

Agenda Item No.

TO: RURAL FORUM
DATE: 17th JANUARY 2008
SUBJECT: UPDATE ON BIDS GOING FORWARD FOR LEADER FUNDING FROM KENT
BY: HEAD OF COMMUNITY REGENERATION
Classification: Unrestricted.

Summary: A report to the August meeting of the Rural Forum informed Members and partners of the evolving bids from Kent for the new LEADER funding programme. This funding stream is being rolled out nationally, through the Regional Development Agencies to support a range of economic, social and environmental measures that support rural communities. This report provides an update in respect of the progress that has been made in relation to the Kent Downs and Marshes bid, which incorporates all of rural Swale. The bid is largely focused on economic issues, but not to the exclusion of social and environmental measures. As such LEADER funding can support a range of priorities set out in the Community Plan and Swale Borough Councils Corporate Plan, with a particular focus on Regenerating Swale. The bid must be submitted by the 31st January 2008. A further verbal update will also be provided at the meeting.

Implications: **Human Resources Implications** - significant officer time has been expended in securing Swales current position within the proposed Kent Downs and Marshes LEADER area. An ongoing commitment will be required to support and promote the LEADER programme in Swale should the bid prove to be successful

Finance Implications. If successful the bid would secure a programme of £3.8 million, and offer external funding opportunities to projects benefiting rural Swale. The direct financial implications for Swale Borough Council are as yet unknown. If the bid is successful a financial contribution, to support the management of the programme may be sought but at the time of writing this remains unclear. If this were the case an estimate would be at £6,000-£8,000 per annum over the life of the programme, to 2013.

Legal Implications – none at present

Crime & Disorder Implications (Section 17) – none at present, although projects within the programme may contribute to this.

Equalities & Diversity Implications – the development of the Local Development Strategy will be subject to an equality and diversity assessment.

Sustainability Implications – none at present, although sustainability is a core ethos that underpins the LEADER programme nationally, contributing to more sustainable rural communities through a range of economic, social and environmental measures.

Risk Implications – Whilst the Expression of Interest submitted to SEEDA has been successful, there is a risk that resources used to develop a Local Development Strategy will result in an unsuccessful full submission to SEEDA in January 2008.

Decision Required: The Rural Forum is requested to

- a) Continue to provide input into the development of the programme, by helping identify local projects that might benefit from the funding
 - b) Agree to receive an update at its next meeting
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Background

1. A new LEADER programme is being introduced, as part of the new Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) that will run from 2007-2013. The LEADER element of the RDPE is being managed through the Regional Development Agencies (in the south east this being South East England Development Agency), but working closely with Natural England and the Forestry Commission.

2. Since April 2007 there have been discussions between a large number of organisations from across Kent, seeking to establish partnerships to take forward bids to secure funding. Swales involvement has been focused on the Kent Downs and Marshes bid, based upon a geographical area which includes Romney Marsh, the eastern portion of the North Kent Downs AONB, all of rural Swale and the Hoo Peninsular. An Expression of Interest was submitted to SEEDA in July 2007 and as reported at the August meeting of the Rural Forum this was successful.

3. Alongside two other bids in Kent work has been ongoing to develop a full bid in the form of a Local Development Strategy (LDS) for the Kent Downs and Marshes area. Keith Harrison, Chief Executive of Action with Communities in Rural Kent, has led this.

4. The three themes upon which the Local Development Strategy is focused are
Theme 1: Local Product Development
Theme 2: Sustainable Rural Tourism
Theme 3: Rural Communities Managing Change

5. An early draft was submitted to SEEDA for comments on the 30th November and limited guidance on issues arising from this were received back in December, along with specific technical instructions relating to required format and length of the LDS

6. A final and fully costed draft of the LDS must now be submitted to SEEDA by the 31st January 2008. Following a grant of £7000 being made available by SEEDA, with additional resources from Kent County Council, Ghg Consultancy Ltd was selected by the team leading the development of the LDS to assist with this. Following bid submission on January 31st, a decision is not expected until late April/early May.

7. Open consultations, took place in Hoo, Lenham, Sheerness and New Romney during December, which included discussions on Local Action Group structures and future projects. At the time of writing the LDS remains under-developed, particularly in relation to the management, financial and governance

arrangements. However, intensive work continues to develop and refine the LDS and a verbal update will be provided at the meeting of the Rural Forum.

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Background Documents

Report to the Rural Forum, August 2007,

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