

RGN Longitudinal Case Studies – North East

Wooler Growth Hub

Case Study Report

Introduction and approach

This RGN case study focuses on the **Wooler Growth Hub**, one of the North East RGN Pilot projects. The Growth Hub is based at the Cheviot Centre, in the Northumberland town of Wooler, and owned and managed by the Glendale Gateway Trust (GGT). The Cheviot Centre is the main community facility in Wooler and contains the Tourist Information Centre and the local library. The Growth Hub relates to business offices, including the new pods within the Centre.

This final report draws on three case study visits (which are reported separately in three Annexes). It provides a rounded assessment of the project over its lifetime, including overall performance against objectives and addressing barriers to rural economic growth, the ‘journey’ of the project throughout its lifetime, and lessons in relation to the ‘theory of change’ and the relationship between cause and effect.

Overview of the project

The project application form set out the background and aims of the Wooler Growth Hub. In terms of evidence of demand, the application referred to consultations with local businesses in developing the Glendale Community Plan in 2011. The business survey highlighted a high proportion of home-based and micro enterprises in the Wooler area and also that local businesses viewed lack of sufficient space and poor Broadband speeds as constraints on growth.

The project’s main aim was therefore to “add new office space, smart workspace and conference/training facilities to a thriving community resource centre to stimulate new businesses and grow existing business activity”¹. The application highlighted the need to “provide the right environment for new and emerging enterprises to flourish bringing new business activity to the area and with it employment opportunities and more disposable income”.

In terms of activity, the project involved creating additional business units, smart workspace (hot-desking) and a refurbished training room at the Cheviot Centre. This included the installation of three eye-catching ‘pods’ in the courtyard outside the centre. As well as the capital works, the project managers also set up a new Enterprising Glendale networking group. Although not formally part of the project, one of the Rural Enterprise Development Officers (REDO) employed through the RGN rural business support programme delivered one-to-one support and workshops from the hub.

¹ GGT (2012), Wooler Rural Growth Hub – Full Application Form

Figure 1: Wooler Growth Hub – Cheviot Centre, Wooler

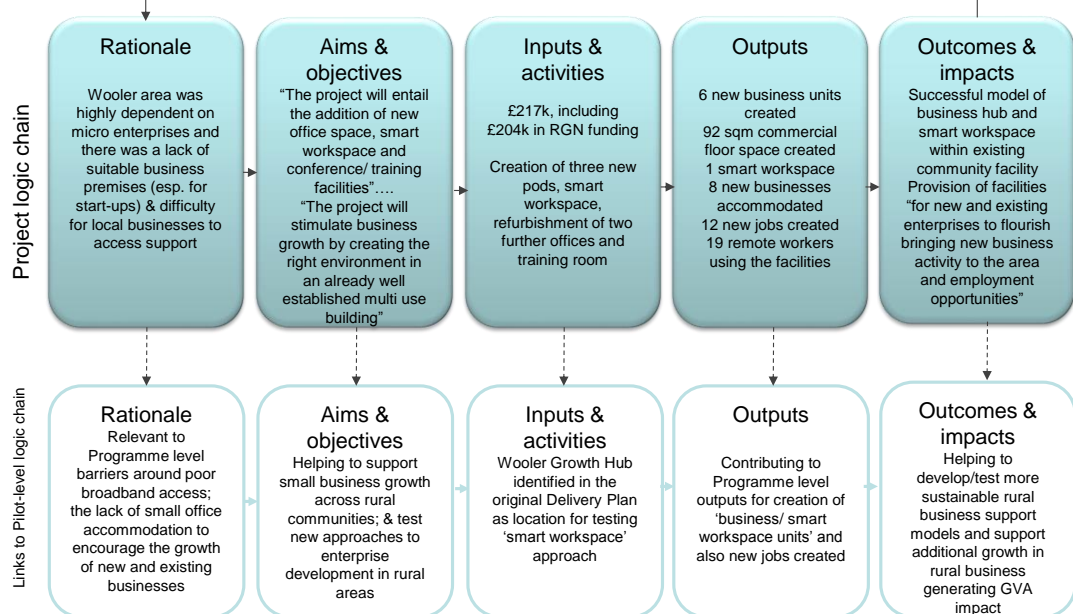


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The project's initial plan fit well with the RGN programme for the North East as outlined in the original RGN Delivery Plan. In fact, the Wooler Hub was already identified as one of the locations where new approaches to enterprise support would be tested, specifically in relation to the smart workspace concept. The proposed activities, outputs and outcomes were all directly linked to the wider North East RGN programme (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Project logic chain and theory of change

Project level theory of change: *The Wooler area in the north of Northumberland had a high proportion of home-based businesses and there was a shortage of suitable office accommodation locally. The provision of small and affordable units within the town's main community facility would help these home-based businesses and new start-ups to grow their businesses. The inclusion of a smart workspace and improved training facilities would help to develop a Work Hub which would become the main location for business support and advice, helping other local businesses to grow.*



Source: SQW – based on project application and NE RGN Delivery Plan

The project was completed by March 2015. All of the RGN funding was spent alongside some match funding provided by the Glendale Gateway Trust which runs the Cheviot Centre in Wooler. The project spent £217k in total including £204k in RGN funding and £13k in match funding. Of the RGN funding £173k was capital expenditure for the development of the smart workspace, creation of three pods and refurbishment of three offices and the training room in the main building. Nearly £31k of RGN was spent on the revenue costs of managing the Growth Hub with some match funding provided by the Glendale Gateway Trust.

It should be noted that this project received a very high RGN intervention rate (94%). This was permitted by the North East RGN programme as it was judged there would be high levels of additionality. Although there was limited leverage in terms of the Growth Hub project, the Cheviot Centre’s track record enabled it to secure further funding from Northumberland County Council funding as a remote learning hub, from March 2016.

Table 1: Key statistics - inputs (as presented in Q10 monitoring returns)

	Spend to date	Lifetime target	% of lifetime target spent
Defra’s RGN funding:	£204,169	£204,169	100%
Public sector match:			
Private sector match:	£13,095	£13,095	100%
Total expenditure	£217,264	£217,264	100%

