PROJECT UPDATE

European Structural & Investment Funding News Issue Three / Autumn 2015





£17m pot to support business

MORE THAN £17 million of European funding is being made available for projects which promote economic growth and create jobs across the Marches.

Applications are now being invited for projects focused on research and innovation, business competitiveness, low carbon and information communication technology (ICT).

The largest amount of funding on offer is £9.5m allocated to helping the region's small and medium-sized enterprises to become more competitive. And £2.3m has been allocated to improve connectivity by extending broadband deployment.

Projects being considered for the business competitiveness funding need to promote entrepreneurship, support the creation of products, services and development and growth in regional, national and international markets.

SME competitiveness is one of four themes identified as priorities for funding in the Marches European Structural and Investment Strategy (ESIF). This was developed by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership following consultation with stakeholders, partners, the business community and the voluntary and charitable sector.

The LEP is the private sectorled organisation working with the local councils in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, to help grow prosperity and create jobs.

The region has been allocated

a total of around £90m of European money for projects being delivered between 2014 and 2020 and just over £17m of that pot is now available for this second round of applications to the European Regional Development Fund.

GROWTH

Councillor Roger Phillips, Chairman of the Marches ESIF Committee, said: "The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership area's plan for growth is driven by the needs of our businesses and community.

"The funding this area is getting from the new programme will play an important part in delivering our vision for the area. Having agreed the local priorities for using this funding and moving our economy forward, we can now get on with making sure we invest the money in projects that deliver growth and jobs in The Marches."

There is £3m available for projects which promote research and innovation and business investment and a further £2m to support a shift towards a low carbon economy.

This includes promoting the production and distribution of energy derived from renewable resources, promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy use in enterprises and adoption of low carbon technologies.



Above: Councillor Roger Phillips, Chairman of the ESIF committee

The application criteria are set out in the application information available on the Government portal at www.gov.uk/european-structural-investment-funds. There is an online application system.

Prospective applicants are advised to contact the Marches Technical Assistance Team (gary.spence@shropshire.gov.uk, hannah.owen@shropshire.gov.uk or call 01743 252976) for advice and support.

TOURISM BOOST FOR THE MARCHES

RURAL BUSINESSES working within the tourism sector across the Marches are being invited to bid for a share of funding that is focused on the development of visitor attractions, tourist information, recreational infrastructure and small scale infrastructure.

The funds, which are part of the RDPE (Rural Development Programme for England) Growth Programme and delivered via Defra, will range in value between £35,000 and £100,000 and be equal to up to 40% of the total project cost, although some community based projects may be eligible for grants equal to 80% or more of the total costs. All applications must be received by the deadline of October 30 2015.

Announcing the launch of the programme, Farming Minister George Eustice, said: "By helping our rural entrepreneurs to achieve their full potential, the roll out of the Growth Programme is great news

for our rural communities.

"This funding is going to support businesses, bring highquality jobs to rural areas, boost rural productivity and grow the local economy."

The tourism sector across the Marches makes a significant contribution to the economy generating over £1 billion per year in Gross Value Added (GVA) and employing over 33,000 people. Tourism has been identified by the Marches LEP in its ESIF (European Structural & Investment Funds)

Strategy as a key sector for growth, as Gill Hamer, Director of the Marches LEP explains: "Tourism already makes a significant contribution to the Marches economy and we believe has the scope to grow further.

"We are keen to see investment secured that allows attractions to extend their offer outside of the peak season; that enables the development of new festivals and events that will attract overnight as well as day visitors; and that improves the information and infrastructure on offer to visitors. I would urge small tourism business, communities, farmers or landowners who might have a project in mind that could benefit from this funding to find out more."

Applicants must demonstrate how their project will develop the tourism offer in the Marches LEP area and deliver value for money. They will need to show how their project fits with the key visitor economy priorities for the region and demonstrate that it will not displace activity from elsewhere, whilst making a contribution to the destination as a whole. The creation of jobs and an increase in overnight visitors to the region will also be a requirement of any application.

A total of £500,000 is available through this call in the Marches and a maximum of 14 projects will be funded, although a further broader call is anticipated to be announced later in the autumn for projects not currently eligible.

Any interested parties keen to find out more about applying for these funds should contact one of three key contacts in each local authority area: Erica Sherry, for Telford & Wrekin, on 01952 383785 / Erica.sherry@telford.gov.uk; Rachel Jones for Herefordshire on 01432 261784 / rejones@herefordshire.gov.uk and Joe Bubb, for Shropshire, on 01743 252516 / joe.bubb@shropshire.gov.uk



Business support scheme success



1 the voice of businesses needs to be heard

The Business Enterprise Fund

...provided grants to start- ups or existing businesses in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin, Herefordshire and Staffordshire that want to invest or expand of up to £10,000. Between 2011 and 2015 it:

- created 196 jobs
- supported 229 businesses
 - helped 82% of businesses increase sales
 - assisted 83% of businesses to increase profits
 - attracted
 £1.54m
 in capital
 investment
 from private
 firms

Eureka! Moment

...offered
businesses in
Herefordshire,
Shropshire,
Staffordshire and
Worcestershire grants
to stimulate innovation
and growth. Between
September 2013 and June
2015 it:

- delivered audits to
- 118 businesses, nearly double the target
- awarded grants of more than £116,000
- engaged 16 businesses in new collaborations with the UK knowledge base
 - helped create

 10

 new jobs

when shaping future support for businesses

EUROPEAN FUNDED business support schemes in the Marches have created or safeguarded nearly 800 jobs, new reports have revealed.

