



<u>Committee and Date</u> Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership	<u>Item</u> 6	<u>Paper</u> E
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SHROPSHIRE HILLS LEADER

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Summary

This paper informs the Partnership of progress with the bid to deliver in the Shropshire Hills the 'LEADER' element of the Rural Development Programme, and seeks endorsement of the approach proposed.

Background

1. LEADER is a Europe-wide rural development funding stream, which has had three previous rounds since its start in 1991. From 2007-13, LEADER is a part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), and is overseen by Regional Development Agencies. LEADER has to be delivered in defined areas, and an open bidding process is required. In the Autumn of 2007 Advantage West Midlands invited Expressions of Interest from groups wishing to deliver LEADER, with a deadline of 4 January 2008. £10.2m is allocated for LEADER delivery in the region up to 2013, and AWM have indicated that they envisage six to eight LEADER delivery areas. AWM with the European Rural Group decided that in the West Midlands LEADER will focus on the social and community measures of RDPE (namely basic services, village renewal, rural heritage and training).
2. The AONB Partnership identified at an early stage of development of RDPE the potential for the Partnership to be a deliverer of LEADER. When the guidance was published by AWM in October 2007 and other interest within the county was understood, the AONB Team brought partners together and led a process of developing an Expression of Interest. In particular due to the social and community focus and interest from District Council regeneration officers, it was decided that the EOI would seek to deliver LEADER in a wider area than the AONB, including market towns lying just outside it such as Ludlow, Much Wenlock and Bishop's Castle (total population 54,000 c.f. AONB 18,000). The County Council's Pathfinder work on rural access to services was also highly relevant and has been especially valuable in developing the proposal.
3. A report was taken to the Management Board on 5 December 2007 outlining the approach of the LEADER bid, and approval was given to submit the Expression of Interest by 4 January. The aims in the EOI for LEADER delivery are:
 - To improve the quality of life and wellbeing of people in and around the Shropshire Hills.

- To build on sense of place and attachment to the Shropshire Hills landscape as means of improving people's quality of life and wellbeing.

More detailed objectives and performance measures are shown in Appendix 1 below.

4. The proposal seeks to meet the requirements for a LEADER Local Action Group efficiently through close links to the existing Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership. The proposed structure for these links is shown at Appendix 2. Up to 10% of LEADER funds are allowable for administration costs, and it is envisaged that a dedicated member of staff would be co-located with the AONB Team in Craven Arms, offering both efficiency and integration. The roles for LEADER of distributing grants and assisting with project development and monitoring are very similar to those successfully undertaken by the AONB Partnership in recent years through the Sustainable Development Fund. The County Council would be the accountable body for the LEADER programme in the same way as it currently is for the AONB Partnership.
5. The Expression of Interest was lodged with AWM by the deadline of 4 January. Comments on all bids were made by county Local Strategic Partnerships and assessment was by the Regional RDPE Partners Group. On 24 January we received a letter inviting us to progress to the next stage of preparing a Local Development Strategy. The Expression of Interest was scored in the 'High' scoring band, and feedback on the bid indicated that *"the RDPE Partners Group was particularly impressed with your approach to integrating sustainable development principles within the proposal as well as the close fit with existing local and sub regional plans and strategies."*
6. The next stage is that AWM are holding a workshop on 11 February for areas invited to go too the next stage. The Local Development Strategy will need to be developed over the coming months, and it is on approval of this that a firm offer of funding will be made. Our Expression of Interest put forward an indicative budget of around £250,000pa, which would enable appointment of a full-time co-ordinator within the 10% allowable for administration.
7. The LEADER programme represents a fantastic opportunity for the communities of the Shropshire Hills to benefit from this external funding. It is also an excellent project delivery opportunity for the AONB Partnership at a crucial time following the end of the Blue Remembered Hills project. There are great opportunities for further integration of the AONB Partnership's work with that the local authorities and local strategic partnerships. This is especially timely with the unitary transition.

Recommendation

The Partnership is recommended to endorse the bid led by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership for delivery of LEADER.

List of Background Papers

Management Board report of 5/12/07 available at

<http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/partnership/documents/4.Leader.pdf>.

Full Expression of Interest for Shropshire Hills LEADER, available on request.

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 content of this paper has been informed by discussion among some members of the AONB Partnership and Team. The LEADER bid was developed in consultation with a steering group formed for the purpose with local authority and voluntary sector representation beyond that of the normal AONB Partnership representation.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Issues, Objectives and Performance Measures for LEADER delivery in the Shropshire Hills

Appendix 2 Proposed structure for LEADER delivery linked to Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership

Appendix 3 Map of proposed LEADER area and relevant context

Appendix 1 Issues, Objectives and Performance Measures for LEADER delivery in the Shropshire Hills

ISSUE: i) Real disadvantage suffered by a significant minority of the population.

ii) Benefits to people's wellbeing and quality of life from the high quality of the environment are not reaching potential.

OBJECTIVE 1. To improve wellbeing, through better access to services, support, places, transport and facilities throughout the Shropshire Hills.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE A) By 2013, achieve a measurable increase in the uptake of key services locally.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE B) Throughout the programme, achieve 80% of participants in organised activities scoring positive results on at least three of five national 'quality of life' indicators (learning, community, physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, employability).

ISSUE: iii) Uncertainty over the sustainability of communities in the area.

OBJECTIVE 2. To strengthen community capacity and cohesion by broadening participation in community activity.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE C) By 2013, achieve a measurable increase in level and breadth of engagement with voluntary activities, capacity building and community led planning.

ISSUE: iv) Insufficient capacity to capitalise on a broader potential volunteer base and widespread latent interest in the landscape to support local regeneration.

OBJECTIVE 3. To develop sense of place and community pride around the Shropshire Hills as a basis for sustainable regeneration.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE D) By 2013, achieve a 20% increase in levels of voluntary and community activity related to places and community pride.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE E) By 2013, achieve measurable increases in spend on heritage-based regeneration.

ISSUE: v) Uncertainty over the sustainability of the economy of the area.

OBJECTIVE 4. To improve local learning and networking opportunities for businesses and improve the necessary infrastructure to enable them to grow.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE F) By 2013, achieve measurable increases in the take-up of training within the area.

ISSUE: vi) Inadequate structure and capacity to address the needs of the area in an integrated way.

OBJECTIVE 5. To develop the Shropshire Hills LAG as an effective partnership to deliver a strategically focused, locally appropriate LDS, sharing ideas and good practice.

PERFORMANCE MEASURE G) By 2013, achieve 70% coverage of the area with Community Led Plans (Parish Plans or equivalent).

PERFORMANCE MEASURE H) By 2013, enable 200 people from the Shropshire Hills area to visit, or host visits from other LEADER areas or similar projects.