

LEADER UPDATE

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Summary

This paper gives an update close to the end of the current round of LEADER, describes the proposed activity of the year of 'transition' funding in 2014, and sets out some of what is known about the next round of LEADER from 2015-2020, issues for the AONB Partnership to consider regarding this and the likely timetable for decisions regarding the next round.

1. Current LEADER Programme

The 2009-13 Shropshire Hills LEADER programme will close at the end of December 2013. Since 2009 the Shropshire Hills LEADER programme has funded 28 projects with grants totalling £916,157 and been involved with two co-operation projects and national LEADER networks. Information on the projects has been published in a booklet, copies of which are still available.

As of October 2013, 99% of the available budget has been claimed, with only £12,543 left to claim by the end of December. The table below shows a breakdown of LEADER spend by Measure per Financial Year.

Projected Total LEADER Expenditure by Measure						
RDPE Measures	2009 - 2010	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012	2012 - 2013	2013	Programme total
321	£10,132	£105,789	£143,209	£84,702	£18,093	£361,927
322		£84,840	£82,718	£87,120	£11,761	£266,440
323	£30,000	£51,114	£52,789	£92,469	£10,150	£236,523
421		£2,435	£18,589	£29,241	£1,000	£51,266
431	£51,807	£51,135	£42,512	£44,829	£31,942	£222,226
Total	£91,939	£295,314	£339,819	£338,363	£72,947	£1,138,384

Of the total national budget of £137.9m, 89.6% had been spent at the end of September 2013. Spend by individual Local Action Groups (LAGs) varies from 67.3% to 99.8%, with actual levels of spend varying from £586k to £5.3m. The Shropshire Hills programme with 99% spent by the end of October 2013 reflects strong financial performance.

As the current programme draws to a close the LEADER Co-ordinator will carry out a programme evaluation in consultation with Partnership/ LAG members.

2. LEADER Transition funding Jan 2014 – Dec 2014

As previously reported, Defra have offered existing LAGs the opportunity to bid for a year of Transition funding for Jan – Dec 2014. In July 2013 the AONB Partnership as the Shropshire Hills Local Action Group (LAG), successfully applied for LEADER Transition funding, which will cover the costs of full time extension of the LEADER Co-ordinator post for that time period, plus some other minor costs.

The transition funding has two aims:

- **To review performance of the current programme, identifying and addressing areas for further development.**
- **To set out a new Local Development Strategy (LDS) (to be submitted by August 2014) and build relationships with the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership and other local stakeholders.**

Further details of proposed activity in the transition period were set out in the paper to the Partnership of 9 July 2013.

3. LEADER 2015 – 2020

A new programme of LEADER will be launched as part of the next round of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). The new programme is likely to start in 2015 and finish in 2020. The LEADER approach will continue to be a mandatory component of the next Rural Development Programme, with a 5% minimum EU programme fund allocation as required by the Regulation. It will retain its current purpose as a programme delivery mechanism where delegated powers are given to a LAG to determine and deliver a LDS in accordance with a national operational programme. Defra are currently developing guidance for the new round of LEADER but have indicated that a key priority will be to support jobs and economic growth in rural areas.

The next round of European programmes will require greater alignment of funding and activity. This will be expressed through a UK Partnership Agreement. In parallel with the RDPE, at England level there will be a growth programme model encompassing using European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) and a portion of European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) funding. Local Enterprise Partnerships are producing local strategies for the use of funding channelled via the growth programme, including considering how local level needs are best addressed. It will be important to align RDP funded LEADER activity with any rural growth related initiatives led by the LEP. There may also be opportunities for LEPs to boost the activity of a rural LEADER group through a 'multi fund' approach using ERDF, ESF or EAFRD from an area growth programme allocation.

The process and timetable for selecting LAGs in the next programme is still to be determined. However, it is anticipated that all existing LAGs will be well placed if able to demonstrate how they have addressed any performance or development opportunities identified.

The Partnership has not yet made a firm decision about being a Local Action Group (LAG) for the next round, due to the lack of clarity so far on certain aspects of the new programme, but has expressed the aspiration to do so. Issues needing to be resolved are mainly around whether the Partnership could again deliver LEADER in the same Shropshire Hills area and the fit of new LEADER economic priorities with the primary purpose of the

AONB. While LEADER once again offers real and positive opportunities for raising the profile of AONB aims, both of these aspects have the potential to cause significant organisational difficulties for the AONB Partnership and warrant careful consideration.

With the timescales of the transition year, it is expected that an additional meeting of the Partnership will be held early in 2014 to work on development of the new LDS, and that the key decision regarding the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership acting as LAG for the new LEADER programme will need to be made in March 2014.

If there appears to be potential conflict between LEADER priorities and the primary purpose of the AONB alternative approaches that would require the development of a new LAG will need to be considered, very likely with close involvement of the AONB Partnership as a member. It is of course possible however that an alternative LAG operating across the AONB may be more likely to result in projects that do not contribute to the enhancement or the protection of the landscape. The opportunities need to be explored to align the new LDS with the AONB Management Plan and the use of appropriate terms and conditions written in to all future LEADER funding contracts to avoid conflicts with AONB purposes.

