

UKSPA

2026-2029

Advancing the development
of science parks and
innovation clusters.



Introduction

For more than four decades, the UKSPA community - a collective of pioneering leaders, partners, innovators and institutions across locations and business affiliates - has helped shape the UK's knowledge and innovation economy.



Through collaboration, ambition and long-term commitment, our members have established science parks and places of innovation as essential drivers of business growth, knowledge exchange, inward investment, research commercialisation and wider societal benefit.



Over this period, the role of science parks has evolved significantly. Traditional measures of success remain important but no longer capture the full extent of their contribution. Today, UKSPA's members - including Science, Technology and Research Parks, Incubators and Accelerators, Knowledge Quarters and Innovation Districts - are defined less by physical infrastructure than by their ability to cultivate dynamic innovation ecosystems. By bringing together businesses, universities, investors, entrepreneurs and public institutions, these places accelerate the translation of ideas into economic and societal value.

Alongside this evolution, the UK's innovation landscape has changed. Mission-led growth, place-based innovation and cluster development have become central to industrial strategy, while governments, investors and businesses increasingly expect innovation ecosystems to deliver measurable economic, social and environmental impact. Diverse governance models have also emerged - from university and civic-led ecosystems to commercially driven developments - but the strongest innovation clusters are increasingly characterised by partnerships between universities, industry, investors, government and civil society, recognising that long-term success depends on shared leadership, aligned incentives and collective commitment.

These changes present an opportunity to define the next era of leadership and impact for the sector.

UKSPA's strategy is informed by member consultation and a clear understanding that expectations have evolved. Members continue to value networking, collaboration and shared learning, and increasingly look to UKSPA to be an evidence-led, outward-facing organisation that champions the sector nationally.

Although science parks and innovation clusters are now a core component of the UK's innovation and economic infrastructure, their contribution is not yet consistently understood, evidenced or reflected in policy, investment and funding decisions.

This strategy responds directly to that challenge. It positions UKSPA to raise the sector's national profile, strengthen relationships with governments across the UK, engage earlier in policy development and provide authoritative thought leadership underpinned by robust evidence. It also reinforces UKSPA's role in elevating the integrity and reputation of the sector through clear membership standards, data and a stronger definition of the sector.



Internally, the strategy marks a shift from an organisation centred primarily on events and research towards one with stronger data and digital capability, deeper sector intelligence, enhanced skills development and clearer leadership pathways. It also reflects UKSPA's role in helping members navigate emerging challenges and opportunities.

Ultimately, this strategy reaffirms UKSPA as the trusted national voice and convenor for science parks and innovation clusters.

Success will be measured not by activity alone, but by stronger outcomes for members, greater policy influence, enhanced sector credibility and UKSPA's recognised role as a system-critical partner in the UK's innovation economy.

