

UK spotlight on Luton's innovation achievements

FOLLOWING a visit by UK Business Incubation (UKBI) in the summer, staff at the Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre were invited to speak at the UKBI conference on *Incubation for Regeneration* in Liverpool.

Regeneration is currently a hot topic on both central and local government agendas and the conference covered the latest developments and views of practitioners and policy makers.

Delegates considered three case studies from incubation projects in Liverpool, East London and Luton.

Delegates to the conference included representatives from incubation centres throughout the UK as well as from regional development agencies, business support agencies, regeneration agencies, universities, the finance community and local and national government officials.

Mike Anstey, Luton and Dunstable Innovation Centre manager, said: "We were delighted to have been chosen as a UKBI case study.

"It enabled us to show a national audience some of the new and exciting developments that are transforming Luton."

The Innovation Centre, with its headquarters at The Spires building in Adelaide Street, will be mounting a campaign later in the year - 'Luton InSpires' -

designed to focus local attention on the new Luton based companies and enterprises revitalising the local economy.

The innovation centre has now spread to three other locations and is nurturing nearly 40 businesses.

It will refocus its activities on a new centre to be established at Butterfield Park in the next two years.

The Innovation Centre was established in The Spires building in September 1998 as a collaborative venture between the University of Luton, Luton Borough Council and Business Link.

The project was funded through the Luton Dunstable Partnership with £332,000 of Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding. This was allocated to cover the first three years of Innovation Centre operation, until April 2001.

The aim was to establish a permanent means of creation of small businesses and jobs within the Luton-Dunstable conurbation.

In 2000 all available units were occupied and a waiting list was in operation. In response to this, additional space was secured at Britannia House in Leagrave Road which offers industrial units for light manufacturing as well as office space.

In 2002, following a successful Phoenix bid in January to run the DEVICES project, additional funding

was awarded from the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF).

This funding was allocated to the Cambridge Luton Innovation Project (CLIP).

In April 2002 further SRB funding was granted to develop the offshoot centre at Britannia House.

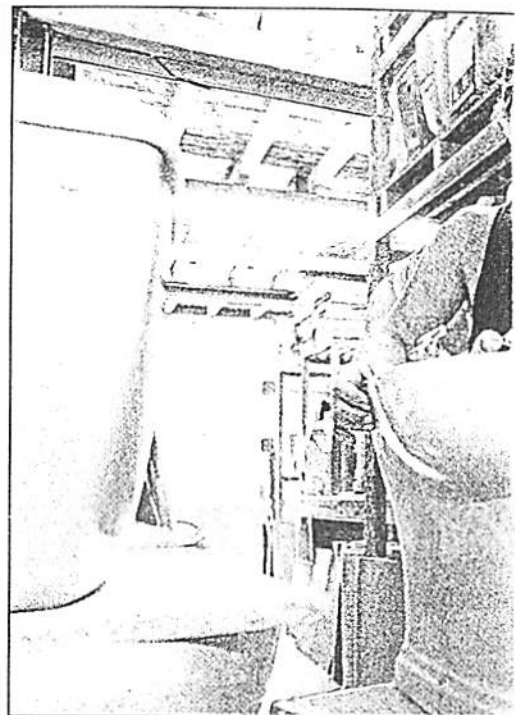
Objective 2 funding was awarded as part of a package of projects to provide support for new small businesses.

The Spires and Britannia House accommodated a total of 23 businesses.

In April 2003, nine offices were secured within the town centre Hat Factory for arts and media based enterprises. The Hat Factory is a Luton Borough Council owned arts venue. All the offices were occupied by June.

Office space was also acquired within the Marsh Farm area of Luton - an area targeted for major regeneration and which has been allocated New Deal funding. The building originally housed Coulter Electronics and is now the site of a number of regeneration projects.

During 2003 there has been a noted increase in the demand for virtual accommodation. There are currently nine virtual members and a further two applications for virtual membership waiting for approval.



■ EVERYTHING'S PANNING OUT WELL: Jim Chapman

Caught

By John Cole

IF there's a more unusual business in Bedfordshire than Second Time Around Sanitaryware tell us about it!

Retired plumber Jim Chapman is recycling old bathroom furniture and fittings.

Using mild acids "but mostly elbow grease and patience" he scrubs dirt and limescale off discarded bathroom ceramics which have been brought to him by plumbers or collected from the Biggleswade Tidy Tip.

Then he stores the cleaned up items in his industrial unit in Tyne Road on Sandy's Middlefield Industrial Estate - ready to answer the call if an insurance company gets caught short by a claimant's demands.

Jim has created a business supplying replacements for broken parts of bathroom suites which are no longer made and for which there are no new replacements.

People who suffer damage to a bathroom ceramic - a cistern lid or a toilet bowl perhaps - sometimes claim for an entire suite from their insurance company if it is so old that they cannot order a matching replacement component.

But the insurance companies know that Jim Chapman may hold the answer on his warehouse racks or may be able to hunt down the required piece.

Jim identified future problems over supply while he was working with his plumber father Reg a quarter of a century ago and he began collecting parts. "I used to

Recycling
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Time Around
Jim has to provide each coded colour that help them require come in, often insurance firm from their

If that sounds, it's nothing saves the cunning around merchants, plenty requests, to the problem customer take public have to usually the ei

He has also in his warehouse weekend at the call be called old bathroom reclamation c

IoD plea on long term sick

REHABILITATION must play a greater role in halting the rising tide of long-term illness and incapacity in the workforce, a report from the Institute of Direc-

seven years.

Geraint Day, Health Policy Analyst at the IoD, said: "The chances of returning to regular employment tend to diminish with the

pany provided an occupational health service for employees. However, employers felt more could be done by other bodies to assist in rehabilitating staff