

Area North Committee – 19th December 2007

8. Somerset Levels & Moors LEADER+ Annual Report

Lead Officer: Alex Sherman, Manager of Leader +
Contact Details: asherman1@somerset.gov.uk or (01458) 251309
Website: www.levelsleaderplus.org.uk

Purpose of the report

To outline the work undertaken through the Somerset Levels & Moors LEADER+ programme, highlighting example benefits to South Somerset District Council's Area North, in order to seek a match funding contribution for 2008 (April 2008 to December 2008).

Recommendation

That Members comment upon and note the report.

LEADER+ in general

- EU financed rural development programme.
- Based on local action: 800+ LEADER+ Local Action Groups (LAGs) across the EU.
- LAGs are made up of private / public / voluntary sector representatives.
- Each LAG has its objectives (e.g. environmental, economic, social) set out in a business plan. It supports projects (both local and trans-national) that aim to serve LAG objectives.

Somerset Levels & Moors LEADER+

- 35 organisations on LAG (established 2001).
- LAG operates in three tiers: full partnership, 6-person elected executive (Programme Management Group) and one 'arms-length' steering group guiding key project work on local product development (project officer serving this agenda is hosted by Somerset Food Links Ltd.)
- Organisations serving on the Programme Management Group to date have been: Community Council for Somerset, Mump Group of Parish Councils, Northern Group of Parish Councils, Sedgemoor District Council, Somerset County Council, Somerset Federation of Young Farmers Clubs, Somerset Guild of Craftsmen, Taunton Deane Borough Council, Womens Farming Union, Yeo Valley Organics Ltd. RSPB, Dobunni Farm.
- 6 LAG objectives tied closely to key areas of work – development of local products, landscape management, small-scale tourism and heritage.
- Indicative budget of £2.6 million: £1 million from the European Union, £600,000 from UK Government (Defra), the remaining £1 million to be found in match funding on a LAG and individual project basis.
- Budget split: Just over £2.2 million for projects, remainder for programme administration between April 2002 and December 2008.
- LEADER+ designation granted in 2002.

AN

An overview of Somerset Levels & Moors LEADER+ progress

Across the Levels & Moors

- 86 projects supported to date
- Projects worth £2,210,000
- 35 main projects, 6 trans-national / inter-UK, 51 under small grant scheme
- 275+ businesses supported through projects
- 100+ community groups involved in projects
- New land management techniques trailed through projects

In South Somerset District

- 15 projects operate within South Somerset only
- 44 projects out of the 92 operate / have operated across local authority boundaries which include South Somerset, worth a total of £1,783,173
- LEADER+ is spending according to plan which means £1 of South Somerset money is matched by a further £36.38 of EU, DEFRA and other local public funds. This does not include the other £350,000 of private funding raised as a result!

Some highlights from 2007 for Area North

As LEADER+ projects tend to be collaborative and cross administrative boundaries, it is not always easy to identify successes in specific places. Area North beneficiaries have been both within the LEADER+ parishes and, by working in partnership with projects from elsewhere in the Levels, also elsewhere in this part of South Somerset District. Seven examples of work includes:

Local products

- Levels' Best – has developed a collaborative 'brand' for produce that comes specifically from the Somerset Levels & Moors and has local provenance. This brand is used as a marketing tool for tourism and residents to signify quality and the local accountability for the product and is used by both food producers and hospitality providers alike. A website (www.levelsbest.co.uk) supports the businesses involved and lists their details and areas of speciality and the number of subscriptions to the brand have exceeded expectations.
- Orchard Link (Somerset) – a 30+ strong group of small-scale fruit growers seeking to share advice, training and equipment to help develop new products from cider apples. Growers from Area North are involved.

