

**23<sup>rd</sup> February 2016**

**Agenda Item: 9**

## **REPORT OF CORPORATE DIRECTOR, PLACE**

### **NOTTINGHAMSHIRE LEADER PROGRAMMES – STATUS UPDATE**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide Committee with its second six-monthly update on the North and South LEADER Programmes in the County noting:
  - a) The positive progress made to date;
  - b) The extensive process requirements required, and;
  - c) The focus of activity for the next 6 months.

#### **Information and Advice**

2. The LEADER Programme period is 2014 to 2020. Whilst there have been delays in launching the national programme, partners are now actively calling for local project submissions in Nottinghamshire.
3. Members will recall that the focus of LEADER is to support rural growth and investment and create jobs. LEADER is a 5% mandatory top slice of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) and approximately £138m has been made available for 80 local groups providing grant access to 85% of eligible rural areas across England.
4. As previously reported, there are two LEADER Programmes in Nottinghamshire for which the County Council holds the Accountable Body role for both. These are:
  - The North Nottinghamshire LEADER Programme: covering designated rural areas in Mansfield, Newark and Sherwood and Bassetlaw – with £1,853,000 provisionally allocated to spend by 2020, and;
  - The South Nottinghamshire LEADER Programme: covering designated rural areas in Gedling, Rushcliffe and Ashfield - with £1,555,000 for the same period.
5. Each Programme is overseen by a separate Local Action Group (LAG). These are local partnerships which have a private/civil society majority. Both Nottinghamshire LAGs are chaired by a representative of the private sector.
6. The Nottinghamshire LEADER allocation also sits alongside £5.2m of “rural growth funds” allocated to the D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership. As with

LEADER, the national Managing Authority for the funds in England is the Department of Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and its agent in operational matters is the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). Every effort to ensure complementarity in the use of both “rural specific” funds is undertaken; locally this is through membership of the D2N2 Rural Reference Group.

7. Additionally, projects in rural areas are eligible for other non-rural specific funding sources which includes other European Structural Investment Funds (ESIF). The LEADER Programme Managers can offer advice to applicants based on their individual project needs and funding eligibility requirements – in addition to referrals to and from the D2N2 Growth Hub.

### **Programme Contracting**

8. The Funding Agreement for both Nottinghamshire LEADER Programmes is now in place. The Delegated Authority Agreement has been signed, formally conferring key Programme Management functions on the County Council as the Accountable Body. This has allowed the Nottinghamshire programmes to accept outline applications. Under the approved Delivery Plans for 2015/16, it is expected that full applications will be submitted and processed within an average of four calendar months, thereby allowing contracting and spend as per Programme forecast in 2016/17.

### **Achievements in Period (1st September 15 to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2016).**

9. There has been significant progress in period. A summary of this is included in paragraphs 10 to 18, with further detail included in Appendix A.

### **National Launch - England**

10. At the national launch of LEADER in London on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015, the Farming Minister George Eustice delivered the funding announcement identifying LEADER as a key plank of the government’s devolution commitments under its Rural Productivity Plan. The completion of the national launch, enabled local Programmes to prepare to “go live”.

### **Nottinghamshire LAGs Formalised**

11. Following the national launch, the North and South Nottinghamshire LAGS were formalised. This included the election of private sector chairs and vice chairs, thereby reflecting LEADER best practice nationally.

### **Nottinghamshire Launches and Websites**

12. The local Programme launches took place on the 4<sup>th</sup> November 2015, which presented the opportunity to showcase the two dedicated LEADER websites and local branding which has been developed by the County Council on behalf of the partners:
  - [www.nottscc.gov.uk/leadersouth](http://www.nottscc.gov.uk/leadersouth)
  - [www.nottscc.gov.uk/leadernorth](http://www.nottscc.gov.uk/leadernorth)

13. The key objective of each website is to provide overarching information and initial eligibility tests for prospective applicants. The eligibility criteria for the Programmes are complex and are continually being updated by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). The local approach is for the websites to drive potential applicants to the Programme Officers, in order that tailored and up-to-date information and guidance can be provided.
14. The overriding objective of all communications, across all mediums, is to: maximise knowledge, access to and take-up of the funding and to build partner numbers, diversity and levels of engagement.