Source: NE RGN monitoring data up to June 2015

Reflections on delivery across the project’s lifetime

Innovation and risk

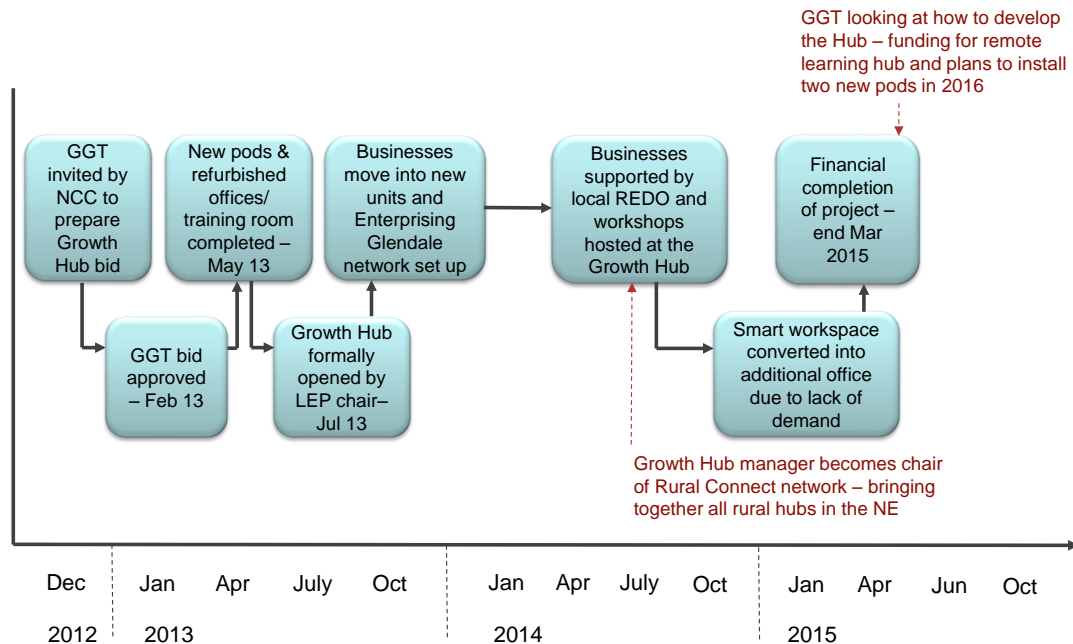
The integration of business facilities within an existing community facility was viewed as the main example of innovation within this project. Although there was some element of risk, project managers were confident that the approach would work based on feedback from businesses in a previous rural employability project delivered by Northumberland County Council and also involving the Cheviot Centre. This feedback suggested businesses wanted support to be provided by a trusted and locally based organisation. The Glendale Gateway Trust (which runs the Cheviot Centre) was already regarded as the main community-based regeneration organisation in Wooler. **There was also a question around how the ‘quirky’ pods would be received but all the feedback has been very positive. The final element of risk in the project was the inclusion of smart workspace. As it turned out, there was no demand for this even after various attempts to promote to local businesses.**

Delivery pathway

The project has been managed by the Glendale Gateway Trust (GGT) and the process has all gone to plan. In late 2012, the GGT was approached by Northumberland County Council about becoming one of the Growth Hubs in the Pilot RGN programme. It was invited to prepare a funding application and business plan and these were developed and finalised in early 2013. The installation of the pods and refurbishment of the offices and training room was completed by May 2013 with a formal opening of the new Growth Hub by the Chair of the

North East LEP in July 2013. The only change to the project was when the smart workspace was converted into another office in February 2015. This change was agreed with the North East RGN Programme Manager and it was prompted by the lack of demand for smart workspace.

Figure 3: Project journey (from start)



Source: SQW

What has worked well / not, and lessons learned

The main positive lesson from the project is that combining business and community facilities can work well in a rural market town like Wooler. It has had a number of benefits. For example, it was easy to promote the new offices since the local community already knew of or used the Cheviot Centre. There have also been benefits to businesses both in terms of creating a vibrant ‘community’ environment but also providing tenants with business opportunities through their exposure to community groups.

Although there has been some churn in the tenants, there has been steady demand over the two years for the new units. After some initial publicity (e.g. in the local press) when the pods were opened, project managers advertised in the Centre when a unit became available and they were filled soon after. The success of the pods is clear from the fact that the GGT is planning to introduce two new pods at the same location in early 2016.

The Wooler Growth Hub has been well integrated with the wider RGN programme in the North East. There have been two main links. First, one of the REDOs employed through the RGN rural business support programme used the Hub to deliver one-to-one support and workshops (the whole point of the rural business support programme was to use hubs like Wooler to deliver outreach support to rural communities). All businesses interviewed during the case study visits were very positive about the advice and enthusiasm of the local REDO. Another link was through the project manager’s involvement in Rural Connect, a new network

of hub operators in the North East (also funded through RGN). This has helped the hubs to learn from each other’s experiences of running these types of facilities.

The project has also involved the setting up of a new business group, Enterprising Glendale, which has informal networking events every month. Over 60 individuals have been involved in Enterprising Glendale (including around 10-15 of the local B&Bs and other shops, cafés and self-employed businesses). However, there has been a lot of fluctuation in the number of network event attendees – between five and 15 people coming along to each event. The feedback from businesses suggests these have been useful events especially for those people who have recently set up in business and could benefit from general advice and support; the emphasis has been on very new and micro-scale businesses.

The project has had mixed performance in terms of its main output targets. The level of churn is reflected in the higher than anticipated number of businesses accommodated. Both physical outputs have been fully achieved (assuming the converted smart workspace represents an additional office) but there was no progress on the use of the smart workspace. **Half of the new jobs created target has been achieved. Although two of the current tenants have created new jobs, it is difficult to see where other new jobs will be created over the coming months with the other tenants based in the Growth Hub.**

Table 2: Key statistics - outputs (as presented in Q10 monitoring returns)

Output indicators	Achieved to date	Lifetime target	% of lifetime target achieved
New jobs created (FTE)	6	12	50%
New businesses accommodated	11	8	137%
Number of new business units created	7	6 + smart workspace	100%
Commercial floor space created (sqm)	92	92	100%
Number of remote workers using facilities	0	19	0%

Source: Project application and monitoring forms – for latest quarter (Apr-June 2015)

The only real weakness in the project has been the smart workspace. For over a year, a room was available in the Centre for hot-desking. Project managers tried to promote the facility (mainly through social media) but there was very little interest. According to project managers there has not been the anticipated demand for this type of hot-desking space because local people preferred to use coffee shops. Also, due to the remote location of Wooler, it was very rare to have people travelling through who may want to use a hot-desk for a couple of hours. It may be that this type of facility could work in some rural towns but there needs to be a reason why people would be travelling through (e.g. the project managers acknowledged that in Northumberland, towns with train stations such as Berwick, Alnmouth and Morpeth may be better suited).

Demand, outcomes and impacts – over the lifetime of the project

Demand

As mentioned earlier, **there has been steady demand over the two years for the new units.** Although the Centre has not had any formal waiting lists, when a unit has become available it has been filled within a month or two. The Centre is currently fully occupied.

There were high levels of demand for the REDO support. Throughout the period of the RGN rural business programme, there was a high level of demand for the workshops delivered at the Wooler Growth Hub, particularly for the pre-start workshops. These workshops were for all local people/businesses, not just Hub tenants.

The demand for the networking events has fluctuated but this is not surprising given the time constraints on small businesses (e.g. the number of B&Bs attending has tended to drop off during the busy summer months) and there may be certain topics and speakers that are of more or less interest. The project managers are currently looking for more feedback from members on the types of topics for future events, conscious of the need to retain the interest.

Direct outcomes and impacts achieved to date

There is evidence that some of the 11 businesses that have so far used the RGN funded offices in the Wooler Growth Hub have realised *business* benefits from the project. For example, four businesses interviewed for the case study could attribute some growth in sales to the project, of which two have seen significant sales growth. Moving to the Hub has led to improved broadband connections, networking opportunities and access to business support through the REDO and workshops.

All businesses have valued being part of a ‘business community’ and noted the social benefits of working alongside other small businesses. Even for those businesses that could not attribute any quantifiable impact on their business, they reported that moving to the Centre has led to a more professional approach, a greater willingness to network and in some cases, increased confidence in how to run their business.

Most of the businesses that have used the Wooler Growth Hub have modest growth ambitions and there have not yet been any examples of businesses moving on from the Centre to find larger premises. Some of the businesses supported have been “lifestyle” businesses and others have been people just looking to work a few days a week.

