



European Structural Funds Programmes 2000 to 2006

CELEBRATING SUCCESS



Celebrating Success

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INTRODUCTION

Back in 2000, through the 2000-2006 ERDF and ESF Programmes, the West Midlands region was awarded £900 million in European funding. The Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) were given the task of administering these funds.



As the final date for eligible expenditure under both Programmes has now passed, it gives me enormous pleasure to report that, since 2000, we have seen these funds being successfully invested in projects the length and breadth of the West Midlands region.

From transforming businesses, to transforming lives the results are impressive. 58,519 jobs created or safeguarded, 25,937 businesses assisted or have received financial support, more than £1.4 billion worth of sales brought to or maintained in the region, 51,064 jobless or employment people have received training, 19,535 people have improved their skills and obtained NVQ1 to 4 qualifications. Even more results will be reported when final claims are submitted in April.

You will find many examples of the benefits delivered by the funding within this publication. By sharing these stories, we are able to demonstrate the positive impact these funds have had, and will continue to have, on our region's future.

From the revitalisation of Birmingham Town Hall in the city centre and the development of the Hereford Learning Village in Shropshire, to the award winning Electric Wharf in Coventry, there really is much to celebrate.

I hope you enjoy reading about the successes and achievements of the European Structural Funds Programmes and I look forward to working with you in the years ahead to build upon the strong foundations of these truly remarkable results.

Trudi Elliott, Regional Director

Government Office for
the West Midlands

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMMES

European Structural Funds in the West Midlands

European Structural Funds have made a real difference to the economy and lives of people in the West Midlands. Set up by the European Commission to help reduce differences in living standards between the regions of the European Union, the West Midlands was awarded £900 million of Structural Funds money under the Objective 2 and 3 Programmes which ran from 2000 to 2006 however spend continued until the end of 2008.

The European Structural Funds Programmes were targeted at regenerating some of the most challenged urban and rural areas of the West Midlands, and provided support for re-skilling and retraining its workforce. Major improvements in infrastructure, businesses and industry, as well as social and community regeneration, have all helped to support environmental and economic sustainability and secure a better future for every sector of the West Midlands community.

During the 2000 to 2006 Programmes, £575 million has been allocated to the region under the Objective 2 Programme. A wide range of organisations have accessed funding through this Objective to support an even wider range of different activities. Eligible bodies such as the Regional Development Agency, Learning and Skills Councils, Higher and Further Education Institutions and private and voluntary sector organisations, have all been able to apply and use funding for activity that is for the good of others. This included focus on the region, districts, sectors, communities or individuals and ultimately aimed to increase economic opportunity and the region's prosperity.

Objective 2 Funds

There were two funds within objective 2 split into two distinct areas of the funding – the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF), and the objective focused on three priority areas:

- **To create a diverse and dynamic business base by improvements to infrastructure, businesses and industry.** This aimed to modernise the large traditional manufacturing base and capitalise on a number of high growth sectors. It achieved this by supporting small to medium enterprises (SMEs) supporting and developing their competitiveness in the region.
- **Creating the conditions for employment growth.** This aimed to create the conditions to enable the region to realise its full potential and assist in the other objectives of securing employment for the most disadvantaged communities in the region. It achieved this by a

number of methods including strategic regeneration packages, securing employment in development areas, removing physical barriers to markets, employment and training and finally developing ICT capacity in order to remove these barriers.

- **Regenerating communities.** This focused on areas where there was a combination of problems which created an area of exclusion. These problems included unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing and high crime. Again a number of methods were identified to do this including developing enabled communities, developing employment opportunities, building sustainable and connected neighbourhoods and upskilling communities.

Objective 3 Funds

In addition to this the region was awarded £325 million of funding for the Objective 3 Programme which was delivered through the European Social Fund (ESF). Apart from a small number of direct bidding rounds to GOWM, the majority of Objective 3 funding in our region was delivered through 9 Co-financing organisations – the Learning and Skills Councils, Jobcentre Plus, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council and Birmingham City Council. Similar to Objective 2, there was a wide range of organisations that applied and obtained funding ensuring that they met the criteria set by the CFOs for each bidding round.

This objective focused on a number of key areas:

- Tackle long-term unemployment
- Help young people and those at risk from not being able to find work
- Improve training, education and counselling for lifelong learning
- Encourage entrepreneurship and adaptability in the workplace
- Promote equal opportunities and improve the role of women in the workforce

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAMMES

Horizontal Themes

Underpinning the Programmes were the Horizontal Themes. Through all the development and delivery stages of projects, the Horizontal Themes played a key role. During the initial stages of designing a project, thoughts on how the themes were to be incorporated were considered. This ranged from selecting building material which absorbs and retains the heat, to establishing schemes and services which teach construction skills and are available and accessible to all groups in society. For the Programmes there were 3 Horizontal Themes:

- Sustainable Development
- Equality of Opportunity
- Innovation

Combined together these focused on a wide variety of issues that when integrated into projects enhanced and enriched the overall results and benefits delivered to communities in the region. The Horizontal Themes were not about introducing a few initiatives to satisfy requirements. When implemented well they helped to provide a whole culture change which then became the focus and purpose of projects.

In addition to this there were two ESF Programme themes - Information Society and Local Communities. The first focused on the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for employment potential, with the second theme aimed at tackling social exclusion, reducing inequality and promoting regeneration through small community projects. Both themes concentrated on resolving specific issues and breaking down many of the barriers faced by communities in the region.

Partnerships

A key element to the success of the Structural Funds Programmes was the effective working partnerships of stakeholders and organisations in the region. The theme for the European Programmes was 'West Midlands Working Together' which captured the aspirational nature of the Programmes and reflected the partnership approach to delivering the funding to gain the maximum benefit for the region. This document clearly demonstrates how partnership working has not only seen the development of many crucial and worthwhile projects, but also how relationships have been formed that will continue to thrive and flourish beyond the funding Programmes for the benefit of the people of the region.

Following the final date of project spend in 2008, the extent of the outstanding benefits that the Programmes have delivered is starting to become clear. Figures to date show that over 58,500 jobs have been created or safeguarded, over 25,900 businesses have been assisted or received financial support and £1.4 billion worth of sales have been brought or maintained to the region. These excellent results are further supported by over 51,000 jobless or employment people receiving training and 19,500 people improving their skills and obtaining NVQ1 to 4 qualifications. As projects close and submit final reports, these figures are set to increase.



Sub-Regional Focus

HEREFORDSHIRE, SHROPSHIRE, TELFORD & WREKIN AND WORCESTERSHIRE

Often described as some of England's finest counties, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire, this predominantly rural sub-region has benefited significantly from the ERDF and ESF Programmes.

All with differing characters and distinctive heritages, European funding has helped to address the challenges that this diverse area brings. Projects such as The Interactive Technology Centre in Coalbrookdale, the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre at Craven Arms, as well as tourism support projects such as the National Cycle Route 45 and the Market Town Sustainability Improvements in Leominster, have helped to support, and provide alternatives to, the declining areas of the economy.

The Hereford Learning Village and the transformation of the Craven Arms Auction Yard Development in South Shropshire have also helped to address demand from the business community for state of the art office space and learning resources, which again supports the diversity needed for a growing economy.

Case Studies:

- WiRE
- Switch on Shropshire
- Ludlow Vocational Training Centre
- Route 45
- Mak Marine (Connect Midlands)
- Connect
- Regional Technology Exchange Services



Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire

WiRE – WOMEN IN RURAL ENTERPRISE

Supported by the European Social Fund, Women in Rural Enterprise (WiRE) is based at Harper Adams University College in Shropshire and aimed at helping rural women start and maintain their own business or enterprise. WiRE is very active in supporting business start-ups and allows women to benefit from access to expert advice, business mentors and financial packages.

WiRE has been offering business support to women in rural business since 1996, when research conducted identified a significant number of farm diversifications were established by women. These female entrepreneurs were, however, coming up against a number of barriers, including lack of access to finance, lack of confidence, not being taken seriously, rural isolation, and lack of rural business support.

WiRE believes passionately that women in rural business should be heard and valued and this is echoed by the story of Beth Williams who found success after setting up her own business helping to protect an

endangered species. Beth Williams set up Turtle Bags, an ethical company based in Hereford. Turtle Bags aims to raise awareness of the plight of the leatherback turtle, which often confuses plastic bags for jellyfish, its main source of food.

The company sells alternative bags, made from cotton and jute, bought and produced from ethical sources. The business has received backing from the World Wildlife Fund and, after being featured in the magazine Woman's Own, has seen the number of hits on the turtlebags.co.uk website increase massively.



Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire

SWITCH ON SHROPSHIRE

Funded by £2.1 million from the European Regional Development Fund, the Switch on Shropshire project was set up to promote the benefits of broadband services and stimulate demand amongst SMEs, rural communities and businesses, providing grants, to enable companies in the area to be fully prepared.

Delivered by Shropshire County Council on behalf of the Shropshire Partnership, the project has had a significant impact on many people in Shropshire. Hundreds of businesses have benefited from connectivity, website development and hardware, many communities have received equipment, software and expertise which has made a real difference to people's lives.

One business which received £1,950 of funding through Switch on Shropshire was the Ludlow Festival. The festival, a two-week combined arts extravaganza, had always been forced to handle all of its ticket booking by post or over the phone. However in 2005 support from the Switch on Shropshire scheme, resulted in the festival having a full BT Broadband connection and a website

specifically designed for e-commerce to sell tickets online.

The festival that year attracted attention from all over the world – it had strong advance ticket sales using the internet with over £25,000 worth of tickets sold online. The Festival website received over 100,000 visits and sold online advance tickets to cultural visitors from as far afield as the USA, Mexico, the Far East and New Zealand.

For the communities of the area, Switch on Shropshire developed the concept of a Broadplace as a facility within the heart of rural communities, such as village halls, community centres or even the local pub, where everyone could access computers and a Broadband connection.

With a population of only 200 the village of Quatt was one of the smallest Broadplaces in terms of potential user numbers – but has become one of the best-used and biggest in terms of enthusiasm.

The facility is situated in the village hall and runs activities such as a homework club for children after school, social events including film nights, photography competitions using the technology to create a community calendar and drop-in sessions for anyone to use the kit with support.

One community member commented, "Our Broadplace has introduced us to members of our community that we had never previously met, and extended the social use of the village hall".

LUDLOW VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE

The Ludlow Vocational Training Centre in Old Street was awarded £236,000 from the European Regional Development Fund and forms part of the largest training provider in Shropshire County Training.

The state of the art training centre, which opened its doors to the public in June 2004, is run by County Training Ltd, part of Shropshire County Council, and was previously based in smaller premises elsewhere in the town. But the renovation of an empty and rundown building to accommodate the new facilities – which includes an ICT training suite, hairdressing training salon and two large multi-use training rooms - has enabled County Training to massively improve the number and quality of courses available which teach new skills to the people of Ludlow and South Shropshire.

