



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 19 June 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.

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 exceeded its budget profile for the 2011 – 2012 Financial Year. A revised budgetary profile has been submitted to Defra for the remainder of the programme. Performance (in terms of achieving spend) will be measured against this profile, and the results will be used to allocate further funding if and when it comes available.
2. National update
The total LEADER programme spend to 31 December 2011 was £64.1M, of which £37.8M was spent in the last 12 months, demonstrating a significant improvement in performance. The EU 5% target for the LEADER round 2007-13 is £135M. The variation in individual Local Action Group (LAG) performance throughout England is considerable. Measured in terms of the proportion of programme budget spend to date, at 31 December 2011 the range was 10% to 80%. Defra will therefore continue to monitor progress at individual LAG level carefully. This is to ensure that the full allocation of RDPE LEADER funding is committed and spent by the end of the programme. A robust process for reviewing LAG financial performance is in place, and Defra will support LAGs who are struggling, but in the event that it is deemed by Defra that a LAG cannot recover the situation within the programme period, Defra will consider reducing their budget by an appropriate amount and then reallocate the funding to other, well performing LAG(s). The next formal performance review will take place in April / May using performance data up to the end of March 2012.
3. In recognition of the Shropshire Hills LAG's performance up to 31st December 2011 an additional £25,000 has been allocated to us. As of 31st March 2012 the Shropshire Hills budget spend, not including Management and Administration is 66%. Our performance from January 2012 to March 2012 was good, and has resulted in us over-performing in the 2011 – 2012 Financial Year.

LEADER post 2013

4. Negotiations are at a very early stage and there is currently a high degree of uncertainty over both rules and funding available. Defra recognises 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.

LEADER Exchange Group

5. Clare Fildes (Shropshire Hills AONB Development Officer) and Julie Jones (Shropshire Council External Funding Officer) represent Shropshire on the National LEADER Exchange Group. Defra have established this group for three main reasons:
- Ministers wish to work more closely with the LEADER community in order to deliver a successful programme, in addition to the on-going day to day local management by the RDPE Delivery Teams and a positive national Leader conference;
 - Feedback from LEADER practitioners (mainly resulting from last year's budget review process), wanting greater transparency of Defra's approach to LEADER management activity;
 - Publication of the new Rural Development and Common Provisions regulations, and an opportunity to tap into the expertise of the LEADER community to help shape our thinking for the future programme.
6. The overall purpose of the LEADER Exchange group is to provide a structured place for Defra, Local Action Groups and Accountable Bodies to talk and to help inform Defra's decisions and planning for the remaining two years of the current programme, transition and the new programme. The group will not act as a decision-making body but will help inform Defra's thinking – Defra will consider how they will feed back to the Group on what has been done as a result of the advice of the LEADER Exchange Group. The Group will complement and not replace the relationship held between Local Action Groups, Accountable Bodies and RDPE Delivery Teams.

Programme update

7. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership as the LEADER LAG has so far approved £850,406 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 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
Shropshire 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

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

- **Tickwood LLP - Forest Work Rest and Play - £47,820.61**
Forest Work Rest and Play at Tickwood will provide unrivalled opportunities for young able and disabled young people (both physically and mentally) to experience progressive forest schools and or develop business skills and achieve financial independence through working in the natural environment.

Projects under appraisal / development

There are a currently two projects at appraisal or development stage. It is envisaged that these projects will go before the Approvals Panel no later than January 2012.

- The Hurst – Building and grounds restoration / community involvement.
- Shropshire Council Historic Environment Team – Charcoal project.
- The Pheasant Inn – Neenton Community Public House Project
- Bishop's Castle Town Hall project
- Clungunford Community project

Measure 421 Co-operation - Development visit to Loir Valley

8. Pete Banford (Shropshire Hills LEADER Co-ordinator) and Clare Fildes (Shropshire Hills AONB Development Officer) recently visited a LAG in the Loir Valley, France. This was a three day trip to develop a transnational project with the Loir LAG, two LAGs from Estonia and Central Warwickshire LAG. This co-operation is intended to:
 - promote local products and culinary know-how
 - contribute to restructure relationships producer / retailer / restaurateur / consumer
 - raise awareness of the possibilities of local sourcing by comparing practices in the different countries
 - compare the role of food in the curriculum and extra-curricular and special activities.
 - promote economic development in the partner territories.

A full application will be presented to the Approvals Panel in June.

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.