

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 22ND NOVEMBER 2011
title: RDPE ACTIVITY REPORT
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principal author: CRAIG MATTHEWS – RURAL REGENERATION OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive information on the Rural Development Programme for England and its activities in the Pennine Lancashire programme area.

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 INFORMATION

2.1 The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) 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. The programme is focussed on the following themes, or axis, these are:

- Axis 1 – improving the competitiveness of the farming and forestry sectors
- Axis 2 – improving the environment and the countryside
- Axis 3 – rural quality of life and diversification of the rural economy
- Axis 4 – management, administration and the LEADER approach

2.2 To meet European Commission requirements, programme delivery in sub-regional areas such as Lancashire is overseen by Local Action Groups (LAGs). In Lancashire 3 LAGs were set up to manage the RDPE programme of activity under Axis 1, 3 & 4, whilst Axis 2 is being delivered by Natural England and the Forestry Commission: -

- Lancashire West (West Lancashire, South Ribble, Chorley and Preston)
- North Lancashire (Lancaster, Fylde and Wyre)
- Pennine Lancashire (Ribble Valley, Pendle, Burnley, Rossendale, Hyndburn and Blackburn with Darwen)

- 2.3 As part of the Government's last Comprehensive Spending Review DEFRA have been undertaking a full review of departmental budgets including considering the appropriate arrangements for the continued delivery of the socio-economic elements (Axis 1, 3 & 4) for the remainder of the programme period to 2013. Whilst RDPE is set to continue, there will be a lower budget overall following wider reductions in Government spending and there will also be some other changes to the programme following closure of the Northwest Development Agency as it moves towards national delivery arrangements by DEFRA at national level.
- 2.4 The original budget for the Axis 1, 3 & 4 elements of RDPE in Pennine Lancashire was for a £3.2 million programme between 2009-2013, which includes £2.7 million in direct grant aid (projects funding) with the balance to cover other elements of the programme to include such things as staffing, research and project development costs (Axis 4). Since the last meeting DEFRA have informed each LAG of new budget arrangements. The key of these for Pennine being a reduction in the budget by 10% - total of £256,112 out of projects funding. This is a significantly lower reduction than expected given that the level of cuts across the country has been higher than 20%. DEFRA invited the LAG to determine where these savings could be made. It was decided that Measure 111 training and information actions would be the most appropriate given that this activity could be supported under other measures based on a project by project basis and the level of demand being much higher under measures within Axis 3.
- 2.5 As previously stated responsibility for delivery of the RDPE socio-economic elements (Axis 1, 3 & 4) were undertaken by the Northwest Development Agency and as of 1 July 2011 this has now transferred to DEFRA. This has also slowed the progress of applications during this period under those measures other than Measure 312 and Ribble Valley and Pennine Lancashire businesses have and are continuing to benefit from the RDPE whilst DEFRA have been making their arrangements to carry this fund forward. As detailed in the next sections of this report.
- 2.6 Measure 111 Vocational Training and information Actions: as stated earlier in this report, DEFRA invited the LAG to propose further changes to the budget with the flexibility to via funds between Axis 1 & 3. This was seen as an opportunity to better align the whole Pennine RDPE budget and at its last meeting the LAG agreed to move a total of £600,000 (all of the Measure 111 budget) from Axis 1 into Axis 3 to support business development in the current economic climate especially given the programme has excess demand under Axis 3 particularly micro enterprise and tourism projects in development.
- 2.7 Measure 123 Adding Value to Agriculture & Forestry Products: there is currently 1 additional project under development in this measure and 3 projects have been approved: -
- Bowland Bio-energy, Downham, Ribble Valley: the company is involved in the supply of renewable energy wood fuel for biomass heating equipment. They have been established around 6 years and are in a position of growth. The project is to construct a new timber drying and processing facility for wood chip supply. This will reduce timber drying time meaning they can turn over stock more quickly thus increasing profitability.
 - Dove Syke Cider, West Bradford, Ribble Valley: this project is for the creation of a craft cider business, and provide processing and packaging equipment, using the apples which are grown in an existing nearby orchard.
 - Outdoor Screens Ltd, Clayton-le-Dale, Ribble Valley: this project has supported the expansion and relocation of an existing enterprise. The business

manufactures and retails wooden screens for the residential market, to hide such things as wheelie bins and boxes.

2.8 Measure 124 Co-operation for development of new products, processes and technologies: there are a number of proposals under development within this measure, however, currently only 1 approved project and should no other proposals come forward the LAG are arranging with DEFRA to move any surplus budget into Axis 3.: -

- Biomass Research, Pennine Lancashire wide: this research project by a local scientist will explore opportunities to significantly shorten the small-scale woodchip supply chain, increasing its competitiveness. The first report from the research has now been submitted showing positive results.