Table 3: Outcome and impact performance

Expectations for the project	Any outcomes and impact so far?
Web developer moved from home into the Centre and was expecting more exposure to potential clients leading to additional business and a good working environment	Being based at the centre and attending the networking event led to £7k additional income. Some of this may have been generated if they had been doing other business development activity. Moved back home after six months for personal reasons but is still trading
Arts social enterprise moved from home into the Centre to have some dedicated workspace with good Broadband connections to focus on the business	Business has grown from 2 staff to 4 staff and turnover has increased from £23k to £100k. Still based at the Centre

Expectations for the project	Any outcomes and impact so far?
<p>Outdoor education specialist moved from another business centre into one of the pods and was expecting more networking opportunities and to grow the business</p>	<p>Benefited from being based in a community facility with links into local groups and schools – this led to new work with Northumberland County Council and Northumberland College to run training courses. Being based at the centre helped to reduce costs and grow sales of around £20k– <i>“since moving to the centre, the business has flourished”</i> and it moved from one of the pods to a larger office in the main building. However earlier this year, the business decided to relocate to the SE due to personal reasons</p>
<p>New recruitment start-up moved into one of the pods and wanted an affordable unit and lots of interaction with other people – <i>“did not want to be based on an industrial estate”</i></p>	<p>Business has grown from 1 to 4 staff in the space of 18 months and turnover has grown to around £250k. Networking events have been helpful to make new business contacts. Still based at the Centre</p>
<p>Social media consultant moved from home into one of the pods. Could have used the family farm office but wanted good quality and flexible space to work. Also <i>“liked the idea of joining a small business community”</i></p>	<p>Valued having the practical, flexible and affordable office space relatively close to home and there have been social benefits around being based in a vibrant community facility working alongside other small businesses. However there have not been any direct business benefits and the owner wants to maintain part-time working rather than grow the business. Still based at the Centre</p>

Beneficiary example

The business has two main areas of activity: youth theatre production; and training activity (e.g. comms and personal development, confidence training). It provides training for a range of individuals and organisations (e.g. the Baltic, Northumbria University, accountancy firm). Prior to moving into the Hub, the business had two staff. It now has four core staff and eight freelancers (the other staff work from home). Turnover has increased from £23k to £100k. Most of this growth has been on the youth theatre side of the business, and includes a £40k grant from Arts Council England through Grants for the Arts, in January 2015 to undertake a 2-year project to lead the development of youth theatre provision across Northumberland.

Over the last two years, support has involved the provision of part-serviced office with 24/7 access which has been very well managed by the Gateway Trust team. They have been very responsive and have worked hard to resolve some wifi issues. The consultee has attended a lot of the networking events and although the events have not generated any direct impact on the business, the informal networking has been helpful to some extent with people doing talks on different issues for small businesses. There is one live lead with the County Council which came out of an Enterprising Glendale session.

Business support was provided by the local REDO with some funding provided for consultancy support to help with fund raising, which was very helpful. The consultee also attended a social media workshop held at the Hub which flagged some useful suggestions which will be followed up over the coming months.

In terms of the impact of the Hub, the business probably would not have grown to the same extent if the consultee had continued to work from home. The consultee

has really valued having the dedicated office space and practical advice and support from the REDO.

Additionality

Without RGN funding, it is very unlikely that the GGT would have developed the new business facilities at the Cheviot Centre. In terms of those businesses reporting increases in sales since moving to the Wooler Growth Hub, the evidence would suggest that some of this growth either would not have happened if the businesses had still been based at home or would have happened much later. It was suggested by project managers that the more proactive and ambitious businesses may have looked to set up an office in another part of Northumberland.

Sustainability

In terms of the sustainability of the business benefits realised to date, the increased confidence and willingness to network and more professional approach that businesses have developed through the project should last for a number of years.

Impacts pathway

The way in which business outcomes have been achieved through the project have been as envisaged at the outset. New business premises were created in the Cheviot Centre and these were filled by local businesses that were previously working from home. The businesses moved to the Centre because they wanted a designated space to work (away from distractions), better Broadband, more contact with other small businesses, and access to business support. The project provided this and all businesses interviewed as part of the case study were positive about the quality of the premises, business support and working environment. In some cases, this support has contributed to changes in business behaviour and business outcomes. This has typically been where businesses have had more engagement with the networking events and REDO support.

Looking forward

Through being part of the RGN programme, the Cheviot Centre has increased its profile locally as not just a community facility but also as a Growth Hub for businesses. Increased rental income has improved the financial sustainability of the Centre. It will continue to provide accommodation and support for small businesses in the Wooler area and GGT is planning to increase its capacity by adding two new pods in early 2016.

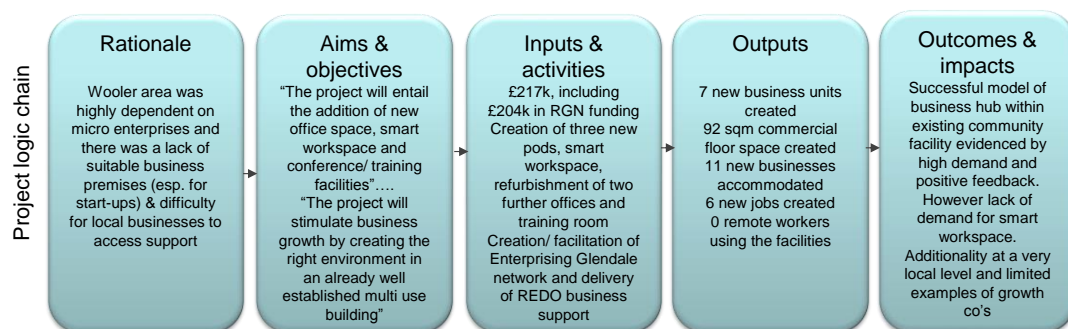
The experience of running the Growth Hub and also learning from other hubs through the Rural Connect network has helped the project managers to develop knowledge and capacity which will help to develop the Cheviot Centre in the future (e.g. through also becoming a rural learning hub).

As a social enterprise, the Glendale Gateway Trust has traditionally relied on public sector funding. Although the increased rental income from the new RGN funded offices has helped, the project managers still have some concerns about filling the gap in revenue funding which was provided by the RGN programme. It was also acknowledged that the REDO support was an important part of the success of the Wooler Growth Hub and this activity came to end in March 2015. The hope amongst project managers is that if a successor rural business support programme is implemented this can also be delivered using the Growth Hub.

Conclusions

- Overall the Wooler Growth Hub has proved to be a successful project which has broadly been delivered as envisaged; the only change was to convert the smart workspace into an additional office. It has addressed the barriers set out in the original application form which were aligned to the wider North East RGN programme
- It has demonstrated the benefits of integrating business facilities within an existing community facility. It has also shown the benefits of ensuring that the facilities are managed by an organisation with existing links with the local community
- There have also been benefits of delivering outreach business support through the Growth Hub, improving local access to support services and networking opportunities
- The project has performed reasonably well so far in terms of its original targets with the exception of the number of new jobs created. Although there was some expectation the project would support some ‘growth’ businesses, only two of the 11 businesses accommodated to date would fall into this category.
- The project has supported more “lifestyle” businesses than anticipated but this actually reflects the profile of the local (Wooler and Glendale) economy. Whilst this has meant limited additional output for the wider Northumberland economy, the project has nevertheless proved to be an important facility in the sustainability of the local economy.

Figure 4: Lessons in relation to the logic chain and theory of change



Source: SQW

Key Lessons

The following lessons can be drawn out from this project case study:

- A high RGN intervention rate helped to ensure the project was delivered on timescale
- The project was generally successful because of two main factors:
 - Glendale Gateway Trust’s experience in running the main community facility in Wooler and the fact it was well-known and trusted in the local community
 - The Hub was well integrated within the wider RGN programme, particularly in terms of the REDO using the Hub to deliver business support and workshops
- There has been high demand for the new business units but the types of businesses using the units have been primarily micro, “life-style” businesses. As a result the impact of the project has been mainly at the local level.

