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around broadband, is still geared to the needs of smaller businesses."

On the ground, the Business Improvement District (BID) in Falmouth is helping. Twenty-six outlets have opened in the past 12 months and vacancy rates are well below the national average. John Hick, chairman of the Falmouth BID, is confident of a positive outcome when its members come to vote on whether it should continue for a further five years. "The lesson we have learnt is how town centres have to inspire people to get involved and using the facilities," he says. "In Falmouth we have an established programme of festivals and events, which we will continue to expand. We've measured the effect of these events and it's huge."

One local business that's part of that story is the Falmouth coffee house Espressini. It

was opened 18 months ago by its owner Rupert Ellis, who relocated from Bristol. He's bullish about prospects for the business and for Falmouth. "We've developed a niche quite quickly as a specialist independent. There's a lot of projects and collaborations we want to work on as the business evolves, but the challenge is using clever, collaborative marketing to keep fresh and attractive and visible," he says.

"Falmouth works well as a base because of the student population, which means we are less reliant on tourism and can trade all year. Being neighbourly and being part of the BID has also helped a lot. There's a good business culture here that we want to ensure continues to evolve."

Another Cornish business that's been making headway, particularly through the hot

spell, is Coolboxes UK near Truro. It's the European distributor for two international coolbox brands, Icey-Tek and Yeti. Julia Nute, who runs the business, says she can take broadband speeds for granted and get support when she needs it through the GrowthAccelerator programme.

"Coolboxes UK has become a direct selling business almost by default, because the margins weren't there to sell through independent retailers. So the website is our shop window and our means of interaction. It needs to work for us all the time, and our back-end systems need to work too. The broadband here in Cornwall has delivered; it's something I don't have to think about much now. That's what you want in business, isn't it? Stuff that just works and lets you focus on what's important."



WILL 'HOT ROCKS' POTENTIAL EVER BE UNLOCKED?

In April, the government withdrew a planned £6m contribution towards a £50m scheme to generate energy using the heat from rocks deep underground near Redruth

It sounds like a big blow to a nascent project and industry, but Ryan Law, who runs Geothermal Engineering, the company that lost that government funding pot, says what matters now is getting the big picture right for geothermal.

"The government needs to act to develop a geothermal industry in the UK. We have lobbied all we can and are now awaiting a statement from the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC), which we hope will

point the way ahead. The lack of a confirmed long-term subsidy for geothermal, which is what every company needs to develop financial projections and attract investors, has been holding us back."

Law is also hoping there will be grants for drilling the test wells the industry needs to get under way, and that any grants come to Cornwall, which is ahead of the country for geothermal because of its resources, research and expertise.

LEP chairman Chris Pomfret says Cornwall has great potential in renewable energy in all its forms, "but it also needs a smarter grid to supply any energy that's produced. There's much that needs to happen, but we are

still looking at potential European funding and we expect support from central government.

"DECC's announcement is crucial. At the LEP we really want to see either or both of Cornwall's slated test projects getting started, because that will move everything along and the LEP and other stakeholders can then start to look at incentivising Cornish industry to engage."

The projects Pomfret is talking about are Geothermal Engineering's United Downs project near Redruth and a project planned for a site at the Eden Project, which is being overseen by EGS Energy.

It is three years since the companies first went public

with their plans and geothermal re-entered Cornwall's narrative. But with everything happening in slow motion, the opportunity is starting to look less clear-cut.

Geothermal is the process of pumping water deep underground to be heated by naturally occurring hot rocks before being pumped up to the surface for the resultant steam to generate electricity. The concept is still fraught with complications, but with both the projects, if the test sites work as expected the companies behind them have plans to roll out the formula quickly. By the most optimistic projections, in a decade or two geothermal could meet a fifth of the UK's energy needs.