



Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE)

For rural businesses and communities in South West England

Review of RDPE - South West Regional Implementation Plan 2007-2013

Background Paper – March 2010

Purpose

The RDPE provides a major opportunity to focus on protecting and enhancing the region's natural environment and ensuring the long-term sustainability of our rural communities and businesses. The detailed aims and objectives are set out in the Regional Implementation Plan (RIP), which was formally approved in 2008. 2010 is therefore, in effect, the third year of a six-year programme which runs until December 2013.

The South West RDPE Regional Implementation Group¹ has commissioned a workshop to begin to review progress to date towards the objectives and principles established in the Regional Implementation Plan, and check that these objectives remain current three years after the Plan was drafted. The workshop will take place on 20th April, with an invitation list drawn from key partners and stakeholders.

This paper aims to provide a stimulus for discussion and debate. It is being circulated more widely than the invitees in order to give a larger number of those people involved in or benefitting from RDPE the opportunity to add their comments. It aims to get us to think how well the region is, or is not, delivering the RDPE against its original objectives as set out in the Regional Implementation Plan and what are the lessons to be learnt to inform the remainder of the Programme?

This is not a formal mid-term evaluation but an attempt at stepping back and assessing whether the programmes and activities that have been designed are having the desired effect, bearing in mind that we are still in the early stages of delivery. Are they successful in tackling the underlying problems or have the underlying problems changed? However, any messages arising from this discussion paper and the workshop will help to set the context for a more formal mid-term evaluation planned for later in 2010.

The overall aim of this paper and the subsequent workshop is therefore is to give the opportunity to:

- Assess whether delivery is addressing the RIP principles and priorities
- Review whether the RIP priorities are still the right ones, and
- Allow partners and stakeholders to voice their views and make suggestions for improvements.

To respond to the questions set out later in this paper, please email your comments, to arrive no later than 13 April, to RDPEworkshop@sectormarketing.co.uk

¹ Chaired by GOSW, members include Natural England, Forestry Commission, South West RDA, Environment Agency, and representatives of Convergence and Competitiveness PMCs





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Principles and priorities

The Regional Implementation Plan sets out the following priorities and principles:

Overarching principles

- Achieving sustainable development in rural areas through the integration of environmental, social and economic objectives
- Respecting the limits of the region's environment, natural resources and biodiversity
- Maintaining and enhancing the natural asset base of the region
- Working towards a low carbon economy
- Supporting the region's efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change
- Supporting sustainable growth in the rural economy
- Promoting sustainable communities through encouraging local and integrated solutions
- Meeting the needs of a diverse rural population and ensure equality of opportunity, and
- Exploiting and encourage the benefits of links between rural areas and urban centres.

Programme principles

- Promoting activities that encourage innovation
- Minimising the bureaucratic burden for project applicants, and
- Maximising the integration of funding streams to deliver relevant support across the region.

Priorities for the Region

- Improving business efficiency and enabling business transformation
- Developing the supply chain and adding value
- Managing resources efficiently
- Making the most of our rural environment
- Enhancing landscapes and biodiversity, and
- Developing and maintaining strong and inclusive rural communities.



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Progress - what we have achieved

Natural England

Natural England administers the Environmental Stewardship programme under Axis 2 of the RDPE. Environmental Stewardship has ensured that thousands of farmers and land managers have the funding and advice available to help them undertake work to conserve and improve the countryside – delivering environmental benefits throughout England.

Funding and advice through Environmental Stewardship is helping land managers to conserve, enhance and promote the countryside by:

- Looking after wildlife, species and their many habitats
- Ensuring land is well managed and retains its traditional character
- Protecting historic features and natural resources
- Ensuring traditional livestock and crops are conserved, and
- Providing opportunities for people to visit and learn about the countryside.

In the South West annual expenditure (2009 - 2010) to support existing schemes is £87 million, with a budget of £11.2 million for new schemes this year. We are currently on target to deliver approximately £9 million of commitment for new agreements (a three times increase from previous years). Through promotional and partnership working we have developed a growing demand for high quality schemes able to deliver a range of outcomes.

Delivery is fundamentally through two mechanisms (with amendments for organic and uplands).

Entry Level Stewardship (ELS)

With well over 50% of England's agricultural land now in Entry Level Stewardship, this is the basic underlying scheme open to all farmers and land managers in England. It provides a straightforward approach to delivering simple and effective environmental management across the whole farm that complements existing farming operations, and allows landowners to create their own practical environmental management programme. ELS agreements are for five years.

Higher Level Stewardship (HLS)

HLS is designed to build upon the Entry Levels of Environmental Stewardship, providing the opportunity to develop a comprehensive agreement that achieves a wide range of environmental benefits through more detailed management over a longer period of time. HLS agreements last 10 years.

Examples of success include;

- 550 + km of hedges restored or created
- 100 + km of new permissive footpaths have been created
- 69 traditional orchards have been restored
- 1700+ skylark plots have been created through ELS & HLS, and
- 5000 Ha of heathland restored.





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Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission administers the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) under Axis 2 of the RDPE, Improving the environment and the countryside. This is a nationally delivered programme with some discretion for regional targeting and rates.

The approximate annual spend is £7.5 million and this is focused primarily on establishing new woodlands and the better management for public benefit of existing woods. In the calendar years 2007 and 2008 (2009 data not yet available) some 940ha of new woodland were planted and 34,000ha managed. Approximately 4,500ha of woodland have been improved for biodiversity and 1,300ha improved for public access.