Annex A: Consultees

Neil Wilson – Glendale Gateway Trust

Tom Johnston – Glendale Gateway Trust

Gemma Douglas – Glendale Gateway Trust

Melanie Thompson-Glen – Juno Consulting

7 tenant businesses

Annex B: Visit 3 – September 2015

Introduction and approach

This RGN case study focuses on the Wooler Growth Hub, one of the North East RGN Pilot projects. The Growth Hub is based at the Cheviot Centre, in the Northumberland town of Wooler, and owned and managed by the Glendale Gateway Trust. The Cheviot Centre is the main community facility in Wooler and contains the Tourist Information Centre and the local library. The Growth Hub relates to business offices, including the new pods within the Centre.

This report provides an update on progress made between the second case study visit in April 2014 and the third visit in September 2015. The third case study visit involved:

- a site visit on 8th September 2015
- consultations with project leads from the Glendale Gateway Trust and four current tenants based at the Growth Hub
- additional consultation with the former Rural Enterprise Development Officer (REDO) who delivered support at the Growth Hub.

Inputs, activities and outputs - update

Inputs

The project was completed by March 2015. All of the RGN funding was spent alongside some match funding provided by the Glendale Gateway Trust which runs the Cheviot Centre in Wooler.

The project spent £204k in RGN funding, of which £173k was capital expenditure for the development of the smart workspace, creation of three pods and refurbishment of three offices and the training room in the main building. Nearly £31k of RGN was spent on the revenue costs of managing the Growth Hub with some match funding provided by the Glendale Gateway Trust.

Table 4: Key statistics - inputs (as presented in Q10 monitoring returns)

	Spend to date	Lifetime target	% of lifetime target spent
Defra's RGN funding:	£204,169	£204,169	100%
Public sector match:			
Private sector match:	£13,095	£13,095	100%
Total expenditure	£217,264	£217,264	100%

Activities

There has been some churn in terms of Growth Hub tenants since the last visit, but there continues to be strong demand for the office space and it is currently fully occupied. Over the last year, one tenant decided to move away from the North East due to a change in personal circumstance, and another sold his business (to focus on his other antiques retail business,

which is also based in Wooler). In addition, one tenant progressed from one of the pods to a larger office space in the main building of the Cheviot Centre.

Any time an office has become available the project managers have managed to fill it relatively quickly mainly through advertising at the Cheviot Centre. Since the Centre is the main community facility in Wooler, it is well known locally and has high levels of footfall creating a vibrant environment which tenants have all appreciated.

Due to the success of the 'pods' (located in the courtyard outside the main building) and increasing local demand for business space, the Glendale Gateway Trust is looking to add two new pods early next year. The Trust is hoping to receive funding support from the new LEADER programme.

In the last few months, the Centre also managed to secure a new long term tenant with Northumbria Police deciding to take one of the larger offices following the closure of the police station in Wooler. This development was seen as being significant for the sustainability of the Centre as it secured another 'anchor' tenant. In recent years the balance of the Centre's income has been 65% from use of the community facilities and 35% from Centre tenants. Income from the additional office space provided by the RGN project along with attracting the police as a new anchor tenant means that the Centre now generates 65% of its income from tenants.

The Centre is also hoping that the improved Cheviot Centre facilities will help it to deliver other rural projects and services. For example, in March 2015, the Cheviot Centre received Northumberland County Council Social Enterprise funding to set up a remote learning hub – a facility for interactive communication with specialists in remote locations covering issues such as learning and healthcare. The project is still being developed but partners include Northumberland College (Kirkley Hall), Newcastle University, Northumbria Healthcare, Sage Gateshead and Age Concern.

At the time of the last visit (March 2014), the smart workspace was not being used. After further attempts to promote the room (mainly using social media), the project manager received approval from the North East RGN programme to convert the smart workspace into another office, and the space was quickly let.

Feedback from the project managers highlighted the smart workspace as the main weakness of the project. In their view, there was not the anticipated demand for this type of hot-desking space because local people preferred to use coffee shops. Also, due to the remote location of Wooler it was very rare to have people travelling through who may want to use a hot-desk for a couple of hours.

There have been some challenges sorting out the Broadband for tenants and this has only been resolved in the last two to three months. In the end, the Centre used the Government's Broadband Connection Voucher scheme to ensure everyone now has secure wi-fi. Under the initial plan, businesses would only have been able to get up to 3 MB of bandwidth; the new scheme can offer up to 8 MB. Due to delays, a couple of tenants decided to put in their own hardware.

Up to March 2015, a Rural Enterprise Development Officer (REDO) continued to provide one-to-one business support to tenants and organise workshops delivered at the Growth Hub. Right up to the end of the RGN rural business support contract, there was lots of activity

delivered at the Hub particularly in terms of pre-start workshops (responding to local demand). Since the end of the REDO support, some local businesses have been asking the Centre managers (Glendale Gateway Trust staff) for information on business support. Whilst the Centre managers have been able to provide some advice, it has not been as comprehensive as the advice previously provided by the REDO.

The project managers have continued to organise networking activity through the Enterprising Glendale group set up following the Centre's RGN Growth Hub designation. Originally the network meetings were organised every two months but then members decided to hold the meetings monthly. At the start, these were breakfast events but they were then moved to a lunchtime slot to try to encourage more local B&Bs to attend. This has not happened and the event are likely to be moved back to early morning.

Over 60 individuals have been involved in Enterprising Glendale including around 10-15 of the local B&Bs and other shops, cafés and self-employed businesses. However, there has been a lot of fluctuation in the number of network event attendees – between five and 15 people coming along to each event. Some members are also involved in other local networks in Berwick, Alnwick and Amble. Project managers are looking to develop a more formal structure of events and currently surveying members for ideas on topics they would like to discuss.

The challenge for the Enterprising Glendale network will be to keep small businesses engaged in this type of group “for them to stay interested there needs to be something tangible from the meetings e.g. information on grants, and discussions on topical issues”. Project managers indicated that there have been other unsuccessful attempts at setting up, and maintaining business groups in Wooler (e.g. a retailers association and Chamber of Trade).

Joint working

Up until March 2015, one of the Rural Enterprise Development Officers (REDOs) delivered the rural business support programme at the Wooler Growth Hub which ensured the project was well integrated within the wider North East RGN programme.

Since the last case study visit the project manager has also been highly involved in the Rural Connect initiative, another part of the North East RGN programme which has created a network of rural business hub operators. The project manager is chair of the steering group for the network which now has 35 hubs as members and meets on a quarterly basis at hubs around the North East.

This network has been successful in developing new and stronger relationships amongst the social enterprises and private sector organisations that manage hubs across the North East. For the Glendale Gateway Trust having these meetings with other hubs has been useful to discuss operational issues involved in running a business hub, including leases, pricing and local promotion.

Management and delivery

There were no changes in how the project has been managed since the last visit. The Glendale Gateway Trust who own and manage the Cheviot Centre have provided support to businesses by managing the offices and helping to organise the Enterprising Glendale networking

meetings. There has also been some promotion of the Growth Hub and networking events on the main Glendale Gateway Trust website. The REDO delivered one to one support and workshops at the hub up until the end RGN rural business support contract in March 2015.

Outputs

The project has had mixed performance in terms of its main output targets. The level of churn is reflected in the higher than anticipated number of businesses accommodated. Both physical outputs have been fully achieved (assuming the converted smart workspace represents an additional office) but there was no progress on the use of the smart workspace. Half of the new jobs created target has been achieved. Although two of the current tenants have created new jobs, it is difficult to see where other new jobs will be created over the coming months with the other tenants based in the Growth Hub.

