

Annual Progress Report – Heart of Wessex LEADER Programme

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Purpose of the Report

To update Area East Committee on the activities of the Heart of Wessex LEADER Programme during 2017/18.

Public Interest

The whole of rural South Somerset benefits from the LEADER Programme, which supports locally designed rural development and enterprise initiatives. This is a 5 year EU funded programme that went live in November 2015. It focuses on supporting rural job creation and economic development.

Due to BREXIT the programme will finish early. All projects should be contracted by 30th September 2019 and the current guidance is that project spend should be completed (ie final claims paid) by 30th September 2020.

Recommendation

That Members note and comment on the report.

Background

Projects funded under the new LEADER Programme (2015-2020) focus on delivering jobs and growth, 70% of the projects funded under LEADER will directly support the rural economy (eg: through creating and developing micro and small sized rural businesses). 30% of projects will also need to demonstrate that they are contributing to improving the rural economy. The programme has 6 priorities: (1) increasing farm productivity (2) micro & small enterprise and farm diversification (3) rural tourism (4) rural services (5) cultural & heritage activity and (6) forestry productivity.

The Heart of Wessex LEADER Programme covers south Wiltshire, part of Mendip, the Area East part of South Somerset and part of Area West. Locally it is overseen by a Local Action Group (LAG). The total picture of LEADER coverage across SSDC is shown in the appendix. This has aligned its activities to the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). The Managing Agent and Accountable Body for the heart of Wessex LAG is Wiltshire Council. The Programme Manager and Administrator are based at the Balsam Centre Wincanton.

The launch of the programme was delayed for over 9-months due to the General Election and a total revision of all the documentation required for the launch of the new programme. The first call for expressions of interest was put out in November 2015.

Cllr Mike Lewis, Area East, was appointed to serve on the Executive for the LAG. All Members in the area of benefit have been kept in contact through the newsletter from the LAG and further details of the programme are on the website: www.heartofwessex.co.uk

Progress of the Programme

- The Heart of Wessex LEADER Programme has allocated £1,703,000 of grant funding to 43 projects across the LAG area. Nineteen of these are in Area East (see table below)
- The Heart of Wessex successfully bid for additional funding in early 2019 and was awarded £227,000 taking the project investment budget to £1,752,843
- 54% of the overall project allocation for the entire area has been invested into Area East
- All grant funds are paid retrospectively and all claims must be fully evidenced
- Over £1,200,000 of grant claims have been approved and paid to beneficiaries
- 28 new FTE's have already been created
- The Heart of Wessex LEADER Programme is now closed to new project applications, pending the availability of any further funding
- Business advice is available from various sources to help businesses establish and grow. This includes the NDO (economy), SSDC Economic Development Team and a range of other sources/websites for various aspects of business growth, funding, etc. A factsheet has been produced to help businesses find the help they need

Awards approved for projects located in Area East (each with a grant intervention rate of 40%) **are as follows:**

Applicant	Project	Grant Awarded £	Total Project Cost £
Snells, Mudford	Support build & furnishing of The Trough Farm Shop	96,708.00	241,177
Camel Hill Farm, Queen Camel	Purchase of a No Till Drill	15,278.00	38,195
SH & GH Keen, Wincanton	Purchase of 2 pieces of machinery	17,257.60	43,145
Godminster Farm, Bruton	Moo Meters – cow collars	12,724.00	31,810
Norwood House Chocolate, Wincanton	Purchase of capital equipment to expand artisan production	14,037.00	50,000
Lievito Ltd. Lovington	Purchase of new equipment to expand artisan bakery	36,355.04	90,888
Snells, Mudford	The Glass Box – extension to restaurant	63,392.80	158,480
AJ Portch, Gilcombe Farm, Bruton	To expand compostable toilet hire business by increasing the number of units	77,020.00	192,550
Kimbers Farm Shop, Charlton Musgrove	To create a café & kitchen for farm shop	43,496.58	108,743
DV & ME Sweet & Son, Holton	Installation of cubicle matting to improve dairy cow welfare	14,088.00	35,220
Feltham's Farm Ltd, Horsington Marsh	New cheese factory	71,928.71	179,823
CLG & J Wadman & Son, Holton	Installation of a robotic milking system to improve animal welfare & productivity	133,756.38	334,392
Gilcombe Farm, Bruton	Compostable Toilets for festivals	77,020.00	192,550.00

Tyre Renewals Ltd, Castle Cary	New tyre baler	97,841.20	244,603.00
Mattimia, Wincanton	New Bread Oven	5,920.00	14,800.00
Easy Bean Ltd, Mudford	New equipment and building works to support business expansion	37,692.16	67,985.39
Sycamore Process Engineering Ltd, Sparkford	New building and equipment	85,496.80	213,742.00
The Chocolate Society, Wincanton	New Equipment	16,963.64	42,409.09
Jonathan King-Brain, Sparkford	Building infrastructure and new equipment for elderflower presse enterprise	25,386.38	63,465.96
	Totals	£942,362.29	2,343,978.20

The figures quoted are the award of funding based on the Grant Funding Agreement. Final figures may vary as the funding is paid retrospectively based on actual project costs. Area East projects have attracted significant funding through this programme. Early funding went to farming enterprises; however a significant amount of funding has now been awarded to a range of businesses throughout Area East. As a result many new jobs are being created and others safeguarded.

Next steps

Applications are now closed to new enquiries. Projects are now delivering and the team is working with beneficiaries of the grants to ensure successful delivery of their projects.

At the present time we do not know if there will be a successor scheme put in place by the UK Government.

Financial Implications

None directly arising from this report. The Area East Committee set aside a ring-fenced sum to support of the programme in 2014 – £960 is remaining. The intention was to assist applicants to bring forward high quality proposals in this Area.

Corporate Priority Implications

The current Council Plan states that:

- We want a strong economy, which has low unemployment and thriving businesses – one of stated ways which we will address this is to:
 - Work in partnership to deliver investment and development that local people value

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

Carbon emissions and adapting to climate change implications (NI188) in due course this designation could provide a way of supporting local employment and promote local produce/services in our communities contributing to greater self-containment, thereby reducing carbon emission

Equality and Diversity Implications

Rural communities are vulnerable to isolation from services & markets and face higher transport costs. This programme provides an opportunity to support locally important economic initiatives.

Background Papers: *See website*