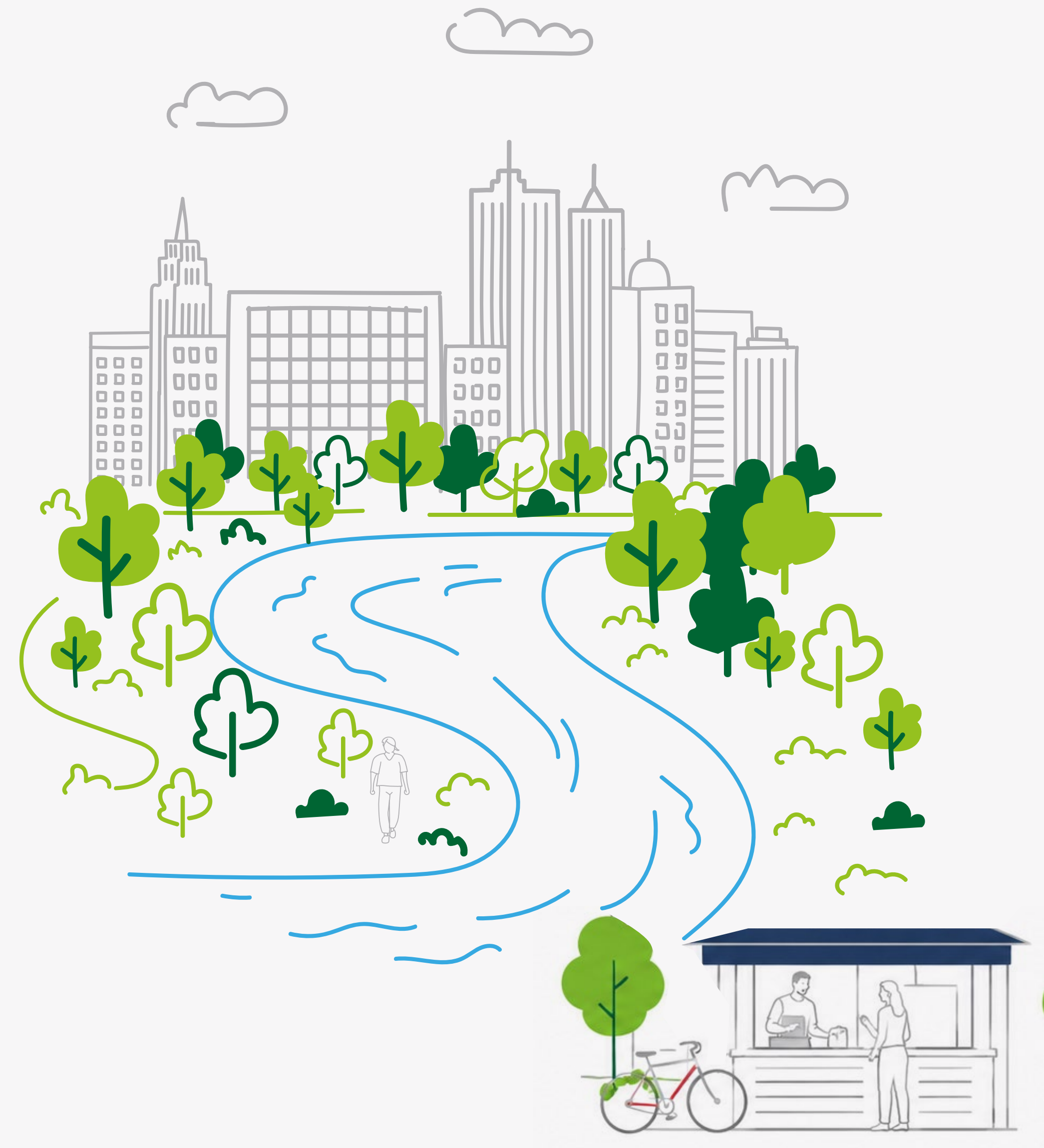


Science parks and innovation clusters
are not peripheral assets; they are a
core part of the UK's national, social and
economic infrastructure.



Strategic context

The environment UKSPA's
strategy must address



UKSPA's strategy launches at a pivotal moment for the sector. Members operate in an environment that is more complex, competitive and fast-changing than at any point in the sector's recent history.

Economic uncertainty, rapid technological change, evolving public policy and the transition to a more sustainable economy are reshaping the conditions in which science parks and innovation clusters support innovation-led growth.

Expectations are also increasing. Policymakers are seeking stronger delivery of national and regional growth priorities. Investors require clearer evidence of impact.

Universities face greater pressure to commercialise research, while

businesses need faster access to talent, capital, infrastructure and collaborative networks.

Success is therefore no longer determined solely by the quality of physical assets.

It increasingly depends on the strength of innovation ecosystems, access to skills, investment and infrastructure, effective cross-sector partnerships, and the ability to respond to technological, economic and environmental change.

These external forces create significant opportunities for the sector, and reinforce the need for stronger evidence, greater visibility and more effective representation if science parks and innovation clusters are to secure their full role within future policy, funding and investment decisions.

The following themes summarise the principal external drivers shaping the sector and their implications for UKSPA and its members.

Political

Cluster development, place-based innovation and mission-led growth have moved from peripheral concepts to central pillars of economic and industrial policy.

Despite this, engagement between government and the sector remains fragmented. Science parks are affected by policy across innovation, higher education, skills, infrastructure, planning and regional growth, yet there are few mechanisms through which collective

sector insight consistently informs decision-making.

