PROJECT UPDATE

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MORE THAN 3,000 small and medium-sized businesses in the Marches LEP region will have received advice or grant support via European Regional Development Funding since 2016, new figures have revealed.

The LEP area of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin was allocated £60m from the ERDF for the period between 2014 and 2020. Projects benefitting from this funding started delivering in 2016 and activity will continue through to June 2023.

The ERDF, part of the European Structural Investment Fund (ESIF), pays for a range of business support and grant programmes, large capital

£44 million funding to support business

build projects and environmental schemes.

Herefordshire Councillor Roger Phillips, Chairman of the Marches European Structural Investment Fund Committee, said: "From the outset, we wanted to encourage projects which would deliver sustainable SME growth and job creation. The ERDF in this region has seen significant success, right from the delivery of programmes which promote research and innovation through to those which support a shift towards a low carbon economy.

"To date, £44m has been awarded to projects delivering in the Marches and a further 21 applications were submitted in the latest call window that closed on September 30 2019, which will utilise the remaining £16m.

"Over the course of the ERDF investment, it is anticipated that more than 3,000 small and medium sized enterprises will receive advice or grant support, there will be annual savings of at least 5,000 tonnes of carbon and 50 hectares of land will

have improved biodiversity."

There is likely to be a further opportunity to bid for funds in February 2020, because the remaining funds from across the LEP areas will be wrapped up into national calls.

• Gary Spence, Marches ERDF Technical Assistant, is happy to advise on future bidding opportunities. He can be contacted by email, gary.spence@shropshire.gov.uk or phone, 01743 252976.

Expert help and grant support for Hitherbest

A TELFORD FABRICATION specialist has secured a number of new contracts, contributing to a 20 per cent increase in turnover, after receiving support from ERDF projects.

Hitherbest, which provides sheet metal/punching, folding and powder coating capabilities, benefitted from expert assistance from the Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP) and the Manufacturing Growth Programme (MGP), including a strategic review and identifying ways in which the firm could improve its energy usage.

This led to the introduction of specialist energy engineering consultancy Pro Enviro and a comprehensive project that has already generated nearly £15,000 of savings and a reduction in gas, electricity and powder usage.

"We've had a very strong twelve months that has seen us win a lot of work to produce parts for switchgear cabinets, industrial equipment and the heating and ventilation sector," explained Peter Grant, Managing Director at Hitherbest.

"Five new jobs have been created, taking our total workforce to 35 highly skilled staff. In line with this expansion, we were also using our machinery and plant more and recognised the need to work smarter with energy to have a positive impact on the environment and help to manage costs effectively."

He added: "Internally, we didn't have the right expertise to make it happen, so we decided to turn to support from BEEP and then the Manufacturing Growth Programme.

"It has proved to be a wise decision, as this approach gave us a framework and support for an in-depth analysis of the environmental opportunity that we knew we had, but simply didn't have the resource or knowledge to carry out whilst still trying to keep on top of day-to-day priorities."

We are happy to assist wi funding queries you miel

A further consultancy grant of £2,150 was accessed through MGP2 in June 2019 to ensure Hitherbest is investment-ready through the development of a robust business growth plan and accurate financial forecasts. Ultimately the project will enable the company to increase capability and capacity, generating new business sales.

We are happy to assist with any EU funding queries you might have so please do not hesitate to contact us on any matters relating to current or new programmes.

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RURAL BUSINESSES are being invited to apply for up to £750,000 in EU grant funding for projects which help grow the regional economy and create new jobs.

DEFRA's Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) Growth Programme provides grants for rural business development, food processing businesses and those involved in rural tourism infrastructure.

Grants, funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), start at a minimum of £20,000 and applicants can apply for up to 40 per cent of eligible costs. The maximum grant for business

development and tourism projects will be limited to £175,000, whilst the maximum grant for food processing projects will be limited to £750,000.

The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership is particularly encouraging applications from farming businesses that want to diversify into non-agricultural activities and environmental and land-based rural businesses wishing to expand. Expressions of interest for a grant must be registered by 16 February 2020. Gary Spence, Marches EU Technical Assistance Officer, said: "Grant funding can help pay for constructing or improving buildings or

CALL FOR RURAL PROJECTS



The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

Europe investing in rural areas

buying new machinery or equipment. However only companies employing fewer than 50 people can apply under the rural business and tourism themes, although any size of business can apply under the food processing theme, subject to meeting other criteria.

"Projects need to demonstrate evidence of a sound business case and good value for taxpayers' money by creating jobs off the back of the grant investment. We would advise organisations considering an expression of interest to read the guidance carefully before applying and discuss their ideas with their local Growth Hub officers."

Application is in two stages and organisations must first submit an Expressions of Interest (EOI) form. If successful at this stage, organisations will be invited to formally apply. EOI forms must be received by February 16 2020. Funding bids must be submitted by May 31.

• For more information and advice on how to apply, visit https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rdpegrowth-programme or contact the Marches Growth Hub at enquiries@marchesgrowthhub.co.uk

ERDF FUNDED business support projects in the region are promoted by the Marches Growth Hub, which this year launched a new campaign to encourage more companies to investigate what funding is on offer for businesses.

