



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 18 October 2011	<u>Item</u> 6
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LEADER IN THE SHROPSHIRE HILLS UPDATE

Responsible Officer Pete Banford, Shropshire Hills LEADER Co-ordinator
e-mail: pete.banford@shropshire.gov.uk Tel: 01588 674089 Fax 01588 674099

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. The Shropshire Hills LEADER programme is currently classed as the best performing Local Action Group (LAG) in the West Midlands region, in terms of grant expenditure made. As a result of this good financial performance, the 20% cut that had been made for the region's LAGs for this Financial Year has in our case been reinstated.
2. As part of the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, a 35% cut has been implemented on all English Local Action Groups for the 2012 -13 Financial Year. This significant cut will have a major implication for the Shropshire Hills LEADER Programme, but fortunately is not enough to affect existing contracted projects. The impact will fall on potential projects, and as a result there is now a reduced opportunity to support local activity. Defra have given priority to upland areas in the remaining period of the Rural Development Programme for England, and LAGs classified as upland are not subject to this cut. Unfortunately the criterion used was 40% of the LAG area being agricultural 'Severely Disadvantaged Area (SDA), and the Shropshire Hills LEADER area at 29% SDA did not qualify (though the AONB itself has 48% SDA). A letter was sent by the LEADER Panel Chair to Robin Mortimer Defra's Director for Wildlife, Landscape & Rural expressing concern about this classification. The decision will not be changed, but there is a small possibility of us being allocated some more funding if there is underspend by other areas, since Defra must ensure that 5% of RDPE is spent through the LEADER approach in order to avoid an EU fine. The boundary of a Shropshire Hills LEADER area for the next round of LEADER will need to be considered carefully with this issue in mind. It is expected that we would wish to continue as a LAG, and some preliminary discussions have been held by Defra about the next round.
3. A new programme budget reflecting the 35% cut has been approved by DEFRA (please see table below), and the necessary Contract Variations have been signed.

Projected Total LEADER Expenditure by Measure						
RDPE	2009 - 2010	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012	2012 - 2013	2013	Programme total
321 Basic services	£10,132	£105,789	£158,045	£165,087		£439,055
322 Village renewal		£84,840	£92,062	£58,415	£8,857	£244,175
323 Rural heritage	£30,000	£51,114	£25,543	£25,415		£132,073
421 Co-operation		£2,435	£11,644	£29,330	£19,090	£62,500
431 Mgt & Admin	£51,807	£51,135	£44,000	£40,000	£32,508	£219,450
Total	£91,939	£295,314	£331,297	£318,247	£60,455	£1,097,253

4. From 1 July 2011 responsibility for the delivery of support for farming and forestry competitiveness, diversification of the rural economy and rural quality of life under Axis 1 and 3 of the RDPE, and the community-led LEADER programme, transferred from the eight existing Regional Development Agencies to DEFRA. Shropshire Council's contract with Advantage West Midlands on behalf of the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership as LAG, has therefore transferred to Defra. Some of AWM's staff have transferred to Defra in Worcester so we have continuity of contacts.

Programme update

5. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership as the LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) has so far approved £751,123 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
- Co-operation Actions research, preparatory and initial implementation costs - £7,000

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

- **Offa's Country Sustainable Tourism Programme - Walking with Offa Co-operation Project - £24,006**

This ambitious project brings together 7 LAGs in England and Wales to deliver a co-ordinated programme of sustainable tourism activity across and along the Welsh - English border. Activity will include joint marketing and promotion of walking, a public transport study and literature, a research project, exchange visits, networking and good practice training courses. The activity will be managed by Adventa LAG in Monmouthshire on behalf of all the LAGs.

- **Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme - First Stage - £10,073**

The Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme aims to ensure the area is recognised as a centre of industrial heritage, with local people and visitors understanding the impact of lead, copper and barytes mining and quarrying on local communities, the villages and the land. The scheme will work jointly in England and Wales, ignoring administrative boundaries, and will explore over 700 years of border conflict and strife.

- **Church Stretton - Implementing Church Stretton Marketing Plan £28,800**

To fund a two-year part-time Marketing & Development contract to ensure long term financial viability of collective marketing through the new town website and other means, promoting more visitor income and greater use of community facilities

- **Land, Life and Livelihoods - Caring for Land, Life and Livelihoods in the Clun Forest - £18,969.30**

To maintain and enhance the local communities of Bettws-y-Crwyn, Newcastle and Mainstone by improving their financial viability; building on their cultural and social resilience; and promoting, sustaining and celebrating the beauty and biodiversity of the landscape.

- **Bishop's Castle Heritage Centre – Gleanings from the past – Looking to the future - £9,189**

This project will gather and share information about history and heritage on parishes within the AONB area. The project will recruit Parish Champions to help identify local cultural heritage material to develop Parish Profiles and share the information between Bishop's Castle Heritage Resource Centre, Shropshire Archives and local communities.

- **Small Woods – Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland Restoration Pilot Project - £10,752.50**

This project will Work with local landowners to support woodland management on PAWS and ASNW sites and extraction of timber for local wood fuel supply across the Shropshire Hills AONB.

6. Projects under appraisal / development

There are currently three projects at appraisal or development stage. It is envisaged that these projects will go before the Approvals Panel in October 2011.

- National Trust – Community Wildlife Groups in the Shropshire Hills AONB.
- The Hurst – Building and grounds restoration / community involvement.
- The Novers – Community Forest Garden.

7. Potential increase to Budget

It has been suggested that high performing, from a spend perspective, Local Action Groups may be rewarded with increased budget as the programme draws to a close in December 2013. Ministers want to see additional funding allocated to Local Action Groups where the available evidence suggests the capacity exists to maximise its use.

The Shropshire Hills LEADER Coordinator is working with potential applicants to ensure that there is a bank of projects that are ready to go should further budget be made available. The LEADER Co-ordinator has advised these potential applicants that funding may not be available and that Contracts will only be issued should the opportunity arise. Once the Shropshire Hills LEADER programme is fully allocated the LEADER Coordinator will present a report to DEFRA highlighting the potential projects / spend that is available in addition to the contracted budget.

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/ .
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 LEADER Appraisals and Approvals Panels have been involved with the projects.