By working with the Learning and Skills Council, Jobcentre Plus and Learn Direct, the centre offers a wide range of courses from ICT to hairdressing to care.



The Centre manager said: "These new facilities have completely transformed what we can offer to the people of South Shropshire".

"What we are always keen for people to realise is that training is for everybody – whether they're long-term unemployed,

young people, older people, people who want to change their career or just people who want to continue their life long learning. We're delighted with the centre - it's all on one level, which makes it accessible for our disabled users, and has all the facilities we could have dreamt of."

ROUTE 45 – MERCIAN WAY

£325,615 of ERDF money has helped connect rural businesses through a revolutionary cycle path – Route 45 Mercian Way.

Encouraging environmentally-friendly travel, the revolutionary tourist route is part of the 200 mile Route 45 which runs from Chester to Salisbury and takes in sights such as Stonehenge, the Severn Valley Railway and the World Heritage Site of Ironbridge.

An official opening in October 2005 marked the completion of the final length of the Mercian Way, alongside the Severn Valley Railway between the Severn Valley Country Park and Hampton Loade station.

Careful consideration was given to ensure that the Mercian Way is environmentally friendly – the path has a light coloured stone chip covering which blends in with the local countryside and conservation experts were



called in from the start of the project to ensure that the homes of local wildlife, such as dormice, were protected.

The route has also acted as a huge boost to local attractions and businesses situated on the route and has also provided safer

cycling opportunities for local communities forming a sustainable link between towns and villages.



Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire

MAK MARINE

European Funding helped to develop Connect Midlands, a project designed to address the lack of preparedness of potential high growth SMEs in the region which were looking for external equity investment.

Through the aid of coaching and mentoring support for technology companies, Connect Midlands covered issues ranging from the business model, routes to markets, financial planning and the implications and benefits of introducing external equity holders. One of the beneficiaries to have received this help is MakMarine Limited.

Family run business MakMarine Limited was established in 2001 and works in the field of research and development. Set as the original company, MakMarine has expanded its portfolio to include Mak Technology Limited, which focuses on research into marine technology and general vehicle systems, and thirdly c-fury Limited.

Although successful in identifying projects to take to markets, they recognised that they needed a lot of work on the commercial structure, their business plan and skills on

communicating with investors, and got in contact with Connect Midlands. After attending a workshop hosted by Connect Midlands, they signed up for the Amber and Green stream and with a background in engineering, a keen family interest in small speed boats became the focus of the business.

Research in this market showed that there was a lack of a compact family orientated speedboat that offered all around flexibility, including; high performance allied to excellent fuel efficiency, good ride quality and above all passenger safety and usability.

With knowledge of a possible solution based on an existing hull technology which had never been used on such a small scale before, they approached the original hull inventor in South Africa, who assisted in developing the core hydrodynamic platform.

Using his expertise, their engineering skills and extensive use of a full sized technology demonstrator that was built to evaluate the concept, the design was refined.

With support from a small group of investors, MakMarine built a pre-production c-fury™. The pre-production c-fury™ is used to undertake a Market Validation phase, including demonstrations for consumers, agents and commercial partnerships aimed at securing forward orders and business alliances.

Simon Mccloughin, Director of MakMarine said, "Connect did not give me all the answers, but it helped me form the questions that I needed to be asking. The knowledge gained from the Connect scheme has greatly assisted us in picking the most appropriate route forwards – one that will work!".

Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire

CONNECT

£2,048,000 of money from the European Social Fund has helped to stop the cycle of repeat offenders. The Connect project was a ground-breaking project between the probation and prison services designed to help ex-offenders by removing barriers to employment.

Connect was a partnership between the West Midlands prison area and the four regional probation boards – West Mercia (Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Shropshire), Staffordshire, Warwickshire and West Midlands. The project was aimed at preventing 'short sentence' prisoners – those serving 12 months or less – from re-offending in future.

Whilst in prison, because of the inherent constraints of a short sentence, such prisoners are unable to acquire educational or work skills or start and complete offending behaviour programmes. That's why Connect was launched in June 2003 - to provide support for those serving shorter sentences, helping remove barriers to employment, reducing re-offending and therefore crime in local communities.



Connect offered support to prisoners whilst in custody, such as motivational programmes, development of a personal action plan followed by support once they are back in the community. This included sourcing

accommodation and helping them to access education, training, health services and leisure facilities. The project also provided ex-prisoners with a personal mentor to help them find a job.

Herefordshire, Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Worcestershire

REGIONAL TECHNOLOGY EXCHANGE SERVICES

Over £800,000 of ERDF money was used to help fund high technology-related growth for local rural and semi-rural businesses.

Regional Technology Exchange Services addressed the lack of high technology resources within the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Objective 2 target area, and aimed to support over 90 local businesses through two key initiatives.

These initiatives were the Marches Technology Fund (MTF) and the Marches Technology Ring (MTR). The MTF offered financial support and assistance to businesses over three years to help them achieve high technology growth, via knowledge transfer, physical facility improvements, patent protection or the development of technology to be commercially exploited.

The MTR aimed to develop software and methodology compatible with the standards of the neighbouring Birmingham-Worcestershire High Technology Corridor and Rural Regeneration Zone. This involved creating the role of a new full-time Technology Co-ordinator, and improving the sales of 36 local businesses over four years.

One businessman helped by the Regional Technology Exchange Services was Tony Botsman, who invented a conveyor belt to be used in agriculture, to create a middle stage between manual harvesting and automatic harvesting. He invented an instantly inflatable conveyor belt that could be used in various

terrains - first of its kind in the world. After designing and building a prototype, he applied to the MTF for a grant to help protect the intellectual property rights to his invention and towards building a full-size prototype. With this help, he was successful in building and holding a demonstration of the prototype, gaining interest from many potential suppliers.



Sub-Regional Focus

STAFFORDSHIRE

Located in the heart of the UK, this land-locked county has undergone vast change in the last 20 years. Since the mid 1980s European funding has helped to regenerate and transform this sub-region from suffering the devastating results of the collapse of its strong industrial base of coalmines and steel, into a sub-region with a sustainable and prosperous future for residents and visitors alike.

For the economy and people of Staffordshire the transformation has been most beneficial. With new cutting edge innovative businesses being attracted by facilities such as Hothouse and the rejuvenation of declined areas including the old mining site at Silverdale Colliery, the knock-on-effect has been not only the large number of training, skills and job opportunities created for local communities, but also much needed investment.

The economy has been further enhanced thanks to European funded tourism and leisure developments such as the Chasewater Visitor Hub and the many improvement projects including the Hatherton Canal Regeneration project, aimed at developing the canals and connecting route ways running throughout the sub-region.

Case Studies:

- Silverdale Enterprise Park
- Community Training at Chatterley Whitfield
- VEST
- North Staffordshire Canals and Connecting Route Ways
- LEAP
- BIC



Staffordshire

SILVERDALE ENTERPRISE PARK

Almost £2.2 million of ERDF funding has been used to create Silverdale Enterprise Park on the site of the former Silverdale Colliery which closed in 1998 after a decade of decline which saw employment numbers reduce from 1,100 in the early '90s to just 150 at the time of closure.

During the 2000 to 2006 European funding Programme, Staffordshire County Council has led a major drive to maximise the potential of the funding in the area to create more jobs and prosperity. Working together with the county and borough councils, and the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone, the County Council created a project designed to jump start businesses in North Staffordshire area.

The regeneration of the site aimed to help address the social and economic issues in this deprived and isolated former mining community, by creating new employment opportunities for local people. The scheme comprised the regeneration of a 6 hectare

site to produce 4 hectares of high quality developable land suitable for office, manufacturing or small-scale distribution uses. To further stimulate economic entrepreneurialism paving the way for even more cutting edge new businesses to become established in the area, a 1,800 m² Enterprise Centre of small-scale workshops and studio style offices with on-site innovation focused management by the Business Innovation Centre organisation (the BIC) was an integral part of the scheme.

The Silverdale Enterprise Park has helped small and medium businesses thrive, by providing specialist high quality

accommodation at a price that is affordable and on user friendly terms. The achievements of the project were highlighted in 2005 when the project won a Celebrating Success award from the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone, for 'Exceptional contribution to regeneration in North Staffordshire' in the category of impact on enterprise.



Staffordshire

COMMUNITY TRAINING AT CHATTERLEY WHITFIELD

Over £1.7 million from the European Regional Development Fund has been used to transform a part of Staffordshire's rich history into training space for the benefit of local residents.

Chatterley Whitfield first appears as a working colliery in 1750, mined by a Burslem coal merchant. Mainstream production began a century later when the site's first three deep shafts opened. By the outbreak of World War Two, Chatterley Whitfield employed 4000 people and was the first UK colliery to achieve an annual output of 1 million tonnes. However the coalmining complex stopped operating in 1976, had been kept open as a museum until 1986 and was then named as an ancient monument by English Heritage.

During the duration of the European Programmes, a variety of developments have taken place to the site which are assisting

to ensure a viable future. One of these is the ERDF funded project Community Training at Chatterley Whitfield which was delivered in partnership with English Partnerships.

The project was divided into 2 elements focusing on the physical and non-physical works. The aim of the project was to open up the site acting as a catalyst for further development by providing an upgraded access road with improvements including a cycle path and street lighting and a new roundabout off the A527. In addition, the repair and refurbishment of Building 12 (listed) and Building 13 and 14 was completed to accommodate new businesses

and enterprise units. ERDF was also used to provide match funding for two revenue projects. Business Innovation Centre Staffordshire was targeted at engaging businesses to relocate locally at the centre, whilst Groundwork delivered the second project aimed at reaching out into the local communities to identify skill gaps in order to up skill local people.

VEST – VOCATIONAL EMPLOYEE SKILLS TRAINING

ESF funding has been instrumental in helping the Vocational Employee Skills Training (VEST) project in Staffordshire develop staff training programmes for local small to medium enterprises.

The VEST project was launched in February 2002, with funding from the Staffordshire LSC. It was managed by the Consortium of Staffordshire Colleges alongside the partner colleges that belong to it.

The ESF support has enabled the development of packages and courses to be delivered to SME staff in smaller group sizes and more convenient locations.

The programme involved college staff visiting SMEs, to assess their training requirements before signposting them to existing courses at one of the partner colleges. Tailor-made training packages were then provided where skills gaps were highlighted.

As part of the VEST project, training needs analyses were carried out for SMEs and micro businesses to help them access vocational training in the Staffordshire area. More than 900 employees have been assisted in accessing vocational training, with 20 training packages developed to cover a variety of subject areas.

One of VEST's projects has seen a Staffordshire snack food company develop the taste for learning, putting its production staff through line manager and manual handling training.