The grants have been adjusted, and eligibility extended, to assist with the removal of rhododendron, a host of the Phytophthora tree disease. This Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) has been focused initially on Cornwall and recently extended into Devon. The intervention rate is now 80%. WIGs for Ancient Woodlands have been extended across the region at an 80% intervention rate.

Linkage to Axis 1, particularly woodfuel investments, is made between the Forestry Commission and Woodland Renaissance.

Grant budgets are substantially committed though there is a lag between offer and claim. Looking forward, it is likely that the WIG will be extended further to help combat the damage to ancient woodlands threatened by Phytophthora. We are working closely with Natural England to tackle rhododendron on farmland through Environmental Stewardship. The Forestry Commission is also considering a revised additional contribution payment to encourage the replacement of productive woodlands lost to open habitat creation or the restoration of planted ancient woodland sites.





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South West RDA

South West RDA is responsible for 20% of the region's RDPE funding, to be spent on activities under three Axes:

- Axis 1 – Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors
- Axis 3 – Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of the rural economy, and
- Axis 4 – Community-led Development – the Leader approach.

Overview

All the main elements of the programme are now in place or in the final stages of approval following extensive consultation with stakeholder groups. Over 50% of the RDPE allocation of £157 million is committed to approved projects, and this is expected to rise to over 65% early in the new financial year as other commissioned projects under consideration come forward for decision. More than 75 direct applications from businesses have been approved, and new proposals continue to arrive at a rate of 10-12 per month.

Expenditure for 2009 - 2010 is planned to be £10 million. This is planned to rise to £27 million in 2010 - 2011 and remain at or above £30 million per year for the remainder of the programme.

Progress against the relevant investment themes is set out in more detail below.

Business Support

A full range of targeted support for rural businesses is in place, including Information, Diagnostic and Brokerage (IDB) services from Business Link and more specialist advice on RDPE at county level and for the forestry sector.

A £1 million-plus project offering advice on Bovine TB has been approved. A further £9 million-plus of projects addressing other animal health and welfare issues are under consideration.

Over £4 million RDPE investment has been allocated to 33 approved business-led projects.

Community and Social Enterprise

A facilitation and support service to develop projects that will improve access to rural services has been approved, as have the first three grants to community and social enterprises.

Community Led Development

15 Local Action Groups have been established, with a lifetime allocation of £33 million in total. All have completed and agreed their operating systems and their delivery plans for 2010. LAGs have between them approved nearly 300 projects, with a total RDPE investment of around £4.8 million.





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Resource Management

A £5.8 million advice programme to assist farmers improve their profitability through better management of resources was launched in October 2009, delivered by Natural England and Business Link. This is complimented by a £10 million small capital grant scheme, which is processing its first claims for completed projects.

Skills Development

The successful Vocational Training Scheme is nearing completion, to be superseded in summer 2010 by a new skills programme meeting the objectives of the RDPE Regional Skills Framework.

Supply Chain and Adding Value

Over £11 million of RDPE investment has been allocated to 27 approved business-led projects, including a £5.7 million investment in the expansion of a dairy business in Cornwall.

Project officers to support the livestock sector in the three uplands areas have been appointed.

Sustainable Rural Tourism

Six region-wide strategic projects have been selected. Four have been fully approved, one partly approved and the remaining one is under consideration.





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Key Questions

The workshop will be focused around the following key questions. Any written responses to these questions received by 13th April will be fed into the discussion.

1. Are we delivering and achieving against the RIP principles and priorities?

The Overarching Principles, Programme Principles and Priorities listed above should be addressed under the following headings:

1.1 Strong, sustainable, diverse rural communities.

- Promoting sustainable communities through encouraging local and integrated solutions
- Meeting the needs of a diverse rural population and ensure equality of opportunity
- Developing and maintaining strong and inclusive rural communities, and
- Exploiting and encourage the benefits of links between rural areas and urban centres.

1.2 Business Efficiency and Sustainable Economic Growth.

- Supporting sustainable growth in the rural economy
- Improving business efficiency and enabling business transformation, and
- Developing the supply chain and adding value.

1.3 The Rural Environment and Landscape, Biodiversity and the Natural Asset Base.

- Respecting the limits of the region's environment, natural resources and biodiversity
- Maintaining and enhancing the natural asset base of the region
- Making the most of our rural environment, and
- Enhancing landscapes and biodiversity.

1.4 Resource efficiency, Climate change and a low carbon economy.

- Managing resources efficiently
- Working towards a low carbon economy, and
- Supporting the region's efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change.



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1.5 Integration, Innovation and Processes.

- Achieving sustainable development in rural areas through the integration of environmental, social and economic objectives
- Promoting activities that encourage innovation
- Minimizing the bureaucratic burden for applicants, and
- Maximising the integration of funding streams to deliver relevant support across the region.

2. Have issues facing Rural areas changed since the RIP was drawn up?

If yes, which aspects and with what consequences for RDPE?

Could there be changes in the emphasis of the Programme as a result?

If some areas receive an increased emphasis, which others should be scaled back?

Are there other eligible activities that could be considered under the programme? Or, other activities that are not currently included within the scope of the programme where a request to alter the programme documents might be appropriate?

In considering these issues, please bear in mind that policy is still developing in some areas. For example:

- Broadband provision is not currently eligible under mainstream RDPE, although some pilot projects are under consideration for support through additional funds from the European Economic Recovery Programme. Activity in this area will need to be consistent with the wider Digital Britain agenda.
- New funding for the generation of renewable electricity has recently been announced (Feed In Tariffs or FITs) – any RDPE investment would have to be consistent with this.

Contact us:

Please submit your responses to these questions to

RDPEworkshop@sectormarketing.co.uk to arrive no later than 13 April.

