



Hertfordshire business can help put young athletes on the road to the London 2012 Olympics

Businesses in Hertfordshire have been given the chance to help young athletes on the road to the 2012 London Olympics.

They are being invited to support a talented athletes scheme which is aimed at giving financial help to children and young people from Hertfordshire who have the potential to achieve in their sport.

The initiative is expected to help fill the gap in funding which is lacking for those youngsters who are working their way up to the top level of their sport.

Principles of the scheme were revealed in February at the "Hertfordshire is Ready for Winners" conference, chaired by Daily Telegraph sports journalist Sue Mott, which brought together public and voluntary organisations who are working together to promote the potential which the London 2012 Games can bring to the county.

Since then the scheme has developed from an idea into reality and will be launched at the annual Herts Sports Partnership Service to Sports Awards, which take place at the University of Hertfordshire on Monday 30 April 2007 at 7.00pm.

Jane Shewring from Hertfordshire Sports Partnership, which is behind the initiative, said although there is lottery money to help support elite young athletes who have been identified as having the ability to represent Great Britain, the funding available for other talented sporting youngsters is patchy.

She said: "There is a huge disparity about what athletes get and how much they get – a lot get missed out on their way up.

"This is the opportunity for small and medium businesses to get involved. It's going to be so worthwhile because it's about helping athletes on their way to achieving their best and it creates a legacy for Hertfordshire beyond the 2012 Games."

The original idea for the scheme followed the desire expressed at last year's inaugural "Ready for Winners" conference that local small and medium sized businesses should have the chance to contribute in some way to the London 2012 Games and its Hertfordshire legacy.

The scheme will be managed by SportsAid – the national charity which awards annual grants of £500-a-year to school-age talented athletes.

The idea is that any donations from Hertfordshire businesses would be made to SportsAid but all the money would be re-directed back to the county in grants to local athletes. If the Hertfordshire initiative is successful it may be used as a model for similar schemes around the country in the run up to 2012.

The initiative was welcomed by Hertfordshire County Council – which has promised to donate to the scheme – and the University of Hertfordshire which already supports talented athletes working with the English Institute of Sport and through the government's Talented Athletes Scholarship Scheme (TASS).

The University's director of sport Nick Brooking said: "The funding available to support young athletes varies considerably according to their chosen sport. This new initiative will be a huge boost to those who currently fall through the funding gap and will increase their chances of success – at all levels."

Any businesses interested in becoming involved in Hertfordshire's talented athletes scheme should contact the scheme administrator on 01707 281183 or donations@hertsisreadyforwinners.co.uk.