Andy Baldwin, for Better Tasting Snack Food, said, "We were fortunate to receive substantial funding in support of various training programmes for our production staff, including NVQ first line manager and manual handling training. All of this training has helped to provide the company with a better-equipped and safer workforce. In summary, without the support of VEST, much of the above training would not have been possible."



BETTER TASTING SNACK FOOD, STAFFORDSHIRE

Staffordshire

NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE CANALS AND CONNECTING ROUTEWAYS

Financial support from the European Regional Development Fund has played a pivotal role in transforming North Staffordshire's canals from an underutilised resource into green corridors that are underpinning the area's economic and social revival.

The £5.5m supported project has seen over 17 kilometres of towpath transformed into an accessible all weather surfaced pathway. Towpaths have been widened at key locations to improve access, while new visitor moorings have opened up visitor access to shops and pubs.

A key part included environmental improvements such as hedge laying to encourage the growth of fauna and flora as an integral part of the new look corridors. The plan was part of the 'Greening for Growth' strategy, designed to exploit green space as a catalyst for economic and social regeneration. Under the vision, the canal network around Stoke-on-Trent was transformed into a system of green routes that underpinned the area's economic and social revival.

The towpaths form a network linking the historic canals with Greenway routes – regeneration corridors that connect former coalmining and industrial areas who were experiencing higher unemployment and lack of investment.



The project has greatly improved the environment for leisure, business and community use through improved access points and connections. It provides an alternative transport network, enabling local people to walk and cycle to key destinations.

The centrepiece of this ambitious vision is the £1.1m visitor centre at Westport Lake, an eco-friendly community and visitor hub at the heart of the rejuvenated waterway network.

This has assisted North Staffordshire in becoming a premier and high quality visitor destination and developments such as this have helped to make this a sustainable reality.

Staffordshire

BIC – STAFFORDSHIRE & BLACK COUNTRY BUSINESS INNOVATION CENTRE

Using European money, Staffordshire and Black Country Business Innovation Centre (BIC) has enabled local companies to turn business ideas into commercial reality by helping clients to develop their own innovative ideas by assisting in design and production of prototypes; market research and advice on funding and renting office and workshop space and business incubation facilities.

Lynn Sumner worked as Head Artist at Royal Doulton for 35 years before pursuing a career as an independent artist. She received help and support from the BIC to set up an incubation unit at the Burslem School of Art, where she received many commissions for her work.

Award winning AddMaster's Additive Masterbatch Solutions, a company, which developed additive products for the polymer, benefited from office space, funding for website development and a BIC R&D grant helped expand a range of anti-bacterial products for the medical sector.

Staffordshire

LEAP

The Learning and Employment Advantages for People (LEAP) project was managed by Connexions Staffordshire and part funded by the European Social Fund and Advantage West Midlands.

It was an exciting initiative offering in-depth support to people who are economically inactive in disadvantaged areas across Stoke-on-Trent and Newcastle-under-Lyme helping them into work.

The LEAP project offered a range of creative support measures that helped build people's confidence and remove any barriers that may have prevented them from finding

sustainable employment. These measures included: one-to-one advice, job tasters, and job search support; help with CV's, interview skills and in some circumstances expenses towards childcare, protective equipment and training. Job Tasters, providing short term placements to increase employability skills were also arranged.

LEAP used a partnership approach, working

closely with a wide range of stakeholders including employers and subcontracted projects, where additional support in specific areas of expertise or training was provided to clients.

The success of the project is reflected in over 300 people obtaining employment, over 450 entering into accredited training and over 150 Job tasters completed.



Sub-Regional Focus

BLACK COUNTRY

The Black Country has undergone huge regeneration - from an industrial area struggling to compete with global market changes and demand, to a thriving and prosperous sub-region with improved infrastructure, environment and local businesses.

With a large number of projects receiving support, the ERDF and ESF Programmes have provided a lifeline to this part of the region. Many projects have been delivered aimed at tackling a variety of barriers. Focused on social and community regeneration were projects such as Free Potential - the primary business support service of the Black Country Knowledge Society, tasked with broadening the appeal of learning, piloting new ways of learning for business and making facilities and opportunities easily accessible for local communities.

On a different note was the flagship Wolverhampton Science Park which supports the growth of innovative businesses by providing a quality physical environment and support services to the science and engineering technology sectors. This in turn has attracted inward investment to the area from the UK and overseas.

Case Studies:

- Black Country Knowledge Society
- The IT Futures Centre
- Access to Learn
- Wolverhampton Network Consortium Action Plan
- Bilston Civic Regeneration
- Walsall Revitalisation



Black Country

FREE POTENTIAL - BLACK COUNTRY KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

Hundreds of growing businesses in the Black Country have benefited from a pioneering project which has helped to improve their competitiveness and boost profitability. Called Free Potential, the ERDF project was the primary business support service of the Black Country Knowledge Society, which was tasked with broadening the appeal of learning and piloting new ways of learning for business.

Free Potential addressed the ambitions of the Black Country Consortium's 30-year vision to help the sub-region become a premier league player in the knowledge economy, by giving small to medium sized businesses access to online services.

Black Country Consortium Chief Executive Sarah Middleton said: "Private sector business expertise is crucial to our ambitions. Much of the region's aspirations are dependent on the creation of an inclusive and prosperous knowledge-based society and Free Potential was an invaluable support service to the 32,000 businesses that operate here."

At the heart of Free Potential was the Enterprise Portal that gave companies 'smart card' access to a comprehensive range of business resources designed to help SMEs manage their business and enhance the skills of employees. In addition to this a state-of-the-art 'Netbus,' which takes online facilities direct to businesses, acted as a catalyst for Free Potential's success.

Black Country

THE IT FUTURES CENTRE

£3.8 million of European money has given small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the West Midlands the technology to thrive in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

The IT Futures Centre project, based in Wolverhampton, was part funded by the European Regional Development Fund and was set up to help SMEs within the Objective 2 area improve their IT capabilities. Demonstration facilities are also available within the Centre enabling companies to evaluate the latest software and hardware.

The IT assistance offered ranged from upgrading an existing system, through to designing and implementing an entirely new system or creating a company website from scratch.

The project's consultancy arm is known as the 'IT Futures' team, provided 5 days consultancy advice and the loan of appropriate IT software and hardware to SMEs in the West Midlands across a range of sectors. From the Creative industries and Engineering Design, through to Food and



IT FUTURES CENTRE, BLACK COUNTRY

Drink, Medical Technology and Tourism and Leisure – a diverse range of small companies have benefited from the IT support.

Quality Sweet Centre was established in 1979 initially as a manufacturer and retailer of Asian sweets but in recent years diversified into a successful catering service providing a full catering service to a range of customers for events, business meetings and Asian weddings. Imagine that you need to supply 2,000 vegetable samosas on a given day, half to an event in Sheffield, the other half to an event in Bristol. You have staff, vehicles, production, accounting and suppliers to

co-ordinate. You know that if all the elements of your operation were linked by mobile IT, everything would be so much more efficient. But how do you go about it?

The solution was the engagement of the IT Futures team who developed a comprehensive IT solution for the complex administration involved in the management of several large-scale events at the same time. The system has provided a huge number of benefits for the company, not least of all by the ability to maintain an easier overview of the business status when compared with the previous paper-based system.

Black Country

ACCESS TO LEARN

Youngsters in Walsall have been given a 'Second Chance' thanks to an ESF project aimed at helping young people back into education.

Access to Learn's Second Chances project was aimed at people who had become disengaged from education or who had been excluded from school, but who wanted another chance at learning. It was run by the Vine Trust, which provided Christian outreach to young people and the wider community, by providing venues free from compromising pressures.

Through 12-week-long courses, the scheme offered people aged 14-16 the chance to learn things that would be useful to them, also helping with personal and social development, giving young people a step up into a life at college and work.



Black Country

WOLVERHAMPTON NETWORK CONSORTIUM ACTION PLAN

Wolverhampton Network Consortium has spearheaded a community based regeneration action plan which has co-ordinated investment including funding from the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund.

The action plan focused upon the most deprived neighbourhoods in the city and addressed priority investment needs highlighted by action planning and community consultation in the 15 neighbourhoods where community networks had been established.

The plan aimed to provide the catalyst for economic regeneration, creating jobs and new training, enterprise and learning opportunities for local communities, thereby helping to strengthen disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Investment has been channelled into a range of priority measures. There has been support for community based networks and neighbourhood management initiatives to promote community capacity building, development of a range of innovative social enterprises which have provided new employment and learning opportunities and provision of new and enhanced community facilities.

Amongst the new and enhanced community facilities are projects at Tettenhall Wood Institute, Pendeford Oasis, West Park

Childrens Centre and the Wednesfield Childrens Village on the site of the former Bray House. These projects have attracted significant complementary funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and from the Surestart Local Programmes. Social enterprises have been developed in a range of sectors, two of the many innovative examples being the Neighbourhood Wardens for Stowlawn and Millfields and the development of the young women's resource centre in partnership with the YWCA.

ESF funding has been utilised to the full, enhancing and developing the skills of communities and increasing the training opportunities for residents, as well as providing support for them to gain occupational and vocational skills and qualifications. Projects supported through ESF ranged from telecommunications training, to the delivery of green apprenticeships through the Environmental Green Goods and Services project, as well as training for unemployed people in the communications and media industry through the local community radio station.

By working with communities to identify and address specific needs, a number of projects across the City benefited from action plan funding and the benefits are illustrated in many ways including the creation of over 250 new jobs, training for over 1000 residents of some of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, as well as the building of 14 new and refurbished community facilities. The action plan achieved over and above their set targets, and although the action plan has come to an end, the work it has supported and helped to deliver will not.

Black Country

BILSTON CIVIC REGENERATION

Over £1.4m of ERDF was invested into a regeneration package to help improve and develop the area of Bilston in Wolverhampton.

Bilston Civic Regeneration, a package comprising of three projects: Bilston Townscape Heritage Initiative, Bilston Town Hall and Church Street/Walsall Street environmental improvements, was designed to revitalise the town's historic core into a vibrant and sustainable town centre. The projects enhanced the physical environment, reduced vacant and underused premises, stimulated new private investment, and strengthened the links with the main shopping area. In addition to retaining the existing business economy, the plans secured new businesses and employment opportunities within town centre properties by improving and refurbishing space for new start-up businesses.

A major part of the package was the total refurbishment and renovation of Bilston Town Hall which brought the building back to its former glory as a focus of community activity and secured its long-term sustainability. The hall attracts and accommodates a vibrant mix of uses including community uses, social enterprise initiatives and training activities.

Other elements of the package included improvements to the surrounding environment creating a safer, cleaner public space, which in itself acts as a catalyst to new private sector investment. Traffic calming measures, pavement widening and the creation of a new public space incorporating street furniture & artwork have also been undertaken.

Bilston Central Metro station is accessed from this development area and the improvement to the entrance, along with improved signage also formed part of the scheme. These improvements have, in addition to reducing private car volumes also promoted the use of more sustainable public transport.

