

Eco-hub for disadvantaged entrepreneurs



Setting up your own environmentally-friendly business can be challenging enough but with a tough economic climate and youth against you, success is even harder to achieve.

But, with the help of the Southend YMCA, young disadvantaged entrepreneurs will benefit from the conversion of a dilapidated historic building into a brand new eco-hub facility providing affordable workspace,

meeting rooms and conference facilities.

The old St John's Stables are set to be transformed into the new eco-hub which will provide the necessary vital support to help fledgling businesses at a crucial time in their development and, over the course of three years. It is expected to enable 90 small and medium-sized businesses to adopt an active environmental policy. It will also create 16 jobs including a new eco-hub manager.

Explaining how the idea was conceived, Syrie Cox, chief executive officer, Southend YMCA, said: "Although Southend-on-Sea has a high entrepreneurial culture, it has a higher than average failure rate among business start-ups. As we support around 500 marginalised young people in the area, we wanted to provide them with the option of starting a business as a way of helping them progress towards independence and greater inclusion."


Creating a total of 200m² of new employment space, the project will deliver five affordable and managed workspace units, multi-purpose rooms for group work and meeting rooms as well as conference facilities. With on-site support and access to mainstream business networks, it will also provide young entrepreneurs with business advice and support to help them develop eco-efficient, ethically aware, enterprises.

As well as helping new businesses to be environmentally-friendly, the building itself will lead by example to become an eco-efficient flagship building. The renovation work undertaken will use sustainable development principles to Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) standards of 'very good' and the finished building will also comply with Building for Life criteria – the national standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods.

With high government targets for the reduction of carbon emissions, innovative schemes to help businesses become more carbon efficient and projects encouraging young people to take responsibility for these issues at the very beginning of their business life are vital.

To provide an impact longer-term by encouraging other new businesses in the area to put low carbon at the heart of their daily business practices, the intention is for established, successful small and medium-sized enterprises to move out of the eco-hub to make room for other new start-ups.

The project is estimated to cost in the region of £768,000 with £307,244 coming from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Talking about the importance of the funding Syrie said: “The project would not have been possible without the financial contributions from the European fund and other partners. We are extremely grateful to ERDF for their support throughout the whole process.”

Priority Axis 3			
Funding:	Total Project Cost: £768,061 ERDF: £307,224		
Solution for Business Product:	Low Carbon Energy Demonstration and Business Premises		
Scope:	Essex	Project Duration:	June 2009 – June 2012
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ERDF Details:	<p>The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) is a seven-year investment programme part financed by the European Union. Its objective is ‘towards low carbon economic growth’ in the East of England and €110.9 million has been allocated to our region.</p> <p>The fund aims to help small and medium size enterprises respond to the challenges of climate change and the huge commercial potential behind a low carbon economy.</p> <p>For more information visit: http://www.communities.gov.uk/regeneration/regenerationfunding/europeanregionaldevelopment/eastengland/ </p>		