Table 5: Key statistics - outputs (as presented in Q10 monitoring returns)

Output indicators	Achieved to date	Lifetime target	% of lifetime target achieved
New jobs created (FTE)	6	12	50%
New businesses accommodated	11	8	137%
Number of new business units created	7	6 + smart workspace	100%
Commercial floor space created (sqm)	92	92	100%
Number of remote workers using facilities	0	19	0%

Source: Project application and monitoring forms – for latest quarter (Apr-June 2015)

Outcomes and additionality

This final case study visit included interviews with four tenant businesses: three that moved in over the last year and one that has been there for two years, and interviewed during the first case study visit.

All four businesses reported that moving to the Growth Hub has had a positive impact on their business. All had previously been working from home and required a dedicated work space away from other distractions, with improved Broadband connections. The businesses were already familiar with the Cheviot Centre (e.g. as their local library) and so found out about the new Growth Hub when visiting the Centre.

Whilst one of the new tenants has only needed the office space (which she is very positive about), the other businesses have benefited from the new offices, one-to-one support from the REDO and the support and advice provided through the Enterprising Glendale group. All businesses were very positive about the way the Centre is managed, the responsiveness of the staff managing the Centre and the business support that has been provided.

In terms of business outcomes two of the tenants have experienced growth in turnover since being based at the Wooler Growth Hub. The feedback suggests that some of this growth either would not have happened if the businesses had still been based at home or would have

happened later. Project managers stated that without the RGN funded Growth Hub, these two businesses may have looked to set up an office in another part of Northumberland.

The other three tenants interviewed (all with quite modest levels of turnover) stated that being based at the Hub has helped them develop a more professional approach to running their business which would have been a lot more difficult had they still been working from home. Two of the businesses also highlighted that all the support received (especially the REDO and networking support) has helped to increase their confidence.

Conclusions from Visit 3

The project has progressed well since the last case study visit. Some tenants have moved out but new businesses have soon moved back in to the Growth Hub and the Centre is currently fully occupied. The addition of the Growth Hub has helped raise the profile and consolidate the Cheviot Centre as the main community facility in the town and surrounding Glendale area. The success of the 'pods' is clear from the fact that the Glendale Gateway Trust is planning to introduce two new pods in early 2016.

The support provided to tenants has all been well-received including the day-to-day facilities management, the organisation of Enterprising Glendale events and the business support provided by the REDO. The only main challenge for the project was the lack of success with the smart workspace which has now been converted into another office.

Looking ahead the Cheviot Centre will continue as a Growth Hub and plans to increase its capacity with the two new pods. The Centre has been moving to a more sustainable model generating more income from tenants (including long term tenants which now include Northumbria Police).

However, the project managers do have some concerns about filling the gap in revenue funding which was provided by RGN and, before that, through delivering the Rural Employability Programme for Northumberland County Council. RGN has clearly helped to enhance the Cheviot Centre and the project managers hope to use their improved facilities to deliver other services such as the remote learning hub.

Consultees

Neil Wilson – Glendale Gateway Trust

Tom Johnston – Glendale Gateway Trust

Gemma Douglas – Glendale Gateway Trust

Melanie Thompson-Glen – Juno Consulting

4 tenant businesses

Annex C: Visit 2 – April 2014

Introduction

This is a report of the second visit to the RGN case study project at Wooler in Northumberland. The visit took place in March 2014 and included discussions with the project manager, Neil Wilson (Asset Development Manager at the Glendale Gateway Trust), two of his colleagues from the Trust, local Rural Enterprise Development Officer (REDO) Melanie Thompson-Glen, and three of the Centre's tenants. Background documentation was also reviewed. The focus of the discussions was the progress made by the project over the last six months.

Project overview

The Wooler Growth Hub project has involved creating three additional business units ('pods'), three further office spaces, hot-desking space and a training room at the Cheviot Centre which was already the town's main community centre with library and Tourist Information Centre. The project still has the same aims of making the existing community facility in Wooler an enterprise hub for local start-ups and existing small firms. It has a particular focus on helping home workers. All activity at the Cheviot Centre is managed by the Glendale Gateway Trust. In addition to the new units, a new networking group ('Enterprising Glendale') has been established and the Hub is also used as a base for the delivery of another RGN project, the rural business support programme.

Implementation over the last six months

Overall the project has progressed well in the last six months and broadly in line with what was expected. At the time of the visit in March 2014, one of the three new pods was vacant but a new business was moving in the following week which will bring the Centre to capacity.

The Centre now has a range of businesses including a PR firm, a theatre production/arts training company, an outdoor education social enterprise, a complementary therapy company, a recruitment specialist, and an arts and crafts company. The new company moving in is involved in event management. In addition, there are a couple of community organisations also based in the Centre: the Royal Volunteer Service and Glendale Agricultural Society.

Each of these organisations has had some support provided by the local REDO employed through the rural business support programme which is delivered across the North East RGN area. There has also been further networking activity through Enterprising Glendale. This is the new business network set up for tenants and other local businesses with the events taking place every second month in the Cheviot Centre.

Another strand of recent activity has been the project manager's involvement in the new RGN project to bring together a more formalised network of enterprise hubs across the rural parts of the North East (there are currently 22 hubs signed up so far). The project manager of the Wooler Hub has been chair of the working group to develop this wider network, working closely with the project manager of the rural business support programme. A new website is in the process of being developed which will enable the hubs to share information and also

promote more effectively the facilities and support available through the hubs. The Wooler Hub did already have some contact with other Northumberland hubs but this network is expected to improve links between partners from across the rural North East.

The project spend is on target. The total capital of £168,000 has now been spent. Half of the revenue budget has also been spent in line with the original application. Overall, around £187,000 of the total combined budget of £209,000 has been spent with 95% of the funding coming from RGN and the remaining 5% from GGT.

What works (or not) and why

In this visit we received feedback from the Trust Director who has been involved in the whole process of redeveloping the Cheviot Centre. Whilst adding some new business units to the community facility was reportedly 'on the radar' when planning the Centre's redevelopment, prior to RGN it was unclear where they could have accessed the funding for business units. RGN can therefore be viewed as speeding up the process of developing these units but arguably also adding value in terms of the Hub approach and linking in with other RGN projects (two of which are mentioned above).

Bringing together community and business facilities is regarded as one of the key strengths of the project. There has been a good level of business activity and interest in the new pods over the nine months since the Hub was launched (although there was a slight lull in interest before Christmas when there were a couple of pods temporarily available). The comparison is made with the nearby Glendale Business Park which offers basic business units but little else in terms of business development and networking support and reportedly lacks the same atmosphere or 'vibrancy'.

One of the aims of RGN is about testing new approaches. Consultees made the point that there was a relatively high level of risk in this project, both in terms of combining a community and business facility but also with the innovative design of the pods. So far, it is suggested that this risk has paid off. Glendale Gateway Trust, which manages the Cheviot Centre, is regarded as an enterprising organisation and therefore well suited to running this type of enterprise hub.

There has been some marketing of the Wooler Hub through articles in the local press (e.g. Berwick Advertiser, the Northumberland Gazette and the Journal). However, the project manager is uncertain about how effective this has been and stated that most of the enquiries about the pods continue to come through word of mouth. This links back to the point made about the importance of an organisation's credibility and profile in the local community – "people like to know who they are dealing with". In recent months the Centre has been increasing its use of social media to promote the pods, smart workspace and the new network – the Centre currently has 73 likes on Facebook and 200 Twitter followers.

