



It is hoped that the Pool Innovation Centre will play a key part in driving up the area's business aspirations

Centre provides an inspiring focus for our entrepreneurs

The Pool Innovation Centre is a potent symbol of the regeneration work that has been going on in the Camborne, Pool, Redruth area for some time. Business editor **Liz Parks** met with its director and tenants to hear more about the vision for this £11.9 million scheme



Several hundred years ago, West Cornwall was at the forefront of the UK's innovation and wealth creation thanks to the mining industry and associated technology.

Those days are long gone and, with the departure of its erstwhile prosperity, the area around Camborne, Pool and Redruth sank into a decline that is only now being reversed.

Cornwall College and Pool Business and Enterprise College have been seeking to raise the aspirations of the area's youngsters, while the urban regeneration company, CPR Regeneration, has been driving forward major infrastructure upgrades to its road network as well as investment in ambitious schemes like the Heartlands project to turn around a former mining site.

Standing in a prominent position on the Trevenson Road, the Pool Innovation Centre is an important — and tangible — sign of the progress that has been made so far.

PIC is the first of three innovation centres planned for Cornwall. Planning work on the second, the Tremough Innovation Centre, which would focus on the creative sector, is under way with work on a third less advanced. This would focus on the medical sector and is earmarked for Trelliske.

Officially opened by HRH the Duke of Kent on July 26, PIC is already home to 10 ten-

ants across a range of sectors from graphic design through to accountancy and IT. These are: Hooper Graphics, SEMTO, SW Computers Ltd, Redfuse, Live Events, Sideways Guides, 3WhiteHats, PSG Cornwall, IBG Communications Ltd and West Accountancy Ltd.

As well as providing high quality office space, the centre also offers firms access to business support and high speed, affordable broadband.

A key feature of firms that are accepted as tenants is that they must be growth-focused.

The vision for the PIC is as an incubation centre that businesses pass through rather than being based there.

The idea is that with reception, maintenance services, the latest technology and the opportunity to access business support all provided at the site, businesses can focus solely on developing and growing.

When they have done this and are mature, they would move out of the centre to other premises in the area.

"They can come in and work on the business, with business support and one should have, in three or four years, a stronger, more sustainable business that can be set back outside. That's the regeneration effect," said PIC's interim director Bernard Curren.

With a strong emphasis on energy efficiency, the building uses 60 per cent less energy than a conventional office building because of its bio-

mass boiler, grey water harvesting system and "intelligent" controls to regulate temperature and light.

In addition to the ethical considerations behind this environmental focus, there is also a strong business case for its green status both in terms of energy savings and benefits to tenants.

"From a business perspective, it gives people the opportunity to trade from a really environmentally positive address. If you go for quite a lot of contracts there will be issues around your carbon footprint and the environmental statement of being based here gives businesses that advantage," added Mr Curren.

And it's not just a resource for the 60 or so businesses that will eventually be based there. A key goal is to attract non-resident businesses to use its meeting rooms and conference facilities so that it is a facility for the wider business community.

"It has been open for eight weeks and it has provided 27 events with 900 local businesses coming through the doors. It's not an exclusive business address. I want to use the word inclusive as much as we possibly can. We will try and work with everyone that we can," said Mr Curren.

The centre is managed by the University of Plymouth, drawing on best practice from the well-established and well-regarded Tamar Science Park, of which it is a founding partner.

The need for additional office and business incubation space in the area has been recognised for some time.

Mr Curren quotes a recent study which found that West

Cornwall has one third more home-based businesses than the national average.

"Some of these enterprises could, with the opportunity, become more than home based businesses. They could employ additional people and grow to the next level," he said.

"Our ambition would be to be a magnet that would attract businesses who want to grow from the outset. We have clear criteria that tenants have to meet — there are no manufacturing businesses and they have to have real business ambitions."

PIC has taken shape relatively quickly after securing backing from both Cornwall Council and the South West Regional Development Agency.

It has been funded by £9 million of European Regional Development Fund Convergence investment and just under £3 million from SWRDA.

As with many new developments, PIC was conceived in a radically different economic landscape to the one in which it is actually operating in.

Mr Curren said that the centre has had to review prices because of the drop in commercial land values. But he said that the tough economic conditions would create opportunities — as well as challenges — for businesses.

"We will have things that are being done in house that will be out-sourced and available to be done by business. There will also be individuals or groups from, for example, the council that have skill sets that would allow them to consider setting up an enterprise of their own. There are opportunities around what is undoubtedly a problem."