

# Rural Development Programme is launched in South West

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The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) will be formally launched on Monday (4 February) in the South West by the South West of England Regional Development Agency, Natural England and the Forestry Commission.

The programme will provide financial support for a wide range of activities in rural areas including environmental stewardship, skills development, farming and forestry diversification, resource management, renewable energy supply chains and community-led development.

The RDPE is a seven-year programme, worth £3.9 billion nationally, and jointly funded by the EU and national Government. It aims to safeguard and enhance our rural environment and foster competitive and sustainable businesses and thriving rural communities.

The RDPE has three priorities for rural development:

1. Improving competitiveness of the agriculture and forestry sectors
2. Improving the environment and the countryside
3. Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification of economic activity

The RDPE priority for improving the environment and the countryside is being delivered by the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme and Natural England's Environmental Stewardship Scheme

In this region, the South West of England Regional Development Agency (RDA) will deliver priorities 1 and 3 with a budget of £156.8 million over the seven years. The RDA is also responsible for ensuring that five per cent of the RDPE funding is spent on enabling community involvement in rural development.

The delivery partners in the South West aim to ensure that investment in each of the three priorities will help support investment in the others.

The South West prospectus, available from the RDA on Monday, sets out the support that will be available to rural businesses and communities as part of the RDPE in the region.

RDPE funding will be available in two ways:

- Rural groups, organisations and businesses will be able to access the Programme through a Rural Development Gateway ([www.sw-ruralgateway.info](http://www.sw-ruralgateway.info)), which will offer business support and help with development of projects; and
- The South West RDA will commission larger, strategy-driven projects.

The aims, objectives and priorities were agreed for the socio-economic investments with regional partners and these are set out in the Regional Implementation Plan.

On this basis of a thorough analysis of South West England's rural characteristics and economy, the Plan sets out eight themes in which funds will be spent:

Skills development

Social enterprise

Business support

Supply chain and adding value

Resource management (soil, water, energy, waste)

Sustainable rural tourism

Biodiversity and landscape

Community-led development

The identification of these themes has led the RDA to take a proactive approach to project development under the new programme by commissioning projects and working with groups of key businesses and/or community partners to develop projects.

RDA Board member Sir Harry Studholme said: "In developing this approach, we engaged in extensive consultation with other organisations to develop a clear picture of the needs and priorities for the region and for sub-regional areas.

"We want this funding to deliver multiple outcomes and leave a legacy beyond the life of the new Programme."

Ben Bradshaw, Minister for the South West, said: "The SW region is set to benefit from the biggest share of funding from the new Rural Development Programme for England.

"What is really special is the way in which partners are working together to help protect and enhance the region's natural environment and ensure the long-term sustainability of our rural communities and businesses".

Monday also will also see the RDA announce the start of the £170 million European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Competitiveness Programme which covers the whole of South West England - excluding Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly - and replaces the old Objectives 2 and 3 programmes.

## **Ends**

### **Notes to editors:**

Further more information on the RDPE and the schemes see [www.sw-ruralgateway.info](http://www.sw-ruralgateway.info).

1. The South West RDA leads the development of a sustainable economy, investing to unlock the region's business potential. It works in partnership with public and private sector organisations and takes a long term view. It aims to drive up the region's productivity by giving people the skills they need, encouraging enterprise, improving infrastructure, regenerating places and promoting the strengths of the region. For more information see [www.southwestrda.org.uk](http://www.southwestrda.org.uk)

2. Natural England works for people, places and nature to conserve and enhance biodiversity, landscapes and wildlife in rural, urban, coastal and marine areas. We conserve and enhance the natural environment for its

intrinsic value, the wellbeing and enjoyment of people, and the economic prosperity it brings. For more information see [Natural England](#).

3. Environmental Stewardship (ES) was launched in 2005, builds on the very best practice already evident in British farming. During the period 2007-13 the national budget for ES will be £2.9 billion. The objectives of ES are to:

- Conserve wildlife (biodiversity).
- Maintain and enhance landscape quality and character.
- Protect the historic environment and natural resources.
- Promote public access and understanding of the countryside.
- Natural resource protection.

4. The Forestry Commission is the government department responsible for forestry in Great Britain. It supports woodland owners with grants, tree felling licences, regulation and advice; promotes the benefits of forests and forestry; and advises Government on forestry policy. For further information, visit [www.forestry.gov.uk/england-swe](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-swe)

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