Although still early days, the networking activity of the project is well-regarded. Since the last case study visit, there have been another two meetings of Enterprising Glendale. These events have alternated between breakfast and lunchtime and take place at the Cheviot Centre. As highlighted previously, this is something new for the local business community. There was, and still is, a retailers' association in Wooler but this rarely holds any events. The Enterprising Glendale events have typically attracted around 15 businesses with a mix of tenants and other

local businesses. Twenty-six firms have been involved to date and they now receive a short e-newsletter with profiles of local businesses and upcoming events.

Although the networking events have been quite informal to date there are plans to make them more structured and bring in external speakers. For example, at the next event there will be a presentation by iNorthumberland to talk about the new superfast broadband infrastructure (Wooler has received this ahead of other market towns because of its role as an RGN hub). Business Northumberland is also coming to speak to the group (business support programme delivered by BE Group/OI on behalf of Arch, the Northumberland Development Company).

The one part of the project which has still to deliver is smart workspace. This room in the Centre's main building is available for hire for local business people looking to hot-desk. One consultee suggested that it simply needs more or better promotion but others have become sceptical about whether there is much demand for this locally. The local REDO is based at the Rothbury hub (20 miles south of Wooler) and they have had the same difficulty in promoting their smart workspace. The Centre has been in contact with a local initiative called 'Colleagues on Tap' to see if they are interested in using the space. This initiative organises days to bring together self-employed home workers.

There is a push to promote the smart workspace more using Facebook and Twitter and the hope is that the new website promoting the North East enterprise hubs will drive interest and demand. There was some frustration that it has taken so long to set up this new hub network, with consultees pointing out that after the launch of the new website there will only be eight or nine months of the RGN pilot remaining. However, the RGN programme manager highlighted that this has actually happened as quickly as possible following the research and feasibility work that took place at the end of 2013.

Whilst the project manager is determined to give the smart workspace an opportunity to be successful, there is only so long they can afford to have empty space in the Centre. If it still has not taken off by the end of 2014, it is likely that the space will be converted into either a new business unit or more meeting space for community groups (which is always in demand).

Another constraint relates to the limits on supporting B2C (business to customer) firms. This is a stipulation of the ERDF funding for the project but something which is very difficult to explain to business, particularly when so many rural firms are B2C.

Outputs and outcomes achieved over the last six months

Outputs

The project has agreed the following outputs with the RGN team at the County Council and are reporting on a quarterly basis. The following figures are based on the original project application form and the latest quarterly monitoring data provided by the GGT. Since the last visit, two additional businesses have been accommodated and one extra job created.

Table 6: Key outputs for Wooler Growth Hub

Output	Project targets	Achieved to date	Achieved in last six months
New jobs created (FTE)	12	2	1
New businesses accommodated	8	7	2
Number of new business units created	6 + smart workspace	7	-
Commercial floor space created (sqm)	92	92	-
Number of remote workers using facilities	19	0	-

Source: Project application and monitoring forms –for latest quarter (Jan-Mar 14)

Outcomes

The businesses consulted during both case study visits have all been positive about how being based at the Hub has helped them make connections and find out what is going on and how to access business support. The networking events seem to be progressing well and are providing an opportunity to share experiences and lessons. As an example, the project manager highlighted that at the last event, one of the tenants explained how he was using the main Wooler community website to drive interest in his business. This reinforced the importance of generating more online content about the hub and the businesses based there.

Although still relatively early days for the project, there are some examples of businesses being able to report on benefits from a business and personal perspective. In the table below we have summarised the different feedback from the two case study visits.

Table 7: Beneficiary feedback

Beneficiary details	Support received and expectations	Visit 1 impact?	Visit 2 impact?
Web developer	Moved into the Cheviot Centre and has attended networking events. Expecting more exposure to potential clients leading to additional business and a good working environment	Being based at the centre and attending the networking event has led to £7k additional income. Some of this may have been generated if they had been doing other business development activity. No change in employment as yet	Business has moved back home for personal reasons
Theatre production/ arts training company	Moved into the Cheviot Centre and has attended networking events. Expecting some new business leads	Too early to say – need to see what happens from the three contacts established so far from the networking events at the Centre	Not available at time of visit
PR business	Already based at the Cheviot Centre and has attended networking events. From a personal perspective, it is good to have more people based in the centre. Hoping there will be business opportunities from new businesses moving in/ starting up	Not relevant – was already based at the Centre, therefore not a direct beneficiary.	Limited direct impact of being based in the Hub (already based there) but have helped deliver 12 hour specialist marketing support, therefore generated some income. Employee also attended a social media workshop which was useful.

Beneficiary details	Support received and expectations	Visit 1 impact?	Visit 2 impact?
Outdoor education social enterprise	Moved into one of the pods and has attended networking events. Expecting more networking opportunities – have already noticed the benefits of being based in a community facility with links into local groups and schools. Expect to increase turnover and take on more staff	Being based at the centre has generated around 20k so far this year – “since moving to the centre, the business has flourished”. The networking aspects as well as reduced overheads and more straightforward rental structure has helped the consultee focus on the business	Has moved into a larger office in the Cheviot Centre. Business has been improving over the last six months. New leads through being based at the centre and the networking events – e.g. working with the council and Northumberland College to run training courses. Good ongoing support “moving (to the Centre) has saved the business”
Recruitment specialist	Moved into one of the pods and has attended networking events. Recently set up the business and wanted an affordable unit and lots of interaction with other people – “did not want to be based on an industrial estate”.	N/A	Business has only been running a couple of months. Very happy with the unit and “cannot fault the support provided”. Networking events have been helpful to make new contacts.

Source: Interviews with tenants

Feedback from businesses based at the Wooler Hub suggests that the new facility is playing an important role in helping rural businesses in that area. Arguably the types of businesses being supported are unlikely to be high growth firms in the traditional sense but nevertheless, collectively, they make an important contribution to the sustainability of the Wooler economy.

Interestingly, the project manager stated that there is currently no or limited awareness of the Hub and the business support programme amongst the larger local employers such as Glendale Engineering or McLaren Engineering. The aim is to use the RGN project over the coming months to reach some of these firms and ensure that they are linked in to the other larger regional or national business support programmes.

Future plans

There are two areas of immediate priority for the Wooler Growth Hub. The first is to resolve the issue with the smart workspace. If there is still no interest later in the year (after a few months of more promotion on the new NE enterprise hubs website), it is likely to be converted in to a new office or meeting room. Since the smart workspace was an important element of the original enterprise hub concept, the project manager wants to give it as good a chance as possible to succeed.

The other key area will be to ensure the continuation and growth of the Enterprising Glendale network. Although the relatively informal structure seems to have worked well so far, plans are in place to make it slightly more structured with speakers being invited to come along. More marketing should help on both fronts and plans are being developed to update content on the main Wooler community website as well as the new NE enterprise hubs website.

There is another year of RGN revenue funding for the project. Beyond this, the project manager is confident that GGT will be able to maintain the current resourcing for managing

the Centre. However, the main risk is around the resourcing for the networking and business support activity. As already mentioned, the success of the project is due partly to the links with the other RGN project, the rural business support programme and the support provided by the local REDO. The future of this activity remains uncertain.

Conclusions

The table below summarises the performance of the project in terms of spend and outputs. Nearly 90% of the project costs have been spent with the remaining costs relating to revenue expenditure. While the outputs on new units and floor space have been achieved, there is some way to go in achieving the jobs created and remote workers targets. The project manager believes around six jobs will be created by the end of the RGN project in March 2015.

