

**LEICESTERSHIRE TOGETHER (LOCAL STRATEGIC
PARTNERSHIP) BOARD**

Monday 19th November 2007

NATIONAL FOREST RDPE LEADER APPLICATION

REPORT OF LEICESTERSHIRE RURAL PARTNERSHIP

Purpose

1. To update the Board on the submission of a funding application for the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) LEADER approach.

Background

2. The RDPE is a Government programme to implement funding provided through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) between 2007 and 2013. LEADER is a delivery element within this programme. There is a two stage application process to emda: Expression of Interest (28/09/07) and a full Local Development Strategy (18/12/07).

LEADER Approach

3. In the East Midlands LEADER aims to help address the local economic needs of coherent rural areas; defined by similar social, economic and environmental characteristics. The programme also focuses on addressing economic under-performance and rural disadvantage. A maximum population of 150,000 has been stipulated and cross LA boundary applications have been encouraged.
4. LEADER will be delivered by Local Action Groups (LAGs) whose purpose it is to develop and implement a Local Development Strategy, which meets the LEADER criteria and the needs of the local area. The LAG will constitute a minimum of 50 per cent private / voluntary sector representation.
5. Regionally, £12m has been designated for the LEADER approach - over a six year period. It is anticipated that between 4 and 6 LEADER programmes will be successful in the East Midlands.
6. Regionally, these funds will be split amongst the following programme measures: Diversification into non-agricultural activities; Support for the creation and development of micro-enterprises; Encouragement of tourism activities; Conservation and upgrading of rural heritage; Training and information related to the above; Running costs and co-operation of activity between LAGs.

Progress to date

7. It was agreed amongst partners that a Leicestershire wide application did not meet the emda criteria, and therefore the LRP agreed to support and encourage applications from specific rural geographies.
8. Two Expressions of Interest were submitted from Leicestershire: the National Forest area¹ (led by the National Forest Company) and High Leicestershire² (led by Network Rural Ltd³). The LRP and relevant Local Authorities supported both EOs.
9. Following feedback from emda, partners have decided to pursue with the National Forest Application to the second stage. The High Leicestershire partners have decided to focus attentions to exploring opportunities for accessing other RDPE funds which will become available in 2008.

National Forest Second Stage Application

10. The National Forest Local Development Strategy (LDS) is in development and will be submitted to emda by 18th December 2007.
11. 50 per cent of the geographical area and 43 per cent of the population is in Leicestershire. The area also covers 7 of the 19 LAA priority neighbourhoods.
12. The strategy will be balanced between: *meeting identified economic and social needs in rural communities, market towns and former mining villages, and exploiting the great potential and unique opportunities provided by the creation of The National Forest to change the landscape and develop communities in the 21st century in a truly sustainable manner.* Where possible it will align delivery to support the priorities of the emerging County SCS and revised LAA.
13. Emerging priorities for the LDS include:
 - a. development of the woodland economy to secure the management of woodlands and provide commercial opportunities for woodland owners
 - b. development of sustainable tourism, including the accommodation stock, joint visits, high environmental standards, quality service, local produce, transport options
 - c. improved accessibility within and to the area
 - d. retaining community identity and character
 - e. to address these issues in an integrated manner to help the NFC and partners provide a leadership role to develop practical approaches to creating sustainable communities.

If successful, delivery of the programme will commence in Spring 2008.

14. Partners signed up to support the National Forest LAG include:
 - Leicestershire and Derbyshire County Councils

¹ This is a cross boundary application with Derbyshire and Staffordshire

² A Joint Characteristic Area as defined by Defra covering parts of Melton, Harborough and Rutland.

³ Company Limited by Guarantee in Owston established to deliver leisure, cultural and educational activities to the surrounding rural area.

- Leicestershire Economic Partnership and Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership
- North West Leicestershire District Council
- South Derbyshire District Council
- Lichfield Borough Council
- Groundwork Leicester and Leicestershire and Derby and Derbyshire
- Leicestershire Rural Partnership
- Leicestershire Rural Community Council and Derbyshire RCC
- Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire Wildlife Trusts
- Ibstock Community Enterprises
- Leicestershire Promotions, Tourism East Midlands
- Country Lands and Business Association
- National Trust

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board notes the contents of this report.

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