### **Applicant Master Classes and Call for Outline Applications**

15. In December 2015, both LEADER Programmes held Applicant Master Class events following the publishing of the North and South Nottinghamshire Applicant's Handbooks. These events helped identify those applicants with the most developed ideas and gave hands-on support to achieve the optimum take-up rate when the programmes published open calls for activity in early January 2016.
16. Throughout the Programme, similar events will be held close to all future calls for application submissions.

### **LEADER Business Engagement and Information Sharing Events**

17. During the period, a major mail out to businesses has been completed together with two targeted business e-shots. Key guidance documents have also been released and various briefing sessions have been attended to engage both directly with prospective applicants and with key stakeholders and interested parties.
18. There has been extensive attendance at business events enabling both formal presentations and networking opportunities. A breakdown of events and information supporting the animation activity September 15-31 January 2016 is attached as Appendix B.

### **Programme Resourcing and Processes**

19. Under the Programme there is a requirement for a strict and formal "Separation of Duties", delineating roles and responsibilities within formal processes. Clear and compliant arrangements are in place locally to achieve this within the RPA's guidelines. The resourcing is however lean and the process requirements extensive.
20. Indeed, the RPA requires that all local procedures are nationally consistent. The Programme delivery mechanisms have, in turn, been designed to address EU audit concerns during the previous programme. However, many details are still being worked on by the RPA, even though the majority of the local programmes are accepting applications. Every effort has been made in Nottinghamshire to provide consistent and useful advice and guidance but this is not always without its challenges as national requirements can emerge that

impact projects mid-way through processing and can effect what is and isn't eligible, as well as changes in process and evidence requirements. Conversely, the RPA has also changed stance on matters that have opened up some opportunities to projects where some revenue costs have now been deemed eligible.

21. Where there are inconsistencies or changes in the Rural Payments Agency's requirements for the local determination of applications, these are being discussed with the local RPA team. The risk of dampening interest and take-up in the programme is being actively monitored. Further, a networking event has been scheduled by the RPA for all East Midlands Programmes. This provides an opportunity to collectively raise the risk to programme performance of having disproportionate processes in place, particularly when the values of the grants sought are typically less than £35,000 and the key target audience is new micro and small businesses.
22. Furthermore, the Nottinghamshire Programmes are actively contributing to the LEADER "Local Exchange Group" whereby elected regional representatives from local programmes meet with DEFRA and RPA officials to formally discuss issues relating to operational and performance matters.

#### **Applicant Interest to Date**

23. Formal and informal project interest has been extensive and four outline applications have been generated with a strong pipeline of interest for future calls for applications. Most interest is in support for small and micro enterprises and rural tourism projects. Further details are included in Appendix C.
24. Based on current submissions, within the approved delivery plan for 2015/16, overall take-up rates for North Nottinghamshire are generally on target against the submitted spend profile. However, applicant demand is not equal across all priorities and at this stage there is no guarantee that the outline applications will be converted to contracted activity. That said, it remains a key priority of the LEADER staff to try and facilitate such a positive outcome.
25. The South Nottinghamshire profile is behind target. Nonetheless, this is the first time that this area has had access to specific rural funding of this nature and this may have contributed to higher initial project interest in the South that will take longer to convert to formally submitted applications. Six projects are being actively worked-up, with a high degree of confidence that they will be submitted as part of the next call for funding (commencing mid-February 2016).

