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**Successful bid for rural advice network**

22 March 2012

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| Rural communities in the North East of England are set to benefit from a share of £15m worth funding as part of a government scheme to help reduce business isolation and promote growth.  The money will be used to establish three rural business networks that encourage and promote rural businesses, as well as a number of physical local hubs that will inject intensive business support.  The successful bid, submitted by The North Eastern Farming and Rural Advisory Network (NEFRAN) on behalf of the North Eastern Local Enterprise Partnership, will provide support for rural businesses across Northumberland, Durham and Gateshead.  The money has been awarded by DEFRA as part of the Rural Growth Networks pilot scheme to help support and grow rural enterprises.  The three networks will focus on enhanced business support, better broadband provision, a simplified planning approach and an estates management framework across uplands areas in:   * North Northumberland – Wooler, Alnwick & Berwick. * West Northumberland – Charlton & Hesleyside Estates, & Hexham. * Middleton Teesdale & Derwent Valley – Gibside Estate & Middleton in Teesdale Auction Mart.   Northumberland County Council will act as the bid coordinator for the group which includes: private sector businesses, Northumberland National Park Authority, The Country Land and Business Association (CLA), Development trusts, Northumberland Estates, Gateshead Council and Durham County Council.  The business hubs are spread across the pilot area and will include business support, networking opportunities, dedicated mentoring, high quality workspace and office units. There will also be specific support for creative enterprises and a project that focuses on the redevelopment of redundant buildings.  Antony Braithwaite, chair of NEFRAN said: “We are very excited that we have won this bid against some stiff competition. We worked with the North East LEP and our success shows that the LEP is effective in the rural areas as well as the urban. We received great support from the private rural estates and the Country Land and Business Association and DEFRA. We believe that in return we can generate many rural business growth opportunities.”  Paul Woolston, chair of the North East LEP said: “I am absolutely delighted to hear this announcement. The plans are wholly consistent with what the LEP is trying to achieve for the North East in promoting economic prosperity. The rural areas of our region are critically important to a balanced economy and we hope that through this initiative we can also encourage vital enterprise activities.”  Cllr Tom Brechany, executive member for planning, housing and regeneration at Northumberland County Council said: “The rural economy is vital to Northumberland and the wider North East so this funding will come as a real boost to many communities in the region. It’s so important that rural enterprises are able to access the knowledge, support and expertise that will enable them to grow. This bid represents a real partnership across our rural areas and the funding is sure to make a real difference.”  Tony Gates, chief executive at Northumberland National Park Authority said: “The development of Rural Growth Networks will connect some of England’s most remote rural areas. In the Northumberland and Durham Growth Network this will see the development of a series of small hubs in market town linked to deep rural areas through innovative approaches such as the live/work hubs in the Northumberland National Park.”  **Details of the hubs**  **The Alnwick Enterprise Hub** will be developed in conjunction with Northumberland Estates on the existing Cawledge Business Park which adjoins the A1. The proposal will provide 10 smaller business units within the existing hub. Intensive business support, mentoring and networking will be provided to businesses within this Hub and the wider North Northumberland Hub.  **Berwick Virtual Incubation project** will act as the focus of the North Northumberland Hub, and will enhance the existing business support provision to offer services to high growth businesses both within Workspace and elsewhere within Berwick and the surrounding areas.  **Smart Work Centres in Northumberland** will deliver eight new office units in Wooler both as individual units and shared space. The project is being led by the Glendale Gateway Trust.  **The Derwent Valley Enterprise Hub** will develop an enterprise hub in the Derwent Valley, supporting up to eight creative businesses in the Garden Shed, which is utilising underused buildings within the National Trust’s Gibside Estate. In terms of Gateshead it will promote tourism businesses (especially the development of bed and breakfast accommodation), food and drink related activities, and exploring the development of other land and property assets in rural Gateshead for business use.  **Live-Work Enterprise Hubs – Northumberland National Park -** the proposal will create between 10 and 20 new live-work units in the North Tyne area of the Northumberland National Park. The two estates (Charlton and Hesleyside) will be responsible for the redevelopment of the redundant buildings and the marketing of the new live-work space units. The National Park’s Sustainable Development funds and other funds will be used to add renewable energy and wider suitability into the building renovations.  **Hexham Enterprise Hub-** Conversion of existing redundant, large office shell into circa 5,000 sq.ft of managed workspace within a key market town, serving a wide rural hinterland. Design Matters will run the facility, employ the administration officer, manage the lettings and undertake all landlord responsibilities. The facility will enable the growth of around 20 knowledge intensive businesses through access to managed workspace not currently available.  **Middleton Farmers’ Auction Mart Development -** providing new office space for rent in Middleton in Teesdale both as individual units and as shared space. It will provide a facility for farmers markets and agricultural and business training. The facility will enable the growth of around 24 businesses through access to managed workspace not currently available.  Further information about the Government's new rural growth drive here: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/news/2012/03/22/rural-growth-drive/> |

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