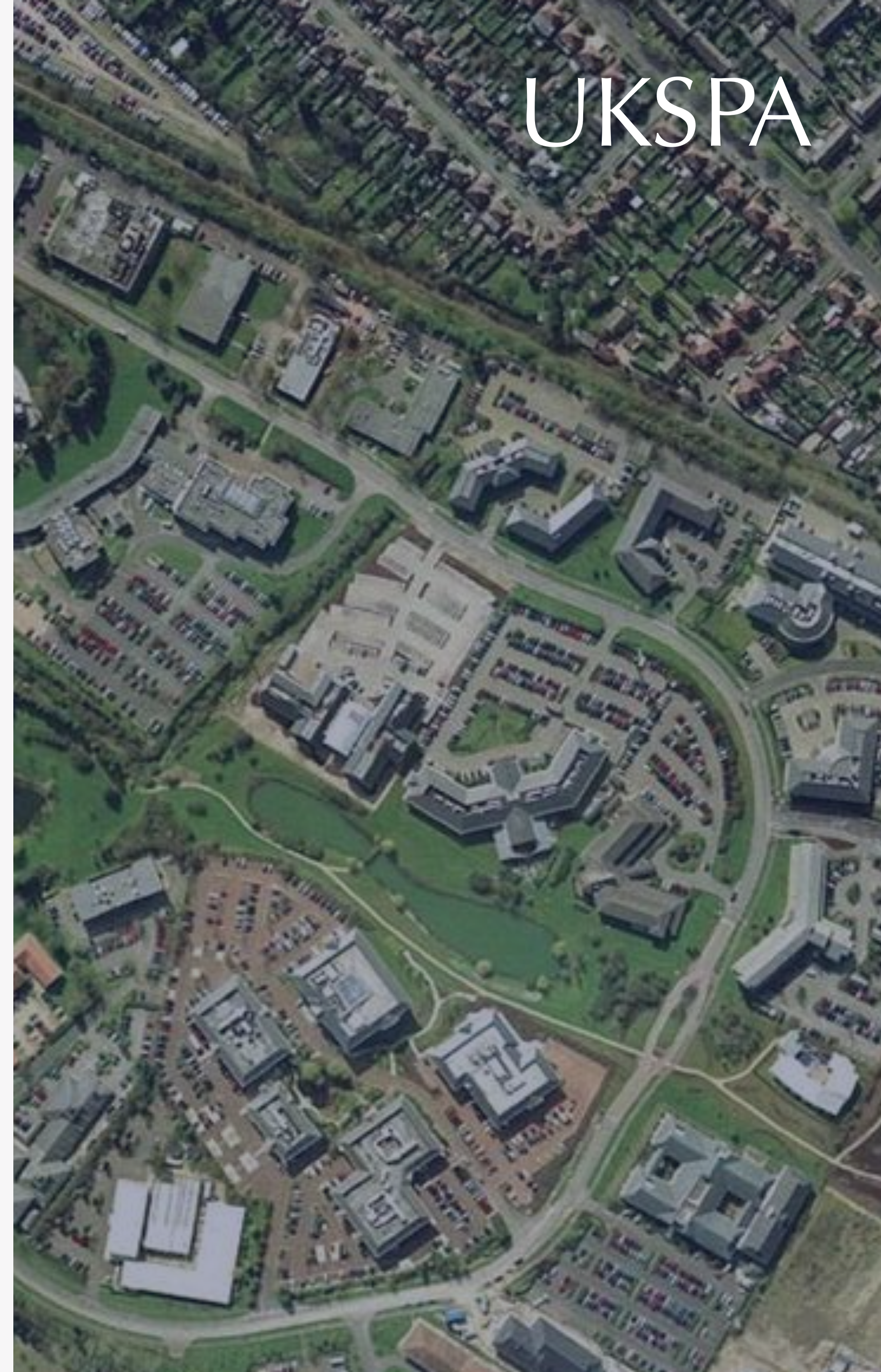
Strengthening UKSPA's policy influence creates an opportunity not only to respond to change, but to help shape it.



Economic

Inflation, infrastructure constraints, energy costs, skills shortages and international competition continue to challenge investment, development and business growth.

At the same time, expectations for demonstrating economic impact have increased. The ability to evidence outcomes, attract investment and support business scaling places greater importance on robust data, sector intelligence and evidence-based decision-making.



