

<p><u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership</p> <p>25 June 2015</p>	<p><u>Item</u></p> <p>4</p>
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'NATURAL GROWTH' LEADER PROGRAMME 2015-2020

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Summary

This paper outlines the changes in governance arrangements proposed for the 2015-20 Natural Growth LEADER programme.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to endorse the proposed changes.

Background

Following a recent European audit of the national 2007 - 2014 LEADER programme concerns were raised around Conflict of Interest and Governance and it is likely that significant financial penalties may be applied to DEFRA. As a consequence DEFRA/RPA are keen to ensure that all new LEADER groups are both compliant and have a consistent approach to the selection and approval of projects. The proposed governance of each LEADER programme will be reviewed in the Delivery Plan and this needs to be agreed by DEFRA/RPA ahead of contracting the programme.

It has been made clear in the new guidance that any decision-making panel should not be made up of more than 49% of any single interest group. A review of all the potential LEADER groups identified a number where this could present a problem. The proposed structure of the Natural Growth LEADER programme where the Approvals Panel would all become members of the AONB Partnership was questioned and this was found not to conform to the 49% single interest group guidance.

A meeting between representatives of the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, RPA and Shropshire Council was held on 8th June to discuss the issues and work up some possible solutions. Two possible options to resolve the governance issue were discussed:-

1. The AONB Partnership remains as the LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) but the Approvals Panel is made up of a majority of non-AONB Partnership members.
2. The AONB Partnership becomes just an advisory group for LEADER, and the new Approvals Panel becomes the LAG for the Natural Growth LEADER programme.

In the light of all the guidance received from Defra, AONB Partnership representatives have proposed moving forward with the second option, and this has been supported by DEFRA/RPA.

The Partnership is recommended to endorse the proposed change to the governance structure, to enable the new LAG to be recruited as soon as possible enabling the programme to be contracted and launched by autumn 2015.

List of Background Papers Natural Growth LEADER LDS submission at http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/looking-after/leader/
Human Rights Act Appraisal The information in this report is compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.
Environmental Appraisal The recommendation in this paper will contribute to the conservation of protected landscapes.
Risk Management Appraisal Risk management has been appraised as part of the considerations of this report.
Community / Consultations Appraisal The topics raised in this paper have been the subject of earlier consultations with Partnership members.
Appendices None