Table 8: Summary of project statistics

		Achieved to date	Lifetime target	% of lifetime target achieved
Expenditure	Defra's RGN funding:	£183,410	£199,992	92%
	Public sector match:			
	Private sector match:	£3,240	£9,421	34%
	Total expenditure	£186,650	£209,343	89%
Outputs	New jobs created (FTE)	2	12	17%
	New businesses accommodated	7	8	88%
	Number of new business units created	7	6 + smart workspace	100%
	Commercial floor space created (sqm)	92	92	100%
	Number of remote workers using facilities	2	19	10%

Source: RGN monitoring data provided by GGT and Northumberland County Council up to Mar 2014

As highlighted in the previous case study report, part of the reason that this hub appears to be working well is the fact that the project brings together both community and business facilities. This is helping to create a good atmosphere for people to work in and is also helping to generate potential business leads. Whilst this model works in Wooler it may not necessarily be so appropriate in other rural areas.

Since opening just under a year ago, there has been consistently high interest in the new pods that have been built. The Centre has also been used for delivering business support (through another RGN project) and networking activity. There have now been four Enterprising Glendale events, typically attracting around 15 businesses with a mix of tenants and other local businesses. Feedback from the businesses has indicated that this support is an important part of the overall package.

There are elements in the project that have not worked so well and the main example is the smart workspace. It is hoped that the new NE enterprise hubs project will help generate interest in this hot-desking space but if this does not happen the space is likely to be converted into a new office or meeting room.

There are some interesting lessons coming out of the project and lots of enthusiasm from the project managers to work with other hubs and this is likely to increase over the next few months. Whilst the project seems to be creating a business hub for Wooler, the big challenge will be how to maintain the support and momentum beyond the RGN funding period. The main issues therefore to explore at the final case study visit will be to reflecting on the overall impact of the project and to assess how the added value support can continue in the future.

Consultees

Neil Wilson – Glendale Gateway Trust

Tom Johnston – Glendale Gateway Trust

Gemma Douglas – Glendale Gateway Trust

Melanie Thompson-Glen – Triloge Ltd.

3 tenant businesses

Annex D: Visit 1 – September 2013

Introduction and methodology

In this case study we look at the Wooler Rural Growth Hub based at the Cheviot Centre in Wooler. Wooler is a market town with 2,000 residents in the north of Northumberland, the wider Glendale area (250 sq miles) has a population of 6,000. Prior to becoming a Growth Hub, the Cheviot Centre was already an established community facility housing the Tourist Information Centre, the local library, community meeting rooms and some office units. The Cheviot Centre is owned and managed by the Glendale Gateway Trust.

This case study has been produced following a visit to the Cheviot Centre in September 2013 and discussions with the project manager, Neil Wilson (Asset Development Manager at the Glendale Gateway Trust), local Rural Enterprise Development Officer (REDO), Melanie Thompson-Glen, and four of the Centre's tenants. Background documentation was also reviewed.

This is one of 10 longitudinal case studies being undertaken across the RGN Pilot initiative (two in each Pilot area). These are designed to consider what works (or not) and track progress in achieving outcomes over time, over time; and help us to better understand the relationship between cause and effect across complex interventions; and in the light of both, to help us form a view on what works, what doesn't, and why. The case studies will provide evidence to feed into a number of other aspects of the wider RGN monitoring and evaluation process, especially the six-monthly process evaluations, the interim and final impact evaluations (in Spring 2014 and Spring 2015 respectively), and dissemination activities.

Overview of the project

The project has involved creating additional business units, hot-desking space and a training room at the Cheviot Centre. This has included the creation of three eye-catching 'pods' in the courtyard outside the centre. The aim has been to make the existing community facility in Wooler an enterprise hub for local start-ups and existing small firms. It has a particular focus on helping home workers. The Centre now has a range of businesses based there including a PR firm, an online marketing company, a theatre production/arts training company, and an outdoor education social enterprise.



Wooler Growth Hub – Cheviot Centre, Wooler, Sept 2013

In addition to the physical works, support has also been provided to businesses through Enterprise Glendale, an informal networking group which has held two events at the Centre

so far. According to the RGN application form, *'the project will stimulate new business growth by creating the right environment in an already well used and established multi use building which houses the Tourist Information Centre, branch library, community meeting rooms and office units by private, voluntary and public sector organisations... the RGN programme now allows the Trust to introduce to Wooler pilot forms of flexible workspace including the concept of 'smart workspace' (i.e. hot-desk options) and also self-managed workspace for those wishing to try out new business ventures, developing micro businesses or touch down space for 'agile workers' and home workers seeking to graduate out into commercial premises'*.

The development of the project and lessons learned

In terms of the rationale behind the project, it was highlighted that it is difficult for home-based businesses and start-ups to find suitable and affordable premises with office space and meeting rooms. Nearly three quarters of business in the Glendale area (Wooler and the surrounding area) are home-based and it was stated that in order to grow they need access to affordable office space.

Before becoming a Growth Hub, the Cheviot Centre had a very limited offering to businesses. Nearby, there is some private sector business accommodation (e.g. at the Ford and Etal Estate) but this tends to be more expensive and these sites cannot offer the same links into the local community. Berwick Workspace, 17 miles north of Wooler, is probably the closest similar project. However, this is managed quite formally with a strict policy about moving businesses on and limited use of the common spaces. One of the new tenants in Wooler was previously based in Berwick.

Another driver for the project was to provide better business support. Feedback from delivering a recent rural employability project highlighted that business advice and support in rural areas needs to be delivered and tailored locally. The support also needs to be delivered by a trusted and credible organisation. The Glendale Gateway Trust (which runs the Cheviot Centre) was already regarded as the main community-based regeneration organisation in Wooler.

This combining of community and business facilities is regarded as the main example of innovation in this project. It was stated that opportunities have been created for tenants because they are based in a community facility and that when setting up or growing a business in a rural area, it is all about developing personal relationships.

Feedback from the current tenants interviewed suggested the primary reason for moving to the Centre was to access small affordable business units, either because they were previously finding it difficult to work from home or their previous accommodation was too expensive.

In terms of the process of setting up the project, the project managers stated that this was all quite straightforward. In light of all the other developments recently taking place at the Cheviot Centre, it was viewed by the County Council as a prime candidate to be one of the new Growth Hubs and the GGT was encouraged by the County Council to prepare a funding application and business plan. These were developed and finalised in early 2013 and the new offices were opened in May 2013. From the project's perspective, the RGN initiative came along at just the right time to help complete the centre with the new business units

Inputs and funding

With this project, RGN support has helped the Cheviot Centre put in place the final piece in the jigsaw in a programme of refurbishment which started four years ago. The new Tourist Information Centre was developed (moved from other site in Wooler) with support from the Northumberland Strategic Partnership (Market Towns Programme). The library was built using funding from charitable trusts and Northumberland County Council. The performance hall received support from Village SOS (Lottery) and the garden area was redeveloped with funding from Age UK. The total funding for these improvements was around £175,000. They have also recently received HCA (Homes and Communities Agency) funding (around £300,000 from the Homes and Communities Agency) for redevelopment of their affordable housing stock (they manage nine properties in Wooler). Although the original vision had always been to include additional business space, without support from RGN, it was stated that the new units would not have happened for the foreseeable future.

The total project costs for the Wooler RGN Growth Hub are £209,000. RGN is providing 95% of the funding and most (£170,000) relates to the capital costs of creating the new business units. The remaining £40,000 of project funding relates to staff salaries and marketing costs. The Council was happy to provide this high intervention rate because of all the other sources of funding that had been accessed for the rest of the Cheviot Centre. Nearly all of the capital funding has now been spent.

