

Village halls boosted by £1.2 million to rejuvenate community hubs

Village halls in England have received £1.2 million through a government funding scheme, helping these community hubs make vital refurbishments to continue the invaluable role they play in rural communities.

So far, grants for 21 projects have been approved as part of the [£3 million Village Halls Improvement Grant Scheme](#) launched in April 2019. Improvements include repairs to roofs, refurbishments to toilets and kitchens and new meeting rooms.

The announcement was made at the start of Village Halls Week, a national campaign running from Monday 20 January to Sunday 26 January. The campaign celebrates the services that village halls provide in rural communities across England, and will involve events at 650 village halls across the country.

With more than 10,000 village halls across the country, these spaces provide vital hubs for communities to come together, collaborate and celebrate. Many halls provide a space for shops, cafes, pop up pubs, nurseries and doctors.

The celebrations will be marked in a speech by Defra Rural Affairs Minister Lord Gardiner at an event in Westminster today (20 January).

Defra Rural Affairs Minister Lord Gardiner said:

Village halls are an essential part of rural life. I am delighted that our grant scheme is helping to refurbish our nation's village halls, and each and every one will make a real difference to their communities.

There can be no doubt that village halls are more important and relevant than ever. Village Halls Week provides a perfect opportunity for people up and down the country to celebrate these wonderful places at the heart of our rural community.

Through the government's grant scheme, run by charity organisation Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE), village hall committees are able to [apply for grants of up to £75,000](#) towards refurbishment and alteration of their buildings.

David Emerson CBE, Chair, ACRE:

We are delighted to manage the Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund and have been overwhelmed with the fantastic response from halls.

The impact of the grants are huge and will make a great difference to rural communities. Village Halls Week is the perfect time to celebrate the new facilities rural communities can now enjoy.

On Friday, Lord Gardiner will visit Westleton Village Hall in Suffolk, which has received £75,000 to transform a much loved but well-worn village hall into a warm and inviting community centre. The building will be refurbished while a new foyer café will be available to local residents and the many ramblers, dog walkers, cyclists, runners and tourists that visit the village each year.

Anne Layton, volunteer, Westleton Village Hall:

Almost the whole community has a stake in our village hall, and we have called on skills from so many people to make this project happen. We host many activities such as film club, exercise groups and community meals, and now with this vital government funding we will be able to do much more.

Without our village hall, many people in our community would be very lonely, and we can now bring even more people together.

The announcement comes on the same day of the annual report on the government's Loneliness Strategy, which sets out the approach to tackling loneliness in England. With the help of government funding, village halls across the country are helping to increase community cohesion, while reducing isolation and loneliness.

Further information

- The Village Halls Improvement Grant Scheme was announced in the 2018 budget as part of £8 million made available to help with the cost of repairs and alternations to community buildings (village halls, miners' welfare facilities, Armed Forces veterans' facilities) to mark the centenary of the Armistice.
- Funding covers 20% of the total costs of a project. The remaining funding comes from a combination of charity reserves, fundraising, local authority funding and other grants such as the [National Lottery Community Fund](#).
- The application must be a village hall or similar rural community building and a registered charity. New build projects will not be eligible to apply to the fund due to their high costs and long timescales.
- Applications will be assessed by a panel including Defra officials and [Action with Communities in Rural England \(ACRE\)](#) staff with extensive experience of halls and grant schemes. The grant funding will be managed by ACRE on behalf of Defra and advice and support to potential applicants will be provided through the ACRE network.
- [Applicants can apply for grants by following this link.](#)

PM hosts first ever UK-Africa Investment Summit in London

- PM calls for UK to be the 'investment partner of choice' for African countries
- Summit will generate new opportunities in Africa for businesses across the UK
- PM announces the Government will no longer provide any direct support for thermal coal mining or coal power plants overseas

Prime Minister Boris Johnson will make the case for the UK as the 'investment partner of choice' for African countries at a major investment summit in London today.

He will say the UK has unique expertise and innovation in technology, clean growth, infrastructure and finance which can feed the continent's demand for sustainable growth.

The UK-Africa Investment Summit, hosted by the Prime Minister, will bring together 21 African countries with UK and African companies. This is the first time governments and businesses from the UK and Africa have come together for an event of this scale.

Deals worth billions of pounds will be announced at the Summit. These will drive jobs and growth in all parts of the UK and in Africa, benefitting a range of British companies from family firms to major multinationals. All new investments will reflect the Prime Minister's commitment to build long-term, sustainable relationships in Africa underpinned by our values and high standards.

The Prime Minister will use his opening speech to illustrate this modern partnership with examples of UK businesses like Dorset-based Low Energy Designs, which is installing smart street lighting across Nigeria, Northern Irish firm Lagan which has won the contract to build a business park in Uganda, and Diageo which is investing £167 million to build a state of the art, environmentally friendly breweries in Kenya and wider East Africa.

At the Summit, the Prime Minister will announce an end to UK support for thermal coal mining or coal power plants overseas, ending direct Official Development Assistance, investment and export credit.

