



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership 1 July 2014

<u>Item</u> 6

LEADER 2015-2020

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

Summary

This paper provides an update on the AONB Partnership's bid to be a LEADER Local Action Group for the 2015-20 round of funding.

Background

The AONB Partnership, as an existing Local Action Group (LAG), was in autumn 2013 awarded transition funding by Defra for 2014 to develop a new programme for 2015-20. In order to deliver LEADER in the 2015 – 2020 programme period, a new Local Development Strategy (LDS) has to be submitted to Defra by 5 September 2014. In March 2014, Defra issued the National Delivery Framework for the new LEADER programme, and also invited prospective new LAGs to bid for transition funding, and two other groups in Shropshire were awarded this.

Defra and Shropshire Council however indicated strongly their wish to see no more than two LAGs within Shropshire in the new programme. There was also a strong steer for full rural coverage, and that the Shropshire Hills LEADER area, as operated for the 2009-13 programme, was felt to be too small in terms of population for the new programme. The three groups with transition funding have therefore been in discussion, and had to submit proposed boundaries to Defra by 23 May for indicative funding allocations. One of the other groups has a focus on the north of the county, evolving from the former Northern Marches LAG (having separated from the Cheshire part of this), and is being supported by Shropshire Wildlife Trust. The third transition application was made by the Intelligence Foundation CIC with an interest in the eastern part of Shropshire, but not apparently linked to any proposed or incipient LAG structure. This group have indicated that they do not necessarily intend to progress to becoming a LAG, but seek to represent the interests of the eastern part of the county (which has not had LEADER funding before) and to some extent to influence the delivery of LEADER across the county.

Following these discussions the AONB Partnership submitted a proposed LEADER working area of the whole southern half of the county (also including some of rural Telford & Wrekin), approximately south of a line drawn by the M54, A5 and A458 from east to west. To minimise the risk of conflict between LEADER and AONB purposes, our preference has always been to continue the governance model of the AONB Partnership itself being the LAG. The extended geographical area does potentially raise some issues for this, but on consideration it has felt to still be the best option. An analysis of the interests of AONB Partnership members shows a large proportion of members representing interests or areas extending well beyond the AONB, many to the whole county. There may be a need to add some representation specifically from the 'new' eastern area, but changes to the Partnership's membership must not compromise its primary governance role for the AONB.

To minimise any difficulties, it may also be appropriate to promote the new programme with a thematic title, rather than majoring on 'Shropshire Hills' LEADER.

The AONB Partnership was on 23 June advised by Defra of an indicative budget allocation for the LEADER 2015-20 round of between £1.89 million and £2.7 million (dependent on the detailed allocations to successful applicant LAGs), based on the southern half of Shropshire area as submitted. Allocations in the order of £1.6 million per LAG had earlier been mooted, so this is a favourable indication. The map indicates the 'Shropshire Marches' LAG supported by Shropshire Wildlife Trust covering the northern half of the county (along with rural parts of Telford & Wrekin).

Consultation. To ensure that the LEADER approach is adopted in the development of the next LDS and to ensure that the funding is used effectively and efficiently, a series of consultation events are in progress. A survey has been sent out, a series of consultation events and one to one meetings are currently being held across the southern Shropshire area. The aim is to engage with a wide range of stakeholders with the results feeding into the Local Development Strategy for submission to Defra.

Proposed LDS priorities

Based on the consultations carried out so far and on strategic guidance, the proposed overall purpose for the 2015-20 LEADER programme in the southern part of the county is:

To improve the economic wellbeing of the area through sustainable development, drawing on the area's environmental and cultural assets and qualities.

The LEADER Local Development Strategy will need to implement the six national LEADER priorities, and the following has been proposed as the way to convey and direct these in the ways most appropriate to the needs of the area:

- Increasing **farm productivity** in ways which enhance natural capital;
- Developing sustainable **micro and small enterprises and farm diversification**;
- Building **rural tourism** making the most of Shropshire's assets;
- Improving **rural services** to support business growth and development;
- Enhancing the **natural, cultural and heritage** attractions of the area;
- Increasing **woodland and forest productivity** in ways which enhance natural capital.

These elements will form the cornerstones of the new LDS and are the subject of the consultation event on the afternoon of 1 July, to which invitations have been sent broadly.

Timetable to LDS submission

- LEADER Co-ordinator attends DEFRA workshop on LDS development Bristol 24 June
- LDS proposals to be submitted to the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for approval - 27 June
- AONB Partnership consultation event for southern Shropshire LEADER area - 1 July
- Results of survey collated – 4 July 2014
- Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership LDS in draft - 31 July 2014
- LDS submitted to Defra - 5 September 2014

LEADER 2009 -2013 programme

The LEADER 2009 – 2013 Evaluation report has been completed and is now in the final edit. A copy of this report will be available shortly on the AONB web page.

4. Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to welcome the indicative budget allocation, and guide on further development of the Local Development Strategy principles.

List of Background Papers None
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 follow on from earlier discussions with Partnership members.
Appendices None