**District Dispatch**

Recently, I’ve been finding out about some of the amazing projects across the district that we have helped fund, using money that we have secured from the Government’s Levelling Up Fund.

Following our bid in 2022, we were pleased to be allocated £1.7 million from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF).

Money from the UKSPF is there to help encourage economic growth and improve the quality of life for people across the district, while the REPF is intended to support projects which assist with supporting businesses and community infrastructure to address the challenges faced by rural areas. During the first round of the funding that we administered, 23 projects across the district were approved and these are due to be completed by April 2024. More than £220,000 has been issued to businesses and community groups to date!

I’ve been struck by the amazing variety of the work that we have been able to support from small charities, to growing businesses and community organisations. The money has made a huge difference by helping them to expand what they offer to their customers and allowing them more flexibility in what they do. Some of the businesses have also been able to keep jobs in our district — and increase staff posts — which will support our local economy and ensure that our communities continue to thrive.

One of the community organisations that benefitted from funding included the Fishbourne Centre, which updated their heating and hot water system to make it more efficient and make the centre a more attractive venue for the local community. Last year, we also granted funding to the Chichester Community Development Trust so that they could create a covered outdoor seating area — complete with a pizza oven — so that more residents can enjoy the space all year round. It will also enable the trust to put on more events in future.

We have also helped volunteers at the Chichester Cathedral Flower Festival who, thanks to funding, have been able to expand their skills and knowledge to make their flower arrangements more sustainable for future events. Another interesting project funded by the UKSPF is the Bourne Heritage Trail, which has been organised by the Wemsfest Community Interest Company. They have created a series of history-based heritage trails in the local area.

We’ve also been able to help a number of rural businesses through the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). Woodfire Camping near Petworth was able to install a large event tepee, which they can use to host larger groups and grow its corporate events market. Since introducing the new covered area, they have held four larger events, and the new facility has been in much demand! Another business to benefit from the funding is Splash Robe, which makes a three-in-one outdoor robe made from recycled materials. Funding has helped the company to secure patent protection and develop a website where people can view and buy the product. Using the funding, the business has also been able to keep jobs in the local community of Birdham where they are located, which is fantastic news.

As well as the funding that has been granted to businesses, community groups and organisations, the council has been directly delivering a number of its own projects. These include a Culture Spark way-finder project in the Medmerry area of Selsey; the successful laser light show in Chichester during the half-term break; and the council’s Cross, Market & More events, which started again this month. The second round of funding closed in January and received a fantastic response, and we are currently reviewing the applications. I’m looking forward to sharing more news about the projects that we have supported over the coming months.

Best Wishes

Councillor Harsha Desai

Cabinet Member for Growth and Place at Chichester District Council