#### **Areas of Focus for the Next 6 months**

26. There are 2 broad areas of work to be completed in the next 6 months. These are promoting engagement and take-up of the programmes and meeting programme management requirements, in order for the County Council to fulfil its role as the Accountable Body. In terms of engagement and take-up, the following activities are planned:

- Continuing the engagement with existing partners and expanding the range and number of private and voluntary sector bodies on the LAG in order for them to promote and enable them to act as champions and challengers for the programme. This is in addition to their role as decision-makers and will help maximise the reach and knowledge of the programme within business and local communities. Included will be formal training on roles and responsibilities for all LAG members which will be undertaken by the Accountable Body
- Continuing work with District Council partners to draw from their networks and engagements to promote the Programme and achieve equitable access to the Programme
- Ascertain key sector engagements to also promote equitable access, particularly agriculture and forestry
- Undertaking specific work on developing and implementing the social media strategy for the programme, to create agile communication routes with proven effectiveness within the business community.

### **Other options considered**

27. None. This report is for noting only.

### **Reason(s) for Recommendations**

28. This report has been prepared to support the Committee's understanding of the latest position on LEADER including project interest, work to date, partner roles and engagement along with the focus of activity in the next 6 month period.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

29. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described within the body of the report.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

30. It is recommended that Committee notes the content of this report as part of its six-monthly update on the Nottinghamshire LEADER programmes

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**Corporate Director, Place**

**For any enquiries about this report please contact:**  
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**Constitutional Comments [CEH 12.02.16]**  
 The report is for noting purposes only.

**Financial Comments [SES 12/02/16]**

There are no specific financial implications arising directly from the report.

### **Background Papers**

- *LEADER Rural Development Programme – opportunity to submit application:* report to Economic Development Committee, 1 April 2014, published.
- *LEADER Rural Development Programme – Nottinghamshire proposed submissions:* report to Policy Committee, 2 July 2014, published.
- South Nottinghamshire Local Development Strategy submission.
- North Nottinghamshire Local Development Strategy submission
- *LEADER rural development programme – outcome of submission results:* report to Policy Committee, 10 December 2014, published
- South Nottinghamshire LEADER Delivery Plan – 31<sup>st</sup> July 2015
- North Nottinghamshire LEADER Delivery plan – 31<sup>st</sup> July 2015
- *Nottinghamshire Leader Programmes – Status Update:* report to Economic Development Committee, 8 September 2015, published

### **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

Eligible rural communities in Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Gedling, Mansfield, Newark and Sherwood and Rushcliffe

## **APPENDIX A: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015 – 31<sup>st</sup> January 2016 Achievements in period**

- Nottinghamshire Programme attendance and participation at the National Launch Event and Workshops – 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015
- Formalisation of both LEADER LAGS including an extensive recruitment drive for new private/third sector representatives. This has resulted in:
  - 6 new representatives to the North and
  - 5 to the South
  - Combined, there are currently 26 partnership-voting places confirmed, with 4 support officer places.
- Formal local launches of both Nottinghamshire Programmes completed – 4<sup>th</sup> November 2015:
  - 2 separate launches at Goosedale Conference Centre and Retford Well
  - 131 business intermediaries invited (partners, District Councils, agents, business clubs, national and regional business organisations, sector interests etc.)
  - 41 attendees
  - Question and Answer sessions, websites launched and LEADER Post Cards and “What is LEADER?” marketing material disseminated
  - Member Briefings (District and County) and Press Releases accompanied the event.
- Website Launches:
  - 2 separate sites with interactive mapping to check availability
  - “Apply Now” and “Registration of Interest” buttons.
  - 24 new people have registered through the website and the contact list (including other forms of engagement) currently includes 211 separate bodies/individuals.
  - Includes links to partners and other funding sources
  - Various downloads available with on-going review – currently includes Applicant Handbooks, Fact Sheets, Press Releases, Application Forms, Local Development Strategy etc.
  - Management Area for use of partners will support a web based management approach where possible.
  - Twitter – messaging currently through NCC account
- Applicant Master Classes, Joint LEP Workshop and resultant activity:
  - 62 businesses attended a joint LEADER/LEP rural funding event and Q&A session in October 2015.
  - 16 companies took part in 2 LEADER specific events held in December 2015 offering detailed outline application advice.
  - Further events scheduled 15<sup>th</sup> March 16
  - Application call open from 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016-25<sup>th</sup> January 2016 – resulting in 4 Outline Applications with a total value of circa £372,000.
  - A further 10 projects are at varying points of development with a combined estimated project value of £500,000.
- A North and South Nottinghamshire LEADER Postcard has been produced