2.9 Measure 311 Diversification into non-agricultural activities: 2 projects have been approved under this measure: -

- Wellybobs Farm Park, Darwen, Blackburn with Darwen: the project is sited at the family owned Davyfield Farm featuring petting farm, picnic facilities, cafe and shop, indoor soft play area, indoor and outdoor adventure play areas for families, schools, group visits and parties.
- Yellowhill Farm Rides, Pleasington, Blackburn with Darwen: the farm is located within the Witton Park Estate - the project is a tourist and educational facility. They will be collecting the general public/organised groups from Witton Country Park Show Field for guided tours around neighbouring farmland.

2.10 Measure 312 Support for the Creation & Development of Micro Enterprises: This measure has by far been showing the highest level of interest and demand. 8 projects have been approved under this measure and a further 6 projects are currently in development. Approved projects: -

- Outdoor Elements, Simonstone, Ribble Valley: this project has supported the business to offer bespoke team building and outdoor activities and the development of a permanent site at Simonstone in Lancashire.
- Browsholme Hall, Cow Ark, Ribble Valley: this helped to convert the Tithe Barn buildings within Browsholme Hall into a function room with seating for 120 for weddings and 150 for conferences. The estate could then be open regularly throughout the year for weddings, cultural events (music and theatre), farmers markets and craft fairs.
- Mick Sherliker Ltd West Bradford, Ribble Valley: this project is to plant 31,000 Christmas Trees on land comprising 11.5 acres off Moor Lane, West Bradford. The trees will take 3 years to reach sufficient growth for sale, and then will be harvested 25% per year. The sole customer will be the adjacent Dove Syke Nursery, who also grow their own trees.
- Focus Experiential Training Ltd, Bashall Eaves, Ribble Valley: project to refurbish the corporate hospitality and training business in a series of units converted to a high standard from old stone barns supporting green and sustainable principles.
- Wheatsheaf Hill Farm Lifestyle Centre, Edgewoth, Blackburn with Darwen: the 14-acre farm project will involve transforming an empty agricultural building into a kitchen with table space, toilets and a reception area for corporate events and day courses.
- Printed Cup Company, Clitheroe, Ribble Valley: the company produces bespoke printed paper cups for the wholesale and retail markets, initially

starting in the UK but with a plan to eventually export. New equipment will reduce the average delivery time by half from 7-10 days to 3-5 days.

- Paul Case furniture, Clayton-le-Dale, Ribble Valley: this bespoke furniture manufacturing business project will supply woodworking equipment, signage and dust extraction system to improve production capacity and marketing support following relocation to a larger unit on the A59.
- Brabins Shop & gallery, Chipping, Ribble Valley: this project is to expand the retail area of the oldest surviving shop in Britain to accommodate an improved offer to the customer and secure a key service continuity (general grocery supplies when Proctors store closes) for this rural community.

2.11 Measure 313 Encouragement of Tourism: The programme has some strong large projects seeking funds under this measure but the allocation of £141,600 under the original regional allocation limited the scope for them to develop or meant some key tourism projects could not be funded. Following consultation with DEFRA on this matter a proposed new budget of £416,608 has been agreed. This will now enable a number of those projects to come forward. Currently 5 projects (2 in Ribble Valley) are pending and in development and 1 project has been approved: -

- Pendle Sculpture Trail – The project was approved in Sep 2011 and final details are being resolved in order to be able to issue an offer letter. This will be completed soon.

2.12 Measure 321 Basic Services for the economy and rural population: With two projects approved during the last quarter this measure is now showing good signs of delivering according to the original budget. Currently 5 projects (all 5 in Ribble Valley) are pending and in development and 2 projects have been approved: -

- Gisburn Playing Fields Association, Gisburn, Ribble Valley: the project will pay for the construction and installation of an aerial runway and sheltered meeting area for teenagers to provide facilities for older children to use within the play park at Gisburn. The project is the final stage in a wider re-development of the facilities, which has been funded through a variety of public and private sources including Children's Network Fund, Lancashire Environment Fund and local fundraising.
- Rossendale Citizens Advice Bureau, Bacup, Rossendale: this project will fund the costs of a specialist trainer as part of an overall project to extend the outreach services for Rossendale CAB into the rural areas of the district.

2.13 The current RDPE programme of activity will run until 2013 and further updates will be provided regarding additional projects and future developments.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Pennine Lancashire Local Development Strategy (RDPE) 2009 - 2013

For further information please ask for Craig Matthews, extension 4531