

Update on LEADER Programmes in Area West

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Purpose of the Report

To update Area West Committee on the activities of the 2 LEADER programmes covering Area West.

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. The Rural Payments Agency has said that all projects should be contracted by March 2019 and the current guidance is that project spend should be completed (i.e. final claims paid) by December 2019.

Recommendation

That Members note and comment on the report.

Background

Projects funded under the current LEADER Programme (2015-2020) focus on delivering jobs and growth, 70% of the projects funded under LEADER will directly support the rural economy (e.g. 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 launch of this current LEADER programme was delayed for over 9-months due to the 2015 General Election and a total revision of all the documentation required for the launch of the new programme. During this period the Programme Managers undertook an active programme of awareness raising. A national event took place on 14th October 2015 and a first call for expressions of interest was put out in November 2015.

Significant delays last year were caused by a further period of purdah associated with Brexit and the EU Referendum.

Locally the LEADER programme is overseen by a Local Action Group (LAG), which has aligned its activities to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

In Area West there are 2 LAGs; Making it Local and Heart of Wessex.

Making it Local

Making it Local (MIL) covers all of the Blackdown Hills and East Devon AONB areas, along with the surrounding market towns; this includes Chard, Ilminster and the wards of Blackdown, Neroche, Windwhistle and Tatworth and Forton.

The Accountable Body for MIL is Devon County Council and the Project Manager and Admin Officer are based in Exeter, but also make use of offices in Honiton and Sidmouth. Councillor Martin Wale was appointed to sit on the Executive for the LAG. The website www.makingitlocal.org keeps people up-to-date with details of the programme.

Making it Local is the best performing LAG in the country; it has allocated more of its funds to eligible projects than any other Local Action Group. To date Making it Local has awarded £972,464.62p to 29 projects across the MIL area, 5 of those projects are located in Area West and they are:

- **Ferne Animal Sanctuary** - £98,245 grant, intervention rate 22.11%. This enabled them to build and equip a new visitor centre, which has resulted in 3 new jobs.
- **Perry's Cider** - £21,744 grant, intervention rate 40%. Towards the purchase of kegging equipment allowing them to now sell barrels of cider to pubs, this created 2 new jobs.
- **Glanville** (Farmer) - £12,498 grant, 40% intervention rate. To purchase rumination collars
- **Scott** (Farmer) - £34,710 grant, 40% intervention rate to install a voluntary milking system
- **Whitestaunton PCC** - £2,576 grant, 15% intervention rate. Restoration of church bells

With approximately 17 months of the programme left to run MIL has £424,391 still available for funding, but no longer has money available under Priority 1 (Farming) and Priority 3 (Tourism).

Heart of Wessex

The Heart of Wessex LAG covers south Wiltshire, part of Mendip, the Area East part of South Somerset and part of Area West. Crewkerne and the wards of Eggwood and Parrett sit within the Heart of Wessex LAG. 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 in Wincanton. 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. All of the areas covered by this LAG in South Somerset are new to LEADER programmes.

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

To date the Heart of Wessex LAG has allocated £398,675 of LEADER grant funding to 11 projects across the LAG area.

Over 100 expressions of interest have been registered with the programme, some of which are in Area West. Despite the much stricter criteria under this current programme, a good proportion of these are expected to come forward as detailed bids in the next year. To date there has been 1 grant allocated in Area West, which is:

- **Yarcombe Woodland Products, Hinton St George** £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

Other 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
- **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.

With 17 months of the programme still to run, just over £1million of funding is still available for eligible projects. The Programme Manager is planning another round of advice surgeries (pre-booking essential) –one will be held in the Crewkerne area details to be confirmed.

Other funding streams and support for Rural Development

The Programme Managers are actively signposting suitable projects towards 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>

Financial Implications

None directly arising from this report.

Corporate Priority 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

The LEADER programme provides a way of supporting local employment and promoting 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 websites
