



WEST MIDLANDS
RURAL DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMME



STRATEGIC INVESTMENT GRANT

INVESTMENTS IN BASIC SERVICES FOR RURAL POPULATIONS

The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) is a funding scheme for land based businesses (farmers, growers, foresters, and primary processors), rural tourism organisations and other small rural businesses. The RDPE aims to safeguard and enhance our countryside, to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of our rural businesses, and help communities to thrive.

AWM are responsible for delivering the socio-economic elements of the Programme in the West Midlands.

The RDPE will be delivered through a number of mechanisms including a Strategic Investment Grant (SIG). SIG can fund large scale and collaborative projects to improve the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector, and improve the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy.

The SIG operates through a series of “calls for applications” against particular themes. This ensures a focus on the priorities detailed in the West Midlands Regional Action Plans for the social and economic elements of the RDPE. The Agency will only accept applications which meet the specific requirements of a published call for applications.

This call for applications will be funded mainly under Measures 321, 322, and 323 of RDPE and all applications must comply with the general requirements of those measures¹. The specific requirements are set out below.

Objective

The overall objective of the Basic Services for Rural Populations SIG is to stem or reverse the trend of reducing and poor access to services in rural areas of the West Midlands.

The SIG aims to...

1. Improve the quality of life for local people by providing places to meet, ‘recreate’ and communicate;
2. Support the development of sustainable rural communities with a strong sense of place, health, well-being, security and a demonstrable satisfaction with their environment;
3. Promote service devolution across the rural West Midlands and encourage co-location to reduce the cost burden on service providers;

¹ See page 5-25 of “Information on the Axes and Measures proposed for each Axis, and their description” at http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/Images/Defra%20Guidance%20on%20the%20Axes%20and%20Measures_tcm9-14806.pdf



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4. Encourage new revenue streams to sustain local community buildings and the social enterprises and organisations who run them by instilling a positive culture of enterprise and economic purpose, supported by the relevant infrastructure;
5. Build the capacity and aspirations/wider consciousness of the role of community buildings with the management committees who run them and foster open, inclusive, representative and participative governance;
6. Ensure the equality of access by all sections of the community to the facilities and services developed and delivered

It is expected that each applicant will be able to evidence that their project has been defined as a priority for investment by the relevant County Local Strategic Partnership.

Who can apply?

Under this call for applications for investments will be targeted at:

- Charitable organisations;
- Social Enterprises; and
- Local Authorities acting on behalf of the community sector to enable the improvement of access to services.

What will the grant pay for?

Funds are available for eligible applicants for investments in:

- Small scale capital costs for the refurbishment, extension or new build of community buildings;
- Equipment aligned to the provision of services; and
- Community capacity building activity and facilitation/technical support of the project,
- Costs associated with the establishment (but not ongoing maintenance) of new basic services.

N.B. Items required by legislation, for example planning permission, are not eligible for grant.

Specific requirements

Projects will be expected to demonstrate:

- **Demand** – that there has been a clear involvement of local communities in determining need for the project as well as the project design and ultimately the resulting delivery of services;
- **Supply** – that the required services can actually be supplied;



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- **Integrated services** – that new ways of delivering services are introduced with an emphasis on integration with service providers working collectively (achieving cost effectiveness);
- **Long term sustainability** – that the services are developed to become environmentally, financially and organisationally sustainable.

Each project must be generated from within the community as a bottom up [LEADER style] response to service deprivation in their communities and the continuing governance of projects will need to stay true to those principles.

Projects will be required to generate an audit of the existing service provision within their own locality so that baselines can be tested following the completion of the project.

Projects will be able to articulate their alignment with the local community strategy and Local Area Agreement.

Types of projects that will be supported

This grant is intended to support the setting up of basic services for rural populations and businesses including cultural and leisure activities within villages or groups of villages. Projects can include the small scale infrastructure necessary to facilitate these services, for example:

- Leisure, sports and cultural activities,
- Child care facilities,
- Drop in facilities,
- Small scale transport initiatives designed to improve access to jobs and services,
- Telecommunication services, access to internet, teleworking projects, village ICT initiatives combining IT equipment, networking and eSkills through community structures.

Where investments are to be made in facilities, applicants will be expected to demonstrate compliance with the principles established within the Multi Use Facilities programme of the Rural Regeneration Zone

(http://www.ruralregenerationzone.co.uk/Images/RZZ%20Info%20sheet%201-v3_tcm18-13023.pdf)

How much funding is available?

The grant rate for this call for applications is up to 80% of eligible costs as a maximum and is subject to de minimus limits under commission regulations. This limits the amount of public aid that is normally available to individual businesses to €200,000 in any three year period, this equates to approximately £175,000 at current exchange rates. However, this limit has been increased to €500,000 until December 2010 but is subject to the project meeting state aids criteria. This equates to about £440,000. The minimum



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grant that can be offered under the Strategic Investment Grant is £62,500. Sterling:euro exchange rates can be checked at <http://www.cobody.gov.uk>.

The minimum grant that can be offered under the Strategic Investment Grant is £62,500. Smaller projects should contact their local LEADER group for support.

How do I apply?

If you think you are eligible:

- Visit the RDPE SIG bidding rounds web page to check on current open “calls for applications” and to confirm that your project is eligible against the detailed specification listed.
- If it looks as if you are eligible, you are first encouraged to call Matt Smith at Advantage West Midlands for an informal discussion to cover the following points:
 - Location of the project
 - Evidence of need and demand for the project
 - Details of the services which might be improved by the investment into the physical infrastructure and evidence of support by the providers of those likely services
 - Total project cost £
 - Details of who will benefit from the project
 - Details of LSP endorsement
 - Evidence of the projects environmental, organisational, financial and service sustainability
 - Details of the capability and capacity of the lead applicant for the project
 - Details of the matched funding required and proportion of which is secured
 - To what extent will the proposed services increase (a) the attractiveness and (b) quality of life of the areas affected? You will need to distinguish between the different sectors concerned (such as commerce, health services, transport, IT).
- As part of the application process, and if you have not already done so, we may put you in touch with Business Link West Midlands who will help you assess any need for training or business advice.
- Once received, your full application will be subject to an appraisal process, and once complete the Agency’s Investment Decision Group (IDG) will consider it and if successful, we will issue you with a funding contract and you can begin work on your project.



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Key Contacts

If you want to discuss your ideas informally you can contact either:-

- **Advantage West Midlands**
 - Matt Smith Tel: 01584 813770
 - Web: - <http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/working-with-us/rdpe/default.aspx>
- **Your Local Rural Hub**
 - Staffordshire – Frances Beatty Office 01889 508784
 - Warwickshire - Carrie Robbins Office 02476 858242
 - Herefordshire - Cathy Meredith Office 01432 870033
 - Worcestershire - Valerie Breakwell Office 01905 622 272
 - Shropshire - Victoria Jones Office 01939 262106