

Report on EU Funded Programmes

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Summary: The Board is currently involved in developing bids to the EU funded LEADER programme to support rural development in the Chilterns, and a bid to the Interreg IVB programme which would be based on the protected landscapes around London and Paris.

Purpose of Report: To advise members of current involvement in bidding for EU funds and to report that SEEDA has invited a full bid for the Chilterns to the LEADER fund.

LEADER Programme

1. The LEADER Programme is provided with funds from the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) which is jointly supported by the EU and UK government. The LEADER programme is a long standing programme which supports rural development. It is a complementary part of the RDPE to the grants for forestry and farming. The programme runs on a six year cycle and bids are being sought this year for the period 2008- 2013.
2. The amount of funding available is not clear but there is currently approximately £22m available in the south east of England. Expressions of Interest (EoI) were invited to be submitted by 13th July. The Board prepared and submitted an EoI on behalf of local organisations to cover all the Chilterns, including that part which lies in the East of England.
3. The main themes for the Chilterns LEADER would be:
 - Development of forestry and related industries
 - Development and diversification of farming
 - Promotion of heritage skills
 - Promotion of rural tourism
 - Support for community development
 - Coping with urban fringe pressures
 - Managing climate change
4. The South East of England Development Agency (and other RDAs) is responsible for administering the LEADER programme. They provided a rapid assessment of the Expression of Interest, the outcome of which was that the Chilterns was invited to proceed to the next stage and

prepare a full bid for submission by January 2008. Preparation of this bid will be time consuming and will be led by Business Link for Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, which will also become the so called responsible body for the Chilterns bid. LEADER funding is provided in arrears which can generate a significant cash flow problem- the Board did not therefore put itself forward for this role.

5. The Chilterns Expression of Interest indicated that funding of £3million was being sought. In the event SEEDA were oversubscribed (20 bids were received), and are seeking additional funding which, if successful may be sufficient to allocate sums in the order of £2m+ for the period 2008 - 2013 to some individual areas.
6. The Board will continue to provide considerable support. The Chief Officer has chaired the local action group to date but has handed over to new chairman. The newly formed Local Action Group (LAG) will oversee the development of the bid and, if successful, disbursement of the funds. Several Board members, farmers and foresters and others well known to the Board have been encouraged to become involved.
7. The Board will also provide considerable behind the scenes officer support to help sector specific groups develop their ideas, collate information and liaise with both the South East and East of England Development Agencies.
8. Although the Board will not be the responsible body and is unlikely to secure much of the funding for itself, it will be able to influence significantly the programme and encourage applications for grant aid. The possibility remains open that the LEADER programme manager could be employed and or/based with the Board. The outcome will be significant investment in projects which will help implement many of the aims of the AONB Management Plan.
9. The timetable is for bids to be submitted by January 2008. SEEDA will make a decision in May and if successful funding will be available from July 2008. The Chilterns bid will also have to be assessed by the East of England Development Agency which is working to a slightly different timetable, but should also make a final decision in May 2008. SEEDA and EEDA has provided some assurance that the Chilterns proposal will be treated as one bid and will not be divided on a regional basis.

Interreg IVb

10. This programme also funded by the EU is designed to promote collaboration between European regions. There is particular experience of this programme in Kent and Sussex. A proposal is now being developed, led by the South East AONB co-ordinator with Kent CC as the lead authority to develop a programme based on sustainable natural resource management in protected areas around London and

Paris. A number of French Parcs Natural Regional would be involved as counterparts to the AONBs. The primary work areas would be:

Title	Objective
Local involvement in landscape enhancement	To engage local people in the enhancement of the distinctive features of their landscape, through sustainable natural resource management.
Planning and the integration of the sustainable built environment	To enable communities to create vibrant towns/villages in a way that is sympathetic to the heritage and landscape setting.
Sustainable and innovative local products and initiatives	To allow communities to pilot new ideas and opportunities that build a more sustainable way of life, safe from risk
Renewable energy schemes, audits and analysis	To encourage the adoption of efficient local, low-carbon technologies.
Sustainable education, awareness and understanding	To provide community-led learning on sustainable solutions in the economic heartland of each nation.

11. The Board should be prepared to support this bid. It will not require significant staff time to develop and it is hoped that the match funding can be provided in the form of the Sustainable Development Fund-provided that Natural England continue to provide the grant aid. The bid will be submitted in October 2007 and a decision expected in spring 2008. The programme would run for three years and provide the Chilterns with approximately an additional £250,000 for that period.

Recommendations

1. **To note the Board's involvement with bids to the LEADER and Interreg IVb programmes and to endorse continuing staff involvement with the preparation of both bids.**
2. **To encourage Board members to become involved with LEADER Local Action Group.**
3. **To agree in principle to employ the LEADER programme manager providing the costs are fully covered by the LEADER programme.**