

Funding boost for local bodies

TWO organisations in Badenoch and Strathspey are to receive a total of almost £500,000 of European funding to boost economic growth and create jobs.

The Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) will receive £279,393 and Voluntary Action in Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS) - Community Enterprise Project - will get £213,149 out of a £5.3million pot for projects across the Highlands and Islands.

COAT's money will go towards the £400,000 initiative to train people over the next three years on their Aviemore based Access Skills Training Project.

The balance of the funding has already been secured with a partnership with Cairngorms National Park Authority, Highland Council and Scottish Natural Heritage.

The Access Skills Training Project is a three-year programme which aims to train six trainees per year, for three years, based in Aviemore and working across the area.

The programme is designed to target low wage and low skilled workers to enable them to increase their skills and qualifications. All trainees will receive the minimum wage whilst they are undergoing training.

Trainees will undergo a full time, eight-month training programme in the specialised field of access work, with units on upland and lowland path work, fencing and dyking, interpretation/promotion, vegetation management, survey, business skills, health and safety, first aid and communication skills.

Mr Dougie Baird (COAT Manager), said: "This is excellent news, and will allow us to bring in people and train them in the skills necessary to benefit from the employment

By CLIVE DENNIER

opportunities generated by initiatives such as our Cairngorms Mountain Heritage project, community path networks and development of strategic routes.

"The trainees will get a strong practical and theoretical training in all aspects of this specialised field of work before going into the jobs market"

Cairngorms National Park Authority Convenor David Green said: "Funding trainees to develop valuable skills in outdoor work such as path building will ensure that we sustain a vibrant economy and a long term future for them and their families.

"This project will see a further 18 people receive the skills over the next three years. The Cairngorms National Park Authority is proud to support this fantastic initiative."

Meanwhile Mr John Rainy Brown, chief officer of VABS, said he was delighted to see the group receive funding.

He added: "It will help us continue our work in making communities more sustainable following through from the Our Community a Way Forward project. We will be giving details about how the project will work soon."

Welcoming the funding, Alex Neil, Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment, said: "As always, we are focusing on supporting jobs and boosting the economy.

"This money will make a real difference across the Highlands and Islands - getting people back into work and helping revitalise local communities.

"This round of funding is



Mr John Rainy Brown, chief officer of VABS, who is delighted to see the group receive funding.

testament to the high standard of projects and programmes in the Highlands and Islands dedicated to driving economic growth.

"The diversity of the projects receiving grant reflects the variety of innovative and creative industries synonymous with the Highlands and Islands."

He added: "In the face of increasingly tough competition to attract European funding, this represents a welcome addition, providing stability for some programmes and a new footing for others.

"Each project in its own way will contribute to developing a skilled workforce adding economic value and much needed jobs in the Highlands and Islands, as well as contributing to the Scottish economy as a whole."

The European Social Fund (ESF) is targeted to support unemployed and economically inactive people prepare for work and it helps people in employment to upgrade their skills.

Screen

MOVIE fans flocked to the Screen Machine when it arrived in Newtonmore for its first visit, with one of the screenings out.

The visit from Scotland's first - the first for a long time - was a letter written by P 5, P6 and P7 Newtonmore Primary School.

Their correspondence assured the Screen Machine's owners, Regional Screen Machine, that a visit from the cinema would attract a healthy audience in the village.

As predicted, the four films shown good audiences on Thursday and Friday. The animated comedy *Puss in Boots* and the thriller *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* were popular for the 80-seat digital cinema.

To say thank you to some of the patrons who wrote the original letter, Screen Machine operator Neil MacDonald, who is also a filmmaker and projectionist, gave a short to scenes of the cinema.

It travels rural areas of Scotland.

Mr MacDonald said: "We were delighted by the turnout during our visit, with only one seat left for one performance. I know how much people in Badenoch and Strathspey love the latest films without travelling to the cinema. We'll make sure we return soon with more films."

Find out more about Screen Machine at screenmachine.co.uk.

Gr case

AN UMBRELLA group for business has made a strong case for the future of the Caledonian Sleeper Service and for investment in the region to be improved.

The Cairngorms Business Partnership says that with the current franchise agreement, the public consultation on the future offers a real possibility to see a future in which railways are developed years to come.

Along with the Scottish Chambers