

Hot news this month requiring immediate attention - on the 7th of November the Department for Communities and Local Government announced the [Growing Places Fund](#). This £500 million fund has the objective of lifting economic activity by addressing immediate infrastructure needs and priority is to be given to projects where a marginal contribution is required to make the project feasible. The money is to be allocated through LEPs from the end of January 2012 and one of the main sources of anticipated receipts for what is referred to as a revolving fund is through S106 agreements - so for those wanting to bid for a share of this money there is an enormous to do, in very little time.

The [Higher Education Funding Council for England's Business Plan to 2015](#) is just out and confirms a desire to extend and enhance the information about higher education that is available for students, prospective students and others with an interest (including careers advisers, students' families and employers). We think that universities are going to have to work much harder to get involved with industry in relation to this, to improve perceived (and real!) employability of graduates from their institutions, so whilst not new as a subject area, more initiatives will need to be worked on to get industry interface for students. Some of our client's projects are now delivering this and we hope to grow this further, potentially involving Local Authorities in delivery.

This week I attended one of the Institute of Knowledge Transfer's seminars designed to enhance knowledge transfer between universities and business. A big challenge for universities is clearly how to sell the opportunities that may exist to businesses who don't know what they don't know - and have little idea where to start in finding out what could be of value to them within the university community.

Of most interest to me was [Scotland's Interface programme](#). Dr Siobhan Jordan gave insight into how they are making it easy for businesses to link into university expertise through the Business Gateway office, which now receives about 60 enquiries a month. Trade Associations and groups and organisations like Chambers of Commerce act as their sales force, publicising their existence, and when requirements come in to the office they are circulated to all universities in Scotland, so that any institution can come forward with a proposition. It is then up to the business to follow up the leads it is attracted by.

Case studies ranged from small businesses running boat trips around Loch Ness that wanted to become greener as an organisation, to crab meat producers that wanted to find new things to do with crab shell waste as

landfill sites become more expensive; and cheese manufacturers wanting to break into the snack market.

[Business Gateway](#) have latterly been exploring whether they can do things remotely, using the internet, to help. On line video case studies have been good, available through YouTube. The most successful work stream was to introduce webcast events.

Last week saw the announcement of the successful bids for the [2nd round of the Regional Growth Fund awards](#). 119 organisations across the country received conditional offers sharing around £950 million in the government's bid to stimulate economic growth through localism. In theory the allocations are positive, of course. As our clients and friends know, we are interested in real impact, and for us the jury is still out, despite emerging claims over 1st round investment impact. UK growth rates, compared globally and over time, is what we always want to assess impact on.

Last but not least this month, news now in that two city councils, Bradford and Bristol, have eased **Section 106 planning gain agreements** with developers in a bid to kick start work on stalled projects, following up dated viability studies that prove that the provisions sought are unrealistic today. In one case all Section 106 requirements are now dropped. This follows a [statement by Greg Clark MP](#) earlier in the year that councils should look to renegotiate Section 106 agreements on stalled schemes, where appropriate. Great to see it feeding its way through to real life examples and we would like to think that this can help a number of science, technology and arts focussed projects secure a future - key to economic success in many central areas of our towns and cities across the UK.

See you in December for a final year round up,

Jonathan