- utilising a planned mailshot by Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire colleagues, 1077 eligible businesses have received the post card
  - The postcards have been shared with LAG members (in particular District partners) and have been placed at appropriate public points throughout the County. A re-print is currently underway.
- Elected Member briefings have been issued (November 2015) at both County and District Level and invitations to present at Parish Forum events have been accepted.
- Work has commenced to identify interest and engagement from key rural economic sectors and in particular agriculture (projects to support increased productivity as opposed to diversification) and forestry:
  - attendance at sector events included 2 recently held Forestry Commission Workshops in the East Midlands
- There have been 2 two separate inclusions in the County Council's 'email me' alert to business subscribers
- Publication of key documents such:
  - as "*What is LEADER?*"
  - Applicant Guidance Fact Sheets
  - Applicant Handbooks
- Programme Resourcing – roles that are actively being developed and communicated to applicants and partners. There is a requirement for a strict and formal "Separation of Duties" delineating roles and responsibilities within formal application processes. Current resourcing includes:
  - 1 Programme Officer 100% dedicated to each Programme
  - A 0.25 FTE management overview and
  - a 0.5 FTE Business Support Officer (the latter under recruitment).
- Programme Officers act as the sponsor for projects at outline and full application stage
- Under the delegated authority of the Local Action Groups, the Accountable Body is responsible for the eligibility and completeness checks of outline submissions.
- Full Applications are assessed by an appraiser selected from a panel of trained officers (including District partners). These are separate to the dedicated LEADER staffing.
- The LAG receives the full application for determination with the guidance of the Accountable Body in order to make transparent, consistent and eligible decisions.
- If an application is successful other resources then support the applicant in the contracting, claims and evidencing needs of an approved project – also under the guidance of the Accountable Body.
- Programme interest to date:
  - 74 general enquiries
  - 59 potential projects registered -at varying stages of development (4 of which are being processed for decisions).

**APPENDIX B – ANIMATION BREAK DOWN 1 September 2015 – 31 January 2016**

<b>MONTH</b>	<b>BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT</b>  (multiple attendees)	<b>COMMUNITY/ PARISH COUNCIL/ DISTRICT ENGAGEMENT</b>  (multiple attendees)	<b>PROJECT MEETINGS</b>  (one:one development meetings)	<b>LAG MEETINGS</b>  (Partner Meetings)	<b>STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENTS</b>  (multiple attendees)
<b>SEPT</b>	5	3	-	2	1
<b>OCT</b>	9	2	3	2	2
<b>NOV</b>	7	2	10	1	1
<b>DEC</b>	4	1	5	1	-
<b>JAN</b>	5	1	4	3	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>

**APPENDIX C – Outline Application Round 1 Submissions and Advanced Enquiries at LEADER priority level**

Note – Priority 5 – Culture and Heritage allocation merged with other priorities.	Priority 1 Support for Increasing Farm Productivity	Priority 2 Support for Micro and Small Businesses – including Farm Diversification	Priority 3 Support for Rural Tourism	Priority 4 Provision of Rural Services	Priority 6 Support for Forestry Productivity
North Notts Submitted – Round 1	-	3	1	-	-
South Notts Submitted – Round 1	-	-	-	-	-
North Notts Draft Outline Applications being supported by Programme Officer targeted submission Round 2	1	1	2		
South Notts Draft Outline Applications being supported by Programme Officer targeted submission Round 2	-	3	3	-	-