

Progress Report on the Submission of a bid for the Chilterns to the LEADER Programme 2008-2103

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Summary: Good progress is being made with the preparation of a bid to the LEADER fund for the Chilterns. The sum being sought is £3m for the period 2008 -2013. If successful managers will be need to be employed from next summer. The Board should consider employing the Project Development Officer for the Chilterns LEADER Programme.

Purpose of Report: To seek confirmation of the Board's willingness to employ the project development officer for the Chilterns LEADER programme.

Background

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 for the period 2008- 2013.
2. The amount of funding available in the south east is up to £35m (it is believed there will be 15 bids). The Board prepared and submitted an Expression of Interest on behalf of local organisations to cover the Chilterns, including that part which lies in the East of England. It is a slightly larger area than the AONB but not as large as the Natural Area. (Map 1)
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
 - Managing climate change
4. Preparation of the full bid is being undertaken 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 Board has continued to provide considerable support. The newly formed Local Action Group (LAG) which oversees the development of the bid and, if

successful, disbursement of the funds, is being chaired by Mike Fox. Shirley Judges and Steve Rodrick are also members.

6. Although the Board will not be the responsible body and is unlikely to secure much of the funding for its own projects, it will be able to influence significantly the programme and encourage applications for grant aid.
7. The management structure proposed is that Business Link, as the responsible body for three LEADER bids (Chilterns, Aylesbury Vale and Colne Valley) employs a Programme Manager and administrative staff to cover all three areas. Each of the LEADER areas would have its own Project Development officer. It is proposed the Board employs that person for the Chilterns. The post would be subject to the Board's terms and conditions of employment.
8. The role of Project Development Officer would primarily be to develop projects and help them to the stage of being submitted for grant approval. They would not be overly concerned with administration and financial management which will be the role of the overall Programme Manager.
9. The funding rules allow up to 20% of the grant to be used for administration and other overheads. In theory this is sufficient, but tight. Sharing some overhead costs with other LEADER groups is both desirable and essential. If the Board agrees to this role the grant should be sufficient to meet all costs of employing the Project Development Officer.
10. Bids need to be submitted by 18th January 2008. SEEDA will make a decision in May and, if successful, funding will be available from July 2008. SEEDA and EEDA have provided the necessary re-assurance that the Chilterns proposal will be treated as one bid and will not be divided on a regional basis.
11. The Executive Committee gave an 'in principle' approval for this arrangement at its last meeting in September 2007. Now that the bid is well advanced and will have to be submitted before the Committee meets again, confirmation of that decision is sought.

Recommendation

1. **To confirm the decision to employ the Chilterns LEADER Project Development Officer, subject to all costs being met by the LEADER programme.**

Chilterns LEADER Area

 The Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

