

11th March 2014**Agenda Item: xx****REPORT OF THE GROUP MANAGER, CORPORATE STRATEGY****LEADER RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME – OPPORTUNITY TO
SUBMIT APPLICATION****Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek delegated authority for the Corporate Director, Policy, Planning and Corporate Services, in consultation with the Chair of this Committee, to submit an application(s) to the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) for Preparatory Funding to support and develop new LEADER programmes in Nottinghamshire.
2. This report is to be considered under Option A, Part C of the Constitution. An urgent decision is required as the submission referred to needs to be made by 14th March and this deadline cannot be met unless Committee has an opportunity to consider this report at the meeting on 11th March 2014. It is in the interests of the residents of Nottinghamshire to support the proposal within the report which focuses European funding investment on improving the rural economy.

Information and advice

3. On 25th February 2014, the Government announced that it was inviting new and existing local areas wishing to change geographical coverage to submit proposals for funding to help develop potential bids for rural economic development activities under the LEADER [‘Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l’Économie Rurale’ or ‘links between the rural economy and development actions’] initiative. LEADER is funded through the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy. The next programme period runs from 2014-2020, with activity expected to start in January 2015. £140 million is available in England.
4. The new programme expenditure will be split 70:30 with 70% committed to jobs and growth and the balance for rural community projects that have a clear economic output (e.g. social enterprise development and delivery). The priority activities will be around i) support for increasing farming productivity ii) support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification iii) support for rural tourism iv) provision of rural services v) support for cultural and heritage activity and vi) increasing forestry productivity. All local activity must link to the wider rural and community strategies of D2N2 LEP.

5. The closing date for applications for the LEADER Preparatory Funding is Friday 14th March. Development funding of up to £20,000 per new area (£5,000 for existing areas) is available for research, local engagement and facilitation of Local Action Groups (LAGs) with a view to developing and refining their proposals into Local Development Strategies (LDS) in advance of a second deadline in the summer 2014. Partners and stakeholders will have to establish LAGs as part of any proposals submitted to the second deadline. Further guidance in the form of a National Delivery Framework will be released by Defra in due course – this will guide the LAGs and the LDS development further and seek to support delivery of successful LEADER bids commencing 1st January 2015.
6. In Nottinghamshire, there is an existing LEADER programme and LAG covering rural areas of Bassetlaw and Newark and Sherwood (market towns are not eligible although “concentrated” populations up to 10,000 are). This LAG intends to continue and has already benefitted from £40,000 of Defra Transitional Funding. Bassetlaw District Council acts as accountable body for this programme and Nottinghamshire County Council has previously provided financial support.
7. The current round presents the opportunity to extend coverage for other rural parts of the County. Discussions are ongoing with Borough and District Councils as to how this would work and over what geography – up to 3 new LAGs may be supportable subject to further work – although it is unlikely that any would receive the maximum £20,000 allocation. There is a population ceiling of 150,000 for any new Local Action Group and areas must be designated as rural within Defra’s 2011 rural-urban classification (soon to be updated but not in advance of the 14th March 2014). If consensus can be reached and in order to expedite applications (up to three in the context of one per new LAG), the County Council would need to act as the lead contracting body in the first instance, with a local “sponsor” acting as applicant (for example a community or private sector representative to demonstrate local ownership and commitment). This would not commit the County Council to acting as the lead or accountable body in the future.
8. The development funding on offer is revenue and does not technically require local match funding. It can be used to purchase expert advice and support to facilitate the development of LAGs and their development strategies. If an application(s) were successful, the County Council would be required to cash-flow expenditure as the development funding would be claimed from DEFRA in arrears.
9. At the time of writing this report, discussions with partners and stakeholders are ongoing. Should agreement be reached on an application(s), this will be considered by the Corporate Director, Policy, Planning and Corporate Services in consultation with the Chair of Economic Development Committee prior to an application being submitted.
10. Should an application be submitted, a further report will be brought back to Committee in April with more detail. Submitting an application does not require

the County Council to make any financial commitment. The application can be withdrawn at any point. Further, should a LAG not progress to a full LDS submission or if an LDS was rejected, as long as the funding was spent appropriately with supporting audit trail, no claw back would be applied.

Reason(s) for Recommendations

11. The Government has invited applications under the LEADER programme 2014-2020. Committee approval is required for an application to financial support the development and preparation of a bid. The deadline for applications to the first round is Friday 14th March 2014.

Statutory and Policy Implications

12. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described in the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

13. It is recommended that Committee approves:
 - a) delegated authority to the Corporate Director, Policy, Planning and Corporate Services in consultation with the Chair of Economic Development Committee to consider and submit an application(s) to Defra to support local strategies for submission to the LEADER programme by the deadline of Friday 14th March 2014;
 - b) Subject to an application(s) being submitted, a further report outlining the detail to be brought to this Committee for consideration in April

Report of the Group Manager, Corporate Strategy, Celia Morris

For any enquiries about this report please contact: Matt Lockley, 72446.

Constitutional Comments

The proposals in this report are within the remit of the Economic Development Committee. As the urgency procedure is being used, this will need to be reported to Policy Committee in due course.

Financial Comments [SEM 10/03/14]

The financial implications are set out on the report.

Background Papers

<http://rdpenetwork.defra.gov.uk/funding-sources/leader-resources>

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All