The Bilston Civic Regeneration project helped to ensure a successful future for the town by securing new investment and new confidence in the area.

Black Country

WALSALL REVITALISATION

Two European-funded initiatives have helped to transform areas of Walsall.

Over £1.3m ERDF has funded the Walsall Quality Streets initiative which improved Walsall Town Centre, as part of a wider programme of regeneration activity to support the economic development of the town. The work has focused on Bradford Place Cenotaph, Bradford Street, Butlers Passage, and The Civic Quarter.

The Cenotaph was fully renovated and new lights installed. Butlers Passage, linking the main bus station and the railway station,

has been refurbished and the Civic Quarter scheme saw Darwall Street, Leicester Street and Tower Street transformed with high quality materials, futuristic curved lighting columns and a number of seating areas to attract people. A new public square in Leicester Street has been created, with innovative animated LED lighting.

Elsewhere £525,000 ERDF was used to support the Walsall Central Revitalisation Areas (CRAs) initiative which began in

August 2003 to improve key strategic sites in Bloxwich, Darlaston and Willenhall. Historic buildings have been improved encouraging direct investment from private owners. In Bloxwich improvements to the market place stimulated the redevelopment of surrounding retail premises and a new anchor Wilkinsons store has opened. In addition, the market now trades on an additional day, attracting traders in from other areas.



Sub-Regional Focus

COVENTRY AND WARWICKSHIRE

From the vibrancy and excitement of the city with its heritage, history and shopping, to the peace and tranquillity of the breathtaking countryside, you will find everything in the sub-region of Coventry and Warwickshire.

Historically centred on traditional industries, European funding has helped breathe new life into the area with renovated buildings, new business facilities and opportunities for local community residents to access and take full advantage of re-training and employment opportunities in a wide variety of sectors.

European Structural Funds have played a key role in the regeneration of Coventry and Warwickshire.

Projects that have received funding under the ERDF and ESF Programmes have been aimed at improving the area for the benefit of those who are residents, visitors or simply passing through.

From transforming derelict and contaminated land at Electric Wharf in order to provide space for businesses and an environmental best practice showcase in the area, to raising awareness of organic food and farming at The Vegetable Kingdom through to community projects such as the Hillfields Action Plan where one activity transformed a derelict former printing works into a thriving community facility, as well as encouraging business start-ups and diversification through the Eliot Park Innovation Centre. The impact of the funding in this sub-region has been truly exceptional and with sustainable foundations laid, the future looks rosy for Coventry and Warwickshire.

Case Studies:

- Ricoh Arena
- Hillfields Action Plan
- Vegetable Kingdom
- Skills 2 Success and Act 2
- The John White Community Centre
- MENCAP



Coventry and Warwickshire

RICOH ARENA

Set within a site covering more than 35 acres, the Ricoh Arena is unlike any other development of its kind in the UK. Supported by over £4.7 million ERDF, The Ricoh Arena has acted as a catalyst for regeneration in the north of the city of Coventry and forms an important part of the city council's bigger plan to rejuvenate the entire area.

Work started on the site of the former Foleshill gasworks site in September 2004 which saw the controlled implosion of the last remaining gas tower and a number of years on the project has achieved and surpassed all that was set out to achieve - in terms of employment, environmental improvement, entertainment and profile of the city.

ERDF funding was used to support eligible areas of economic development. This included the state-of-the-art exhibition and conference facilities, a number of public transport initiatives and also the development of pedestrian archways which were built under the railway line to provide better access for all to the arena and also to job opportunities which have been created due to the overall development.

The arena was officially opened in February 2007 where around 10,000 people joined Richard Caborne MP, Kelly Holmes, Beverley Knight and other stars to enjoy the celebrations which were centred on the theme of 'Made in Coventry' with 1,400 people showcasing the arts and cultural scene in the city, taking in all parts of the Ricoh Arena. The two special guests unveiled a plaque in the atrium of the multi-purpose venue, before the Coventry designed and developed Jaguar C-XF Concept car, was shown for the first time in Europe.

In addition to this in May 07, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors West Midlands' awards took place in Birmingham and the Arena together with another ERDF funded project Electric Wharf were jointly awarded the Regeneration award as outstanding projects in the region.

Coventry and Warwickshire

HILLFIELDS ACTION PLAN

The Hillfields Action Plan was awarded £4.9 million from the European Union to support projects between 2002 and 2008.

The transformation of a derelict former printing works into a thriving community facility, Hope Centre, helped kick-start activity and received the FOCUS Award for Regeneration.

With a 50-place day nursery, a community café, a learning centre and a large community hall, the centre hosts meetings, events and activities, as well as delivering services such as a youth programme that gives young people access to sports coaching, music, drama and other activities. The Learning Zone provides ESOL and ICT courses and training in childcare, security, first aid, food hygiene, health and safety and cookery and language taster courses.

Warwickshire Wildlife Trust's Interaction project uses the environment as a focus for community involvement. One example is the regeneration of East Street Pocket Park, where climbing plants, cherry trees and a wildflower meadow have been planted through community planting days. Community recycling bins and a mosaic have also been designed and created by local children in partnership with Arts Exchange through a series of activities and events.

The funding also helped to develop the Hillfields Gardening Club, a group of local volunteers who helped to maintain the various greenspaces that have been

improved across Hillfields. Improvements made to the village square as part of a community planting day were named Best Urban Project at the 2006 Environment Agency Action Earth Awards.

ESF funding was also used to support the area's UK Online centre, to give access to computers, help and advice on using computers and access to broadband Internet, a scanner and photography-related software. Beneficiaries were given employment advice and even CD-ROM-based driving theory courses, to help them search for jobs in Coventry and Warwickshire.

Coventry and Warwickshire

VEGETABLE KINGDOM

European Funding has helped to sow the seeds of success for Garden Organic, the UK's leading organic growing charity, based in Ryton on Dunsmore, Warwickshire.

Nearly £2 million of European Funding was invested in Garden Organic Ryton to create a new interactive experience at their visitor centre called the 'Vegetable Kingdom', and a new facility, 'The Centre for Organic Horticulture', to house the charity's education, research and advisory teams.

The Vegetable Kingdom has been specially designed to tell the history of vegetables in the UK - how they've evolved from wild plants and the part they've played in our social history and incorporates recycled materials and conservation features wherever possible. It takes visitors on a trip through veg history and explores the exotic past of our every day vegetables as well as the more vibrant varieties, all through an array of hands-on displays and games. In line with government initiatives, the centre promotes the benefits of a healthy diet and shows how important vegetables are to general health and well-being.

To complete the experience the kingdom looks over the charity's world-renowned Heritage Seed Library, which preserves over 800 varieties of heirloom vegetables that are under the threat of extinction for generations to continue enjoying.

Visitors are able to see the seed saving process of sorting, cleaning, drying and chilling as well as viewing the many weird and wonderful seeds in the collection.

The Centre for Organic Horticulture offers greatly improved facilities at the charity's primary site, enabling this to become the headquarters of the organisation and a base for the charity's work on researching and promoting organic gardening, farming and food in this rapidly growing sector.

Aside from the positive educational, health and environmental impact of the scheme, the success of Vegetable Kingdom, has had a knock on effect to the local and sub-regional economy.



VEGETABLE KINGDOM, WARWICKSHIRE

SKILLS 2 SUCCESS AND ACT 2

A Warwickshire woman, who left the circus after years as a knife-thrower's assistant, had her talents for entertaining children spotted by a local nursery and went on to earn valuable childcare qualifications thanks to support from the Learning and Skills Council's ESF Co-financing Programme.

Julie Bradford of Henley-in-Arden started out as a hairdresser, but joined the circus aged 25 as a knife-thrower's assistant. However, after years of constant travelling, she left the circus in 2004 to be closer to her family. Her children started attending the Pathways Day Nursery in Henley-in-Arden and the manager immediately spotted Julie's talent for entertaining the children.

She began work at Pathways' Warwick nursery and worked towards an NVQ Level 3 in childcare, having obtained her NVQ Level 2 in record time thanks to two training projects being delivered locally by the Association of Training Providers (Coventry and Warwickshire).

The projects, Skills 2 Success and Act 2, have seen training providers from across the area working together in a number of sectors to offer training to people who could not otherwise afford it.

Coleen Twigger from the Association of Training Providers (Coventry and Warwickshire) said: "Julie already had skills as a mother, but it was the ESF funding from the local LSC which was able to give Julie the opportunity to do something that would boost her into a new career."



THE JOHN WHITE COMMUNITY CENTRE



£650,000 from the European Regional Development Fund has helped to build a thriving community centre in Coventry but its 'no ordinary community centre'...

Many years ago a small group of local people got together to address the growing need for a community meeting place. Unemployment was on the rise, anti-social behaviour was increasing and older people in the community were feeling isolated and lonely. The vision was to develop not just a community meeting place, but a resource centre that would put the heart back into this once thriving and close mining community.

After a couple of years of searching, finally a

suitable site was identified. It was a small run down building owned by the local authority and located on the edge of the recreational field. With the site agreed, funding secured and an architect and developer employed, the project started to take shape with building beginning in 2005.

Through partnership working with Coventry City Council, the result is a bright modern building that is a shining beacon of all the hard work and commitment made by the people involved. The Centre opened its

doors to the public in July 2006 and delivers a wide range of activities. True to its original aims and objectives it offers access to a range of learning and training, a wide range of recreational activities for both children and adults, advice and guidance for people seeking work and support for existing and new community groups. The centres is a welcoming place where people feel they belong, that the community have a sense of shared ownership and where local issues can be addressed by delivering services people want and can access.

MENCAP

Mencap Pathway focused on helping unemployed adults with a learning disability to access training and work.

Its driving force was the belief that paid employment brings greater independence and confidence, and helps people take control of their lives. With ESF funding from Jobcentre Plus, Mencap Pathway has made this possible, supporting people into a wide range of jobs.

Every individual worked with a Job Trainer to

assess their particular needs. Work experience and work trials were set up as well as part-time and full-time employment. Mencap Pathway also worked closely with employers, explaining the many benefits of employing people with a learning disability and helped employers fully integrate them into their workforce. Mencap Pathway continued its help for clients in the workplace, giving them the support they needed to develop and maintain the skills required in a rapidly changing employment market.

David Smalley, 25, who has a learning disability and lives in Nuneaton, was stuck at home, and had never had a job before he joined the ESF Mencap Pathway project. The charity helped him learn his bus journey and walk to work, forged a relationship with builders merchant Buildbase and, through a work placement, helped him gain the work skills he needed to do his job.

Anne Barney, Mencap Job Trainer, said: "Until Mencap stepped in, David had never had a job. He had very little social life and had never even crossed the road on his own. We gave him the support and confidence to prove himself in the world of work."

