



## From the WLEP Chair, Peter Pawsey

We enter 2013 with much optimism founded upon continuing improvement in unemployment figures across the county, with further encouraging feedback from a number of our businesses, and an apparent gradual acceleration of housing, employment and public realm planning applications and construction starts. Early days I know, but several of the initiatives being undertaken by partners across the county, such as apprentice employment schemes, are beginning to bear fruit.

We have far to go, but the potential is there for Worcestershire to really grow and prosper providing we support and enable our businesses to borrow, invest, recruit and develop in an effective way and on the right sites. The Worcestershire LEP and its public sector partners are committed to those objectives.

### **Growing Places Fund**

The WLEP Growing Places Fund is intended to accelerate delivery of economically viable activity to support growth in the local economy, and funding will be used to facilitate schemes which would otherwise face site constraints or delays – and where the market needs support to trigger such development. Approximately £3.5m is available to be allocated through loan or equity financing. If you have a project which may be eligible, contact the WLEP office for our prospectus. Allocations will be made before 31st March 2013, so don't delay.

### **Excellent Progress on Jobless Figures**

The latest unemployment figures for Worcestershire show that there is some good news within the county, although we cannot rest on our laurels as it is early days yet, but it is very pleasing that the jobless figures are coming down.

This gradual improvement has been noticeable over the last few years, but particularly so when comparing January 2012 with December 2012. For the 16-64 age group, there were a total of 11,404 unemployed in Worcestershire in January, 4.1 per cent of the population. By December this had shrunk to 9,854, 2.8 per cent. What is particularly pleasing is that there has also been a dent made in youth unemployment – the 18-24 age group. The Worcestershire total has come down from 3,145, 7.6 per cent, in January 2012 to 2,690, 6.5 per cent, in December.

Although there will be set backs, what we are seeing is a steady and significant decline in the numbers of unemployed compared to the West

## Trade Delegation to Malvern

I was present at the visit of Russian Government officials to Malvern organised by Harriett Baldwin MP. The delegation visited Malvern's historic Morgan Motor Company as part of a tour to the UK, and discussed trade opportunities with Russia.

Alexander Smekalin, Russia's Regional Economy Minister and Sergey Morozov, the Governor of Ulyanovsk, a city in the country's north-east region with a population of 613,000, took part in the trip. One of the things on their future agenda will be looking at ways to increase flights to and from Birmingham International Airport, therefore expanding the trade opportunities.

Plans will also be put in place for a group of business leaders from Worcestershire to head over to Russia during the coming months to deepen the fledgling relationship.

## FORTHCOMING DATES AND EVENTS

### 13 February

Visit by Ms. Mami Yamaguchi, Senior Fellow in Public Consulting Division of Value Management Institute, Japan

### 15 February

Shenstone Group

Midlands and England as a whole.

The WLEP is working with many other agencies to focus on initiatives to support young people into work as a top priority, for instance by working with local employers to encourage participation in the National Apprenticeship Scheme.

## Regional Growth Fund - Round 4

Are you a company leading a business consortium or leading a public sector organisation looking to develop and deliver a substantial project which grows your business and creates new, sustainable employment? And are you looking for aid or grant funding to make it happen? The Government's newly launched RGF4 funding could be just what you need, and I would strongly urge Worcestershire business-led bids to register their proposals by the deadline of 20 March 2013. Bids will be judged on how well they meet five criteria - Project location, Additionality, Sustainable private sector growth, Value for money and State Aid compliance. Round 4 funding will need to be drawn down in arrears following private investment and by 31 March 2016 (ideally sooner), but projects and jobs delivered can take longer. The website

<https://www.gov.uk/understanding-the-regional-growth-fund> explains further and, if you wish to attend a workshop to find out more, we are hosting a session on Thursday, 14th February 8.30am to 9.30am at the Chamber Offices in Worcester.

## County Apprenticeships Boost

Record numbers of people have started apprenticeships in Worcestershire, according to recently announced figures. During 2011/12 1060 people became apprentices, this is excellent news.

We were pleased to be present at the Redditch Apprenticeship campaign launch of 50 apprentices in 50 businesses. Working with Redditch Borough Council, National Apprenticeship Service and North East

Business Insider Magazine

**21 February**

West Midlands LEP Chairs' Meeting in Birmingham

**22 February**

Black Country LEP Meeting

**5 March**

International Export Event - Yamazaki Mazak Limited

**5 March**

Worcester Business School Annual Lecture - St John's Campus

**6 March**

Three Counties Training Provider Association Strategic Forum - Stourport Manor

**6 March**

WLEP Business Board - Worcester Bosch

**7 March**

Wyre Forest Regeneration Fair - Kidderminster

**14 March**

Tourism Sub Group Meeting - Malvern

Worcestershire College, the WLEP brokered this relationship which has then been led by the Council to provide a series of events to encourage employers in Redditch to create a new apprentice post. This includes a 'real apprentice' event at Abbey Stadium on 13th February, an introduction for young people to the apprenticeship experience with real training providers and real employers, including 'have a go' taster sessions.

Finally, a date for the diary during National Apprenticeship week in March. Employers in Worcestershire will have two opportunities to find out how to employ an apprentice and claim the £1500 available grant. **Wednesday, 13th March 2013 at Worcestershire County Cricket Club and Friday, 15th March at Stourport Manor Hotel** - to book a place or for more information contact [info@business-central.co.uk](mailto:info@business-central.co.uk).

## Flying the Flag for Worcestershire

Our congratulations go to:

**Eco2Solar from Kidderminster**, winning National SME Construction Company of the Year at the National Construction Awards.

**Deep Secure in Malvern** and the **Malvern Cyber Security Cluster** are featured in the Telegraph reference Cyber Security 17 Jan 2013.

**Citrus Kids Club Ltd**, winners of the Local Business Awards promoted by Worcester News.

If you have any good news stories that the WLEP should and could promote, please let us know.

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