Social

UKSPA's collaborative community remains one of the sector's greatest strengths. Alongside supporting economic growth, science parks are increasingly expected to contribute to social mobility, inclusion and regional opportunity, reflecting the priorities highlighted in UKSPA's response to the Milburn Review.

As anchor institutions, science parks can strengthen pathways into innovation careers through partnerships with education providers, universities and employers, while supporting apprenticeships, mentoring

and professional development. Growing ecosystem complexity also requires stronger leadership capability and clearer professional pathways across the sector itself.

UKSPA can support members through shared best practice, capability development and stronger evidence of the sector's contribution to inclusive growth and skills development.

Technological

Rapid advances in artificial intelligence, automation, digital infrastructure and emerging technologies are transforming how businesses innovate and compete.

Members must continually adapt their organisations, services and infrastructure while understanding the implications of technological change for the businesses they support.

This creates growing demand for new skills, leadership capability and continuous professional development.

UKSPA strengthens sector resilience through knowledge exchange, leadership development and practical insight that helps members anticipate and respond to technological change.



Legal and Regulatory

Science parks and places of innovation operate within an increasingly complex regulatory environment spanning planning, energy, research, skills, funding and economic development.

As policy evolves more rapidly, members require clearer interpretation of regulatory change and stronger collective engagement with policymakers.

UKSPA can help translate regulatory developments into practical insight, strengthen collective intelligence and ensure the sector's experience informs future policy.



Environmental

Environmental sustainability has become a core business consideration.

Energy availability, grid capacity, planning requirements, carbon reduction targets and climate resilience increasingly shape investment decisions, development viability and occupier expectations.

At the same time, locations are expected to support the development and commercialisation of low-carbon technologies and sustainable business models, positioning the sector at the intersection of economic growth and the transition to net zero.

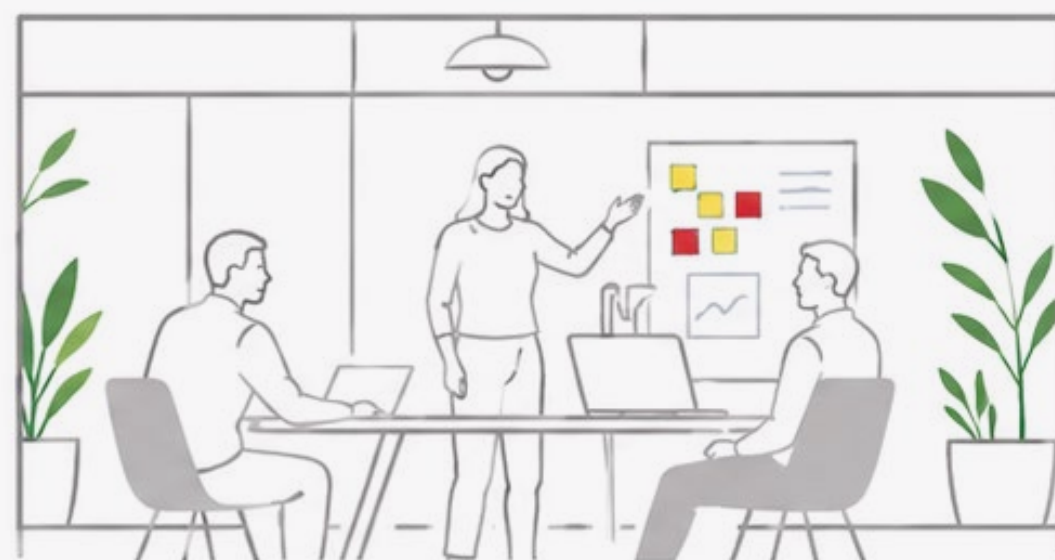
UKSPA can support members through practical guidance, shared learning and sector leadership, helping science parks demonstrate their contribution to a more sustainable, innovation-led economy.



Strategic Implications

Taken together, these trends point to a clear conclusion.

Science parks and innovation clusters are becoming more important to the UK's economic future, while the environment in which they operate is becoming more complex, more demanding and more interconnected.



