

PERMISSION HAS been granted to deliver the Advanced Technology Horticultural Zone – the first phase of an Innovation Campus at NIAB EMR in East Malling.

Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council has given the planning go-ahead for the new science buildings which includes the multi-million-pound development of four state-of-the-art glasshouses, an energy centre and other related facilities and infrastructure.

The greenhouses will incorporate high-tech imaging, robotics, precision irrigation rigs, research-standard LED lighting and CO2 systems to help scientists make advances in horticultural agronomy.

Welcoming the decision, Professor Mario Caccamo, managing director of NIAB EMR, said: "This is a major step forward in us delivering on our promise to continue world-class research, innovation and advances for the UK's horticultural industry from here in Kent.

"There's been a centre of plant research excellence at East Malling for more than a century and the opportunity to develop a modern scientific infrastructure will ensure our scientists will have the world-class facilities to retain and further strengthen our national and international capabilities."

Expected to generate in excess of £2.3m of additional R&D spend in the region, the campus will support scientific advancements and development of new technology-based systems for the horticulture industry. It will also create growth and new jobs throughout the industry and safeguard existing ones at the site.

Oliver Doubleday, chairman of East Malling Trust, added: "The existing research campus facilities and infrastructure are in need of upgrading to ensure their future scientific and commercial relevance. We have taken the decision to accelerate the investment in Phase 1 to ensure Kent remains at the cutting edge of research and innovation. This will help our scientific community secure public and private sector funding by having access to excellent facilities.

"Once complete the campus will replace buildings that are no longer suitable and will quadruple the current laboratory and office space."

The greenhouses will improve the range of the research undertaken by the scientists at NIAB EMR as they will be able to facilitate the implementation of new systems and science-based

Green light for green fingers research investment

digital tools that aren't possible in the existing buildings and enabling more accurate research than under field trial conditions.

The glasshouses will be used by the scientists at NIAB EMR to increase sustainable yields through novel production systems, new varieties, improve plant health and resistance to disease.

Dover District Council's Cabinet has agreed for final consultation on the ambitious new Tourism and Visitor Economy Strategy. Following extensive industry consultation since October, the

strategy becomes an exciting cornerstone to the district's regeneration and investment ambitions, putting White Cliffs Country on the map both nationally and internationally as 'a vibrant world class destination valued for its outstanding heritage, landscape and pursuits, as well as its ease of access, warmth of welcome and wealth of opportunity'. In line with central government's 'UK Industrial Strategy', district plans also feature five key objectives around ideas, people, place, business environment and infrastructure.

Latest figures show that the visitor economy in White Cliffs Country is worth £282m annually and supports 5,796 jobs. The district welcomes over 4.5 million visitor per year. Cllr MJ Holloway, DDC Cabinet Member for Tourism, said: "This is a fantastic opportunity to provide a framework to support regeneration and prosperity through the visitor economy and we are delighted to be able to progress our dynamic new strategy. We look forward to hearing people's comments, which will all be taken carefully into consideration."

Celebrating success across Kent

A CELEBRATION of success in providing housing and other services to communities across Kent saw housing and voluntary sector professionals from across the county gather at the Maidstone Hilton on Wednesday (30 Oct).

Kent Housing Group's (KHG) Excellence Awards 2019 recognised the very best projects, partnerships and people, but also acted as a celebration event that recognised the contribution made by the many professionals and residents who support neighbourhoods in Kent and Medway.

In the ten years since the awards were introduced, they have become recognised as an important way of sharing good practice as well as rewarding individual achievements not just in housing but in partnerships and in health and social care.

Wednesday's well-supported event ended with a surprise presentation to two people who are both retiring after many years service both to their individual organisations and to KHG, which brings together social housing organisations and other interested bodies from across the county.

KHG Chair Jo Ellis presented Special Recognition Awards to Deborah White, who retired the following day from her role as Housing Director with West Kent Housing Association, and Eileen Martin, Director of Operations at Optivo for the past 25 years.

One of the most popular

winners of the night was Alexander Roarke, who set up the Margate Kitchen in April this year with his wife Ann Newstead.

The venture, which allows diners to pay what they can afford for their meal, won the Hero/Neighbour of the Year Award after being nominated by Town and Country Housing.

The nomination explained that Alexander and his team believe sharing food "builds connections, breaks down barriers and feeds more than just bellies".

Another well-received winner was the West Kent-based Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Service (DAVSS), which won the Excellence in Delivery Services for Vulnerable People Award.

Guests were told that in 2018/19, as well as winning a Queen's Award, the charity dealt with 751 referrals, including 40 men, supported 1007 children, helped 131 clients with court cases and obtained 171 protective orders for victims.

The Excellent Partnership Award went to Maidstone Borough Council's multi-agency partnership that brings together the council, Porchlight, Golding Homes and Medway Housing Society, while the Excellent Community Project Award went to The House Project at Edenbridge, nominated by West Kent.

Winner of the Excellence in Development Award, presented by Nick Fenton of the Kent Developers' Group, was mhs homes' Corporation Street scheme.

Nick also presented the Excellence in the Private Sector Award to the HomeFinder scheme and Lenworth House development, both Maidstone Borough Council projects

The Excellent Housing Professional Award went to Victoria Ackrill from Ashford Borough Council, while Jamie Green of Medway Council was named Excellent Young Professional and the Team of the Year Award went to the group behind Thanet's RISE (Rough Sleeper Intervention Support and Empowerment) project.

Moat Homes picked up the Innovation in Digital Transformation Award for its financial calculator and Nicole Foad-Bailey, of Peabody South East, was named Excellent Health or Social Care Professional for her work with the integrated discharge team at Ashford's William Harvey Hospital.

The event organiser, KHG Partnership Manager Rebecca Smith, described the ceremony as "a celebration of all the good things that have been done over the year in support of the people who live or work in our local communities".

Unlike most award ceremonies, the event was free to attend, thanks to generous sponsorship from Kent Developers Group, Capsticks Solicitors LLP, DHA Planning, Engie Regeneration Ltd, Paramount Independent Property Services, Rentplus UK, Optivo and West Kent Housing Association.