

## **Annual Progress Report - Heart of Wessex LEADER Programme**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

To update Area East Committee on the activities of the Heart of Wessex LEADER Programme during 2016/17.

### **Public Interest**

The whole of rural South Somerset benefits from the LEADER Programme, which supports locally designed rural development and enterprise initiatives. This is a 5 year EU funded programme that went live in November 2015. It focuses on supporting rural job creation and economic development.

Due to BREXIT the programme will finish early. Confirmation has recently been received from the RPA that all projects should be contracted by March 2019, and the current guidance is that project spend should be completed (ie final claims paid) by December 2019.

### **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.

Locally it is overseen by a Local Action Group (LAG). This has aligned its activities to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The Managing Agent and Accountable Body for the heart of Wessex LAG is Wiltshire Council. The Project Manager and Administrator are based at Balsam Centre Wincanton.

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 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015 and a first call for expressions of interest was put out in November 2015.

Cllr Mike Lewis, Area East, was appointed to serve on the Executive for the LAG. 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](http://www.heartofwessex.co.uk)

## Progress of the Programme

- Despite significant delays last year caused by a further period of purdah associated with the BREXIT vote, the Heart of Wessex LAG has allocated £314,570.00 of LEADER grant funding to 8 projects across the LAG area. With two years of the programme still to run, roughly £1million of funding is still available for eligible projects. Two of these are in Area East
- The LAG Forum, is open to all interested businesses, community groups and individuals. The Forum exists to enable the wider community to get involved in shaping the programme, hear from successful projects and to help promote the availability of grants
- There are 5 projects working towards submitting applications to be considered by the LAG Executive at the May meeting. If approved, a further c.£190,000 will be invested. Two of these applications are in Area East
- Over 100 expressions of interest have been registered with the programme, some of which are in Area East. Despite the must stricter criteria under this current programme, a good proportion of these are expected to come forward as detailed bids in the next year.
- All grant funds are paid retrospectively and all claims must be fully evidenced.
- 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 has been produced to help businesses find the help they need.
- 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. For example larger expansion schemes may be better suited to RDPE Growth Programme. Current themes are tourism infrastructure and food processing with grants of between £35,000 and £170,000. Further details can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rdpe-growth-programme>

## Projects approved in Somerset are as follows:

- **Little Jack Horners, Mells**, £5,014.24, grant intervention rate 40% - To expand production capability at a successful bakery manufacturing sausage rolls to open up new markets.
- **Yarcombe Woodland Products**, £88,044, grant intervention rate 40% - To enable the company to build an extension to an existing workshop purchase and install an automatic panel manufacturing machine and stacking line to increase production to meet high demand
- **Frome's Missing Links**, £48,378, grant intervention rate 62.79% - To support Phase 2 of their project – "Frome: A walking and cycling destination" with the fencing infrastructure of a mile of cycle path to join up to the well-used "Colliers Way" greenway section of route 24 of the National Cycle Network
- **Snells, Mudford** £96,708, grant intervention rate 40% - The Trough Farm Shop will combine a farm shop and coffee shop to provide the local area with a permanent and unique venue
- **Camel Hill Farm, No Till Drill** £15,278.00, grant intervention rate 40% - The no-tillage system involves the seeds being directly sown into the soil, without any general cultivation of the field.

## Next steps

Due to the reduced timescales for the Programme, it is important that eligible projects are brought forward rapidly. To facilitate this Manager has arranged a series of 1 day applicant surgeries allowing

1 to1 discussions of up to 45 minutes with prospective project sponsors. This is designed to establish eligibility, deal with programme queries and help eligible applicants prepare a robust application.

Sessions planned for May and June all 10am – 4pm:

Tuesday 23<sup>th</sup> May: Churchfield, Wincanton

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May: Frome Town Hall

Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> June: Nadder Centre, Tisbury

## **Financial Implications**

None directly arising from this report. The Area East Committee set aside a ring-fenced sum to support of the programme in 2014, £6,626 is remaining. The intention is to assist applicants to bring forward high quality proposals in this Area.

## **Council Plan Implications**

The current 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 & Climate Change Implications**

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:*** See web site

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