This announcement forms part of the UK's wider commitment to use its expertise and experience to help Africa transition away from fossil fuels towards renewable, sustainable forms of clean energy. In 2019 the UK went a record 83 days without generating electricity from coal. The UK was also the first major economy to set a legally binding target to reach net zero

emissions by 2050 and Glasgow will host the COP UN Climate Change Summit later this year.

The Prime Minister will meet the 16 African leaders attending the Summit including President Sisi of Egypt, President Kenyatta of Kenya, President Buhari of Nigeria, President Akufo-Addo of Ghana and President Kagame of Rwanda, and African business leaders including CEO of Standard Bank Gert Vogel and CEO of Investec Hendrik Du Toit. He will also meet prominent UK business leaders including the CEO of Vodafone Nick Read, CEO of BP Bernard Looney, CEO of Standard Life Aberdeen Keith Skeoch, CEO G4S Ashley Martin Almanza, CEO of Associated British Foods George Weston, and CEO of the London Stock Exchange Group David Schwimmer.

The Prime Minister will also visit the Summit's 'Business and Innovation Hub', where he will meet young entrepreneurs from the UK and Africa and try out examples of their creative technology that is improving lives across the world.

The Summit will involve a number of sessions with speakers from government and business in the UK and Africa. Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, Development Secretary Alok Sharma, Trade Secretary Elizabeth Truss and Business Secretary Andrea Leadsom will also be representing the UK Government.

On Monday evening the Prime Minister, African Heads of State and Government and a number of British and African business leaders will attend a reception at Buckingham Palace hosted by the Duke of Cambridge.

[Growth Gateway announced at UK-Africa Investment Summit](#)

The UK announced the Growth Gateway – a service to help African, UK and other international businesses trade with and invest in each other – at the [UK-Africa Investment Summit in January 2020](#).

The service

The service will help businesses access the UK government's trade, investment and finance offer for Africa all in one place.

It will be made up of:

- online information: a section of [great.gov.uk](#) will provide up-to-date information on the UK government's trade, investment and finance offer, as well as African market guides, UK sector guides and a tool to help businesses understand what support they may need, and how best to access

it; the content will be available in English, French and Portuguese

- a UK-based team of trade and investment professionals: to help African firms export to the UK, find investment partners, and help UK and international companies to trade with and invest in Africa; the team will work closely with [Her Majesty's Trade Commissioner for Africa, Emma Wade-Smith](#)

Eligibility

Growth Gateway's online service will be available for all African, UK and international businesses. Additional support will be accessible to businesses seeking to combine commercial development with social impact in Africa.

Growing prosperity through trade and investment

The UK government is determined to provide support for African businesses to find trade and investment partners and access UK advice and expertise.

For UK businesses, the service offers further assistance to help British businesses to find new business partners and capitalise on opportunities for international growth in African markets.

The programme was announced at the UK-Africa Investment Summit, held in London, UK on 20 January 2020.

[Regional Air Connectivity Review: aviation minister visits Liverpool John Lennon Airport to launch UK tour of regional airports](#)

- Aviation Minister, Paul Maynard, launches UK tour of regional airports as part of the Regional Air Connectivity Review, starting with Liverpool John Lennon Airport
- the Department for Transport seeks the views of local airports to identify how best to support connectivity across the UK
- the review will ensure all corners of the country benefit from economic growth and prosperity for years to come

The Aviation Minister, Paul Maynard, has today (20 January 2020) visited Liverpool John Lennon Airport to launch his UK tour of regional airports, as part of the Department for Transport's Regional Air Connectivity Review.

The review was launched last week as part of a series of measures to support

regional connectivity across the UK, to ensure that people in all corners of the country benefit from prosperity and economic growth in years to come.

The Department for Transport will work closely with the aviation industry, local regions and devolved nations, to identify how it can support connectivity, starting with meeting the CEO of Liverpool John Lennon Airport, John Irving.

Paul Maynard, Aviation Minister, said:

Liverpool John Lennon Airport is a thriving hub for regional connectivity. With 69 domestic flights in and out of the airport every week, connectivity is vital to the success of the region.

The Regional Air Connectivity Review will work to understand how we can level up the country and strengthen local airports to drive economic growth.

John Irving, CEO, Liverpool John Lennon Airport said:

Liverpool John Lennon Airport is an important regional gateway serving the North West and North Wales, benefiting the economies of the areas it serves. However it can only realise its true potential with improved connectivity that will help to boost the region's economy and we therefore welcome the opportunity to participate in the government's review of regional connectivity.

The Regional Air Connectivity Review, led by the Department for Transport, is part of the Prime Minister's commitment to levelling up all regions of the UK, and will ensure all nations and regions of the UK have the domestic transport connections local communities rely on – including regional services from local airports.

UK aims to be Africa's partner of choice for trade and investment

The UK is strengthening its economic partnerships with African nations, as part of a Government drive to ensure the continent's growing demand for investment is met by the UK's expertise and innovation.

