

Support for Market towns

Support for young people



The Wellington Food Town initiative implements a local Community Plan with emphasis on a 'local food and produce'- based regeneration strategy. The strategy aims to revitalise the town centre, revive its economy, and connect and strengthen links between all elements of the food supply chain resulting in a more robust set of local businesses.



Rural Renaissance funds have also been provided to the Somerset Market Towns Forum for two initiatives. One was for a study looking into how tourism initiatives can help bolster local economies, whilst the other has seen the development of information resources for the network of market towns across the County both to share common experiences and look for solutions that help to revive their economies.

Other investments in the market towns have focussed on physical regeneration, such as at Watchet where the Esplanade enhancements are funded by Rural Renaissance. These works, due for completion by early 2008 will see better facilities for tourists as well as local residents.



Rural Renaissance funds have enabled the Somerset Rural Youth Project provide two major projects to benefit rural young people. At the Exmoor Rural Skills Workshop (ERSW) at Simonsbath, the project targets final year groups from local schools and Pupil Referral Units in Western Somerset who will use the ERSW facilities one day per week. They receive practical instructions in rural skills leading towards a variety of qualifications and guided learning on issues of employability. When they leave formal education they will be supported and tracked on their progress towards work.

With the rurality.com project operating across the County, 500 under-skilled or unemployed young people in rural areas have accessed information and advice, and in excess of 100 have then gone on to obtain career-enhancing training and employment opportunities offered by partner organisations.

Access to services

In early 2007 the RR Partnership was pleased to receive an additional contract from SWRDA to deliver further investments that brought about improved access to existing services, or helped provide new services in the villages. Since that date we have been able to support:

- 3 village shops at Middlezoy, Seavington, and Stawley
- 3 village halls or community buildings expanding their training and services at Crowcombe, Martock, and Wincanton
- Provide ICT connections for 7 villages in a communal space whether it be a village hall or shop
- 2 transport projects - one at Wiveliscombe and the other working with young people
- A project to provide advice, guidance and training for unemployed people in Glastonbury and training facilities in Frome and Minehead

"Rural Renaissance has come a long way in what seems a remarkably short period of time, less than three years. The breadth and depth of the initiatives that the Partnership has been able to support indicates that there is a great need for us to continue to provide specific investments to grow the rural economy, and develop local businesses."

Rupert Cox (Somerset Chamber of Trade & Commerce & Chairman of Somerset Rural Renaissance Partnership)

Key outputs that we will have delivered by 2008:

At the end of the three-year Scheme, the various projects will have:

- Directly supported up to 1,000 businesses and encouraged the sharing of expertise and knowledge by over 100 of these
- Assisted over 550 individuals with learning skills and provided employment support for over 50 individuals;
- Directly created or safeguarded in excess of 30 jobs, with a much larger number created or safeguarded as a secondary, or knock-on, effect.

The Somerset Rural Renaissance Scheme is overseen by a partnership of agencies. Somerset County Council provides the accountable body role to administer the Scheme and employs staff to manage the investments provided to local projects.

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Somerset Rural Renaissance Scheme



A Review 2005-8

Somerset
Rural
Renaissance



The aim of Rural Renaissance is:

“To help rural communities in the South West respond to and influence economic change, by supporting the development and implementation of sustainable projects that use innovation and enterprise to:




Create prosperity and generate employment

Improve delivery and access to services

Realise the value of the environment as an economic asset”

South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) 2002

Between April 2005 and March 2008 the Somerset Rural Renaissance Partnership of agencies will have spent £2.5 million of SWRDA investments on over 50 separate projects. These projects will:

-  either provide enterprise development & support
-  and/or help overcome exclusion, skills gap and barriers
-  and/or develop sustainable tourism and local identity

In managing this investment programme we have also looked to develop the capacity of local groups, partnerships, agencies and businesses to help deliver rural regeneration.

The Scheme's Investment funds have been provided from 3 Rural Renaissance Programmes:

-  **Main Programme** – over 20 large scale projects to support the local economy, creating and safeguarding jobs, providing advice and technical support to existing businesses. A mixture of capital and revenue funding for agencies and partnerships to deliver these projects under contract.
-  **Workspace Programme** – the conversion of redundant buildings for new workspace – 10 projects across the County. All are capital funds provided mainly to private businesses.
-  **Access to Services Programme** – over 20 smaller scale projects that deliver new services in an innovative way or help safeguard existing facilities by providing additional elements.

