

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL
ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD

02 September 2020

Report of the Chief Executive

Part 1- Public

Matters for Information

1 WEST KENT LEADER PROGRAMME UPDATE

With the West Kent LEADER programme soon coming to an end, this report gives an overview of how the programme has performed and the types of initiatives that it has funded over the past five years.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 LEADER is an EU grant programme that has provided grants aimed at supporting capital investment and job creation in rural businesses, including farming and forestry enterprises. There are six national priorities for the programme:

- Support for increasing farm productivity
- Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification
- Support for increasing forestry productivity.
- Support for rural tourism
- Provision of rural services
- Support for cultural and heritage activities

1.2 West Kent LEADER Programme

1.2.1 The West Kent LEADER Programme covers a rural area spanning Sevenoaks District, Tunbridge Wells Borough, Tonbridge & Malling Borough and a small part of rural Gravesham. The programme started in 2015 and is currently scheduled to finish at the end of December 2020.

1.2.2 It is administered by staff employed by Sevenoaks District Council, who act as the Accountable Body with each West Kent authority contributing to the costs of administration during the course of the programme (£5,000 per authority per annum).

1.2.3 Individual grant applications have been determined by a Local Action Group (LAG) for West Kent made up of representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors, including rural businesses and land owners.

1.2.4 In total, the programme had a budget of £1,794,000 over five years to allocate for project funding.

1.3 Programme Update

- 1.3.1 As of August 2020, a total of £1,793,723 had been committed for projects (99.98% of the budget). Overall, the programme received 109 Expressions of Interest. Of these, 54 were approved at the Full Application stage, but five of these were subsequently terminated or withdrawn.
- 1.3.2 To date, 39 projects have now completed, with 10 currently still live and yet to claim all of their grant allocation. In total, just under £215,000 (12% of the budget) is yet to be claimed. All of these live projects have had their claim dates extended in response to possible delays due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, the programme has still accepted other applications in the event of underspend in order to ensure that as much of the budget is used up as possible.

1.4 Programme Benefits to Tonbridge & Malling

- 1.4.1 As of August 2020, a total of 17 projects in Tonbridge & Malling had been allocated grant support through the West Kent LEADER Programme, equating to a total of £581,224. Of this funding, £506,538 has been spent, meaning just under £75,000 is yet to be claimed.
- 1.4.2 Table 1 illustrates the distribution of projects and funding across the West Kent Leader Programme area. The distribution across West Kent has broadly been very balanced, with Gravesham only having one project, reflecting the small area of the borough that the programme covers.

Area	No. of Projects Allocated Funding	% of Total	Amount of Funding Allocated	% of Total	Amount of Funding Spent	% of Total
Tonbridge & Malling	17	34.7%	£581,224	32.4%	£506,538	32.1%
Tunbridge Wells	13	26.5%	£592,333	33.0%	£592,333	37.5%
Sevenoaks	18	36.7%	£600,634	33.5%	£479,897	30.4%
Gravesham	1	2.1%	£19,532	0.1%	£0	0%
Total	49	100%	£1,793,723	100%	£1,578,768	100%

Table 1: Distribution of Project and Funding across West Kent

- 1.4.3 One further project in Tonbridge & Malling, seeking around £30,000 LEADER funding could also be included within this list should it get approved at the Full Application stage.

1.4.4 The types of rural businesses within the borough that have been supported through this programme are varied, but include:

- Distilleries
- Conference venues
- Village stores and cafes
- Stables
- Food producers
- Tourism and leisure businesses

1.5 Future Funding

1.5.1 In order to replace funding from the EU, the Government has pledged to set up a Shared Prosperity Fund to 'reduce inequalities between communities'. At the time of writing this report, Government is still tackling a number of fundamental issues that will need to be considered when setting up this fund, including:

- The priorities and objectives of the fund
- The amount of money allocated
- The method of allocating it between countries and regions of the UK
- The model by which funding is allocated
- Who administers the funds and the degree to which local authorities are involved.

1.5.2 As such at present it is unclear as to whether there will be funding allocated to another LEADER-type programme, or if funding will be prioritised elsewhere. Government will be publishing its consultation on the fund in due course, although no specific timescale has been given as to when this might happen.

1.6 Legal Implications

1.6.1 None

1.7 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.7.1 None

1.8 Risk Assessment

1.8.1 Not Applicable

Background papers:

None

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