

Suggestions to be invited for £3m market towns funding

People living in Shropshire's market towns will soon be able to suggest how they think a share of a new £3m fund should be spent to help boost their town.

Shropshire Council's Market Towns Revitalisation Programme was approved by the council's Cabinet on 30 June with the aim of helping to regenerate the county's market towns.

At its meeting on 15 September, Cabinet is being asked to agree the process for applying for funding, and for deciding on the criteria for appraising projects that come forward from the towns.

Under the programme, £2.5 million is being made available to support the larger market towns of Bridgnorth, Church Stretton, Ludlow, Market Drayton, Oswestry and Whitchurch.

A further £0.5 million will be available for the eleven other market towns throughout the county to bid into. These are Shifnal, Wem, Albrighton, Broseley, Ellesmere, Highley, Cleobury Mortimer, Craven Arms, Much Wenlock, Bishop's Castle and Pontesbury and Minsterley.

The money will be available to spend on capital schemes that will provide an immediate stimulus to these towns.

Under the programme Shropshire Council members will work with local town and parish councillors and their local communities to identify and prioritise projects that will make the most effective contribution to the regeneration of their town.

A report to Cabinet proposes that the £2.5m for the six larger towns will be allocated across two rounds, with decisions made in April and October 2011.

Councillors would discuss their initial ideas at Local Joint Committee meetings in October, before holding further discussions with local people to determine their priorities for projects seeking investment. Proposals for up to two projects per town would be invited in each of the two rounds of funding, with a maximum of £400,000 allocated to any single project.

The £0.5m 'capital challenge fund' would also be allocated in two rounds, in April and October 2011. Proposals for up to two projects per towns would be invited in each round, with a combined limit of £75,000.

Councillor Mike Owen, Shropshire Council's Cabinet member for economy and waste, said: "Part of a wider and longer term approach to regeneration of our market towns, this programme aims to provide urgent investment to address longstanding problems and the effects of the recession, and to contribute to the long term economic, social and environmental regeneration of these market towns. It will provide local councillors, communities and other

stakeholders with an opportunity to say how they think this money could and should be spent to provide a real benefit to their town.”

It is proposed that the Programme Board (the Portfolio Holders for Community Working and for Economy and Waste, together with the Assistant Chief Executive and the Assistant Director Strategy and Development) would have delegated authority to approve projects seeking up to £140,000, following a detailed appraisal process. Projects seeking more than £140,000 will be referred to Cabinet.

A further £0.5m will be available to Shropshire’s rural communities under the new rural settlements challenge fund. More information about bidding for money from this fund will be announced in the near future.

Further information

1. Examples of projects which might be considered for funding include:
 - Encouraging public services to share buildings, to reduce running costs.
 - Bringing forward of new employment sites or premises.
 - Acquisition of vacant units for housing conversions.
 - Provision of new retail opportunities
 - Examine potential for enhancing existing markets.
 - Make towns more attractive through building parks, improving street furniture, street art or refurbishing buildings.
 - Develop the ‘visitor economy’ product.

2. Cabinet agreed on 30 June that the detailed objectives for the Revitalisation Programme should be to:
 - Offer an adequate range of services and community facilities, with good transport connections;
 - Encourage good quality jobs to promote less out-commuting and to discourage the out-migration of young people;
 - Ensure that towns have a good range of retail opportunities and to discourage loss of retail spending to competing centres;
 - Encourage more jobs in expanding sectors and reduce reliance on one or two main employers;
 - Protect towns’ natural, built and cultural heritage and improve the quality of the environment;
 - Encourage towns to become more sustainable, contributing to reduced carbon emissions;
 - Promote the provision of a range of high quality housing types and tenures;
 - Promote healthy, learning communities with an active cultural life;
 - Address pockets of deprivation and worklessness;
 - Encourage residents and businesses to engage in the civic and community life of their towns.

On 15 September Cabinet will be asked to amend the last objective to read “Help build the Big Society in Shropshire by encouraging and supporting local people to work together to shape their communities, for example by creating new community managed facilities and services.”