



Rural Development Programme for England for rural businesses and communities in South West England

News Release

28 October, 2009

Wanted – pilot schemes to tackle rural broadband not-spots

A European investment of £700,000 for South West England will be spent on a limited number of pilot projects that will lead to improved broadband access for rural businesses and communities in the region.

The funding comes in the form of a European Economic Recovery Plan award – to help mitigate the impact of the current economic downturn – and is earmarked for upgrading rural broadband.

Ideas are now being sought for a limited number of pilot projects that will provide high speed broadband access for rural areas that are losing out in broadband coverage.

“This funding is really welcome and we want to make sure that it has the potential to provide maximum benefit to the region’s remote rural areas,” said Andy Wood, head of place making and partnerships at the South West RDA (regional development agency).

“It would only have limited impact if we tried to spread it widely across a large number of small projects, so we are looking for one or two pilot projects that have the potential to be adopted across the region.

“It is really important that we use the funding wisely to help prove the case for high speed broadband access in rural areas and to help businesses in terms of economic recovery.”

Given the need for projects to be substantially complete by the end of next year, the South West RDA, which manages the fund as part of the Rural Development Programme for England, is seeking applications by January 15th 2010.

The fund will not cover projects for the region’s towns or Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, which is already receiving significant broadband investment through the Convergence Programme.

More detailed information about the Rural Community Broadband search for pilot projects is available by visiting the Rural Development Gateway website at <http://www.sw-ruralgateway.info/getting/broadband-for-rural-1.shtml>



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For further information, please contact Pat Murray, of the South West RDA press office, on 07733264756

Notes to editors

European Economic Recovery Plan (EERP)

The European Council has approved a European Economic Recovery Plan to help mitigate the impacts of the current downturn across member states. This includes funding for the support of Rural Community Broadband to be delivered through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE).

RDPE

The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) runs from 2007 to 2013. It is the 2nd pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy and aims to support the creation of genuinely sustainable farming, forestry and food sectors, whilst also bringing wider benefits for the economy, the environment and rural communities. It provides the major financial vehicle for protecting and enhancing the environment and securing a range of public benefits for society. Defra is the Managing Authority.

The RDPE has three priorities for rural development:

1. Improving competitiveness of the agriculture and forestry sectors
2. Improving the environment and the countryside
3. Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity

The aims, objectives and priorities for delivering RDPE in South West England were agreed for the socio-economic investments with regional partners and these are set out in the Regional Implementation Plan. On the basis of a thorough analysis of South West England's rural characteristics and economy, the Plan sets out eight themes:

- i. Skills development
- ii. Social enterprise
- iii. Business support
- iv. Supply chain and adding value
- v. Resource management (soil, water, energy, waste)
- vi. Sustainable rural tourism
- vii. Biodiversity and landscape
- viii. Community-led development

Further more information on the RDPE and the schemes see www.sw-ruralgateway.info

In this region, the South West RDA will deliver priorities 1 and 3 with a budget of £156.8 million over the seven years. The RDA is also responsible for ensuring that five per cent of the RDPE funding is spent on enabling community involvement in rural development.

The RDPE priority for improving the environment and the countryside is being delivered nationally by the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme and Natural England's Environmental Stewardship Scheme.



The delivery partners in the South West aim to ensure that investment in each of the three priorities will help support investment in the others.

Organisations involved in delivering RDPE

The South West RDA leads the development of a sustainable economy, investing to unlock the region's business potential. It works in partnership with public, private and social purpose organisations to drive up the region's productivity by giving people the skills they need, encouraging enterprise, improving infrastructure, regenerating places and promoting the strengths of the region. For more information see www.southwestrda.org.uk

Natural England works for people, places and nature to conserve and enhance biodiversity, landscapes and wildlife in rural, urban, coastal and marine areas. It conserves and enhances the natural environment for its intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people, and the economic prosperity it brings. For more information see www.naturalengland.org.uk Environmental Stewardship (ES) was launched in 2005, builds on the very best practice already evident in British farming. During the period 2007-13 the national budget for ES will be £2.9 billion. The objectives of ES are to:

- Conserve wildlife (biodiversity).
- Maintain and enhance landscape quality and character.
- Protect the historic environment and natural resources.
- Promote public access and understanding of the countryside.
- Natural resource protection.

The Forestry Commission is the government department responsible for forestry in Great Britain. It supports woodland owners with grants, tree felling licences, regulation and advice; promotes the benefits of forests and forestry; and advises Government on forestry policy. For further information, visit www.forestry.gov.uk/england-swe

