

From: Mark Dance, Cabinet Member for Economic Development
Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee -19 July 2016

Decision No: 14/00107

Subject: East Kent and Kent Downs and Marshes LEADER Programmes (2014-2020)

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: GEDC Cabinet Committee 16 September 2014.

Future Pathway of Paper: None

Electoral Divisions: Ashford, Canterbury, Maidstone, Swale, Shepway, Dover, Thanet.

Summary

There are three LEADER Programmes for Kent for the period 2014-2020, which in total cover about 95% of the rural area of Kent, and about 400,000 of its population. This report focuses on the two Programmes (North Downs and Marshes, and East Kent) that will be managed and delivered by Kent County Council, which will also act as the accountable financial body. The third Programme (West Kent) will be delivered by the West Kent Partnership, and Sevenoaks District Council is the accountable body.

The report briefly describes how the two programmes were put together by KCC with support from the respective district councils and local organisations since autumn 2014, what the outputs are, and how they will be delivered during the period to 2020.

Recommendation

The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and note the report.

1. Introduction

1.1 At the meeting of the Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee on 16 September 2014, Members considered a report that described the work undertaken to develop a Kent Downs and Marshes LEADER Programme bid for funding from the Rural Development Programme for England (2014-2020), and the opportunity to create a new LEADER Programme area in East Kent (see Annex 1). This report updates Members on

progress in developing the two Programmes, and the next steps for taking them forward.

- 1.2 LEADER (Liaison Entre Actions de Developpement de l'Economie Rurale)¹ is part of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) for the period 2014-2020, and is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. LEADER is managed by the Rural Payments Agency on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).
- 1.3 The funding for LEADER Programmes is allocated to individual Local Action Groups (LAGs) covering a specific LEADER area. Each LAG comprises representatives of the private, public and third sectors who work together to develop and implement a Local Development Strategy, and are responsible for making decisions whether to fund rural projects that benefit the rural economy by delivering jobs and growth. The Deputy Cabinet Member for Economic Development (Sean Holden) represents KCC on the LAGs for the East Kent and Kent Downs and Marshes LEADER Programmes.
- 1.4 There are three LEADER Programme areas in Kent; East Kent, Kent Downs and Marshes, and West Kent. The County Council is the accountable body for the East Kent and Kent Downs and Marshes LEADER Programmes. The accountable body for West Kent is Sevenoaks District Council. This report focuses on the two LEADER areas that the County Council is responsible for.

2. Activity and progress

- 2.1 Following the submission of bids to Defra by KCC and Sevenoaks District Council, three Kent-based LEADER Programmes were approved in November 2014 – the existing West Kent and Kent Downs and Marshes areas, and the new East Kent area. This means for the first time, nearly 95% of the county's rural area is covered by LEADER, comprising around 400,000 people. A map showing the three Programme areas is attached at Annex 2.
- 2.2 Training on the processes for delivering the new Programmes, the recruitment of LAG members, developing potential projects and preparing initial Delivery Plans were undertaken during 2015. These were signed off by Defra and contracts signed in February 2016. The County Council has now entered a formal agreement with Defra to be the Accountable body for the East Kent and Kent Downs and Marshes LEADER Programmes. KCC has also been allocated budgets for these LEADER areas, and will carry out functions set out in the annual Delegated Authority Agreement with Defra.
- 2.3 LEADER funding for eligible projects is available to a wide range of rural based interests. These include rural businesses, farmers, foresters, growers, landowners, environmental organisations, cultural, heritage and community providers, and voluntary and charitable organisations. The maximum amount of grant that can be applied for is £50,000 or 40% intervention, whichever is the lesser. Applicants are subject to State Aid regulations under agricultural or

¹ The literal English translation is “Liaison among actors in rural development”.

industrial 'de minimis' rules, and must declare any other sources of public funding received.

- 2.4 Over the term of the Programme, which will end in 2020, both LEADER Programmes must deliver on outputs agreed with Defra which focus on businesses supported and the number of jobs created. The output tables for East Kent and Kent Downs and Marshes are attached at Annex 3. Applicants undertake a competitive application process for funding and projects must deliver against one of the six LEADER priorities. A list of the priorities are attached at annex 4.
- 2.5 To date, 36 outline application forms have been sent to potential applicants in the East Kent LEADER area. So far, five completed outline applications have been returned and 2 invited to full application stage, of which one has been completed and submitted to KCC for consideration. In the Kent Downs and Marshes LEADER area, 53 outline applications have been sent out. Twenty have been returned and seventeen invited to full application. Seven full applications have been completed and submitted to KCC for consideration.
- 2.6 This follows a similar pattern to previous LEADER Programmes, before 2014, where initial response from potential applicants has been slow. However, this tends to pick up quite rapidly as the Programme reaches its mid-term point.
- 2.7 Further reports about the progress of the two LEADER Programmes will be provided to future meetings of this Cabinet Committee.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The Kent Downs and Marshes LEADER Programme has been awarded £1.886m for the period to 2020, and the East Kent LEADER £1.586m, for projects that contribute to rural economic growth in their respective areas. For information, the West Kent Programme was awarded £1.813m.
- 3.2 The LEADER funding includes a provision for administration and running costs up to a maximum of 18%. This will provide 100% of the costs of two full time staff, in the Economic Development team, who will deliver the Kent Downs and Marshes and East Kent LEADER Programmes.
- 3.3 LEADER is an EU-funded Programme. Now that the UK has voted to leave the EU, the government will have a period of two years to negotiate a withdrawal agreement once Article 50 of the EU Treaty is invoked. The UK will remain a member of the EU during this time and the instruction from Defra is that the Rural Development Programme for England 2014-2020, of which LEADER is a part, will operate under 'business as usual' until further details are made known.

4. Policy Framework

- 4.1 East Kent and Kent Downs and Marshes LEADER Programmes will contribute to the Council's Strategic Statement 2015-2020, and in particular the Strategic Outcome "Kent communities feel the benefits of economic

growth by being in-work, healthy and enjoying a good quality of life”, by engaging with and providing external investment to rural businesses and communities to achieve growth and jobs.

5. Equality and Diversity

5.1 Both Programmes comply with KCC’s Equality and Diversity Policy, which is submitted to the Rural Payments Agency with each LEADER Annual Delivery Plan. Applicants must also consider how their project meets the equality and diversity cross cutting theme for LEADER and ensure that a project does not disadvantage anybody in terms of the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

6. Conclusions

6.1 The LEADER approach to rural development brings together organisations and individuals involved in developing the rural economy, assisting rural communities and enhancing the natural landscape through interventions designed to benefit local rural businesses and communities.

6.2 The LEADER Programme brings rural investment into the county, creates and safeguards jobs, helps with business creation and assists local communities manage change.

6.3 LEADER now covers approximately 95% of rural Kent comprising some 400,000 population, which will benefit from over £5m of EU funding and an additional £7.5m of matching external investment. This will stimulate rural development within the county by creating jobs and economic growth.

7. Recommendation

Recommendation:

The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and note the report.

Background Documents.

East Kent and Kent Downs and Marshes Local Development Strategies;
Annual Delivery Plans for East Kent and Kent Downs and Marshes LEADER Programmes.

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Annex 1: GEDCCC Minute and Record of Decision
Annex 2: Map of LEADER areas in Kent
Annex 3: LEADER Output tables
Annex 4: LEADER Priorities