

## Local Action for Rural Communities – Briefing Update June 2008

Local Action for Rural Communities (LARC) is a new wave of European funding that the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) has been tasked to allocate by summer 2008. There will **£28M** available for a series of LARC Schemes across the region that will run from 2008 to the end of 2013.

The aim of Local Action is to enable rural communities to look at new opportunities to strengthen their local economy and to improve the quality of life for people living in those communities. Local Partnerships covering rural geographical areas were invited to submit their full bids by May 23<sup>rd</sup>. This is a competitive bidding programme that saw 19 bids submitted by that deadline worth £59.6m. There is a strong emphasis on the Schemes delivering against the economic agenda.

Serving Somerset, there were three significant bids serving different geographical areas:

- Western Somerset
- Levels & Moors
- Blackdown Hills & East Devon AONB (20% in Somerset)

Rural Delivery Team members of SCC Economy & Europe have led on two of the partnerships: those for Western Somerset, & Levels & Moors, and have also contributed in a lesser way to the Blackdown Hills & East Devon partnership.

The County Council has offered to provide **accountable body** functions to help ensure good management and administration of the Schemes should they be successful.

### Western Somerset

The geographical area includes the whole of West Somerset, the Somerset part of Exmoor National Park, the Quantock Hills and Wiveliscombe and its 10-parish hinterland. The total population to be served is 58,000 and the bid is **for £3million** over the 6 years.

The key aim of the programme is to move towards a low carbon economy using this as a driver to provide new economic opportunities within the following areas:

- consumption and production
- resource management
- transport
- tourism
- the environment
- supporting rural communities.

### Somerset Levels & Moors

The geographical area stretches from the coast in the west to Glastonbury in the east, and from the north western most border of Somerset to Martock in the South. It expands the existing Levels & Moors LEADER+ programme area around Langport, Somerton and Burnham. Total population of the area is 121,000. The total bid is for **£2.5million** over the period.

Six theme areas for projects in the Somerset Levels & Moors are proposed with the first two being cross-cutting:

- Local governance and ownership
- Environmental sustainability

The following four Themes reflect subject areas for specific development and support:

- Small business and social enterprise development and support
- Development of Local produce sectors
- Sustainable tourism
- Minimising impact: recycling; reducing; reusing.

### **Blackdown Hills & East Devon.**

This builds on the existing LEADER+ area of the Blackdown Hills by incorporating the East Devon AONB and stretching down to the Devon coastline. The rationale for the proposed bid of **£2.9m** is to

- 'Enhance opportunity within the area by using its unique environmental quality as a springboard to economic growth.'

And it is envisaged that this enhanced opportunity will be realised through two key sub-aims:

- To increase the number of well planned, productive, ambitious businesses through improving knowledge of local opportunities in relation to markets, training facilities and innovation.
- To use the unique environmental quality of the Blackdown Hills and East Devon area as a springboard to sustainable economic growth through increased diversification, the development of local supply chains, the sustainable use of resources and the promotion of increased connectedness.

### **Decision Timetable**

Applicants may be invited to interview by the RDA in mid-July and a decision on whether they will receive funding is due to be made by the end of July 2008. It is anticipated that successful bidders may be able to start up their Schemes by Oct 2008 and to start making grant awards by January 2009.

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