



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 7 February 2012	<u>Item</u> 4
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LEADER IN THE SHROPSHIRE HILLS UPDATE

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Summary

This paper presents an update on the progress of the Shropshire Hills LEADER programme.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note progress and offer comments.

Background

1. DEFRA has communicated to all Local Action Groups (LAGs) their aim to achieve their target of spending at least 5% of the RDPE's European funds through LEADER. The Shropshire Hills LEADER Co-ordinator is working closely with projects to ensure that they meet their profiled spend targets for this Financial Year.
2. If there is any redistribution of funds arising from one or more of the 64 LAGs in England not spending to their contractual budget profile or from exchange rate gain, additional funding will be made available at the earliest during the first Quarter of 2012-13. This process would continue on a rolling basis whilst there is still the opportunity for LAGs to commit and spend further funds on good local projects within the programme need.
3. DEFRA will allocate additional funding according to LAG performance (measured by submitted claims compared to profiled budget, on a quarterly basis).

Post 2013

4. The European Commission has now published its legislative proposals for the new Rural Development Regulation, as well as an overarching controlling regulation called the Common Strategic Framework. These proposals place great importance on the continuation of the LEADER approach in the next programme period, including the possibility of extending this type of community-led development to apply across all of the European funds. DEFRA have advised LAGs that the RDPE Network and DEFRA's Rural Development Team Managers will keep LAGs informed of the process and the progression of the new programme.
5. It is proposed to develop our current Approvals and Appraisal Panels (which have now largely completed their task) into a LEADER Management Group to look at making the most of opportunities for the Shropshire Hills from a future round of LEADER.

National LEADER Conference LEADER: Now and the Future 14– 15 November 2011.

6. Pete Banford the Shropshire Hills LEADER Co-coordinator and Clare Fildes the Shropshire Hills AONB Development Officer recently attended the National RDPE Conference in Birmingham. The purpose of the event was to:
- Exchange ideas, experience and information to practically assist the continued delivery of RDPE through the LEADER approach and maximize the opportunities for rural areas and their communities;
 - Provide an update on the remainder of the RDPE programme and an opportunity to input into the development of post-2013 thinking around the next Rural Development Regulation;
 - Provide the opportunity to discuss the different approaches and models that have been developed by LAGs to manage remaining delivery; communications activity; and capture and assess the benefits of their activity to their rural areas.

The Shropshire Hills LEADER Programme had been invited to carry out a presentation. Pete Banford opened the Conference with a presentation entitled 'LEADER - A LAG's eye view'. The message Pete gave to conference was that the LEADER approach provides an effective model for rural community development; the current LEADER process however is not fit for purpose regarding its aims to be a bottom up, community-led rural development strategy.

Programme update

7. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership as the LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) has so far approved £810,887 of LEADER funding.

Approved projects October 2009 to August 2011:

- Ludlow 21 – 'Grow, Cook and Share' £42,000
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust – 'Once upon a hill' £50,000
- Homestart £36,250
- Bishop's Castle Tourism CIC - Festivals Officer £38,878
- Hopton Castle Preservation Trust £30,000
- Caring for God's Acre – Sacred Spaces £70,000
- Soil Association – School Farmers' Markets £40,000
- Shropshire Council - Developing Much Wenlock as hub for discovering East Shropshire £30,000
- Light Foot Enterprises – Farm Carbon £50,000
- Shropshire AONB Partnership - Discover Local - £39,031
- Craven Arms CIC – Into the Hills - £35,000
- Small Woods Association – Forest School - £23, 746
- Shropshire AONB Partnership - Shropshire Hills Farming Project - £59,208
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust - Reserved for Nature - £29,472
- Shropshire AONB Partnership - Walking for Wellbeing - £26,748
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust - Explore more of the Wrekin Forest - £42,000
- The Hive – Youthful Landscapes - £24,960
- Co-operation Actions research, preparatory and initial implementation costs - £7,000
- Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Programme - Walking with Offa Co-operation Project - £24,006

- **Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme - First Stage - £10,073**
- **Church Stretton - Implementing Church Stretton Marketing Plan £28,800**
- **Land, Life and Livelihoods - Caring for Land, Life and Livelihoods in the Clun Forest - £20,000**
- **Bishop's Castle Heritage Centre – Gleanings from the past, Looking to the future - £9,189**
- **Small Woods – Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland Restoration Pilot Project - £10,752.50**

Members have previously been given information on the projects above. A brief outline of one further project approved more recently is included below:

- **The National Trust – Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills AONB - £33,773**

This project will support three existing Community Wildlife Groups, and develop three new ones, to enable and encourage local people to survey and record local wildlife of conservation concern, and participate in action to protect and enhance species and habitats through the appropriate BAP Priority Areas for Action.

8. Projects under appraisal / development

There are currently four projects at appraisal or development stage:

- **The Hurst** – Building and grounds restoration / community involvement.
- **The Novers** – Community Forest Garden.
- **Willowdean** – Using the land and animal husbandry to address social issues and drug rehabilitation for young people.
- **Pheasant Inn Working Group** - To acquire and create community-owned facilities' for the village of Neenton through purchase, renovation of the closed and dilapidated Pheasant Inn pub, the expanded facilities to include a community room and other facilities.

Measure 421 Cooperation Pre-Development visit to Romania.

9. One of the key outcomes from the LEADER programme and approach is the development of international cooperation with other European states. The Shropshire Hills Local Action Group (LAG) is contracted to deliver two of these cooperation projects within the timescale of the LEADER programme - 2008 to end of 2013. To date, one cooperation project has been contracted with three LAGs in Wales, Walking with Offa. To ensure the contractual requirements are met possibilities for the other project needed exploring. A pre-development visit has been made to the Loir region in France (funded by the Warwickshire LAG) and two years ago the LEADER team started discussions with Colin Richards (Historic Environment Manager with Shropshire Council) about his ongoing work in Romania over the past 15 years. Colin has built trusted relationships with the Mihai Eminescu Trust (MET) and fully understands the situation we might be working with in Romania. The area in which MET works covers two LAGs and they have the better relationship with the Brasov LAG, so felt this would be most appropriate.
10. Colin Richards submitted an Expression of Interest (EOI) to the Shropshire Hills LAG for a co-operation project with the MET in September 2011. The EOI was to continue Colin's historic restoration training for local people in Romania to learn the trades necessary to conduct

restoration of the unique 12th Century buildings in the rural villages. It involved taking experienced tradesmen with traditional building skills and building students from Herefordshire College to Romania to help with the work. It was unclear from the application what the benefit to the Shropshire Hills LAG and local area would be beyond the learning for these students which, whilst benefiting individuals and ensuring they had the skills for future restoration projects locally, did not include activity in the Shropshire Hills area.

11. It was felt that the most effective way of identifying opportunities in the Shropshire Hills was for some members of the Shropshire Hills team to visit MET and understand better the issues being addressed in Romania.
12. The objective of the pre-development visit was to identify the realistic opportunities to develop a cooperative approach with the Mihai Eminescu Trust and Brasov Local Action Group in Romania and deliver a jointly funded co-operation project. A fuller report of the visit has been written up and can be made available to members of the Partnership on request.

<p>List of Background Papers LEADER in the Shropshire Hills Local Development Strategy and Business Plan, available at http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/leader/.</p>
<p>Human Rights Act Appraisal The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.</p>
<p>Environmental Appraisal The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.</p>
<p>Risk Management Appraisal Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.</p>
<p>Community / Consultations Appraisal The LEADER Appraisals and Approvals Panels have been involved with the projects.</p>