

Annual Report on Heart of Wessex LEADER Programme

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Purpose of the Report

To brief Area East Committee on the activities of the Heart of Wessex LEADER Programme during 2015/16.

Public Interest

The whole of rural South Somerset now qualifies for the LEADER Programme, which supports locally designed rural development initiatives. This is a 5 year programme that went live in November 2015 and focuses on rural economic development.

Recommendation

That Members note and comment on the report.

Background

Projects funded under the new LEADER Programme (2015-2020) focus on delivering jobs and growth, 70% of the projects funded under LEADER will directly support the rural economy (eg: through creating and developing micro and small sized rural businesses). 30% of projects will also need to demonstrate that they are contributing to improving the rural economy. The Programme has 6 priorities: (1) increasing farm productivity (2) micro & small enterprise and farm diversification (3) rural tourism (4) rural services (5) cultural & heritage activity and (6) forestry productivity.

The programme is overseen by a Local Action Group (LAG). This has aligned its activities to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

Cllr Mike Lewis, Area East, has been serving on the Steering Group for the LAG and is now formally appointed to the Executive Committee. All Members in the area of benefit have been kept in contact through the newsletter from the LAG and further details of the programme are on the website: www.heartofwessex.co.uk

Progress of the Programme

The launch of the programme was delayed for over 9-months due to the General Election and a total revision of all the documentation required for the launch of the new programme. The programme manager undertook an active programme of awareness raising during this period. A national event took place on 14th October 2015 and a first call for expressions of interest was put out in November 2015.

Two meetings of the LAG Forum have been held and so far 6 Outline Applications have been presented to the LAG Forum for endorsement. All of these have been approved and have been invited to move forward to the next stage of the application process:

Applicant	Name of Project	Funding request
Little Jack Horners	We Built this Village on Sausage Rolls, Mells	£5,100
Mr R J & Mrs A Brooks	The Shed, Hardington Mandeville	£28,348
Baltonsborough Farm	Baltonsborough Farm Shop	£36,000
East Knoyle Community Shop Association Ltd	Expansion of Wren's Shop, East Knoyle	£25,916
Bath & West Society of England	Agri-tech & Food Innovation Centre	£97,378
Snells	The Trough Farm Shop, Mudford	£80,000

The next step with these projects is to undergo a detailed Full Application and project evaluation, which is prior to being submitted for approval to the LAG Executive Committee. All projects that are approved by the LAG will then receive a contract and delivery of the project can commence. All grant funds are paid retrospectively and all claims must be fully evidenced.

There are currently over 60 potential projects that have registered an interest in the LAG funding, some of which are in Area East. The application process is, however, lengthy and involved and it remains to be seen how many businesses and community enterprises decide that this programme is worthwhile.

A range of business advice is available from various sources to help businesses establish and grow. This includes the NDO (economy), SSDC Economic Development Team and a range of other sources/ websites for various aspects of business growth, funding etc. A fact sheet is available to help businesses find the help they need.

The South West LEP is setting up a Growth Hub to provide a one stop shop for business advice and support but this is not yet operational.

The Programme Manager helps to ensure that projects are advised at an early stage of their eligibility and realistic prospects of success. She is also well placed to signpost towards more suitable funding from other programmes.

Financial Implications

The Area East Committee set aside a ring-fenced sum of £10,000 in support of the programme locally in 2014, of which £6,778 is remaining. The intention was to secure the coverage of Area East within LEADER in the first instance. Now that the programme is live, it is in place to assist applicants to bring forward high quality proposals in this Area. Member's views are welcomed on the best way to target this funding.

Corporate Priority Implications

The Council Plan states that:

- We want a strong economy, which has low unemployment and thriving businesses – one of stated ways which we will address this is to:
 - Work in partnership to deliver investment and development that local people value

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

Carbon emissions and adapting to climate change implications (NI188) in due course this designation could provide a way of supporting local employment and promote local produce/services in our communities contributing to greater self-containment, thereby reducing carbon emission

Equality and Diversity Implications

Rural communities are vulnerable to isolation from services & markets and face higher transport costs. This programme provides an opportunity to support locally important economic initiatives.

Background Papers: *RPS guidance documents for LEADER Programme*