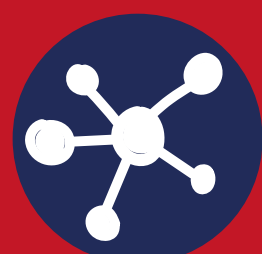
The sector therefore requires stronger evidence, greater visibility, more effective representation and deeper collaboration than ever before.

This is the context in which UKSPA's strategy has been developed, and the challenge it is designed to address.

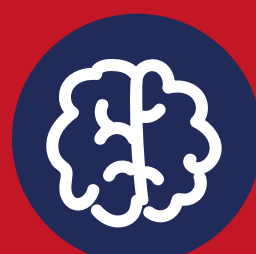
A new approach:
Taken together,
the external context
creates a clear case
for change.



UKSPA has strong foundations:



A national network of science parks, innovation districts, CMOs, knowledge quarters and innovation clusters.



Deep practitioner expertise and peer networks embedded in place-based innovation eco systems.



Access to member- generated insight, operational experience and sector intelligence.



Relationships with government, agencies, universities, investors and regional authorities.



An emerging data infrastructure and shared commitment to sector benchmarking.



Strong trust and legitimacy as a convening and representative body.

UKSPA will continue to fulfil its role as the respected representative body, and as the national body for science parks and innovation clusters: a source for standards, data, insight, policy influence and practical capability-building.

This means becoming the UK's recognised data and insight body for the sector; extending government partnerships; expanding value across tenants, incubators, universities, educators and future talent;

developing professional pathways and accreditation; and using digital tools to scale engagement and insight, without losing the peer-led ethos that members value.

Our Purpose

To advance the development of science parks and innovation clusters for the benefit of the UK economy and communities.

Our Guiding Principles

Influence: We are trusted and use insight to shape policy and investment and position science parks and clusters as essential innovation infrastructure.

Evidence: We capture and share evidence, standards and analysis that demonstrate impact and identify opportunities to unlock greater economic and social value.

Capability Building: We build capability by sharing best practice, learning and skills development, strengthening science parks and innovation clusters to better support businesses, innovation and place-based growth.

System Leadership: We lead by convening across the system, bringing together government, industry, universities and investors to align action around shared outcomes.

Partnership: We work in partnership, bringing people and organisations together because collaboration is central to how we create impact.

Our Vision

A UK where science parks and innovation clusters create stronger economies, world-leading innovation and flourishing communities.

UKSPA OUR STORY 2026-2029

Our Ambition

To ensure science parks and innovation clusters are valued assets, integral to the UK's national, economic infrastructure and a cornerstone of innovation-led growth.

Our ambition moves beyond recognition and legitimacy to describe a future in which science parks and innovation clusters are a recognised part of how the UK delivers growth, innovation, civic ambition and prosperity.

Our Strategic Priorities and Objectives

Priorities shaped by our members

Five strategic priorities emerged as key areas of focus for UKSPA over the next three years.

Each priority is supported by strategic objectives, the actions the organisation will take, the programmes and partnerships to deliver them, and how success will be measured.

Over the next three years, UKSPA will strengthen its role as the independent, unified voice, authoritative reference point and delivery partner for science parks and areas of innovation across the UK.

UKSPA will focus on both **strategic impact** and **observable indicators** when evaluating progress and success, with a focus on **outcomes, influence and system change**.

Priority One: Define and Position Science Parks and Innovation Clusters

We will:

- Define the sector's identity, purpose and value through shared definitions, standards, governance models and a clear narrative on science parks and places of innovation.
- Provide a common intelligence base and language for assessing park and cluster delivery, in support of the industrial strategy, with government, investors, academia and civic partners.
- Establish a national standard and data infrastructure to enable consistent understanding, benchmarking and development of the UK innovation ecosystem, prioritising regional growth and international competitiveness.

Strategic Objectives

1. Define and embed a clear sector identity and national standard, through positive partner collaborations and member engagement.
2. Continue to position UKSPA as the authoritative source of science park and innovation cluster system intelligence.
3. Ensure science parks and innovation clusters are recognised and valued for committing to continuing cluster development, collective national purpose, and sector standards.

Success measures

- Published classification covering all current and future members.
- Adoption and reference by national agencies and departments.
- Annual sector narrative / positioning report.
- External citations across policy, academic, or industry outputs.
- Member participation in the compilation of the sector standard and data intelligence platform.

