

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 27TH JANUARY 2015

title: RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME FOR ENGLAND 2014-2020

submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive an update regarding the forthcoming Rural Development Programme.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Council Ambitions - In addition to Ribble Valley Borough Council striving to meet its three ambitions, it also recognises the importance of securing a diverse, sustainable economic base for the Borough. The work of the Rural Development Programme aims to support this.
- Community Objectives – The issues highlighted in this report will contribute to objectives of a sustainable economy and thriving market towns.
- Corporate Priorities - Delivery of services to all.
- Other Considerations – None.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), also referred to at European level as LEADER, is jointly funded by the European Union and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The aims of the programme are to safeguard and enhance the rural environment, improve the competitiveness of the agricultural sector and foster sustainable and thriving rural businesses and rural economies across England.

2.2 The previous Rural Development Programme finished in 2014, where 28 Ribble Valley businesses and other local organisations received financial support through the programme, and the Councils Regeneration Team are currently working with Lancashire County Council and other Lancashire Districts on a development strategy for the next RDPE programme, which is due to start in Lancashire during 2015.

3 INFORMATION

3.1 To meet European Commission requirements, programme delivery in sub-regional areas such as Lancashire is overseen by Local Action Groups (LAGs). In Lancashire, as with the previous programme, 3 LAGs are in the process of being established to manage the RDPE programme of activity, with some elements also being delivered by Natural England and the Forestry Commission:

- Lancashire North & Bowland (covering the Boroughs of Lancaster, Ribble Valley, part of Pendle and part of Wyre)

- Lancashire West (covering the Boroughs of West Lancashire, South Ribble, Chorley, Preston, Fylde and part of Wyre)
- Pennine Lancashire (covering the Boroughs of Burnley, Rossendale, Hyndburn, Blackburn with Darwen and part of Pendle)

3.2 As stated above the Lancashire North and Bowland Local Action Group (LAG) area will consist of the rural parts of the Lancashire Districts of Ribble Valley, Lancaster, Pendle (part) and Wyre (part). The total population within this area is 118,440 including the eligible population of the market towns of Clitheroe and Barnoldswick and includes the Forest of Bowland and Arnside and Silverdale (part) AONBs. The proposed area incorporates the Bowland Fells and Bowland Fringe and Pendle Hill National Character Areas. This is a different area to the previous LAG (under the previous programme Ribble Valley was within the Pennine Lancashire LAG) and the rationale for the change is based upon the geographic coherence of the area, quality and type of landscape as well potential for Visitor Economy growth and the commonalities within the farming sector.

3.3 The Lancashire North and Bowland LAG area has a distinctive character, with two Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), coastal areas along Morecambe Bay linking to Cumbria in the North (and through the Lune Valley) and the Fylde Coast in the South and sites of special scientific interest. In demographic terms, Ribble Valley is the most rural District in Lancashire and over two-thirds of the LAG area landscape is designated as 'uplands' and is seeking £2,060,000 of resource from Defra to deliver the programme to distribute grants direct to business and other organisations to create and safeguard jobs in the area and develop the local economy across the six Defra themes of enterprise, farming, tourism, rural services, forestry, culture and heritage.

3.4 In preparation for the new Rural Development Programme a number of events have taken place across the county to capture the views of local businesses, organisations and residents to ensure that the Local Development Strategies reflect a bottom up approach and a meeting will take place in February 2015 to formally establish a LAG Executive to oversee programme activity. In the Lancashire North and Bowland LAG area the four Local Authorities represented (Ribble Valley, Lancaster, Wyre and Pendle) automatically have a seat on the LAG Executive. It is also expected that Lancashire County Council will receive a formal offer letter from Defra in March 2015 to enable the programme of activity to begin.

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