

Eco-initiative is just the job for Britain and beyond

GREEN DRAGONS want to go national and possibly European following a highly successful trial in the south-east of England.

The initiative, devised by Action Sustainability and its delivery partner Business to Business, has been tested across the South East region with the help of SEEDA, the South East of England Development Agency.

Two pilot sessions have given 12 carefully selected eco-innovators a chance to pitch ideas for more sustainable building products to procurement directors from major names in the construction industry.

These pilots have produced a number of possible matches, giving sellers a chance to find a market for their ideas and buyers an opportunity to benefit from savings offered through innovation.

But they have highlighted issues that need to be addressed if Britain's construction industry is to benefit fully from the environmental and economic improvements promised by many of the proposed innovations.

In general, the pilots reveal a resistance to change, sometimes commercially driven, but often merely a concern to minimise risk. They also demonstrate that innovators are not always good at selling themselves; and that nobody specifically asks for new ideas, so innovation, by its very nature, cannot be client led.

And they also highlighted issues particular to the construction industry, including complex supply chains that smaller firms find difficult to access; and relatively low profit margins that limit the industry's capacity for research and development, meaning products must be virtually market ready.

Action Sustainability believes it can develop the Green Dragon pilots into a viable commercial service offering construction companies what it calls a 'sustainable innovation pipeline'.

It proposes to share costs between a group of companies to whom it will offer an edge in the form of exclusive details of new construction products and access to a quarterly forum where they can define their sustainable procurement challenges.

It will also work closely with universities and small business groups to identify innovation and make sure innovators' approaches are compatible with the needs of subscribing companies.

Action Sustainability believes everyone will benefit from expansion of the Green Dragon initiative: buyers, sellers and the entire UK economy.

www.actionsustainability.com/green-dragons/

British firms go east to sell sustainability

CHINA beckons Business to Business. The company has recently led a British trade mission that will visit so-called 'sustainable cities' in the southern part of this vast country.

Charged with finding 15 companies to take part in the mission, BtoB persuaded 20 to make the eight-day journey, including a number of architectural practices and engineering companies with established international reputations. University College London also joined the mission too.

Beijing has designated a number of cities in south-west and south-central China as centres for low carbon infrastructure and sustainable urban development under a multi-million pound 'Sustainable Cities' programme.

UK Trade & Investment has signed co-operation agreements with five of the cities and is already working with municipal authorities to identify projects where United Kingdom companies can help them to achieve their ambitious targets.

The mission gave participants the chance to see for themselves the wealth of commercial opportunities on offer.

They visited Changsha, a major river port, commercial and industrial centre, and the capital of Hunan Province. And they also visited Zhuzhou, a main logistics and rail transport hub serving much of south and south-west China.

Together with Xiangtan the two cities make up the Chang Zhu Tan Golden Triangle, an area of about 1,000 square kilometres with a total population exceeding 15 million. In time, the three cities will converge to form a single conurbation.

The mission also visited Chongqing: the fastest-growing urban centre in the world. With a population of over 30 million it is one of the main sustainable cities in China. It is developing policies and projects designed to strike a balance between rural and urban society and to be the model for similar initiatives throughout the country.

The mission finished in Shanghai where missionaries took part in an urban development summit, discussing the challenges of transition to a low-carbon future with senior business people, policymakers and opinion-formers.

Dean Brotherton, from BtoB's Coventry office, led the mission. He says: "We were delighted with the response, particularly given the present economic situation in Britain. Clearly these forward-looking companies have already recognised the truly awesome opportunities to be had in China and will be taking advantage of this trade mission to stake their claim."

Forthcoming missions that BtoB are leading for UK Trade and Investment include software and ICT to the USA West Coast, Environmental Technologies to Malaysia and the Philippines and Low Carbon Technologies to Portugal..

A timely hand pays handsome dividends

ENTERPRISE will plug the yawning gap between the cash we collect in taxes and the much larger amounts we want to spend.

But it needs nurturing: the safest jobs come in modest numbers. Hundreds of smaller employers will create thousands of jobs between them. A few firms will fail, but others will replace them and job losses in each case will barely reach double figures.

Those who might risk their money in a new venture need advice and support from someone who understands business in general and their local market in particular.

Durham County Council seized the initiative in this respect and asked Business to Business to help it organise a Celebration of Enterprise on September 29.

The Council has a story to tell of its success to date and an appeal to make to opinion-formers and decision-makers in both the public- and private-sectors to help it build on that success in the future.