Activities delivered to date

On the physical side, the project has involved the creation of three new pods in the courtyard outside the Cheviot Centre. Each pod can accommodate 2-3 people. Rental rates for two of the pods is £1k per year and the third pod is £800 per year (this is for continuous and exclusive occupancy). It has also included a new training room, reconfigured office space (with units charged out at £1500 and £1800 per year) and smart workspace which is available for hire for local business people looking to hot-desk.



Wooler Growth Hub 'pods', Sept 2013

The work was completed by May 2013 with a formal opening by NE LEP Chair, Paul Woolston, in July 2013. There has been a lot of local interest in the new pods and tenants moved in within a month of opening. Their design combined with the favourable terms and conditions are helping generate demand (and also the fact there are only three of them).

As part of the Growth Hub project, Neil Wilson from the GGT and local REDO Melanie Thompson-Glen decided to set up a new network Enterprise Glendale for all local businesses, including tenants. The aim here has been to organise informal networking in the Centre, particularly for the benefit of new starts and/or in-comers who can sometimes difficult to tap into local networks. The hope is that Enterprise Glendale will provide a legacy of the RGN Growth Hub project. Two networking events have been delivered so far, attracting 11 and 15 local businesses.

Project outputs

The project has agreed the following outputs with the RGN team at the County Council and are reporting on a quarterly basis. The following figures are based on the original project application form and the latest quarterly monitoring data provided by the GGT.

Table 9: Key outputs for Wooler Growth Hub

Output	Project targets	Achieved
New jobs created (FTE)	12	1
New businesses accommodated	8	4
Number of new business units created	6 + smart workspace	7
Commercial floor space created (sqm)	92	92
Number of remote workers using facilities	19	2

Source: Project application and monitoring forms –for latest quarter (Jul-Sept 13)

What is working well (or not) and why

The main success so far has been integrating a business centre within an existing well-used community facility. Although there were some office units previously available in the Centre, since becoming a Growth Hub with the new pods there has been much more of a business focus – one of the tenants commented how recently there has been more of a ‘professional approach’ to running the Centre. Existing and new tenants are all extremely positive about the new facilities and the level of support provided and also the pro-active approaches taken to encouraging networking.

The fact that the Centre was already well established and run by a community organisation is thought to have contributed to the success. According to the project managers, this differentiates the Wooler hub from other privately owned enterprise centres. Whilst many highlighted the potential benefits of being part of a community facility, the point was also made that there needs to be careful management of the Centre so it can accommodate community events at the same time as businesses inviting clients to their office (“better segmentation of the Centre’s different roles”).

The close links between the project and the NE Rural Business Support Programme (also part of the RGN programme) was also said to be working well. One of the REDOs works with the tenants and regularly visits the centre. She brings knowledge of other business support and networks to those businesses based at the centre and has also been involved in setting up the networking events. In the coming months, the Centre also plans to work more closely with other enterprise sites in Northumberland such as Alnwick, Berwick, and Rothbury.

The networking events at the Centre have only just started and are at this stage quite informal. However, those that have attended say that they are worthwhile and useful on two fronts: finding out about what is happening locally and developing potential business contacts. None of the tenants stated there were any other similar business networks in the local area and therefore welcomed the Enterprise Glendale idea.

Over recent months, the focus has been on finishing the physical works and finding tenants for the new units. The project manager acknowledges that there has not been much time left to promote the new smart workspace and as a result there has so far been little demand. However, he expects this to change once businesses become aware of the facility. The issue of staff capacity is a potential risk to the project more generally as the project manager is responsible for all the GGT assets, not just looking after the business units.

Another potential issue highlighted in discussions with project managers is moving-on space for businesses looking to expand. One of the Centre’s businesses originally took one of the pods but then decided he wanted more space and this was then provided in the main building of the Cheviot Centre. If this facility is genuinely about providing support to growth companies there is perhaps some thinking still to be done on where they can move to in the local area once they have outgrown the Centre.

Project outcomes

The project has delivered new business facilities in Wooler which without RGN support are unlikely to have been developed. The level of interest in the new units has been high and

although there has been some changes in tenants most of the available units are being let. From speaking to the tenants there is a high level of satisfaction in the support that is provided at the Centre. According to one new tenant, “it isn’t just an office – with the links to the wider community, it is a place where you can get help and support....I’m getting a lot more for my money than just office space”. Although the new Growth Hub has only been open since May 2013, some of the businesses believe it has had a positive impact on their business. The table below provides feedback on tenants’ expectations and what the impact has been so far.

Table 10: Beneficiary feedback

Expectations for the Growth Hub	Any impact so far?
More exposure to potential clients leading to additional business and a good working environment	Being based at the centre and attending the networking event has led to £7k additional income. Some of this may have been generated if they had been doing other business development activity. No change in employment as yet
Hopefully some new business leads	Too early to say – need to see what happens from the three contacts established so far from the networking events at the Centre
From a personal perspective, it is good to have more people based in the centre. Hopefully there will be business opportunities from new businesses moving in/ starting up	Not relevant – was already based at the Centre, therefore not a direct beneficiary.
More networking opportunities – have already noticed the benefits of being based in a community facility with links into local groups and schools. Expect to increase turnover and take on more staff	Being based at the centre has generated around 20k so far this year – “since moving to the centre, the business has flourished”. The networking aspects as well as reduced overheads and more straightforward rental structure has helped the consultee focus on the business

Source: Interviews with tenants

Conclusions and future plans

The Wooler Growth Hub has only been open six months but has delivered a new business facility that is proving popular with local businesses providing a focal point for accessing business support and also meeting other businesses through the Enterprising Glendale events.

The one part of the project which has perhaps yet to deliver is the smart workspace but plans are in place for the next few months to do more promotion of the workspace, particularly focusing on using social media. The project managers seem open to the fact that if there is not sufficient demand for the hot-desking workspace, then this area could be easily set up as another office. This will be considered when they undertake their 12 month review in May 2014. Businesses at the Growth Hub will continue to be linked in to the other parts of the RGN programme through the work of the REDOs and support they can bring in through workshops and individual business grants.

In terms of potential improvements, it was suggested that there needs to be closer links with other enterprise hubs across the region which will facilitate learning from each other and working more closely to provide the best solution for local businesses. However, overall the

Wooler Growth Hub appears to be performing well, helping local businesses and described by one tenant as a “flagship project” for the local community.

The table below summarises the performance of the project in terms of spend and outputs. Nearly 70% of the project costs have been spent with the remaining costs relating to revenue expenditure. While the outputs on new units and floor space have been achieved, the other outputs will be delivered over the course of the project.

Table 11: Summary of project statistics

		Achieved to date	Lifetime target	% of lifetime target achieved
Expenditure	Defra’s RGN funding:	£142,982	£199,992	71%
	Public sector match:			
	Private sector match:	£987	£9,421	10%
	Total expenditure	£143,969	£209,343	68%
Outputs	New jobs created (FTE)	1	12	8%
	New businesses accommodated	4	8	50%
	Number of new business units created	7	6 + smart workspace	100%
	Commercial floor space created (sqm)	92	92	100%
	Number of remote workers using facilities	2	19	10%

Source: RGN monitoring data provided by GGT and Northumberland County Council up to Sept 2013

The main issues for the next case study visit planned for spring 2014 will be:

- Reviewing the progress of the Enterprising Glendale business network
- Assessing usage of the smart work centre
- Understanding how the new facilities are helping to grow local businesses.

Consultees

Neil Wilson – Glendale Gateway Trust

Melanie Thompson-Glen – Trilogie Ltd.

4 tenant businesses