



<b>Committee and Date</b> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership  20 November 2012	<b>Item</b>  <b>5</b>
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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.

### Background

1. In the context of considerable national pressure to maximise levels of spend to meet the EU target for LEADER, the Shropshire Hills LEADER programme continues to work with the projects to ensure budget profiles are being met and that agreed outputs are being achieved.
2. With the majority of the Shropshire Hills LEADER funded projects closing at the end of this Financial Year, the Shropshire Hills Local Action Group (LAG) is exploring what happens next. Steps have been taken and continue to be taken to ensure that the Shropshire Hills is best placed to benefit from any additional funding from the current programme and the next.

### National update

3. While the overall national LEADER performance in terms of spend has improved there are significant differences between LAGs across the country, and measures have been put in place to provide additional support to some LAGs. After four and a half years of a six-year programme only 50% of the national LEADER programme has been spent. Defra continues to stress the importance of allocating remaining money to projects to ensure that rural communities benefit. There is also a concern that if funding is not used there could be an impact on future decisions on allocations of funds post 2013. Defra previously indicated that decisions on redistribution of funding would not be made until October 2012 at the earliest. No advice has been given as to whether there would be any extra funds available as a result of exchange rate changes due to the current volatility of currencies.
4. Because of the pressure on interregnum programme funding, N+2 (N being end of programme and +2 years) cannot be used to correct outstanding issues (under-spend) from the current programme; any limited funding that might become available to LEADER groups in that period should be used to prepare fully for the next programme period.
5. With 76% of the Shropshire Hills LEADER budget claimed (as of end September 2012), and only £8,500 left to allocate and spend in line with the programme's budget profile, the Shropshire Hills Local Action Group continues to perform well at a national level.

## **LEADER post 2013**

6. Negotiations regarding the next programme continue at a national level, and there is still a high degree of uncertainty over both rules and the level of funding that will be available. Defra continues to recognise the difficulties that a gap between the two programmes will bring, but given the current level of uncertainty it is likely that the new programme will begin in 2014-15.
7. The key issues highlighted by Defra's Rural Community Policy Unit regarding the next programme are as follows:
  - Should we have a nationally consistent LEADER model?
  - What geographic coverage should we be aiming for and how do we get there?
  - How do we identify and address under performance, from this programme into the next?
  - Should LAGs have a minimum budget & size?
  - What outcomes can LEADER deliver for other programmes?
  - Who qualifies for any potential 'transition' support?
8. Within whatever national framework emerges, there will be local decisions and views about how a future round of LEADER could be delivered in Shropshire. The new arrangements may well be different, particularly in the light of the Common Strategic Framework proposals to integrate LEADER with delivery of other EU programmes including Structural Funds. However there is a strong case that continuity of delivery of LEADER for the Shropshire Hills as a unit with its particular priorities would be the best thing for the area. The Shropshire Hills LEADER Local Action Group will continue to work with all relevant colleagues and partners to maximise the potential of securing any further funding from the next programme.

## **LEADER Exchange Group**

9. Defra is currently considering and developing its policy and implementation/delivery positions in relation to the LEADER approach for the next Rural Development Regulation. It has set up the LEADER Exchange Group to ensure that it harnesses the valuable experience held by Local Action Groups (LAGs) and Accountable Bodies (ABs) on LEADER as it develops its policy and implementation arrangements for the Common Strategic Framework and Rural Development Regulation post-2013.
10. The group meets quarterly, acting as a sounding board for ideas and providing a two way discussion and structured environment for LAGs and ABs, Defra and appropriate Government Departments to share experience, ideas and views. All LAGs and ABs were invited to identify and self-nominate two participants for the group, Clare Fildes and Julie Jones continue to represent Shropshire. Julie Jones from Shropshire Council External Funding team was nominated to represent the Leader Exchange Group at the Programme Monitoring Committee (PMC).

## **Programme update**

11. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership as the LEADER LAG has so far approved £889,175 of LEADER funding.

## Approved projects October 2009 to April 2012:

Applicant	Project	Grant
Ludlow 21	Grow, Cook and Share	£42,000
Shropshire Wildlife Trust	Once upon a hill	£50,000
Homestart	Homestart	£36,250
Bishop's Castle Tourism CIC	Festivals Officer	£38,878
Hopton Castle Preservation Trust	Hopton Castle restoration	£30,000
Caring for God's Acre	Sacred Spaces	£70,000
Soil Association	School Farmers' Markets	£40,000
Shropshire Council	Developing Much Wenlock as a hub for discovering East Shropshire	£30,000
Light Foot Enterprises	Farm Carbon	£50,000
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership	Discover Local	£39,031
Craven Arms CIC	Into the Hills	£35,000
Small Woods Association	Forest School	£23,746
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership	Shropshire Hills Farming Project	£59,208
Shropshire Wildlife Trust	Reserved for Nature	£29,472
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership	Walking for Wellbeing	£26,748
Shropshire Wildlife Trust	Explore more of the Wrekin Forest	£42,000
The Hive	Youthful Landscapes	£24,960
Shropshire Hills LAG	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
Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership	Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme - First Stage	£10,073
Church Stretton Town Council	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
The National Trust	Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills AONB	£33,773
Tickwood LLP	Forest Work, Rest and Play	£47,820
Shropshire Council Historic Environment Team	Charcoal project	£5,058

Members have previously been given information on the projects above.

### Projects under appraisal / development

One project, Bishop's Castle Town Hall refurbishment, went to the LEADER Approvals Panel on 8 November, and was approved with limitations on the grant due to the remaining amount of unallocated funding.

### Measure 421 Co-operation

The Shropshire Hills LEADER programme is cooperating with Hiiumaa and Saaremaa LAGs in Estonia, Vallee du Loir LAG in France and Central Warwickshire LAG on a project called 'Growing Gastronomists'. The project aims to improve local supply chains to schools and businesses by learning from activity in partner countries. A recent visit to Estonia follows a

visit to Vallee du Loir in 2011 by representatives from Discover Local and Grow Cook & Share. A further visit to France is planned in March with a return trip to the UK in June 2013. A full report regarding the Estonian trip is available on request.

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