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HS2



Business and Local Economy Fund (BLEF) Overview

The objective of BLEF is to support and maintain local economies in areas where businesses may experience disruption from the construction of HS2. It aims to add benefit over and above committed mitigation and statutory compensation.

The types of initiatives that BLEF aims to support include:

- Schemes to improve the local public realm, especially in retail and tourist areas;
- General promotional activity for local economic benefit;
- Creating and running events that increase footfall or promote business activity during seasonal periods (for example, farmers markets or festivals involving a partnership of businesses);
- Business development and support that responds directly to the disruption from the construction of HS2.

The above list is not exclusive however, and the design of a project and its subsequent BLEF application should be based on direct consultation with local businesses, taking on board their views, needs and ambitions. BLEF projects should include a group of businesses coming together to respond to the construction of HS2 with an eligible lead applicant and accountable delivery body.

The primary target organisations are those which support the development of local businesses and tourism by certain sector(s), a distinct geography or under a common theme or collective purpose. Key examples are Local Authorities (LAs), Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), Chambers of Commerce and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). It is important to note that BLEF cannot not directly fund individuals, limited liability partnerships or private sector company/businesses. BLEF is also not a compensation scheme for individual businesses.

Applications from £10,000 to £100,000 can be for capital or revenue projects or combination. Applications from £100,001 up to a £250,000 are for capital projects only.

Subject to meeting BLEF guidance, funding can be used towards capital infrastructure costs; refurbishment of existing facilities; the installation of fixed equipment; new buildings and structures; and enhanced access and landscaping. If your project includes capital work, please refer to the guidance to identify if your organisation has sufficient security of tenure to meet the Funds programme criteria to be eligible to apply for a capital project. Further information can be found in section 3.4 of the BLEF Guidance document.

Revenue grants can be used to cover running costs, staffing, project delivery costs and related materials and tools such as for project management, business and public engagement and business support. A minor part of a revenue project can include public relations and communications work, subject to BLEF guidance, needing to demonstrate tangible benefits for public funding.



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Match contributions are not a requirement for applications to BLEF, although we do encourage applicants to include cash and in-kind match contributions where possible. In some circumstances, projects that have match funding may be prioritised.

Please note, if your project also benefits businesses that are not disrupted by HS2 construction, match funding will need to be provided for this proportion of businesses. BLEF Funds can only be used to support disrupted businesses. Further information on match funding contributions can be found in section 3.7 of the BLEF Guidance document.

The management of the Funds (both CEF and BLEF collectively) has been outsourced to **Groundwork UK**, who were selected through a competitive tender process and act independently. The Funds work is overseen by an Independent Panel, including an Independent Chair, working with and reporting to HS2 Ltd and Department for Transport.

Evidencing disruption specifically for BLEF projects

Applications need to demonstrate how businesses are disrupted by the construction of HS2 and how their proposed project will support these businesses. Key questions to answer in your application include;

- How will local economic activity be maintained or enhanced through your BLEF project?
- How will the project meet the needs of a group of businesses and how have they been involved in the project's design?
- What are the proposed outputs/outcomes of your project? What is the legacy of your project?

Before applying

Please read the Guidance and FAQ documents available online;
<https://hs2funds.org.uk/>

If you have any queries make contact directly with Groundwork UK by email
HS2funds@groundwork.org.uk

You need to consider whether your project will meet the BLEF Fund criteria and outcomes. Applicants that can provide better evidence that the outcomes will be achieved are likely to be more successful. Applications should provide evidence of comprehensive consultation about the need for the project and will need to demonstrate how the project will be monitored. Applications also need to demonstrate good value for money.

It is important that BLEF applicants consider when the most appropriate time is to apply for funds as projects need to be timed to provide the most benefit to businesses and the local economy whilst HS2's construction takes place. For example:



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- a project encouraging footfall to a town centre should be delivered during times when businesses are disrupted;
- whereas business support sessions to assist businesses to provide an online offer may be better provided before businesses are disrupted so that they have this set up in preparation for when disruption happens.

Applicants can apply as a partnership, involving the wider business community, but there must be an eligible lead applicant which will be responsible for all aspects of the project as the accountable body for the funding contract. All approved projects will require a signed partnership agreement. A maximum of 40% of the total amount of BLEF funding requested can be utilised by partners, therefore the lead partner (i.e. the applicant) must be directly responsible for 60% of the total BLEF funding. Any partner benefiting from BLEF funding must be an eligible organisation. For further information on applying as a partnership please see section 2.6 of the BLEF Guidance document.

Examples of the types of activities that could be supported through BLEF

Activity 1

Promotional campaign to show that traders on a local high street are open for business and to provide a higher profile for the area during HS2 construction works, maintaining or even increasing visitors and trading activity in the areas.

Examples of key outcomes/outputs;

- Creation of training and business development packages for local businesses, including face-to-face training and online activities to maintain and even increase customers and trading activity;
- Business support to develop a group of businesses' and each individual business' brand identity and public presence such as via marketing activities, including social media presence, to maintain and even increase customers and trading activity. Please note, if website improvements will also benefit businesses that are not disrupted match funding will need to be provided to cover this proportion of businesses;
- Promoting the area widely as a place to live, learn and work and to support this there will be a short video/series of clips created promoting the area, demonstrating tangible benefits and results.

Activity 2

Support to social enterprises, community businesses and small businesses in a specific area near to the line of route, such as a city centre location close to a major construction site, especially in anticipation of construction. The support could include training and advice on financial management, business planning, human resources and marketing/communications to maintain local businesses to achieve their financial, social and environmental aims.

Examples of key outcomes/outputs;

- Tailored and expert support for businesses which meets their needs and supports business activity maintenance or even growth;



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- Increase in business confidence and in turn maintenance of local economic activity;
- Encourage a local business network to enable peer support and cross business trading;
- Adaptation, diversification or development of local business activity to enable businesses to compete for opportunities

Activity 3

Improvements to the public realm for businesses and customers in anticipation of and/or during construction. The applicant would need to have sufficient security of tenure to apply for a capital project.

Examples of key outcomes/outputs;

- Creation of artworks, murals and illuminations designed to celebrate the area, enhancing or creating a tailored or even unique destination with a group of businesses, such as an identifiable and distinct food or local produce destination;
- Improvements to the streetscape e.g. overhead festoon lighting, street furniture, flower boxes etc. Improved signage or a walking trail to highlight and encourage visitors to key attractions;
- Events and/or festivals to maintain and even increase customers and trading activity to an area, building the destination's brand;
- Support to businesses to be actively involved in the public realm improvements and gain tangible benefits.

Activity 4

A programme of activities to increase footfall to a distinct location of a group of businesses close to a major construction site. Activities should be delivered during periods of disruption.

Examples of key outcomes/outputs;

- Markets and/or festivals with entertainment and community involvement and where traders will have stalls to promote their businesses;
- A customer loyalty scheme linked to a group of businesses;
- Campaign to identify an area as a destination, to maintain and even increase customers and trading activity to an area.

Further Information

The above example activities and key outcomes/outputs are shared to support applicants in developing their projects and related BLEF applications. We encourage applicants to contact Groundwork UK before applying to discuss their project. You can also visit the CEF & BLEF online map of awards to read about funded projects to demonstrate the Funds' work in action.

Visit for more information: www.hs2funds.org.uk