The £10m Growth Challenge is aiming to increase the number of businesses applying for funding to help drive growth and create jobs.

Paul Hinkins, Chair of the Marches Growth Hub, said: "This challenge is a major new campaign to help deliver funding and support to our fabulous business community. All businesses have to do is get in touch with our Growth Hub teams to find out what they could be eligible for and we will take the strain out of the gain."

Businesses can also log on to www.growthchallenge.co.uk to see if they are eligible for funding which comes from programmes such as the Business Growth Programme 2, the Marches Building Investment Grant and the Business Energy Efficiency Programme.

Mr Hinkins said the Marches Growth Hub was one of the best

performing in the country and the region also boasted the country's second-best survival rate for new business start-ups.

"With this funding, and the expertise of the Marches Growth Hub, we can help business to innovate into new sectors, drive up skills, boost wealth and create one of the best places to live anywhere in the UK."



HELP FOR ENERGY FROM WASTE WHEN SHROPSHIRE COMPANY Edenviro Biomass wanted to see if they could make use of a byproduct of their



digester, they turned to the European Bioenergy Research Institute (EBRI) at Aston University. Funded by the ERDF, EBRI provides practical solutions to businesses to explore the growing 'Energy-from-Waste' market.

The Ludlow-based company manages a woodland area in the region and collaborates with a local farm which has an anaerobic digester on site that uses corn and energy crops as feedstocks. Edenviro engaged the help of EBRI to see whether a byproduct of the digester could be transformed into briquettes.

which could then be burned.

Specialist 1-2-1 advice was followed-up with further support from a bespoke technical assessment of farm waste material and briquetting applications. This highly-detailed report outlined the potential bioenergy market for waste biomass briquettes, an overview of the briquetting process and available technologies and although ultimately the briquette application wasn't appropriate, it has led to alternative uses suggested by EBRI being further investigated by the company.

Solar project cuts energy costs

A SOLAR FARM PROJECT

in Shropshire part-funded via the ERDF is a landmark project in driving a move towards a low carbon economy in the region.



Greenacres Farm in Baschurch is a day care facility run by Shropshire Council providing training in agriculture and horticulture for adults with learning disabilities.

It is now home to a $\pounds47,350$ solar PV array, funded both by the council's capital grants programme and the Herefordshire Council administered ERDF Sustainable Energy in Public Buildings fund.

The 49.5 kWp ground mounted system has seen primary energy consumption at Greenacres drop by 46,660 kWh, which is an anticipated cost saving of £6,206 per year.

The project has also saved more than 16 tonnes of carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere.

The Sustainable Energy in Public Buildings (SEPuBu) is an ERDF funded grant scheme for innovative low carbon measures in public buildings across the Marches.



Building investment scheme success

THE MARCHES Building Investment Grant (MBIG) scheme will have created 110 jobs by the time it closes at the end of the year - with that figure growing to 268 jobs by 2025 as companies which have benefitted continue to expand.

The figures are revealed in a new report into the scheme which says MBIG will have added an extra £30million of value (GVA) to the Marches economy by 2025.

The report gives the scheme - which provides grants to help businesses refurbish, reconfigure and extend their premises and is part-funded by the ERDF - a big vote of confidence.

"The MBIG scheme has had positive impacts in terms of employment and GVA, with these impacts expected to be stronger over the next few years.



Left to right: Mark Pearce, Andrew Manning Cox, Cllr Trish Marsh & Cllr David Hitchiner

Shell Store transformation well under way

A MILESTONE in the £7.3m scheme to transform Hereford's Shell Store into a business incubation and innovation centre has been marked with an official visit from leaders of two organisations involved in the landmark project.

The Leader of Herefordshire Council, Councillor David Hitchiner, and Andrew Manning Cox, the Chairman of the Hereford Enterprise Zone, were on site at Skylon Park recently to see how work has progressed since it began in April. The project is receiving around £2m from the ERDF.

The derelict building, which was built during the First World War and was also

The steel frame
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used as an ordnance site during the Second World War, is being renovated to create more than 2,000 sq metres of employment space for new and growing businesses and facilities for development and innovation. The Shell Store, which is being developed by Barnwood Construction, is due for completion in late Spring 2020. Herefordshire Council and a loan from the Marches LEP's Marches Investment Fund is also funding the project.

Chairman of the Hereford Enterprise Zone, Andrew Manning Cox, said: "It was fascinating to see the great progress that has been made on the conversion of the Shell Store to date. The steel frame was in remarkably good condition, which has given an excellent base for the new facility.

"Once complete the Shell Store will provide much needed employment space for up to 25 dynamic and innovative businesses that will support economic growth in Herefordshire and play an important role in the thriving business community on Skylon Park."

The scheme was well managed and delivered with a strong team in place and beneficiary satisfaction levels were high," the report says.
The scheme is being
replaced by the Marches
Business Investment

Programme which will start delivering in 2020.