

Top 100, 2008

Sponsored
byHAZLEWOODS LLP
BUSINESS ADVISERS & CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

Cash for projects

BUSINESSES in Cheltenham will be able to apply for cash for special projects within the next few weeks, thanks to the imminent launch of Cheltenham Borough Council's Business Pride project.

The borough has set aside between £200,000 to £300,000 for the scheme, which would be used to pay for firms to improve their own environmental practice or develop community improvement schemes.

Jenny Moss, the council's economic development manager, said: "This is a scheme we have been working on for quite some time and it's something we are now just about to run past the new council administration.

"Once we have, we will be asking all companies across the borough, of any size and type, to come to us and let us know what they want to do. We will help them financially if we can, mainly through match funding."

The cash has come from central government, in the form of Local Authority Business Growth Incentive (LABGI) funding. It is expected there will be at least £250,000 available, which must be spent in the next three years.

The borough's economic team has already run two pilot schemes, which it hopes will offer businesses a chance to see the type of projects it will consider.

It match-funded a scheme to install wireless hotspots in Lansdown Industrial Estate, donating £869.50 for the estate's owners to ensure connection for all its clients.

Jenny said: "The owners pointed out to us that the estate has a quite high turnover of small to medium firms and that it does not make sufficient business sense for them all to buy, then install, then remove, internet connections.

"Instead, we helped to make the estate a more attractive place for business by installing the connection across all units."

The second Business Pride 'pilot' was inspired by Cheltenham's Vision 21 environmental firm and Cheltenham Business Partnership.

Vision 21 visited a number of Cheltenham firms and advised them on how to improve their green policies, such as reducing waste, energy efficient lighting and increasing recycling.

The borough gave £2,625 to the scheme, to

be used to set each project in place.

Jenny said: "These are schemes we are really keen on. They make Cheltenham more attractive to businesses and they allow the businesses to improve their environmental patterns.

"There are any number of other possibilities, including things as simple as leaf clearing in the borough, planting trees and flowers or improvements to premises.

"If it benefits business and the community, we will consider it."

The team hopes to launch the scheme by the end of the month.

Jenny said: "We are hoping the new administration will give this the OK, then we can start working with businesses and their representative groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, Cheltenham Business Partnership, Gloucestershire First and the Federation of Small Businesses, so that we can all come together and work out some useful projects."

For more information on Business Pride, contact Graham Philpot, economic development officer, on 01242 264230, or at graham.philpot@cheltenham.gov.uk.



MATCH FUNDING: Jenny Moss

A unique local company

UCAS deals with half a million university applications a year, but there is more to this local company with a national and international reputation...

"Over the past ten years the business has really seen a shift to put technology and data at its heart," explains Chief Executive Anthony McClaran.

"This supports not only the application process well known to sixth formers across the country, but also a raft of services that we offer to schools, careers advisers, the government and the growing international market.

"We develop innovative products to reach out to young people and we're tapping into the Facebook generation with our own networking site that's just for students. We develop products for other agencies too, like the popular Unistats website and applications for summer school places for the Sutton Trust."

To support the continuing level of innovation, the company has a large "Digital Services", or IT, department complete with in-house software developers and network specialists. The technological developments at UCAS have led to an ongoing recruitment drive to expand the department and support future initiatives.

Many of the staff at UCAS cut their teeth in the award-winning Customer Services Unit. "Many people who

come to work at UCAS begin their careers here, progress through the company and stay with us for a long time," says Kate Houston, Customer Services Manager.

"We've got a really proactive programme of employee engagement throughout UCAS including a customer service charter embedded across the business, a thriving social committee and a staff-led team that promotes environmental awareness within the company."

UCAS provides a comprehensive staff training and development programme that demonstrates a clear link between employees' own objectives and wider company goals. Staff also receive a good benefits package including a range of discounts, generous leave and flexible working.

So where is the company heading? "The UCAS vision is to be the world's most successful and sought after provider of education admissions services. This means not only raising our profile globally, but also transferring knowledge and expertise internationally with a view to running education admissions services in other countries," said Anthony McClaran.



UCAS

About UCAS

Staff: 400+
Turnover: £26m
Location: New Barn Lane, Prestbury
Formed: 1993 as a result of a merger of UCCA and PCAS

Status: Charity and private company limited by guarantee
Links: www.ucas.com
www.yougoferther.co.uk
www.unistats.com

Sponsored
byHAZLEWOODS LLP
BUSINESS ADVISERS & CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

Top 100, 2008

A safe port for your money

When it comes to the crunch Clydesdale Bank's thinking local, writes Trevor Forrester, managing partner of Clydesdale Bank's Gloucester Financial Solutions Centre

WITHOUT wanting to sound as if I'm looking through rose-tinted glasses, this time last year many business owners were looking at ways of growing their businesses – expansion, diversifying, acquisition – all were viable and exciting ways of building on the success they had enjoyed.

We expected a certain amount of turbulence in the market, and indeed our own research into business owners' attitudes toward the changing economic situation found that while almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of owners in the South West felt that the economy was heading in the wrong direction, and a further fifty-two per cent found the markets in which they traded to be tougher than five years previous, the majority of business owners were still optimistic about the future prospects of their company.

Then the credit crunch hit – and aren't we feeling it? Aspirations for expansion have lessened and UK business seems to be trying to do up that extra notch on the belt. Although few would have predicted what was going to happen in the US and the knock-on effects for the world markets, our own research also found that sixty-one per cent of business owners in the region expected this year to be a much more difficult trading environment than 2007. So it seems that UK SMEs have been readying themselves for turbulent times.

With the economic situation being as it is, now is the time that business deposits is on everyone's minds. Having funds in reserve that could help your business weather the storm when future bad times hit is of paramount importance – and can help you to get over that first hurdle.

Within the Gloucester FSC we have a dedicated deposits team tasked with helping local businesses to maximise the return on their funds, and a local Treasury partner, Graeme Batstone. Treasury can help safeguard businesses by structuring solutions to help them manage financial risks and help protect their bottom-line profitability.

Keeping £'s local

The Bank also offers excellent solutions for deposit customers and our unique operating model – where locally deposited money stay within the Gloucester centre – ensures that funds are reinvested locally to help the growth plans of other Gloucester businesses.

Equally important to many businesses looking to make deposits is the assurance that they are placing their money with an organisation that demonstrates stability. Indeed, Clydesdale Bank's long-term credit ratings were reaffirmed as AA- by Standard & Poor, and maintained at Aa3 by Moodys and AA- by Fitch.

For further information about the services we



READY TO HELP: Trevor Forrester, right, managing partner of Gloucester Financial Solutions Centre, Clydesdale Bank PLC, with Graeme Batstone, partner, Treasury Solutions

Why talk to us?

- Well-prepared for the challenging market, we've delivered an excellent trading performance.
- We have stuck to the sound principles of a traditional banking model.
- We take a consistently prudent and disciplined approach to risk management.
- We've outperformed our peers – pre-tax profits increased by 17 per cent.
- Diversifying our lending, funding and geographic spread has made us more resilient.
- Our liquidity position is endorsed by Standard & Poor's re-affirming our AA-rating.
- Our business does not include any direct sub-prime or self-certified lending.

have available to business customers, please contact Trevor Forrester or Graeme Batstone on 01452 631900, visit the Gloucester FSC at Epsilon House, The Square, Gloucester Business Park, Brockworth GL3 4AD or log on to www.cbonline.co.uk.



THE TEAM: the staff at Clydesdale Bank