During the transition period appropriate and relevant meetings, visits and presentations will be organised. These activities will assist Partnership members in their decisions regarding the next programme.

A Shropshire Hills LEADER Development Group has had several meetings to discuss the future of LEADER in the Shropshire Hills. The group comprises members of the LEADER Approvals Panel - Alison Caffyn, Tim Barker, Michael Whitouse, Jo Jury and Cecilia Motley, plus representatives experienced in funding programmes – Julie Jones, Gary Spence, Lisa Bedford and Helen Fairweather, along with the Shropshire Hills LEADER Co-ordinator, Development Officer and AONB Partnership Manager. Work has been done to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to LEADER delivery in the Shropshire Hills, and to consider potential project ideas for the next programme.

Potential project ideas for LEADER 2015 – 2020 listed under the six thematic objectives for the next programming period:

Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas.

- Woodland management
- Shropshire Hills Uplands project

Enhancing competitiveness of all types of agriculture and enhancing farm viability.

- Farming diversification – e.g. Orchard creation, Community led agriculture, direct farm sales etc.

Promoting food chain organisation and risk management in agriculture.

- Distribution hub for local food
- The promotion and shortening supply chains of local food

Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems dependent on agriculture and forestry.

- Landscape management e.g. improving and enhancing nature reserves
- School grounds as a biodiverse rich educational resource – similar to Caring for Gods Acre's work with Church yards
- Clun catchment project

Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors.

- Green Economy e.g. Community owned power generation
- Wood fuel
- Community buildings renewable energy generation
- Sustainable Business Scheme and Buy Local initiative

Promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas.

- Contribution to the delivery of the Sustainable Tourism Strategy
- Shuttle buses
- Cycle routes and cycle friendly accommodation
- Bridleways and equestrian tourism
- Adventure play in green spaces
- IT training for farmers
- Cooperation projects between the farming and none farming rural communities
- Village Shop / Community shop/ Public House support – E.g. Aston on Clun Community shop
- Farmers Markets
- Traditional Skill Training
- Care Farming
- Rural Therapy e.g. Animal assisted therapy
- Business Support, networking and advice in Less favoured area (LFA)
- Countryside apprentices
- Social enterprise support scheme – similar to farming project but for businesses
- Micro-business grants that support sustainable business development
- Youth Rangers
- Community led heritage projects
- Landscape / Environmental education – forest schools for teenagers / young offenders
- Marketing and events
- Walking activity
- Walkers are Welcome
- Volunteer Coordinator – may be employed by the AONB
- Research and feasibility studies

4. Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to note the progress with completion of the current round of LEADER, the proposed activity of the year of 'transition' funding in 2014, and proposals for consideration of the next round of LEADER from 2015-2020.

<p>List of Background Papers None</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 topics raised follow on from earlier discussions with Partnership members.</p>
<p>Appendices Appendix 1 SWOT analysis of LEADER delivery in the Shropshire Hills</p>

Appendix 1 SWOT analysis of LEADER delivery in the Shropshire Hills

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to bid as Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership • Good, diverse range of projects that meet Local Development Strategy themes • Good existing contacts with potential projects through SDF and AONB team. Existing AONB Partnership becoming LAG ensured good existing connections with partners • Good range of skills and expertise within the AONB Team and Partnership • Excellent support and communication with Shropshire Council Finance Department and External Funding Team • Good regional and national involvement • LDS very strategic and well positioned • Co-operation activity is greater than with many other LAGs, e.g. Walking with Offa • Strong connection of projects with the landscape and farming • Good follow on from SDF projects, building capacity of project lead groups • Good collaboration and links 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paperwork and defrayal not easy - difficult language an issue • No presentations from projects at approvals panel • Few youth projects • Targeted by Local Authority staff to fill funding gaps • Need more clarity on roles of appraisal and approval panels and the LAG • Running LEADER through the AONB has reduced the visibility of the LEADER programme compared to a stand-alone LAG e.g. website and promotion • Focus on process and spend has meant a lack of information on activity from some projects • Limited scope for evaluation, training and capacity building • Measures restrictive with solely community focus • Needs more 'animation' e.g. through another staff post • 20% M&A is difficult for smaller programmes, as the costs of administering the process can be similar to larger programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possibility of alternative European money channelled through the Shropshire Hills LAG • Development of a new LDS • Income to AONB core budget • Assist in the delivery of the new AONB Management Plan • Evaluate and incorporate change into the current LEADER procedure / processes • Continue to develop good working relationships with Defra • Shropshire Hills LEADER Co-ordinator already in position • Experience of budget profiling and management • Possibility to use the LAG as the approvals panel and involve all Partnership members in approval of projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for conflict between economic objectives of the next programme and the AONB Management Plan • Geography – may be pressure to deliver over a wider area • Levels of funding • Timescales • Accountable body role • Redundancy • Proposed model of LEP interaction not being approved • Further public sector cuts • Loss of current knowledge • Lack of knowledge of the next programme • Finance and monitoring have been delivered free for this programme - this is unlikely for any future rounds