Programmes from the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Department for International Trade (DIT) will boost clean energy supplies, digital networks, and jobs and business opportunities for women, as well as

improving trade infrastructure.

In the lead up to the [UK-Africa Investment Summit](#), which is being held in London today (20 January 2020), £6.5 billion of commercial deals have already been signed by British companies to deliver jobs, growth and investment across the UK and Africa, with deals worth billions more expected to be made during the course of the day. They are expected to mobilise billions of pounds in private sector investment for Africa, marking a new era of trade between the UK and Africa.

Africa has 8 of the world's 15 fastest growing economies and there is huge demand on the continent for clean, sustainable and innovative investment. As home to some of the world's most enterprising technologies and the financial centre of the world in the City of London, the UK is perfectly placed to meet that demand and be the continent's investment partner of choice.

DFID's programmes, totalling £370 million, include:

- Supporting African countries to meet their rapidly growing energy demands through green energy, including better access to solar energy and electricity.
- Helping Africa thrive digitally through a £45 million programme helping young Africans, especially women, access the internet, develop digital skills and find jobs.
- Enabling at least 100,000 more women in Africa to secure high-quality jobs by funding their education and training.
- A £200 million programme to help build basic trade infrastructure in southern Africa. The new programme will support upgrades to border posts, ports and roads. It will also work with governments and businesses to improve trade policies and cut red tape.
- Boosting the flow of private financing into African projects supporting girls' education, healthcare and climate resilience.

Two joint DFID-DIT programmes, totalling £57 million, include:

- A £37 million programme to help businesses, trade with and invest across Africa.
- A £20 million programme that will support businesses in developing countries to increase trade with international markets.
- A separate Climate Finance Accelerator programme, worth £10 million from the Department for Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), will help developing countries reduce emissions by attracting more foreign investment and helping to build renewable energy sources, like wind farms.

The announcement comes as British and African firms announce £6.5 billion worth of commercial deals today, including:

- A £25 million investment by Matalan in Egypt to launch 11 new shopping outlets.
- GSK, who are investing a further £5 million in their operations in Egypt.

- Diageo's £167 million investment in Kenya and East Africa to support sustainability of breweries.

To date, the UK has signed trade agreements with 11 African countries, covering 43% of the UK's total trade with Africa and legislated for a trade preferences scheme with a further 35 African countries, with the ambition to build and deepen existing agreements in the future.

International Development Secretary Alok Sharma said:

Africa's economic potential is huge, with eight of the world's 15 fastest growing economies and a population set to double to over 2 billion by 2050.

We have much to offer African nations – UK aid is tackling climate change and supporting women entrepreneurs, our tech and digital expertise is helping Africa grow new industries and the City of London is channelling billions of private investment into Africa, boosting jobs and growth.

This Summit is a major step in unlocking the UK's unique offer, becoming Africa's investment partner of choice and benefiting people and businesses across the UK and Africa.

International Trade Secretary Liz Truss said:

Trade with countries across Africa has never been more exciting. As opportunities there grow, it's great to see so many British firms paving the way in trading and investing in the region to drive growth, create jobs and boost vital infrastructure.

We want the UK to be the investment partner of choice for African businesses and their governments. Our world-leading expertise in finance, tech, and innovation should make us the obvious choice and mark the UK and Africa out as natural partners for mutual prosperity.

The deals announced today show the massive potential of UK-Africa trade and the investment programmes we're launching will ensure UK and African businesses are able to capitalise on trade and investment opportunities, now and in the future.

Further information

Notes to Editors

For details on the UK-Africa Investment summit click [here](#).

More information on the DFID announcements:

- A £38 million boost to its Climate Compatible Growth Fund to support African governments to use UK expertise to expand their electricity networks, develop cleaner technologies and hire clean energy experts.
- A new £45m Digital Access programme to help some of the most marginalised communities across Africa access the internet and increase their digital skills.
- A £2 million programme to help women in developing countries secure high quality jobs, funding their education and trading. A further £6.1 million will go to Work Opportunities for Women which supports businesses to improve economic opportunities for women, helping support at least a further 100,000 women until 2024.
- A Regional Trade Programme of up to £200 million will support Southern African countries to boost their economic growth through trade. It will support upgrades to essential trade infrastructure and work with governments and businesses to improve trade policies and cut red tape. It will improve opportunities for African and UK firms to invest, trade, and grow across Southern Africa.
- A new £79 million package to support African governments to create opportunities for private investors to put money into development projects to help meet the Global Goals through development impact bonds.

More information on the joint DFID-DIT announcements:

- The £37million Growth Gateway programme will provide dedicated business support service for Africa. It will help businesses, including from Africa and the UK, to trade with and invest across Africa. The programme will also help African firms find new UK partners.
- The Trade Connect programme will provide £20 million over 5 years to increase exports from Africa to the rest of the world, providing direct support and advice to African businesses operating internationally and helping them make the most of their preferential market access to the UK. It will also support UK firms to source more quality, competitively priced products from Africa.

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