Priority Two: Strengthen National Advocacy for Science Parks and Innovation Clusters

We will:

- Build a visible, evidence-led advocacy platform that shapes policy, investment and understanding of the UK's science parks and innovation clusters.
- Represent members through a clear national narrative, robust evidence and proactive engagement with government, agencies and policymakers.
- Position science parks and innovation clusters as system-critical infrastructure that delivers innovation, investment, productivity and regional growth.

Strategic Objectives

1. Establish a recognised national policy framework for science parks and innovation clusters, aligned to UK growth, innovation and industrial priorities.
2. Build a robust evidence base and practical advocacy tools that demonstrate sector impact and support member engagement with local, regional and national decision-makers.
3. Deliver focused, evidence-led engagement with government, agencies, Parliament and strategic partners to influence high-impact policy, funding and delivery opportunities.

Success measures

- UKSPA evidence and recommendations increasingly inform policy, funding and investment decisions.
- Science parks and innovation clusters are recognised in national and regional innovation, growth and industrial strategies.
- Members report greater confidence in policy engagement and influence.

Priority Three: Build Skills, Capability, Leadership and Sector Excellence

We will:

- Strengthen UKSPA's role as the sector's community of practice, giving members access to practical learning, comparative insight, peer support and skills development informed by external policy, technological, economic and market change.
- Capture and translate expertise from across the network into practical tools, guidance and insight that help individuals and organisations working in the sector stay current, build capability and respond confidently to emerging challenges and opportunities.

Strategic Objectives

1. Deliver phased capability-building programmes and strategic partnerships that provide practical learning, peer support and measurable value for members.
2. Capture and share practitioner expertise through benchmarks, playbooks, guidance and case studies, turning member knowledge into repeatable tools and sector intelligence.
3. Work with strategic skills partners to strengthen workforce development, leadership capability and talent pathways across the science park and innovation ecosystem.

Success measures

- Members report measurable improvements in organisational capability, leadership confidence and operational delivery.
- Members actively apply UKSPA guidance, benchmarks, playbooks and shared tools to improve practice, decision-making and policy engagement.
- Clearer skills, talent and professional development pathways are established, informed by external change and sector needs.

Priority Four: Connect Regional Impact to National Influence

We will:

- Strengthen regional engagement as a core part of UKSPA's understanding, representation and support of the science park and innovation cluster sector.
- Build stronger connections nationally and regionally, ensuring that regional intelligence informs national advocacy and national influence delivers value locally.
- Support members to strengthen their role and influence in local and regional innovation and investment.

Strategic Objectives

1. Maintain a consistent UK-wide network of regional groups for engagement, collaboration and intelligence sharing. Ensure regional perspectives and insight are captured and strengthen UKSPA advocacy on national priorities.
2. Develop a standard framework for data, insight and benchmarking across science parks and innovation clusters.
3. Support regional data-sharing partnerships with public, academic and industry stakeholders. Use regional evidence to strengthen UKSPA's national advocacy and policy influence, collaborating with the devolved governments, mayoral combined authorities, local civic institutions, universities, NHS partners and businesses.

Success measures

- UKSPA maintains a strong, well-governed UK-wide network of regional groups that enables engagement, collaboration, peer learning and intelligence sharing.
- A trusted, standardised data and benchmarking framework provides consistent evidence across UK science parks and innovation clusters.
- Members establish stronger data-sharing partnerships with key regional stakeholders.
- Regional insight routinely informs UKSPA's evidence, advocacy and policy influence, connecting regional priorities with national decision-making.

Priority Five: Ensure UKSPA's Organisational Sustainability

UKSPA will ensure its long-term sustainability so it can continue to serve members and support stakeholders effectively, while increasing its impact across the UK's innovation system.

This will be achieved by maintaining a strong membership foundation alongside the development of a more resilient and adaptable operating model that enables continued investment in member value and delivery of our strategic priorities.

Overall, UKSPA will operate with a more resilient and diversified model, underpinned by income growth and operational efficiency.