The Scheme has been administered by Somerset County Council and governed by a Partnership of over 20 agencies. The independent Chair of the Partnership has been Rupert Cox (2005/06) & (2007/08) and Mike Lewis (2006/07). Somerset County Council's Rural Delivery Team has provided the staff to assist a range of public, private, and voluntary sector agencies to develop and deliver suitable projects. The investment funds provided to the Partnership by SWRDA are matched by the various projects. This means that in total over £5 million will have been spent on the various rural regeneration projects over the three-year period.

Case studies

Capital investments



Also on Exmoor, another major capital investment of £100,000 has been made to Phase 1 of a multi-phase, multi-year, development that contributes to the regeneration of the Cutcombe/Wheddon Cross Area. This first phase will assess the feasibility of a mixed-use development within the Cutcombe livestock market and adjacent land site, so as to assist in sustaining the market, develop new workspace and an Exmoor Park Interpretation Centre, and consider the potential for housing.

Other major capital funds of £100,000 have been provided to a new training and skills centre for Frome known as Frome Education and Training Enterprise (FETE) due for completion in 2008. The Partnership has also contributed smaller amounts towards major feasibility studies into the potential development of the Royal Bath & West Showground, the proposal for a Somerset Centre for Local Food and the re-use of the Tone Mill complex in Wellington. Other significant capital investments have been awarded to 11 proposals for the practical conversion of existing redundant buildings for new business use through the RR Workspace Programme.

The largest investment by the Rural Renaissance Partnership of £249,000 was made to the South West Lakes Trust in 2005 towards a £1 million project to improve facilities at Wimbleball lakeside. This project will encourage new higher spending visitors to Wimbleball and Exmoor, will provide training for trainers in outdoor activities, as well as benefiting surrounding rural businesses.

Skills Training

An example of business support and development is the new service provided for those working in the creative industries sector by the BOOST project. The Project received a £150,000 investment to provide technical and financial advice from specialist practitioners within the Creative Industries, coupled with access to resources such as equipment, skills and finance. The project has benefited businesses throughout rural Somerset.

Another exciting project providing advice and skills training to the business sector is the Connecting Rural Somerset project, part of the Somerset Broadband Programme, which has helped businesses make the most of broadband and ICT. Through a sister-project known as Broadplaces it has also worked with communities to provide ICT hubs in village shops and community halls.



Tourism Development

In addition to the major project at Wimbleball, another good example of tourism development is the Coleridge Way project, funded to develop, launch and market the 36-mile walking and horse riding trail in west Somerset. The project works with local businesses, principally B&Bs, cafes, restaurants, pubs and shops to jointly maximise the tourism potential. It has received widespread local and national media coverage.

Complementing the investment at Wimbleball, using Rural Renaissance funding the Active Exmoor project has been able to develop and market a range of activity-based training opportunities across the Exmoor area, working in collaboration with tourism-related businesses. As a result, there has been a large growth in this sector.

The Rural Renaissance investment of £100,000 for the Tour of Britain is to ensure that the benefits of bringing a stage of the successful cycle race to the County are available throughout the rural areas. The actual race day is just one of a package of actions across the calendar to develop cycling as a major tourism activity within the County.

Food & Farming Sector

The Food Sector Support Service provided by Somerset Food Links has worked with producers to develop and market local food and is also working to increase public awareness of local food and its contribution to the local economy, community and environment. Overall, the aim is to increase demand from the public for locally produced food and drink. The Rural Renaissance investment in this project is around £60,000.

For the farming and land based sector the Rural Renaissance Programme has supported further development of the specialist advice service hosted by the District Councils, known as the Somerset Rural Business Support Service. Over the two years it has been operating this will have provided advice and guidance to up to 500 businesses.

Somerset Rural Renaissance financed a feasibility study into the establishment of AONB Foodpaths in the three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty within the County. The aim of the project was to assess the opportunities to develop and market a network of establishments (farms, private homes, quality graded B&B's and produce outlets) providing rural gastronomic and on farm experiences, to be accessible on foot, by bicycle, and on horseback as well as by car, raising the profile of the three areas as outstanding living landscapes with thriving communities.