Sub-Regional Focus

BIRMINGHAM AND SOLIHULL

During World War II Birmingham suffered severe damage by bombing and in the 1950s and 1960s the centre was redeveloped with many concrete office buildings and ring-roads.

The work gave Birmingham the reputation of being a 'concrete jungle' – an image that the people and businesses of the sub-region were determined to change – and change they did.

With a population of around nine million people, Birmingham is England's second city and one of the largest cities in Europe. Now thanks to European funding, it really is a city to be proud of. European Structural Funding has played a key role in Birmingham's renaissance. From the award-winning Water's Edge development at Brindleyplace through to the long-neglected Eastside of the city where amongst a whole master plan of projects you can find Millennium Point - a world-class visitor attraction and technology research facility in the heart of Digbeth; Masshouse Circus - which has seen the demolition of the elevated section of the ring road and 'concrete collar' blocking the expansion of the city centre; and many schemes to support small businesses in the wider Eastside area.

To support this major regeneration a large number of community projects have been developed including Unltd – a project set up by a local social entrepreneur, giving children and young people in the area the opportunity to get involved in artistic workshops to stimulate creativity, promote self worth and personal and artistic development. In recent years the centre of Birmingham has also undergone a dramatic transformation with the redevelopment of the Bullring shopping mall. However it is not only the hustle and bustle of the city which attracts visitors to the sub-region.

The fine architecture, Earlswood Lakes – a popular tourist attraction and the impressive new Touchwood retail complex, makes Solihull an attraction in its own right.

With a world-class cultural scene, the bustling city and outstanding developments offering many facilities and opportunities for all, it is not hard to see how the transformation has made this sub-region a great place to live and visit.

Case Studies:

- MG Rover
- Bangladeshi Youth Forum
- 4Real Life
- The Bordesley Centre
- Connecting Communities to Learning
- Birmingham Town Hall

Birmingham and Solihull MG ROVER

In April 2005 the MG Rover plant closed resulting in the direct loss of 6,000 jobs with potentially serious consequences for the local economy. MG Rover went into administration and the company did not have sufficient cash to continue trading.



A package of £176 million of central and regional Government support for former employees, their families, suppliers and the wider community was announced. This included £15 million from ESF for job search activity and retraining.

The ESF support package delivered by the LSC and Jobcentre Plus, included services to help the workers develop new skills and qualifications and it was also used for apprenticeships, and workers who were eligible for support towards new qualifications even after they had found new jobs.

By June 2007, 93% of the individuals affected were no longer receiving Working Age benefits, 3,302 individuals have received training and 88% of individuals who have received training are now in work.

One of the training courses set up to help ex MG Rover workers was Capital Medical. Two recipients of the training, Steve Godfrey and Steve Wilson, were placed into positions at Birmingham's Selly Oak Hospital. Steve Godfrey said: "We all think hospitals are all about employing doctors and nurses but they are only the tip of the iceberg. There's

a whole host of jobs that I was unaware of until I got a phone call out of the blue from the LSC after I was made redundant."

"Every day is a new challenge and you are dealing with people's lives so the job's vital".

Another example of the training provided was the Activate project. Supported by £493,225 from the European Social Fund, University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust delivered a pioneering training and recruitment project helping unemployed workers take new roles in the NHS.

Since April 2005 more than 137 unemployed people have taken part in the Programme with many now in full time employment.

Course candidates were taught about the huge variety of entry level roles that exist in the NHS and gained practical support with job applications and preparing for interviews. For three weeks candidates also had the chance to shadow an NHS worker in their preferred role, from hospital porter to theatre orderly, or even an A grade nurse.

One former MG Rover worker who benefited from the Activate project was 40-year old Mark Parker from Bournville, gained a job as a theatre orderly at Birmingham's Selly Oak Hospital. Prior to taking the job he had been a Rover worker for fifteen years. He comments:

"After being made redundant I was having no luck at all with my job applications and when I found out about the Activate project I jumped at it. My last job at MG Rover involved working on a production line, but as a theatre orderly I get the chance to talk to different people every day and feel that I am doing something exciting."

Birmingham and Solihull

BANGLADESHI YOUTH FORUM

Streetwise teenager Imran Hussain put his extensive knowledge of Birmingham's youth culture to good use by striving to help wayward youngsters back into education, training or employment.

The 17-year-old was part of the team at the Lozells-based Bangladeshi Youth Forum, funded from Birmingham City Council's ESF Co-financing Programme, which reached out to marginalised youngsters in some of the most disadvantaged areas of Britain's second city.

It's a role Imran relished and which convinced him that his own future lies very much within the field of youth work.

"There were a lot of young people in the area who found themselves kicked out of school and who wandered the streets. I aimed to reach out and show them that there are opportunities available to them," said Imran, a former pupil at Broadway School, Perry Barr.

Imran left school with eight GCSEs but little idea of how he wished to occupy the rest of his life. After a brief unfulfilling spell at college, he sought the advice and support of the BYF team and has not looked back since.

"My main target was to get a real understanding of all aspects of youth work, to perhaps go back to college and, eventually, to study youth work at university," said Imran.

Imran used his skills in art and design to define a series of projects with the aim of making contact with various marginalised groups and pointing them towards education, training or employment.

"I worked as part of the team on a series of arts-based projects trying to engage young people with both the community and with each other, and enjoyed the challenge very much".

Imran's enthusiasm, combined with his own experiences of being a British-born Bangladeshi teenager on the streets of Aston, proved to be invaluable in helping the BYF bridge the gap between disaffected groups around the city.

"Imran was very popular because he knew so many people, and was seen as a bit of a role model when it came to showing youngsters that there's a range of opportunities available to them out there," said his colleague Alfu Miah, an Employment Support Coordinator with the BYF, who was delighted with the young man's progress.



The Bangladeshi Youth Forum was one of four providers selected to deliver the integrated "Employment Connections" programme that was a joint funding venture between the Aston Pride New Deal for Communities initiative and the City Council's ESF Co-financing Programme.

And Imran's verdict on the initiative? "The ESF funding helped to open up a whole new world of opportunity for me, and it could easily do the same for others," he declared.

Birmingham and Solihull

4REAL-LIFE

4Real-Life was a £569,000 ESF funded project ran by Birmingham and Solihull Education Business Links, which offered extended work experience and employability programmes to the local community.

Following completion in 2008, the project has helped over 800 young people from schools and community organisations to make a smooth transition from school into work, training or further education.

Young people who took part, such as 15 year old Anthony Jeyes from Arden School Knowle, benefited from increased motivation, growth in confidence, improved attendance and punctuality as well as a renewed interest

in learning and the world of work. Many secured part-time jobs and all had a better understanding about the opportunities available to them in the future.

Anthony Jeyes took part in a weekly placement at Plume Tyres in Knowle. During his placement, he gained 'hands on' experience - learning how to change and service tyres, stock control and customer service.

Placement Supervisor Mark Houghton commented;

"Anthony grew in confidence and quickly started to get really involved. For many young people like him, practical work experience and insight into the 'real world' is really what helps them grow and broaden their horizons."



Birmingham and Solihull

THE BORDESLEY CENTRE

Over £2 million from the European Regional Development Fund was used to help tackle the high levels of economic and social deprivation in the city and secure the path to employment opportunities by reviving and improving the grade II listed Bordesley Centre in Birmingham.

The Centre is a unique community-led project with large scale intervention dealing with key factors affecting deprivation in communities. Established as a 'Centre of Excellence', it includes more than 4,000 sq m of floor space facilitating quality education, employment and enterprise development within a friendly and stimulating environment.

The impact of the Centre is clear to see, on average attracting 12,000 visitors every week, facilitating the placement of people into jobs every year and helping many individuals to start their own businesses. In addition to

this the Centre has safeguarded and created jobs tackling the skills shortages which has enabled local people to take advantage of the opportunities created by massive building projects, such as the Eastside development and other areas of the City and the Region.

The project was run by The Muath Trust, who were established to realise the dream of long ignored communities by addressing their basic needs, which included access to education and training, social and recreational opportunities. The Trust has demonstrated that the creative and inspired

work of a few determined members of the community can help that community to integrate with the wider society, contribute to its success and share in its opportunities.

With the help of funding from the European Regional Development Fund, Birmingham and Solihull Learning and Skills Council and Advantage West Midlands, the project presented a breakthrough in terms of the scale and range of intervention by a community-based organisation that has demonstrated it can match aspiration with commitment and delivery.



Birmingham and Solihull

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES TO LEARNING

Connecting Communities to Learning was a project set up to reach excluded communities by promoting access to learning and education opportunities within communities, through community based learning and education centres. It involved the physical refurbishment of community premises to facilitate an accessible and appropriate learning environment for disadvantaged communities.

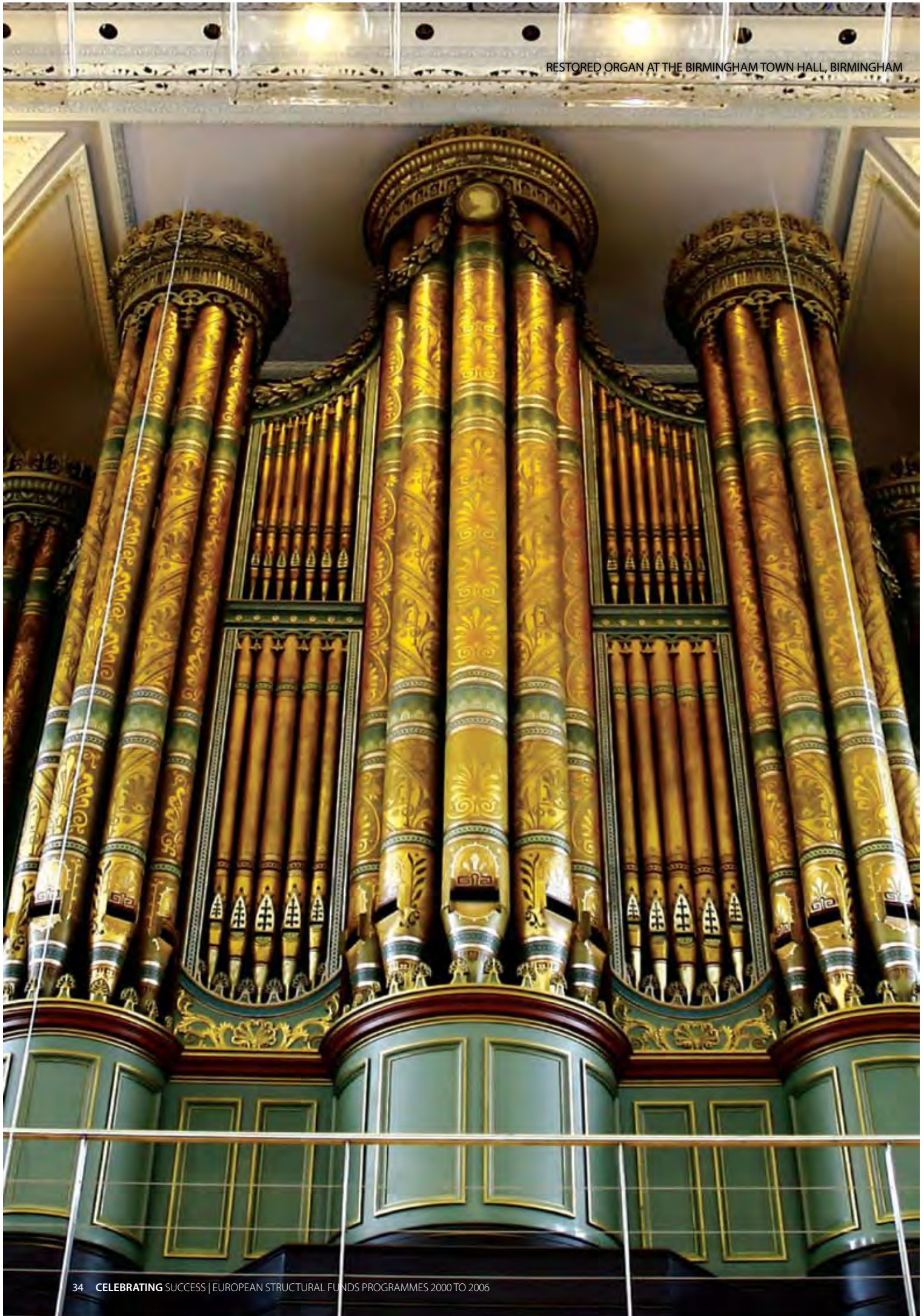
Part of this project was the Cannon Hill Education and Training Centre, in Balsall Heath. Based in a former pub, the centre provides a range of learning opportunities for people who live in the area which is one of the most deprived in the City. With a total project value of £1.6million, the centre received £800,000 from the European Regional Development Fund as well as significant contributions from the Learning and Skills Council, UK Online.