Andrew Wilson from BtoB's Newcastle office led the team in this new venture for the company. They organised a succession of speakers to address the key barriers that business owners face in starting and growing their organisations.

These speakers explained the vital role played by the local authority itself in its support of the county economy; in developing a sense of enterprise among school and college students; and in working with so-called NEETS, those who are not in education, employment or training.

The authority's role in the mentoring of fledgling businesses through its involvement with the County Durham Economic Partnership was also highlighted.

The speakers include a woman who has practical experience of blending public- and private-sector approaches to support the development of her own business.

Barbara Chrisp, proprietor of The Cabbage Patch, a Peterlee-based fruit and vegetable delivery firm which she launched earlier this year with the help of a £3,000 grant from the government's Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI).

As part of her work Barbara advises parents at ten Sure Start Children's Centres about healthy eating.

She says: "I want people to see fresh produce as affordable. Everyone is interested in buying quality goods that are value for money and that's what I supply."

A quick chat is just the job for logistics firm

BUSINESS TO BUSINESS is celebrating its part in creating 30 new jobs and safeguarding a further 11. This success results from the company's organisation of a 'Meet the Buyer' event as part of a continuing supply chain development programme.

The programme is a joint initiative between BAA, the Ferrovial subsidiary that runs Heathrow Airport, and the borough councils covering the airport's job catchment area.

The event, which took place last November, gave Amalga, a west London company, the opportunity to present itself to a number of main contractors working on a multi-million pound refurbishment of Europe's busiest airport.

Amalga is a logistics and site services business that specialises in the particular demands of airside construction. Its expertise covers disciplines such as the storage and movement of materials; security; waste management; site set-up, general building works; and post-project cleaning services.

Initial meetings led to further discussions, which have resulted in contracts that will substantially increase the business's workload; hence its need for more staff.

BtoB's Victoria Weaver says: "Naturally we are delighted with the outcome. Firms that take part in 'Meet the Buyers' have a chance to start a discussion in their 15-minute slot that often leads to a decision to explore options in more detail.

In the normal course of events, smaller firms can have problems getting face-to-face appointments; and in the case of larger potential customers, there can be particular difficulty with identifying someone senior enough to make a buying decision.

At just 15 minutes, a 'Meet the Buyer' interview may seem very short, but a well-organised seller has plenty of time to interest a potential customer.

And 'Meet the Buyer' initiatives offer the chance of a number of appointments on the same day, in the same place; saving buyers and sellers huge amounts of what might otherwise be wasted time."

Victoria and her colleagues are already working on this year's Heathrow 'Meet the Buyer' and hoping to improve on last year's numbers, when they attracted 70 buyers and 370 sellers representing a wide range of products and services.

www.business-business.co.uk/heathrowsupplychains/index.php

Deals in the air after success at Farnborough

WEMBLEY is world renowned for football; Westminster is the birthplace of modern democracy; and Farnborough is the home of aviation.

Every second year the Hampshire town hosts an aerospace spectacular that attracts buyers and sellers from all over the world.

During this year's week-long show deals were finalised worth US\$47 billion, while two public days at the end of the trade show attracted more than 100,000 visitors.

Among the exhibitors were some of the best-known names in global aviation, such as Airbus, BAe, Boeing and Rolls Royce.

Against that background Business to Business was asked to organise two half-day Meet the Buyer sessions to give some of Britain's small and medium-sized suppliers a chance to make pitches to major international players.

It was an unqualified success, according to BtoB's Tim Gordon, who is already looking forward to the next Farnborough International in 2012.

He said: "We were asked to find 40 buyers: in fact we found 43. We offered them accommodation, travel and entry to the show for two days in return for time spent talking to between 20 and 30 suppliers.

As well as buyers from the European Union and the United States, we attracted interest from India, Russia and South America, all places with a growing interest in developing their aerospace industries.

Suppliers' places sold out a week early, demonstrating the understandably high level of interest in a unique opportunity to capitalise on a world-class event so close to home.

We charged £100 per delegate for a series of 15-minute meetings spread over two half days. Some suppliers chose to bring additional delegates so they could meet more buyers and thus increase their chances of doing business.

We have received highly complementary ratings from buyers and sellers alike and I'm confident we will have the chance to build on our success in two years, when the world's aerospace giants return to Farnborough."

www.farnborough1st-meet-the-buyer.com/