

Area North Committee – 23rd April 2008

9. Local Action for Rural Communities (LARC)

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Purpose of the Report

To update the Area Committee on the preparation of the full bid for funding under the Local Action for Rural Communities programme (LARC) to the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA). The Head of Area Development will also make a brief presentation on this.

Recommendation

Members are invited to note and comment on the report and endorse the submission of the full bid for funding to SWRDA for the Somerset and Levels and Moors by Somerset County Council.

Background

Between 2002 and 2008 the Somerset Levels and Moors LEADER+ programme supported 44 large projects and 51 small projects worth a total of around £2 million pounds, available within the rural (under 10,000 population) areas of the Levels and Moors.

In 2007 the new Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) opened, and Somerset County Council submitted an expression of interest to the programme best seen as a continuation of the LEADER+ programme – now known as Local Action for Rural Communities (LARC).

Report

Local Action for Rural Communities (LARC) is a new European rural funding programme delivered through the South-West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA). The aim of LARC is to enable rural communities to diversify and strengthen their local economy and to improve the quality of life for people living in those communities, in particular building on the activities supported through other parts of the RDPE.

One essential feature for the rural area which applies, is to have a recognised landscape character, and a population of less than 150,000.

Somerset County Council is acting as the accountable body for the Levels and Moors LARC programme (and one other in Somerset), which follows considerable discussion between all local authorities, SWRDA and various other bodies, to determine which areas within Somerset, and adjoining counties would best fit the criteria for funding.

The new LARC programme offers the Levels and Moors the chance to build on the previous LEADER+ successes and do much more between 2008 and 2014 in a wider area, which will include the urban areas of Glastonbury, Street and Burnham.

The full bid will be submitted by 23rd May 2008, and if successful will commence in the Autumn 2008.

A steering group of local authority representatives, and other organisations representing the future LARC partnership, is compiling the full bid, and 3 consultation events for stakeholders have been arranged for April 2008.

Objectives of LARC

The core objectives of a LARC programme are:

- Addressing economic under performance.
- Improving provision and access to services as a means of tackling disadvantage.
- Harnessing wider economic value from sustainable environmental quality.
- Developing local governance and delivery capacity in rural areas.

The Somerset Levels and Moors bid

Over the past few months, including the submission of the expression of interest in December 2007, an emerging vision for the Levels and Moors programme, and six themes have been developed.

The Visions represent the overall approach to be adopted for the next six years. The Themes are subjects / headings that projects using the LARC investment must fit within – a project must fit within one or more of the six themes to be eligible for support and will then be assessed.

Visions:

- Sensitively and sustainably utilise and enhance the natural and cultural heritage resources, characteristics and attractiveness of the Levels & Moors, to promote and boost sustainable tourism, local infrastructure, rural communities and economic opportunity.
- Assist and enable businesses and social enterprises, organisations, community groups and clusters and individuals throughout the Levels & Moors to adapt practices and adopt and integrate greater environmental awareness, especially in the face of climate change.
- Promote and develop respect, awareness and long-term security for the landscape, cultural heritage and biodiversity of the Levels & Moors, including positive and sustainable development of these where possible and appropriate.

Themes:

1. **Local Governance and Ownership** – establish a partnership that reflects the Levels & Moors as a distinct area and to support projects and initiatives that span the area.
2. **Sustainable tourism** – support tourism projects that actively contribute to and develop the quality of tourism businesses, amenities and facilities in a

sensitive and sustainable way. Cultural heritage is of specific importance to the area in relation to the Lake Villages, Battle of Sedgemoor, place of the first introduction of Christianity to England and the reclamation of the land from the sea. The natural environment and landscape also offer important tourism opportunities.

3. **Small business and social enterprise development and support** – to provide mentoring and practical support for diversification, new business, adoption of environmental technology and ‘greening’ local businesses, and better representation of local businesses, social enterprises and services for the local community. Develop local and regional markets and add value to businesses.
4. **Local produce sectors** – building on the development of the food and drink sector and other products over the last six years to provide a local resource for residents and a tourism and marketing tool for visitors, in turn promoting the profile and character of the Levels & Moors
5. **Minimising impact** – developing waste recycling, encouraging greater recycling throughout for all, composting of harvest and land-managed by-products. Not only to boost these activities but also to create a local market for the recycled / end products. Measuring and rating the environmental footprint of organisations throughout the life of LARC to gauge the impact of the programme and to enable and inform projects to address Climate Change mitigation and adaptation.
6. **Environment** – supporting projects that demonstrate distinct support for the protection and enhancement of the local landscape and environment and / or positive and informed adaptation to climate change.

In addition, the **Environment** will also be a cross-cutting theme to reflect the need for sensitivity by all projects in delivering outputs and awareness of local businesses, partners and communities, including the need for Environmental Impact Assessments to be applied to all projects and aspects of work.

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Financial Implications

None from this report.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

8 – Work in partnership with the public and private sector in developing and delivery of the Market Towns Vision

9 – Identify and address the particular issues affecting rural areas

Background Papers: Further information about the Local Action Programme is available on the SWRDA website at <http://www.southwestrda.org.uk/what-we-do/regeneration/eafrd/community-led-develo.shtm>