The Cannon Hill Centre supports local people with a local resource. Some of the people who use the centre are from minority ethnic

groups who have low levels of literacy and numeracy, and who have never been in employment. Health and well-being is a major issue for users of the centre and an all-female gym and advice on nutrition and health is also provided. Advice and support is available for those wanting to get jobs, with help being available on interview techniques and completion of application forms.

The centre has become a focal point for the community in the Cannon Hill neighbourhood replacing a prominent eyesore with a well used and valued facility.

In November 2005, Tessa Jowell MP, and fifteen other ministers from across Europe, visited the centre and gained the opportunity to talk to beneficiaries of the project, as part of EU Gender Equality Ministerial Conference. The community training project received glowing reports with Minister's who claimed it to be the highlight of the whole conference.



BIRMINGHAM TOWN HALL

Closed following concerns being raised about the building's safety in 1996, the Town Hall, Birmingham's largest, oldest and most important community facility serving the city centre has been revitalised. Supported by £3 million from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), Birmingham City Council (£18.3m) and the Heritage Lottery Fund (£13.7m), the restoration of one of Birmingham's most valuable Grade 1 listed buildings was finally completed October 2007.

Occupying a prominent site in Birmingham City Centre, the Town Hall was originally opened in 1834 as one of Birmingham's first public buildings. It is seen as a forerunner in the City's history of building grand and prestigious buildings. With over 170 years as one of the city's prime civic and mid-scale music venues, the Town Hall has played host to some of the best known names in classical, jazz and popular music, as well as many of the UK's top comedians during the 1980s and 90s.

During its closure, patrons and supporters of the Town Hall campaigned tirelessly to prevent the building disappearing from the cityscape. As a landmark building in the city centre, its closure in 1996 was seen as a major loss to the cultural life of Birmingham. However the renovation work is now complete and has re-opened as a dynamic, distinctive and thriving multi-purpose cultural and community venue and centre. Aside from national and international performers, with a capacity of around 1,100, theatre style, it now fills an important niche for corporate hires such as launches, business meetings, conferences and presentations. Other key users for the Town Hall are local arts & entertainment providers, community organisations and education institutions.

The renovated Town Hall offers a unique space and fills a gap in the market for a mid-size arts venue. As a welcome addition to the current range of Birmingham venues, its distinguishable features set it apart from existing facilities in the city and provide the perfect complement to other cultural spaces such as Symphony Hall with which the Town Hall is managed in tandem by the

independent charitable trust, Performances Birmingham.

On a broader scale the redevelopment of this iconic building has also helped to create 'a string of pearls' between Eastside, the city centre, the ICC and other developments at Brindleyplace on the west side of the city.



DETAIL OF RESTORED ORGAN, BIRMINGHAM

CROSS REGION FOCUS

The previous sections explain and highlight how a wide variety of projects in each of the sub-regions of the West Midlands has benefited from the support of European funding. Many of the projects developed have been focused on addressing specific needs and barriers characterised by the nature of specific sub-regions. In addition to this there have been unique European supported projects which cover activities across a number of sub-regions.

Cross Region Focus

ACCELERATE

Nearly £34 million of European funding has helped to assist and support the automotive supply chain in the West Midlands through a package of support delivered by Accelerate.

The programme was developed in response to the needs of the region's motor vehicle industry in a collaborative partnership of public and private sector organisations.

The initiatives involved a variety of programmes, ranging from creating customer driven supply chain improvement groups, increasing the awareness and use of technology, business and capital equipment grants, networks for change - all with the aim of improving manufacturing performance, product innovation and future sustainability in all levels of the chain.

Since it was established, Accelerate has assisted over 3,600 companies in securing production efficiencies and best practice manufacturing techniques, safeguarding and creating over 50,000 jobs in the process.

Accelerate also has a proven track record in providing a wide range of professional services, support options and skill development opportunities to the automotive supply chain and one organisation who has benefited more than most is the family run presswork firm Frank Dudley Ltd.

It took all of the Dudley-Toole family, the management team and their employees' determination to keep the company alive when they were caught in the slipstream of the MG Rover collapse. But after having lost nearly a third of its business when Longbridge shut its doors to mass production, the Birmingham-based company secured new customers and work on a range of vehicle platforms.

The firm, which was established in 1948, specialises in metal pressing and welded assemblies, with its products appearing on applications as diverse as tanks and fridges and is always looking for new innovations, such as robotics to improve welding.

Case Studies:

- Accelerate
- Aldridge Piling Equipment (Hire) Ltd

In 2008 the company bought ATJ, a producer of brackets and suspension components for London Taxis which formed an important part of the company's diversification strategy.

Accelerate provided funding for supply chain improvement programmes, as well as helping fund the business operating system, which monitored and organised materials in and deliveries out. In 2008, the company achieved ISO TS 16949 2000 – the latest global automotive quality standard.

Cross Region Focus

ALDRIDGE PILING EQUIPMENT (HIRE) COMPANY LTD

European Funding helped to develop Connect Midlands, a project designed to address the lack of preparedness of potential high growth SMEs in the region who were looking for external, equity investment. Through the aid of coaching and mentoring support for technology companies, Connect Midlands covered issues ranging from the business model, routes to markets, financial planning and the implications and benefits of introducing external equity holders. One of the beneficiaries to have received this help was Aldridge Piling Equipment (Hire) Company Ltd.

For over 30 years Aldridge Piling Equipment (APEhire) specialised in the hiring of small piling equipment and they have diversified into manufacturing and plastic piling. APEhire who supply air power impacted hammers and hydraulic vibratory attachments, required financial assistance with the production of a new attachment that operates as both an impact hammer and a vibrator, the APEX.

Members of the organisation attended a seminar hosted by Connect Midlands, where they described the different streams. The company signed up for the Amber stream, which they have found fantastic.

They gained the opportunity to meet like-minded individuals and discuss ideas in a financial perspective. Connect Midlands broke down the various areas of the business plan, explained how to pitch for investment in an attractive way and looked at how the business could be financed. Connect Midlands also explained how to get the ball rolling by looking at how to use existing products to demonstrate profitability and cash flows. The support received gave the company confidence to go forward and found the scheme very flexible allowing them to adapt to the changing situation.



ALDRIDGE EQUIPMENT AT WORK, BIRMINGHAM

HORIZONTAL THEMES

Whilst aiming to revitalise the region, the European Programmes were also aimed at making lasting changes to the regeneration of the area, ensuring projects were accessible to all communities and that they promoted and encouraged innovation which is essential to the future economic prosperity of the West Midlands. To ensure all these aims were addressed through the Programmes all projects were required to address the Horizontal Themes and incorporate them into activities.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Everything we do has consequences and those consequences are becoming more obvious as we learn about the world around us. The Sustainable Development theme sought to consider the environmental, health, social and economic aspects of our planet in all the decisions we take and make sure that those decisions have more positive rather than negative impacts. The European Structural Funds Programmes recognised the importance of integrating sustainable thinking and practice into all ERDF and ESF funded projects, hence consideration of this Horizontal Themes in all projects.

Sustainable Development is at the heart of all Government policy making and requires the equal and simultaneous consideration of ensuring that opportunities to allow everyone to fulfil their potential are available, environmental protection and enhancement takes place and the provision of the skills required by businesses now and in the future is well thought out.

Considering issues such as skills development, opportunities for individuals and businesses to expand, energy, waste, environmental training and biodiversity,

many projects have proactively considered and incorporated sustainable elements into activities with outstanding results.

Case Studies:

- Hillside Herbs
- Salt Engineering
- Electric Wharf

Sustainable Development HILLSIDE HERBS

Residents of the St Thomas's Ward in Dudley have been encouraged to get green-fingered thanks to an ESF funded project using land, which would otherwise have become derelict.

Hillside Herbs – a £237,000 project run by St Thomas's Community Network, in partnership with BTCV - British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, trained unemployed and volunteers in different aspects of organic horticulture and wildlife promotion, in what was one of the regions most socially deprived areas.

Trainees learnt a wide range of skills from rotation planting and wildlife encouragement techniques as well as organic methods of horticulture, while a food cooperative ran by



the volunteers provided organic, seasonal food, for the local community. Compostable waste was reused onsite and natural habitats supporting a variety of plants and animals species have been sustained.

The site itself supported a large variety of plant and animal species including lesser stag beetles, solitary and worker bees, hover flies, toads, rove beetles, blackbirds and starlings. The established pond which was stocked with tadpoles and wildflowers has flourished

and seeds have been collected for planting around other areas of the site.

BTCV's involvement in the project ensured that the wildlife considerations of the broader area were taken into account. Hillside Herbs provided an additional wildlife refuge which connected to others in the local area.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Development SALT ENGINEERING

Based in Coventry, Salt Engineering has been making fixtures, jigs, gauges and tools to order for over 20 years. Selling only to the trade, historically the company has worked within the aerospace, automotive and engineering sectors, but has now expanded its activities to be involved in nuclear power and gas turbine industries where there are areas of growth. However the company realised that times were changing after being informed by Land Rover, a valued customer that in order to continue their business relationship they would need to obtain ISO 14001.