Landscape management

- Marsh Ragwort Study – a project trialling three non-herbicidal methods of controlling the toxic Marsh Ragwort at three sites across the Levels & Moors, including West Sedgemoor reserve in Area North. This project is managed by the RSPB and is now in the last of its three-year duration as a trial. The final report will be published shortly.
- Farm Plastic Recycling – a project involving more than 100 farmers in disposing of black plastic waste material from farms and other land-based businesses. Farms in Area North participating. Now closed, alternative funding is sought.
- Farmer Links – a project involving more than 50 farmers in sharing good land management practice in the Raised Water Levels Areas of the Levels & Moors. Farms in Area North participating.

Community-scale tourism / heritage

- Langport International Festival of Walking – the second of three annual events happened in 2007. Attendance was nearly doubled from the previous year and through the involvement of the British Walking Federation, was publicised in 46 countries. Independent figures suggest that the festival encouraged a local spend of over £200,000 by visitors.
- Somerset Guild of Craftsmen Marketing and Development – assisting the re-branding and updating of promotion of the Somerset Guild of Craftsmen. This strengthens their image and market position and the likely success of their gallery in Somerton.

The above successes (including those happening elsewhere in the Levels & Moors) are all, in part, thanks to the support of South Somerset District Council. The Somerset Levels & Moors LEADER+ Local Action Group is very thankful for the support you have given to date; feel free to share the success!

Why SSSDC supports LEADER+

- South Somerset District had made an initial agreement (in 2001) to provide £8,150 a year towards the Somerset Levels & Moors LEADER+ programme. The total contribution sought from area committees is broken down on a per capita basis

Area North (87%) - £5,317.88 (pro rata of £7,090.50 for 9 months)

Area East (13%) - £794.63 (pro rata of £1,059.50 for 9 months)

- Each year South Somerset and Sedgemoor Districts are invoiced for £8,150. Taunton Deane Borough and Mendip District £4,075. Somerset County Council £14,450.
- All LEADER+ programmes require some local 'match funding' to support programme administration (demonstrating that there is local support for operation of a LEADER+ programme); in England this rate is fixed at 28%. The remaining 72% is covered by the European Union and UK Government (Defra).
- Some LEADER+ programmes also seek local match funding to support strategic projects or those discovering that other match funding fails to materialise. Two LEADER+ projects in the Levels & Moors fall into the former category: Selling the Levels and the Small Grants Scheme. The first receives £3,000 a year; the latter receives £2,400.

LEADER+ in 2008

- The current programme finishes at the end of December 2008. Large project may continue up until June 2009.
- The final year will see the final extensive monitoring and evaluation of all main projects including reviews of targets and outputs. This will underpin future local investment and may be the basis for further funding.
- Projects operating within the next year under the current programme in South Somerset are: Selling the Levels, Management Trial of Marsh Ragwort, Langport International Festival of Walking, Levels Best Promotion, Hidden Somerset website development, Farm Radio audio tourism. In addition there is local involvement with the European Sustainable Food Producers Network, a Trail Development project linking with the Blackdown Hills and LEADER+ group in Ireland, and a Small Scale Orchards Management Study across 6 rural counties in England.

Bidding for 'Local Action in Rural Communities'

- Local Action is a new European programme similar to LEADER+ that is available to specifically identified local areas on a competitive bidding basis – locally through the South West RDA. The Levels & Moors Local Action Group is intending to submit a bid for this to secure further economic development funding for the Levels & Moors area to cover the period 2008 to 2014.
- The main focus for the new programme is to create a new governance structure for the Levels & Moors, develop sustainable tourism initiatives and local community facilities, improve environmental awareness and good practice and assist the development and support for small businesses, both environmentally and with supply chain.
- The primary aim is to engage directly with local communities and to encourage 'Community Led' projects. The main bid will be compiled before May 2008 and there will be detailed and thorough consultation in the New Year upon which to base and develop the application.

Further questions?

We are happy to try and answer any further queries you have. Please contact Alex Sherman, Somerset Levels & Moors LEADER+, Old Kelways, Somerton Road, Langport, Somerset, TA10 9YE

Telephone: (01458) 251309

E-mail: asherman1@somerset.gov.uk

Website: www.levelsleaderplus.org.uk
