

BY EMAIL

26 May 2020

Invitation to Bid for Enterprise M3's Supporting Town Centres Fund

In recognition of the urgent need to ensure social distancing in our town centres, support their reopening and longer-term vitality, Enterprise M3 LEP is launching a new £500,000 pilot programme.

Whilst the fund is focussed initially on measures that will bring back confidence in our towns, the LEP is also seeking proposals that support the longer term repurposing of town centres, as well as linking to the emerging priorities in our Local Industrial Strategy around the environment, low carbon and digital technology.

Context

The Covid-19 crisis is forcing us to reassess our lifestyles, change the ways we work, and has a particular resonance in how we use our town centres through supporting transport and infrastructure and place.

There is an urgent need to open up town centres to enable shops and businesses to trade and allow communities to safely visit. This is critical for local economy and the LEP is already working alongside the Growth Hub and local partners, such as the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), who are advising business about social distancing and supporting retailers.

The LEP is developing an Economic Recovery Plan and a key element of this is the reopening of the town centres. In the short term we are looking to do this by providing infrastructure investment to assist with coming out of lockdown and enabling society and the economy to continue to function. There is also a longer-term aim to re-vision how town centres work, building in new experiences and encouraging walking and cycling alongside public transport.

This approach aligns well with Government announcements to help local communities and town centres recover from the Covid-19 lockdown. Ministers have asked that we focus on how public transport can be made safer, how people can walk or cycle to work and creating more room in town centres as social distancing continues.

This fund is designed to complement and build upon the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund announced on 24 May 2020. We would expect proposals to be closely

aligned with the aims of this fund and where a local authority is investing Reopening High Streets Safely Fund in the same location as this funding to clearly demonstrate where there is added value.

Principles

Overall the LEP is looking for pilot projects that can be delivered at pace and will keep people safe, as and when movement restrictions are relaxed and urban spaces such as high streets, commercial areas, transport hubs and shopping areas, become busier.

The pilot nature of the programme is important as the LEP is keen to see what type of interventions work and could be rolled out elsewhere, and equally important which ones don't. We will expect projects that receive funding from Enterprise M3 to contribute proactively to this learning and to share experiences with other town centres, both locally and nationally.

The fund will cover pedestrian space, movement of people, queuing requirements and traffic management. However, if applicants have proposals which don't neatly fit into these categories, but nevertheless meet the overall aims of the programme, the LEP would welcome an early discussion as these can still be considered. We know that we are all learning at pace as the situation develops and we wish to operate this fund as flexibly as we possibly can.

We are looking to support pilot programmes, that may be of a temporary nature, but with potential to be made permanent, in areas of highest footfall, particularly those that provide a range of attractions and services as they pose the greatest risk. Pilot programmes might include, but not be limited to, schemes that provide confidence to users of the road and public space or perhaps release space within constrained areas to enable greater use for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users

Initially this would be sufficient to enable the reallocation of space, but with the potential to be made permanent and attractive as part of the regeneration and repurposing of our town centres. Bidders are encouraged to put forward innovative solutions whilst acknowledging the need to deliver quickly. **Pace of delivery will be critical and we will look to initially prioritise proposals which can deliver on site (in full or in part) by September 2020. All projects supported using this fund must deliver by 31 March 2021 at the latest.**

In assessing proposals, we will look at the following criteria:

- Is the project deliverable within the stated timescales
- Has the project identified costs and appropriate matched funding?
- Does the project clearly demonstrate how it can support social distancing?
- Have benefits and outcomes clearly been identified?
- Does the project align to the emerging Local Industrial Strategy?
- Does the project align with other initiatives (e.g. those planned by shopping centres, transport hubs, Business Improvement Districts etc?)
- Does the project use technology, data and digital tools both to maintain social distancing, and to aid decision making?
- Does the project include low carbon elements?

- Does the project include design principles for a safer urban space?
- Has a risk register been provided?
- Does the project have the potential to share best practice with others and to be rolled out elsewhere in the Enterprise M3 LEP area?

In more practical terms we will be looking for proposals that can demonstrate:

- Deliverability – we would expect the first projects to start delivering in July and all projects must be completed by 31 March 2021.
- A clearly identified timetable that can be met at pace
- A robust funding package, ideally with match funding and/or ability to lever in private sector investment
- Clear identification of any risk
- That they can meet statutory and legal requirements
- Maintenance and longer-term commitments have been identified
- How monitoring of the effectiveness of the measures will be undertaken
- That they address issues highlighted in the recent Government Guidance Coronavirus (COVID-19): Safer Public Places - Urban Centres and Green Spaces <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/safer-public-places-urban-centres-and-green-spaces-covid-19>
- Close alignment to the Reopening High Streets Safely Funding where this is applicable.

Process

The LEP plans to utilise some unallocated Local Growth Funding to support infrastructure projects. Please note this is primarily a capital fund. If your proposal requires revenue funding, please complete the relevant section within the EOI as there may be potential for the LEP to offer limited revenue funding where it is directly linked to the capital investment.

The LEP wants this funding to be allocated very quickly, so we have developed a streamlined application process. Applicants should complete the attached Expression of Interest. It is appreciated that at this stage, some of the information requested may not be available, where this is the case it is acceptable to highlight this on the form, with an indication of how and when this will be provided. Key at this stage will be to identify the amount of funding required, locations and what it would be used for. The amount of detail and justification required will be to an extent proportional to the amount of funding sought. We would envisage bids between £10,000 and £100,000.

Proposals will be assessed by LEP officers internally assessing against set criteria. The Chief Executive has been given delegated authority to approve allocations up to £100,000. Where possible the LEP will align with local authorities own internal approval procedures and applications for the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund. In this way a funding decision can be made in a matter of weeks, but with a clear audit and decision-making trail.

Whilst preference will be given to schemes where match funding is available, in this instance, it is not be an absolute requirement. We do however expect this fund to be

very competitive and would encourage bidders to explore match funding opportunities in order to maximise their chances of success.

Eligibility

Bids are welcome from both public and private sector partners, but where they involve works on the highway, the support of the relevant highway authority (i.e. Hampshire County Council or Surrey County Council) needs to be clearly demonstrated. We would expect to see a high degree of partnership working in developing proposals with broad engagement with the relevant organisations – including businesses, Business Improvement Districts and the relevant local authorities.

As ever, we want to work with you to co-design these proposals as far as possible and would encourage you to get in touch with the Enterprise M3 team to discuss your ideas. We are all learning as we go through these unprecedented times and we want to offer as much flexibility in this process as is possible so that we use our funding to best support the Enterprise M3 economy. There may be things that we haven't thought about, we may need to try and secure further funding to bolster our efforts, but we do want to ensure that we work together to deliver swiftly.

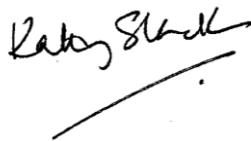
Timescale

The fund is being launched today and we welcome initial submissions by **12pm on Friday 5 June** and we would aim to make an in principle decision by Tuesday 23 June.

It is recognised that some proposals will take a little longer to be developed therefore there will be a second deadline for applications of **12pm on Friday 26 June** and the LEP commits not to allocate all of the funding in the first round.

If you have any general questions or comments regarding the process, or would like to discuss potential proposals please email us at: bids@enterprisem3.org.uk .

Yours sincerely



Kathy Slack
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Enterprise M3 LEP