At first the company did not recognise the relevance and benefits of introducing this as they did not consider themselves to be a big polluter and they don't use chemicals. But after progressing on a programme organised by Business Sustain they began to see things differently. They reviewed their systems and the ability to quantify them and reflect on how their activities effect the environment. Although they don't use chemicals, they identified that improvements could be made in the disposal and recycling of the swarf (metal shavings) and waste oil. Changes were put into place and the company are now controlling their own destiny in terms of waste which in turn has maintained existing business and provided opportunity to expand.

Business Sustain provided assistance, information and interpretation of new legislation, training sessions for management and staff to raise awareness, explain the new changes and meet other suppliers; and finally worked closely with the company to review current activities and explain and put into place measures which would allow them to achieve the required standards.



The support from Business Sustain has given them a competitive advantage and without an organisation like Business Sustain, small companies such as Salt Engineering would not have got the 14001 and would not be aware of the environment elements.

Tom Moss, Director of Salt Engineering said, "We have worked hard and safeguarded our business and we are much more comfortable now at looking towards the future. Without Business Sustain, we would not have been

able to do this not knowing where to start and how to fund it. They were terrific and they also made it enjoyable to learn ensuring everyone understands its relevance".

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Development ELECTRIC WHARF

On the site of Coventry's original electricity turbine, £1.8m from the European Regional Development Fund has helped to build a village for the future which is innovative, sustainable and integrated with the surrounding communities.

From energy use and waste disposal to landscaping and biodiversity issues, Electric Wharf is an outstanding example of how sustainability can be truly incorporated into all aspects of a development producing an environmental showcase in the local area.

Established in 1896 to generate the first electricity for the City, the Electric Wharf project has taken the old Boiler House, Turbine and Generator Halls and renovated and converted them to create homes and work spaces whilst taking into consideration and putting into practice a whole host of sustainable elements.

The project is green in a number of different ways. New roofing material on site made from recycled aluminium and steel is left untreated rather than using paints or other preservatives. The theme of recycling extends to using building materials which have been recycled from demolition or sourced from local suppliers with much of the new internal structure of the buildings made from scrap reengineered timber. Waste recycling is also encouraged and supported through ample segregation space.

80% of materials from the original site have been recycled including old untreated steel used as kerb edges and old bricks used as planted retaining walls around the front of the buildings. Metal floor gratings were used for ramps and external cladding creating features around the site. The remaining brick waste was crushed onsite and reused for fill.

Electric Wharf retained as much of the historic fabric of the original buildings as possible



with exposed old brickwork and steel. Original roof trusses have been retained in many of the buildings and have been made into a feature of the internal design of the units. Reminders of the heritage of the site have been incorporated into the design and rather than being hidden they are left overtly in their original condition. A travelling crane that would have been used in Electric Wharf's first life has been retained as an additional element of "industrial archaeology", but incorporated into the supporting structure for balcony space.

Water and electricity provided the inspiration for many design aspects of the development and were incorporated into the walkway design of the developments entrance. Focusing on water, the project made a feature of the canal and a new footbridge across the canal has opened up access from the north of Coventry to the City Centre, via a pleasant waterside route for pedestrians and cyclists, increasing access to job opportunities for residents in one of the City's most deprived communities.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

One of the focuses from Europe is on gender equality which tackles the inequalities in employment between women and men, improves opportunities in training, balanced representation in decision making processes and the reconciliation of work and family life.

Europe, however, recognises that ethnicity is an equally high equality issue within the region. Combined with the UK's long-established legislative framework around equal opportunities, the Programmes covered all aspects of equal opportunities including race and disability ensuring that everyone has equal access to training and other assistance regardless of gender, ethnicity or disability.

Equality of Opportunity is not just about political correctness; demographic changes, skills shortages, the need for new enterprises and wealth generation make it fundamental to the economic success of the region. The Structural Funds Programmes provided a real opportunity to create sustainable benefits – an opportunity which many projects took and developed in their own ways.

Case Studies:

- Project Renaissance 21
- Access to Finance
- The Severn Centre

Equality of Opportunity

PROJECT RENAISSANCE 21

Construction skills have been born again thanks to £205,960 from the European Social Fund.

Project Renaissance 21 based on Edward Road in Balsall Heath Birmingham, was a specialised training and work experience programme run by social enterprise Jericho Community Business. It focused on the basic skills needed in the construction industry, particularly painting and decorating, bricklaying and carpentry.

The scheme took a unique approach to ensuring equal opportunities was addressed - Trainees were referred to the project from local hostels, addiction agencies and Job Centre Plus within the local Objective 2 wards as well as from further afield to satisfy the demand to this type of training. Everyone who took part underwent an intensive interview at the start to establish their training and development needs, and mentor support was available throughout the programme.

City & Guilds qualifications were worked towards first as they rely on skills tests rather than written evidence – this made it easier for those trainees with literacy issues to still



attain certificates. In addition to this mentors worked alongside trainees to provide constant one-to-one support and to track the personal development needs of those on the courses. Some of the mentors, who had experienced disadvantages themselves through homelessness and unemployment, also received training in order to perform their mentoring roles.

Extensive monitoring of the trainees on the course gave a rounded picture of the disadvantages and barriers faced by the trainees on the Renaissance Programme.

On average most trainees had multiple disadvantages including homelessness, long-term unemployment, and a background of offending, drug use or former addiction issues.

A part of the Programme focused on the renovation of a local house by Renaissance trainees. Once completed this became available as temporary accommodation for some of the homeless individuals who attended the Programme.

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Equality of Opportunity

ACCESS TO FINANCE

Access to Finance has long been perceived as a barrier for women and ethnic minorities starting and developing a business.

Although there is considerable demand from small businesses for flexible forms of finance, the sums and costs involved mean that small scale venture capital is unattractive to commercial venture capitalists.

To address this issue, the Access to Finance measure within the Objective 2 Programme was established recognising that a range of mechanisms were required to meet the varying needs of businesses. One project identified to deliver this support was the Advantage Creative Fund.

Advantage Creative Fund (ACF) was a £5 million venture capital fund set up specifically to assist the growth of the creative industries in the West Midlands by investing in creative businesses that have a potential commercial product or those needing to expand for sustainability.

Supported by nearly £2.5 million of ERDF the project has made a number of investments in companies covering a wide variety

of activities in the creative industry. One company to have received support is DA Recordings and Emusu.com.

Established in 2001 and trading since January 2005, DA Recordings is a music service provider working within the industry to distribute music via an e solution mechanism. Founders Chris Thompson and Ann-Marie Taggart, led a team of creative and sales staff in Birmingham and technical experts who work from Delhi in India.

The main product is titled Emusu.com and this, along with other products, enables record companies to sell their catalogues over the internet and mobile phone. DA Recordings then pay the royalties on the behalf of the music companies to the artists. This sales activity is then reported to the official chart company.

Advantage Creative Fund helped DA Recordings by offering business advice, contacts and leads for the company,

marketing advice and equity finance.

"Funding was a major obstacle as our business was just not on the radar of traditional sources of finance like the banks. Fortunately, we found the Advantage Creative Fund who has invested more than £200,000 enabling us to recruit the people we needed and put in place the commercial infrastructure," said Chris. "Without the investment from ACF it would have been very difficult to secure the funding necessary to take the business to the next level."

The company boasts success with a significant rise in the number of clients and websites it now services and won two Creative City Awards sponsored by Birmingham City Council and the European Regional Development Fund for Outstanding Innovation and The Outstanding Business Development Award which is an excellent endorsement of the success.

Equality of Opportunity

THE SEVERN CENTRE

£1.1 million from the European Regional Development Fund has helped to establish the Severn Centre - a multi-use community centre, in Highley, Shropshire, which incorporates training facilities, a community hall, computer suite, all day childcare, internet access, a library, a police station and veterinary service as well as a range of sport and leisure facilities.

The Centre boasts impressive initiatives and services all ensuring that equal opportunities issues are considered and implemented. From the planning stages this project has involved many representatives from the community. Led by Bridgnorth District

Council, the planning and delivery of the project involved the Highley Project Group which comprised 30 community representatives and ten statutory agencies. The Centre continues to maintain these links with a number of local volunteers contributing to the running and maintenance of the centre. A 'Friends and Users' group was also set up to help with fundraising.

The Centre is fully accessible with all services on one level, automatic doors, low level reception desk, Braille signage and hearing loops; nominated spaces for parking for disabled people and parents with children.

OFSTED registered childcare supports all other activities at the Centre. A service is provided, which enables working parents to take advantage of it. This includes both breakfast, holiday and after-school clubs. A large number of children are registered with more parents from a wide area, interested in using these facilities. This has replaced a previously patchy childcare service and has also enabled a number of local people to access jobs and start new businesses. The provision of childcare was of fundamental importance in the design of the project and has great potential to be a self sustaining element of the centre.

INNOVATION

Without new ideas we cannot develop better products and services and so provide a better future for everyone living and working in the West Midlands. We always need new ideas and inventions which is why the Innovation Horizontal Theme was so important.

The emphasis on the Innovation Theme during the Programme has helped the region to prepare for many of the new EU Programmes which are largely based on the Lisbon Agenda, which itself has innovation at its core.

Innovation is not just about new inventions, it is based on the four key areas of the development of companies and resources, knowledge transfer and engaging the end-user. There are many examples of how projects have utilised innovation to restore the competitive advantage of the region.

Case Studies:

- The Hothouse (Phase 2 – Annex)
- New Product Development for the Jewellery Sector
- Eliot Park Innovation Centre (EPIC)

Innovation

THE HOTHOUSE (PHASE 2 – ANNEX)

Over £480,000 from the European Regional Development Fund has been used to support the Hothouse Phase 2 Annex project which has developed and brought to life the innovative side of Stoke's ceramics industry.

Located in Stoke on Trent, European funding has helped to extend a previously successful ERDF project, providing a hub for learning as well as support for businesses in the ceramics and high value added industries. The project included the provision of studio and incubator space as well as a variety of technologies and support which have all helped to reshape how the ceramics industry behaves and is perceived through innovating around design possibilities.

The Hothouse works under a number of key principles: change, challenge, encourage, inspire, support and celebrate. These principles drive the businesses that work there to innovate in their approach to work and by providing the networks and technologies they need then new exciting work is now being supported.

