

2 December 2015

Economic Development Committee

Essex Rivers Rural LEADER Funding Programme

Report of: *Anne Knight, Economic Development Manager*

Wards Affected: *All*

This report is: *Public*

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the Essex Rivers Rural LEADER funding programme and the actions proposed to promote this to businesses and parishes within the Brentwood Borough.

2. Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That the Essex Rivers Rural LEADER funding programme is promoted to businesses and parishes within the LEADER area of the Borough using option 2 to encourage grant applications that will support the rural economy and services.**

3. Introduction and Background

- 3.1 The 2014 Brentwood Economic Development Strategy sets out a shared vision and framework to steer the interventions of Brentwood Borough Council and partner organisations to deliver optimum economic benefits to the Borough to 2030.
- 3.1.1 Business support and the rural economy are priority objectives of the Economic Development Strategy and initiatives that support business development, growth and improved productivity are a key part of this. They are also a priority for the Council's Corporate Plan and the South East Local Economic Partnership.
- 3.2 Following research by the Economic Development Manager on the rural funding arena and potential opportunities for Brentwood Borough, an Expression of Interest letter was submitted to the Rural Community Council for Essex in January 2014 to support them in their request to develop an Essex Rivers Local Action Group (LAG) to bid for EU LEADER funding.

- 3.3 The Essex Rivers LAG includes rural parts of Maldon and Chelmsford and the rural northern part of Brentwood borough including Ingatestone, Freyning, Mountnessing, Tippscross, Brizes and Doddinghurst, part of South Weald and part of Shenfield local authority areas (see separate flyer for map).
- 3.4 During June 2014, the Rural Community Council for Essex worked with partners over the summer to develop the bid which was submitted in September 2014.
- 3.5 During Spring 2015, DEFRA announced the bid was successful and a formal launch of the programme was held in October 2015. £1.8 million grant funding is now available for the Essex Rivers area until 2020 to support the following priorities:
- Support micro and small businesses and farm diversification
 - Boost rural tourism offer
 - Develop the market for added value local food and drink
 - Build on the area's high quality and diverse natural assets to promote visitor spend in the economy
 - Develop a clear identity for the rural assets of the area to attract visitors and investment
- 3.6 Projects must also be able to demonstrate that they are contributing to economic growth and/or job creation and provide match funding. The minimum grant is £10,000 and can provide up to 40% of a projects funding. The minimum total project value for any one project therefore needs to be £25,000. The maximum grant is £100,000.
- 3.7 Farmers, producers, foresters, rural businesses, rural communities, public, private and voluntary sector organisations who are legal entities in the LAG area or that will benefit the LAG area under one or more of the priorities can apply.
- 3.8 Potential applicants should contact Beverly Davies, Programme Manager on 01376 574330 or beverly.davies@essexrcc.org.uk to discuss initial project ideas and request an outline application form. If this is successful applicants will be asked to complete a full application form. An applicants handbook providing further advice and guidance can be found on the Essex Rivers website, www.essexrivers.co.uk

Programme Promotion

3.9 To ensure that the businesses and communities of Brentwood Borough maximise the potential benefits from this grant programme, it is recommended that we implement a range of actions to promote the programme and encourage project applications/development. The actions proposed include:

- Working with the Communications Team re: PR, social media, press
- Disseminating e-flyers via business directory/CRM
- Disseminating e-flyers to key business groups e.g. Brentwood Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses, business rural networks and forums
- Presentation to Parish Council meeting in Town Hall and dissemination of e-flyers
- Posters and flyers displayed in Town Hall and other public notice boards and meeting places
- Presenting at business and community meetings in the Brentwood parishes of the LAG.

3.10 On behalf of Brentwood Borough Council, the Economic Development Manager is a member of the Essex Rivers Local Action Group which will oversee and steer the overall Essex Rivers LEADER programme.

4. Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

There is a need to raise awareness of and promote the Essex Rivers LAG Rural LEADER programme and the grant opportunities available to support Brentwood's businesses and rural economy.

Option 1 – Do nothing

4.1 This is not a recommended option as it does not support the Council's priorities of Business Support and the Rural Economy and the economic benefits this brings. It would not raise awareness of the opportunities the programme offers and would limit the number of applications being submitted from Brentwood borough to benefit the rural economy and drive forward the ED Strategy.

Option 2 – Promote the programme within the Borough

4.2 This option will support the promotion of the programme via implementation of a number of actions as outlined at 3.8. It will raise

awareness of the grant opportunities this programme brings to benefit rural businesses and communities, encouraging applications to come forward.

5. Reasons for Recommendation

- 5.1 To promote the Essex Rivers LAG Rural LEADER programme to the businesses and communities in the LAG area of the borough to encourage grant applications to be submitted and projects to be implemented to support the Rural Economy and Business Development priorities of the ED Strategy. Option 2 is the preferred option as it provides a variety of approaches to support this agenda to a wider range number of target beneficiaries and works with a range of partners.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 The Economic Development Strategy successfully underwent public consultation and has been adopted. This included support for the Business Development and Rural Economy priorities.

7. References to Corporate Plan

- 7.1 Economic Development is a key priority to support the delivery of the Corporate Plan priorities of sustainable economic development, promoting a mixed economic base across the Borough, maximising opportunities for retail and a balanced night time economy. This includes:

- Facilitating the creation of new businesses
- Support for skills development
- Assisting in the provision of advice and guidance for local businesses
- Working in partnership with the business community and support agencies
- Seeking inward investment into the Borough
- Assisting the SE LEP and Heart of Essex Partnership to secure projects and funding to benefit the Brentwood Economy

8. Implications

Financial Implications

Name & Title: Chris Leslie, Finance Director

Tel & Email: 01277 312 542 christopher.leslie@brentwood.gov.uk

- 8.1 There are no budget implications for Brentwood Borough Council except for staff time. Promotion of the programme has the potential to support a number of rural economy projects bring investment into the Borough.

Legal Implications

Name & Title: Chris Potter, Monitoring Officer

Tel & Email: 01277 312 860 christopher.potter@brentwood.gov.uk

- 8.2 None

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

- 8.3 None

- 9. Background Papers** (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright)

- 9.1 None

- 10. Appendices to this report**

Appendix 1 – Programme promotional flyer and map

Report Author Contact Details:

Name: Anne Knight

Telephone: 01227 312607

E-mail: anne.knight@brentwood.gov.uk