

Item 5. LEADER

1. Summary

This outlines progress with the AONB Partnership's delivery of the 'LEADER' element of the Rural Development Programme for England.

2. Background

- 2.1. In January we learned that our Expression of Interest had been successful, and were invited by Advantage West Midlands to progress to the next stage of producing a full LEADER Local Development Strategy. Ours was one of two bids scored 'high', and it has become clear that this will enable our programme to receive more money despite the relatively low population.
- 2.2. Draft guidance on preparing a Local Development Strategy (LDS) was received on 11 April and will be discussed at a meeting of the West Midlands LEADER network on 15 April. A meeting is being held on 21 April of the small steering group who worked on our bid to progress the LDS. Initial feedback suggests that as our bid was well developed, we will have less work to do than some other areas. Part of this will involve identifying potential actions for the first year, and a project ideas form will be circulated to help with this.
- 2.3. The Chair and AONB Manager had a useful meeting with Celia Bahrami, Director of the Shropshire Partnership on 7 March, partly exploring the close links between our LEADER programme and the Community Strategy priorities.
- 2.4. The AONB Partnership Tour is to be held on 20 May at Oak Farm Ditton Priors, and will be themed LEADER. It will effectively be a launch of the wider engagement which is necessary. Invitations will be sent out imminently. Publicity about the LEADER programme will also be needed. A two page summary about our LEADER programme has been prepared, and this is attached separately.
- 2.5. Structure and governance. One aspect of feedback from Advantage West Midlands on our bid was a need to clarify the LEADER structure and its relationship to the AONB Partnership. This will require further work, but based on our own and others' experience some general principles are proposed here to guide the right approach:
 - LEADER should be aligned and integrated as closely as possible with other AONB activities.
 - The structure should recognise the additional partnerships which LEADER will require in addition to existing ones the AONB has, due to the wider geographic area and issues addressed.
 - The identity and integrity of the AONB Partnership should be retained.
 - The County Council's role as accountable body needs to be clear and appropriately acknowledged.
- 2.6. A new LEADER Local Action Group will be required, for which a Chair will also be needed. To aid integration, it is suggested that this Chair should be on the AONB Partnership, and ideally also on the Management Board. Terms of Reference will need to make clear that this is a sub-group of the AONB Partnership.
- 2.7. The relationship to the Sustainable Development Fund needs further consideration. SDF money in 2008-9 will be fully allocated before LEADER processes start so there will be time to consider links for 2009-10.

- 2.8. Finance, Admin & Staffing. Discussions are ongoing with the County Council's external; funding team, who may well be able to provide the financial monitoring and reporting roles, drawing on the allowable admin costs of the programme. This would keep the necessary close role of the accountable body, and potentially provide good links with the Northern Marches LEADER group. It is felt that a full time LEADER Co-ordinator within the AONB Team is the other vital ingredient. It would be preferable that this person has some input to the development of the programme, and to help get the programme under way it would be preferable to appoint to this post as soon as possible. As we do not yet have written confirmation of funding, this would require the County Council to take a calculated risk in offering the job before the programme is completely approved.

3. RECOMMENDATION:

The Management Board is recommended to comment on and support the progress and proposed directions.

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