Virtual modelling is just one of the new applications of technology that the Hothouse uses. A whole virtual dining room, a product of the Hothouse and Wedgwood partners



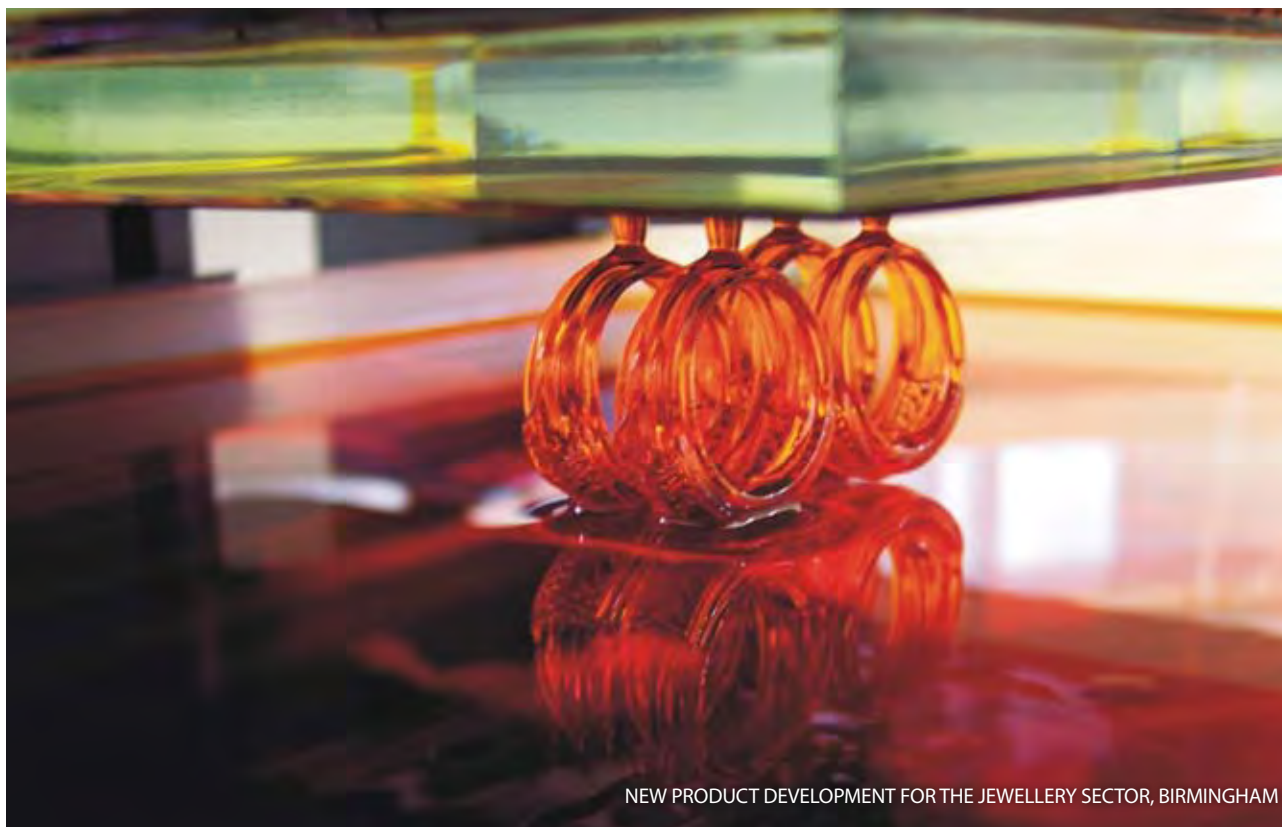
allows the opportunity to see how ceramic designs will look in different settings. The same technology could allow currently stored and inaccessible historic Wedgwood collections to be permanently displayed in a virtual museum – where there is space for only 1,000 items to be displayed at one time there are 250,000 that could potentially be accessible through ICT.

Technology is also being used to make 'fast prototypes' from many different materials. It is also possible to reproduce designs of very large objects in original materials using this technology. One such example includes

a 6.5ft marble reproduction of a statue of Pomona for the Dutch government. Work such as this is at the cutting edge of CAD technology and represents the world's first reproduction of such complex structures. CAD technologies are also being used by the Hothouse to create online product specification for clients and customers – this allows greater flexibility for potential customers in a competitive industry.

Innovation

NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT FOR THE JEWELLERY SECTOR



NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT FOR THE JEWELLERY SECTOR, BIRMINGHAM

European Structural funding has helped to secure the future competitiveness of the region's jewellery industry with over £1.2 million of ERDF money used to fund the New Product Development project. The project provided a full product design and development service, offering concept to prototype assistance to SMEs and micro businesses working within the West Midlands.

The future competitiveness of the West Midlands jewellery industry relies on product innovation and the greatest barrier to this remains the under-developed and under-utilised design base within the region. This project provided a dedicated new product development team to help SMEs bring new ideas to market.

The project supports and develops the existing design-based industry in the region focused around Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter and the Alloy Group in the Herefordshire and Marches rural areas, it adopts a signposting and outreach policy to its client SME's, thus linking more effectively with mainstream business support structures and manufacturing, creating enhanced networking and marketing opportunities.

The Jewellery Industry Innovation Centre (JIIC) has become recognised throughout the region as a specialist new product development Centre and since its opening has supported many companies such as award-winning jewellery designer, Aimee Winstone, one of eight designers to win the Platinum Design Innovation Award in 2006, to the Black Country Museum, who sought

help in recreating Victorian badges for a policeman's helmet and a postman's insignia.

In July 2007 innovative products, cutting edge technology, renowned international designers and trend predictors gathered to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Centre. Set up as part of University of Central England in Birmingham, the JIIC has assisted hundreds of small businesses in the jewellery and high value goods industries within the West Midlands to develop innovative new products using design, research and technology that might otherwise be unavailable to them.

Innovation

ELIOT PARK INNOVATION CENTRE (EPIC)



One of the first new office space developments in the Nuneaton area for over 20 years was born by an injection of £2,875,000 of ERDF funding.

Eliot Park Innovation Centre (EPIC) was a joint initiative between Warwickshire County Council and Advantage West Midlands. The Centre has helped business start-ups and innovative technology and knowledge-based companies in northern Warwickshire as well as attracting those from further afield.

The EPIC project has shown how innovation can be successfully integrated into regeneration ventures. The concept and design of the building has achieved the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) Excellent rating for Environmental Design.

Innovative environmental technologies include photovoltaic panels to generate energy for the building from daylight, a Termodeck heating and cooling system and motion-detecting natural lights.

An example to other developments in the Objective 2 area, the focus of the EPIC project is on cultivating a culture of innovation in northern Warwickshire through providing an infrastructure with 3,122 m² of high quality flexible space available for companies to let, with units from 25 m² up to 200 m².

EPIC offers multi-occupancy, flexible office space and onsite business support as well as networking and development opportunities. This innovation culture also allows for ready access to skills and facilities as well as the exchange of experience and adoption of best practice.

Flexible letting agreements coupled with the capacity to upgrade to larger units in the centre means EPIC enables its tenant companies to grow while remaining in the same premises and region.

Located within three miles of the M6 and with journey times of less than 25 minutes to Coventry, and 40 minutes to Birmingham and Leicester, EPIC is ideally placed to take advantage of the existing industry within the region. Three airports in the Midlands, on top of the strong road and rail infrastructure, allow the EPIC companies to operate on a global level.

ESF PROGRAMME THEMES

The integration of new technologies made available by the Information Society can help strengthen economic and social cohesion. In England there are a range of Government policies and programmes which encourage and improve the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

ESF Programme Themes

INFORMATION SOCIETY

This European Social Fund theme aimed to harness the employment potential that increased use of ICT provides. It helped to reduce the divide between those who have up to date ICT skills and those who do not, provide training and employment opportunities for those in remote or rural areas and increased the range and number of jobs available in the labour market.

This theme offered great potential for the development of new forms of employment.

It opened up new ways of working such as teleworking, providing wider access to jobs and more flexible working practices. Additionally, it created new opportunities in training through providing a basis for overcoming mobility and access problems.

The provision of ICT was systematically integrated into all types of activities, and particularly those that sought to develop basic and key skills.

Case Studies:

- Fusion ICT

Information Society

FUSION ICT

Workers in the West Midlands were provided the opportunity to join a 'virtual classroom', which allowed them to improve their IT skills online without leaving their desks, thanks to a project provided by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC).

Funded by the LSC's ESF Programme, the unique employer-led training project was free to those taking part and was run by a local provider that specialises in IT-based training – Fusion ICT.

Employers in the region nominated staff to participate in the project, which led to a recognised ITQ qualification, equivalent to an NVQ Level 2. The course, which included weekly training sessions in a virtual classroom established using webcams and Fusion's own v-training technology, allowed learners to

see and hear their tutor and other learners. By sharing experiences in this interactive learning environment they gained skills to help them get the most out of popular office software programmes including Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel.

Hilary Caple, ICT Training Delivery Manager at Fusion ICT, commented:

"Most employers are aware that IT skills are lacking in the workplace and this is affecting productivity but at the same time, they are reluctant to send workers off-site to take part in external training programmes. By working with these businesses, we have been able to provide a form of training that enabled workers to benefit from the best of traditional instructor-led learning, without leaving their desks."

As well as giving staff practical tips about how to use office software more efficiently, the training equipped employees to deal with IT issues that commonly occur in the workplace.

Button and Co law firm in Coventry took part in the training project. Pat Thomas, Practice Manager at the firm, said:

"As a busy legal practice, we were looking for a training solution that could be completed easily, without taking up too much time. This project enabled us to train at our desks, either after work or during lunch breaks, to refine our IT skills and learn how to use software packages more effectively. All those that took part learnt a great deal."

LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Promoting local development and employment was an important theme in the European Social Fund Programme. This theme ensured that small community projects called Global Grants and area-based policy initiatives were developed to tackle social exclusion, reduce inequality and promote regeneration.

Global Grants activities helped people from disadvantaged communities and groups move closer to the labour market. The shape this took varied from building confidence and increasing motivation, to support for new business start-ups aimed at improving an area in some way for the benefit of the local community.

Case Studies:

- COINS

Local Communities

COINS



The Community Opportunity Initiative in North Staffordshire (COINS) scheme was created by North Staffordshire Voluntary Action staff in response to the high level of red tape that can discourage small local groups in the community from accessing resources to help better their lives.

One of the projects to have benefited from COINS was the 'Motivating People Initiative', which was aimed at providing quality housing to disadvantaged groups in danger of social exclusion and homelessness. Conducted by the YMCA in Stoke-on-Trent, the initiative involved residential motivational

courses which were open to people in the area, where all were encouraged to take part in activities to increase their levels of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Other activities were set up by the project to help people between the ages of 16 – 65

move closer to the labour market. This was achieved by providing basic skills training, confidence building, new business start-ups, volunteering and mentoring schemes and local community activities to improve the quality of life for the residents and the local environment.

For further information contact:

European Secretariat

5, St Philips Place

Colmore Row

Birmingham B3 2PW

Email: euro.funding@gowm.gsi.gov.uk

Tel: 0121 352 5000

Fax: 0121 352 5188