

Weald Granary secures grant funding from RDPE

Weald Granary has secured grant funding in support of a £1.9m expansion programme at its central store facility at Mereworth, near Maidstone.

The grant – awarded by the South East England Development Agency under the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) - will meet 40% of the project's costs.

It follows recent planning approval for development of a range of new high-speed intake and outtake facilities and a further 6,250t storage silo. This will bring storage capacity at the site to 64,500t.

According to Weald Granary Chairman, Andrew Brice, the development, which will be ready for next harvest, largely aims to improve operational efficiency.

“It will be of major benefit to our members, providing additional storage facilities, improving turn-round times at the weighbridge and speeding up intake and outtake,” he says.

Mr Brice says that the plan is to start construction in January and advanced sales mean that he's fairly confident that all additional storage offered by the new silo will be sold in advance of this.

“The prolonged, high yielding, wet harvest has brought the inadequacies of many on-farm stores into clear perspective. Many growers have had grain cut by high output combines which they've been unable to sell, move or dry effectively.

“In contrast, our members have had most loads uplifted soon after combining, quality tested and safely dried down to low moisture contents with quality kept intact. It is this that is driving interest from growers in the SE and I wouldn't rule out further expansion before 2010,” he says.

Mr Brice says that overhead loading hoppers will keep vehicles moving and the addition of an extra weighbridge will further speed turn-round at the store. We aim for a 30 minute turn-round and while this was difficult at times this year, should be achievable once the new facilities are in place for next harvest.

The new office and laboratory facility will include a new information technology platform giving members and customers real time access to quality and weight data. This will enable Weald Granary to meet the highest vendor assurance standards increasingly required by end-user customers.

Weald will also be hoping to cut some fuel bills; part of the project includes a pelleting plant to recycle grain screenings from the store for use in a bio-mass boiler to heat the office and laboratory facilities.

Mr Brice says that the grant award recognised the fact that Weald Granary comprises over 180 arable farmers in the region, all of whom will benefit from the development. This project enables the central store to deliver significant added value to both members and end-users. He acknowledged the support of EFFF and marketing agent Grainfarmers in helping secure the grant funding.

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More information from Andrew Brice, Tel 01634 251068

Issued by Mike Saull, Landline PR, Tel 01743 761711 – saul@landlinepr.biz