

Item 06 - Leader Programme Closure Report

The attached report was considered by the Development & Conservation Advisory Committee on 4 October 2022. The relevant Minute extract is below.

Leader Programme Closure Report (4 October 2022, Minute 17)

The Leader Project Officer presented the report on the closure of the LEADER programme. The national programme was due to end this year, and the Council had been managing the closure of the West Kent program. The West Kent programme had been awarded £1.8 million, and had gained £2.7 million in match funding.

He advised the Committee that lessons learned from the LEADER programme would inform how future rural funding systems would be managed locally. This would involve a local-led decision making body drawn from the private, public, and the third sector, and a simple application process for smaller projects.

He then gave a presentation on some of the successfully funded projects.

In response to questions, the Strategic Head for Commercial and Property outlined the proposed application process for the future Rural England Prosperity Fund. He advised the Committee that although administration of the fund would be shared across West Kent, the funding the Council received would be ring-fenced for projects in the District.

He further outlined the scrutiny processes for the LEADER programme. All claims were conducted in stages, and evidence was required for each stage. A site visit was also conducted for each scheme to ensure funds were spent appropriately. The Committee discussed the ways in which the LEADER programme was publicised, and the importance of Local Action Groups in advertising and delivering grants.

Resolved: That

- a) the findings of the report and the on-going auditing requirements regarding post-payment monitoring and file retention, be noted;
- b) the 2014 LEADER programme's successful awarding of £1,812,550 of grant funding to rural businesses in West Kent, which in turn leveraged over £4.5m of investment into the sub-region's economy, be noted; and
- c) the Government's awarding of Rural England Prosperity Funding to Sevenoaks District Council, and the Council's plan to apply the good practices learnt from the LEADER Programme and build on its Legacy, be noted.