An external independent review of six programmes – the Business Enterprise Fund, the Marches Environment Technology Network (metnet), Marches Grads for Business, Optimising Business Broadband, and the Redundant Buildings Grant scheme – revealed that collectively they led to 776 new or safeguarded roles and placed 45 graduates into local businesses.

The schemes worked with more than 500 businesses, established 60 new businesses and helped 57 to expand as well as attracting £8.34m of private investment into the Marches.

Marches LEP Chairman Graham Wynn welcomed the evaluation results, which can be downloaded from the LEP's website. He said: "These figures should be set in context against what has been a very difficult economic backdrop over the past few years.

"All programmes performed very well against their targets, in the majority of cases exceeding them, and delivered targeted business advice, support and grants where it was needed. There have been important lessons learnt from the delivery of all these projects that we will be taking forward into the delivery of the Marches Growth Hub."

SUPPORT

The Marches Growth Hub brings together all the national and local business support in a 'one stop shop'. The hub will be based around a comprehensive business support website and dedicated enquiry phone line for firms to access funding, support and advice, alongside three physical hubs in each of the Marches local authority areas.

LEP Director Gill Hamer added: "We want to consolidate and build on the success of these EU-funded schemes, delivered both by the LEP and its partners. The evaluation noted that the voice of businesses needs to be heard when shaping future support for businesses in the Marches. The new Marches Growth Hub will address that and streamline and simplify access to advice and support."

There have been two rounds of funding for The Redundant Buildings Grant Scheme

in Shropshire, Herefordshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire. Since February 2012 it:

- supported 72 businesses
- created 475 jobs
- helped 57 companies expand
 - led to 21 new businesses

Optimising Business Broadband

...helped SMEs in Shropshire and Staffordshire discover how fibre broadband technology can vastly improve their businesses. Between September 2013 and June 2015 it:

- ran 20 events
- engaged with 300 companies
 - assisted / 5 businesses to improve their technology

Marches Grads for Business

...provided support to businesses in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Herefordshire to employee a graduate to help their business grow. Between January 2013 and June 2015 it:

- worked with 53 businesses
 - placed 45 graduates
- created 23.5 jobs

Building Better Opportunities will be launched in the Marches this autumn

BIG LOTTERY FUND is looking to match fund the Marches European Social Fund (ESF) for social inclusion in a joint investment called Building Better Opportunities. This joint funding will be available to support unemployed and economically inactive people in the Marches along a pathway towards employment.

Project outlines will be launched on the Big Lottery website in the autumn and will be based on the social inclusion priorities in the Marches ESIF Strategy. The project outlines will set out what each project will need to achieve and for the Marches

there will be two project outlines, one for Herefordshire and one for Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin. Big Lottery will only fund one project per project outline and the process will be competitive.

Any organisation is eligible to apply, however the projects will be better suited to partnership working. Responding to this, Big Lottery awarded Partnership Development Funding to the Marches to raise awareness of the Building Better Opportunities programme, bring partners together and ensuring they understand ESF funding requirements.

Building Better Opportunities

Home About BBO in the Marches Events New Resources Contact

Building Better Opportunities

Welcome to the Marches Building Better Opportunities

Resource and Information Website

A Marches Building Better Opportunities website has recently been launched. Any organisation interested should visit www.bbomarches.com where they will find further information and resources. In June, Expressions of Interest were completed by stakeholders interested in the potential lead or delivery partner role; this document is available on the resources pages of the BBO Marches website. Interested parties are encouraged to use the information in this document to make contact with stakeholders.

£1.4m boost to the economy

A SPECIALIST network that provides free support to environmental businesses in the Marches and Worcestershire has provided a £1.4 million boost to the economy over the past two years.

The Marches Environment Technology Network – metnet – provided £1,410,750 GVA (gross value added) through its work and helped create 25 jobs.

The independent evaluation of phase 2 of the programme revealed that metnet exceeded its targets set for the period from April 2012 to March 2014.



It said 130 businesses in the Marches actively benefited from involvement with metnet and 96 per cent of the surveyed companies rated metnet as "very useful" or "useful"

Forty per cent of companies said metnet had helped them win new business.

Metnet encouraged SMEs to network and collaborate, innovate and grow through seminars, workshops, meet the buyers events, its website and marketing activities.

It also provided grants for small to medium sized environmental businesses that need expertise to improve their business performance and signposts organisations towards funding streams.

The network worked with businesses across the

sector including renewable energy, waste management, low carbon, waste and recycling.

It was funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the four local authorities – Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

Solar panel installers Sun RG, from Tenbury Wells: "metnet has definitely helped us increase our bottom line because we found a lot of people quicker, and it saved us time and money and put us in touch with partners that are also in metnet. We were looking for certain suppliers, and, through metnet, I've come across a business in

Stourport, which I would never had met, and as a result we are now diversifying to solar thermal next year. Metnet is a fantastic resource to be able to tap into to."

Telford based Sea-Chem, an environmental solutions specialist: "We'd been through all the usual channels like Business Link and overseas trade support, but metnet is dynamic, fantastic, put together conferences, shows, meet the buyers – they're excellent."

Below: metnet's networking events have been beneficial to businesses in the environmental technologies and services sector.

