

Response from Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership to consultation on the Marches LEP European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy 2014-2020: 7 October draft

21 January 2014

The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Strategy.

General comments

The Strategy is well presented and thorough in most aspects. The summaries in the appendices are useful. There could be much more discussion around rural aspects and the countryside generally, with a focus on current thinking for RDPE and LEADER priorities.

The description of the area could better demonstrate the truly distinctive character of the Marches. There are three Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the Marches LEP area: The Shropshire Hills, the Malvern Hills and the Wye Valley. These are nationally important landscapes, signifying comparable landscape quality to National Parks and all AONBs have International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Category V Protected Landscape status. This means that the Marches include some exceptional landscapes, which are important because they:

- Provide a wide range of ecosystem services
- Are attractive places for people to live and work
- Attract visitors and provide opportunities for sustainable tourism experiences
- Are sensitive to some forms of development

Having two of the 28 national World Heritage Sites and the plethora of other cultural heritage is also exceptional and can underpin significant economic development.

LEADER in the Shropshire Hills

Consultation on the proposed Local Development Strategy will take place in 2014 but it is currently proposed that the LEADER Programme in the Shropshire Hills focuses on economic development based on the high quality of the environment. This would include sustainable tourism, including development of and access to heritage sites, creative industries, local products, food and drink supply chains, countryside management, landscape education, farming and forestry. Skills development would also concentrate on these sectors and would include volunteer programmes and rural outreach to encourage people back to work. Co-operation with other Local Action Groups (LAGs) within the Marches LEP area will be encouraged, as will joint working across the Welsh border and with LAGs from elsewhere.

At this stage it is envisaged that the Shropshire Hills LEADER Programme would be managed by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, with Shropshire Council as the Accountable Body but this will need to be confirmed following the consultation.

RDPE

With 12% Voluntary Modulation, we understand that the Marches LEP will be receiving around £7.5 million in RDPE funds to contribute towards the delivery of the ESIF. We would welcome the opportunity of further consultation on how RDPE can help deliver the Strategy.

Other

We suggest that Harper Adams University College should be featured, and mention of opportunities to work more closely with Aberystwyth and Bangor Universities on ecosystem services and agricultural research.

There is no comment about the Marches being on the border with Wales- how could cooperation with Welsh initiatives be encouraged?

Detailed comments

P4 1.1 Vision

First paragraph- include RDPE budgets.

P5 1.2 Priorities

3rd paragraph Add "The exceptional landscape underpins rural economic development and delivers a wide range of ecosystem services."

P8 Location

Add "The Marches LEP is primarily a rural area of exceptional natural and cultural heritage value, with three nationally important Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs): the Shropshire Hills, Malvern Hills and Wye Valley and two UNESCO World Heritage Sites: The Ironbridge Gorge and Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal. This makes the area attractive for people to live and work, and to visit. Economic development drawing on the qualities of this exceptional landscape should be encouraged and any negative impacts minimised. Agriculture and other land based businesses are still important business sectors as is tourism."

P9 D. Environmental Technologies and Services

Add "Countryside and heritage management and ecosystem services."

P10 E. Visitor Economy

Add "and three AONBs".

P11 2.0 SWOT

Strengths

Add "Resilient, largely self-sufficient, market towns in the west of the area with distinct local character" (AWM research)

High quality of life

Harper Adams University College"

P12 Opportunities

The natural resources and the environment are ideal for the production of food and renewables.

Add "and other ecosystem service delivery."

Opportunity to enhance the support for local businesses in particular in relation to employees, access to finance and business skills. Add "and environmental improvements."

Scope to work with more universities (eg....) Add "Aberystwyth and Bangor Universities".

P18 5.1 Current Governance Arrangements

Add "Local Nature Partnerships (and Local Access Forums?)"

5.2 Future Governance Arrangements

How will rural interests be represented in the future? These seem to be underrepresented in the current structures.

P21 6.0 Links to other EU Programmes

Add "A system will be developed to ensure activity funded through the SIF will complement activity funded through the main RDPE programme and LEADER."

P23 Indicative activities for 1.1

Add "Outreach services to be provided to remote rural areas."

P25 Indicative activities for 1.3

Add "Visitor giving schemes to support conservation and ecosystem service delivery."

P30 Sub Priority 3.1 second line replace "food" with "flood".

Sub priority 3.2: Investing in the natural environment to support sustainable economic growth.

Add "and cultural heritage" after "natural environment".

Indicative activities for 3.2

Add "Developing cultural heritage sites as tourism destinations."

And "Promotion of environmentally friendly businesses, especially in tourism."

P35 Add "rural isolation" to list of excluded/ marginalised groups.

Indicative activities for 5.1

Add "Provide outreach services to those suffering from rural isolation."