We will:

- Explore opportunities to diversify our income base and develop scalable products and services that enhance value for members and contribute to the wider innovation ecosystem.
- Pursue growth and efficiency in a way that strengthens UKSPA's ability to deliver for members, expand its reach, and increase its long-term impact across the sector, while preserving the collaborative ethos and integrity of our community.

Success measures

- Growth in UKSPA location and affiliate membership, across science parks, innovation clusters, CMOs and wider innovation system partners.
- Member retention supported by higher engagement and value.
- Increased income diversification beyond core membership subscriptions.
- Development and uptake of scalable services for members and wider innovation system partners.
- Improved operational efficiency enabling greater reinvestment into member-facing services and strategic priorities.

Strategic Objectives

- 1.** Expand UKSPA's membership across the UK innovation system, engaging science parks, Cluster Management Organisations (CMOs), Knowledge Quarters, Innovation Districts and ecosystem partners.
- 2.** Increase member retention by delivering high-value, relevant services.
- 3.** Diversify income through scalable products and services for members and the wider innovation system.
- 4.** Strengthen organisational capability through commercial planning, insight-led decision-making and efficient resource allocation.
- 5.** Improve operational efficiency through digital enablement and streamlined delivery, increasing investment in member services and strategic priorities.



THEORY OF CHANGE 2026-2029

When science parks and innovation clusters are better defined, better connected, better evidenced and better supported, they deliver greater economic, social and innovation impact for the UK.

UKSPA

Stronger Science Parks & Innovation Clusters

Stronger Regions

Stronger UK

1. FOUNDATIONS What UKSPA draws on



A national network of science parks, innovation districts, CMOs, knowledge quarters and innovation clusters.



Deep practitioner expertise and peer networks embedded in place-based innovation eco systems.



Access to member-generated insight, operational experience and sector intelligence.



Relationships with government, agencies, universities, investors and regional authorities.



An emerging data infrastructure and shared commitment to sector benchmarking.



Strong trust and legitimacy as a convening and representative body.

2. CORE FUNCTIONS What UKSPA will do



Define & Standardise
Establish clear definitions, classifications, standards and benchmarking frameworks.



Build & Mobilise Evidence
Develop a robust, nationally recognised evidence base that demonstrates impact.



Strengthen Advocacy
Use evidence and member insight to shape policy, investment and innovation strategy.



Enable Regional Intelligence
Capture local intelligence, support collaboration and connect regional insight to national influence.



Build Capability & Leadership
Support members through peer learning, leadership development and skills pathways.



Strengthen Organisational Sustainability
Evolve our operating model to ensure long-term resilience and growth.

3. OUTPUTS What UKSPA delivers

A recognised national framework defining science parks and innovation clusters.

A coordinated programme of policy engagement and advocacy.

Expanded membership representing the full innovation ecosystem.

A shared sector data, insight and benchmarking platform.

Regional engagement networks operating across the UK.

Strategic partnerships with government, agencies, universities and regional institutions.

Regular national and regional evidence reports and policy briefings.

Leadership, professional development and peer learning programmes.

Practical tools, services and resources that support member organisations.

4. OUTCOMES How members and the sector benefit

Clearer sector identity

Science parks and innovation clusters are consistently recognised as a distinct and strategic part of the UK innovation system.

Stronger organisational capability

Members have strengthened capability, access to evidence, tools and good practice, and clearer professional pathways.

Stronger regional innovation systems

Members are further embedded in place-based innovation partnerships and regional growth strategies.

Greater collaboration and knowledge exchange

Members collaborate even more effectively through national and regional networks, sharing insight, data and best practice.

Greater sector recognition and influence

The sector is more strongly recognised in policy and investment contexts, with UKSPA acting as its trusted convenor and representative voice.

5. LONG-TERM IMPACT The lasting difference

Science parks and innovation clusters are recognised as core national economic infrastructure.

Policy and investment decisions are informed by robust sector evidence.

The UK innovation system is more connected, data-driven and place-based.

Regional innovation ecosystems are better aligned with national priorities.

The sector demonstrates measurable contributions to productivity, innovation, skills, investment and growth.

UKSPA is recognised as the authoritative national voice for science parks and innovation clusters, combining evidence, advocacy, capability and convening.

UKSPA

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UKSPA Strategy 2026 - 2029

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