, DSTL Porton, Lockheed Martin and many other contractors), Mapping (OS), Animal/Agriculture (IAH Compton, Sparsholt), Space (Chilbolton, Harwell), Media (Sky at SSP, Winchester College of Art). Automotive (Ford Southampton, MIRA Thatcham etc).

All this activity generates ideas and Intellectual Property that in turn leads to start up and spin-out companies being created. These companies usually stay close to their mother organisations in the early years but then move to grow-on space when they reach greater security/maturity. They become more footloose throughout this process.

The city and its surrounding villages score well on many of the lifestyle factors that given significant weight when locations are selected by R&D businesses. The leaders and decision makers within these businesses that have already chosen the location as a place to live might also choose it as a place to work if there was a viable focal point and the right accommodation available.

In many respects Winchester is quite similar to Cambridge, a city which has managed to continue to preserve and enhance its historic centre whilst attracting a diverse range of high quality employers in a range of parks around it.

Bushfield Camp

If a focal point can be found that could provide the range of accommodation the sector needs it would pull in demand from elsewhere in the region (and possibly from overseas). A medium sized science park (say of between 400,000 and 800,000 sq ft) could perhaps be fully occupied within 10-15 years judging from the evidence of other existing parks of this size.

To have any chance of success it is self-evident that the city must provide a site or sites where these companies can be accommodated. To be credible in the eyes of prospective occupiers the site will need to be more than just an allocation in the LDF. It will need to be masterplanned, have infrastructure and utilities and a robust delivery vehicle.

To justify Winchester as their locational choice occupiers must be convinced that if they want a building delivered within a normal business planning timescale (circa 2 years or less) it will be delivered, otherwise they will simply choose one of the many thousands of other viable sites around the UK/Europe. They will also want to see expansion/contraction options in the future so the city needs to accommodate the full spectrum of the sector from large multinationals to small start-ups.

A Bushfield masterplan could perhaps show a home for one or two "anchor" occupiers - a large public sector lab or private sector company, a university faculty or possibly a multinational from outside the knowledge sector. There would then need to be space for SME's and companies growing out of incubation. The start-ups would need easy-in/easy-out space with more direct business support like an incubator building. There would need to be some modest support amenities such as cafe, sandwich shop etc but I can see there being a useful link with the new park and ride bus service that would allow employees to use the city centre amenities without resorting to driving. Easy pedestrian access to the Sainsbury at Badger Farm could also mitigate the need for extensive on-site facilities.

The companies in this sector typically have strong CSR policies and a desire to lead and be seen to lead environmental initiatives. They will be well suited to the challenges that the Bushfield site will have to design buildings that fit comfortably into the existing landscape. The site could without doubt become an exemplar for ground breaking environmental design providing it is balanced with the need for it to be commercially viable. The architectural practices that specialise in this sector would likely be extremely keen to show what can be achieved here. The large proportion of the site that is to be set aside for open parkland will also be a major attraction for the companies in this sector.

Targets for Demand

There are sectors of the R&D community that Winchester could make a viable play for. It is clear for example that a number of public sector science bodies are intending to renew their estates after years of underinvestment. Winchester is located in reasonable proximity to a number of these entities. The city could also exploit its position along the axis between the established R&D clusters in Southampton and Oxford and the numerous R&D sites along it. At the other end of the spectrum a reasonable level of demand could be expected from the commercialisation of IP created locally (such as in the multimedia, IT, marketing and creative industries). It is well known that start-up companies have a strong preference to locate as close as possible to their mother organisation so Winchester could expect to capture anything grown locally if it can provide these entities with a suitable location.

Benefits of R&D Employment

The desire for the Council leadership to attract more private sector employers to the city is understandable - it will help reduce out-commuting and diversify the employment base. Knowledge based employment has the additional benefits of paying above average salaries, attracting and creating entrepreneurs and acting as a catalyst for the creation of more general employment. Its tendency to cluster and collaborate is also attractive.

Conclusion

From this high level perspective it is clear that Winchester has the attributes to become a viable choice as a location for the R&D sector and that Bushfield Camp, if suitably masterplanned and with a robust delivery model could be the focal point.