

**Submission by the Welsh Development Agency to the
Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee meeting
on 19 January 2006**

Rural Development Plan 2007 – 2013, Axes 3 and 4

INTRODUCTION

1. The Welsh Development Agency (WDA) is pleased to be invited to attend the Committee meeting on 19 January 2006 at which there is to be a discussion on the implications for Wales of the Rural Development Plan 2007–2013, with specific regard to Axes 3 and 4.
2. This paper is intended to provide some background information for Members and draws on the experience of the WDA in facilitating the delivery of a number of rural community programmes on behalf of the Assembly in Wales, including the current LEADER+ programme and Article 33 of the current Rural Development Regulations.

BACKGROUND

3. The challenges facing rural areas are many and varied and have been brought about by a combination of factors including the decline of traditional industries, a dispersed and ageing population and the decline of local services and community facilities. Diversification of the economic base of rural areas to provide quality job opportunities remains a key challenge, as does the provision of accessible services.
4. Rural communities have a vital role in economic development and spreading prosperity across Wales. They are supported by mainstream programmes that assist business, promote inward investment and facilitate community regeneration.

5. In addition, there are specific initiatives designed to support rural areas including LEADER+, Rural Community Action and Article 33, which the Agency facilitates on behalf of the EPC **Department** of the Welsh Assembly Government.
6. These, and other, programmes have an important part to play in terms of:
 - helping local communities identify the challenges they face and the opportunities they have to surmount them
 - creating a platform for further economic, social and environmental development, and
 - piloting new and innovative approaches to rural development

WDA ROLE

7. **The Rural Unit of the WDA was established as part of the merger of the Development Board for Rural Wales with the WDA in 1998. The Unit is responsible for a wide range of activities covering policy and strategy development (both internal to WDA and working with others) as well as facilitation of rural programmes.**
8. The Rural Unit Department facilitates and manages the rural programmes on behalf of EPC of the Assembly who provide ring fenced budget for the programmes. The WDA does not deliver these programmes; that is done by a number of Partnerships throughout Rural Wales.
9. The main functions of WDA relating to the programmes are as follows:
 - co-ordination of strategy for the delivery of each programme and across the programmes
 - financial allocation and budget control

- monitoring and evaluation (with a new performance monitoring framework being developed)
- networking and technical assistance
- sharing best practice and looking for opportunities to mainstream
- work with local delivery partnerships
- liaison with Assembly, WEFO and others

LEADER+

10. LEADER+ is currently one of the Commissions' four Community Initiatives but under the new arrangements post 2006, LEADER will become part of the Rural Development Plan. The aim of the current programme is to pilot innovative approaches to rural development which will contribute to a more sustainable society, economy and environment for Rural Wales.

11. The objectives of the Welsh LEADER+ Programme are:

- to test new approaches to rural development
- to build the capacity of target groups, communities and businesses and encourage their involvement in the development of their localities
- to secure the sustainability of successful pilot projects by integrating into mainstream programmes and transferring the approach to new areas
- to learn from other rural areas and participate in joint activities where appropriate.

12. The LEADER+ programme is delivered by seven Local Action Groups (LAGs) who represent the local community. They are:
- PLANED (Pembrokeshire)
 - Adventa (Monmouthshire)
 - Glasu (Powys)
 - Northern Marches Cymru (rural Wrexham)
 - Cadwyn Clwyd (rural Flintshire and Denbighshire)
 - Menter Mon (Anglesey)
 - Rural Conwy
13. As required by the Commission, each of the LAGs focuses on a particular theme within the Programme for delivery of their local action plans (Action 1). The themes are:
- improving the quality of life in rural communities
 - adding value to local products
 - making the best use of natural and cultural resources
14. Whilst the bulk of the programme budget is allocated to Action 1 activities, the groups are also encouraged to take part in Action 2 activities which support co-operation between rural areas either within Wales, the UK or in other EU Countries.
15. Projects valued at almost £20 million are being supported via the current LEADER+ programme in Wales, with some £7m from the Assembly, £9 million from Europe and the remainder from other public and private sector sources.
16. By the end of the programme in 2008 it is forecast that the capacity of many rural communities will have developed partnership working, will be established, as well as:

- over 120 new products and processes will be piloted
- over 60 jobs will be created
- over 60 jobs will be safeguarded

17. Examples of projects currently being delivered via the LEADER+ programme in Wales include:

- Mona Bauhaus (Menter Mon) – project which harnesses local resources, sponsors design workshops and supports the development of prototypes. Bauhaus identifies differentiating factors of the area which lead to a unique and unifying identity
- Plugging the Leaks (PLANED) – this is a community-led economic development strategy tool developed by the New Economics Foundation. Workshops are held which assist local communities to identify the economic resources in their local economy and determine ways to use them more effectively. The outcomes from the workshops form the basis for multiple community agreed projects where true local economic growth is key.
- New Harvest (Glasu) – aims to add value to the local food produce of Powys through the testing of innovative ideas relating to producing, processing and distributing food products in the Glasu LEADER+ area. It also encourages and develops the capacity of producers involved in food processing and manufacturing. Glasu will act as a laboratory resource in facilitating trials and research and by providing assistance to food producers and processors.
- Growing Green Tourism (Cadwyn Clwyd) – promoting the environmental aspects and distinctiveness of the Clwydian Range, developing a “green cluster” of communities and businesses piloting new and innovative approaches to environmentally sound practices.

- Village Hall Strategy (Northern Marches Cymru) – building on a RCA funded community needs analysis, this project has audited community facilities in Wrexham and is funding actions to make these facilities more sustainable, including looking at the potential of income generation.

ARTICLE 33 OF THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

18. Article 33 provides project funding to support projects in the rural areas of Flintshire, Wrexham, Monmouthshire, the Vale of Glamorgan and parts of Powys.
19. The programme supports projects in the following categories:
 - basic services for the rural economy and population
 - renovation and development of villages and protection and conservation of the rural heritage
 - encouragement for tourist and craft activities
20. The current programme ends in October 2006. Funding is provided to Community Partnerships to implement projects which are contained within an Action Plan submitted for consideration. A budget of £8.7 million is available over the period 2000–2006, with additional match funding of some £3 million being secured to date for over 150 projects.
21. Examples of projects currently being delivered via the Article 33 measures in Wales include:
 - Babbington Meadow, Monmouth – provision of outdoor play area facility for young children within the local community
 - Cowbridge Physic Garden, Vale of Glamorgan – restoration and recreation of an 18th Century garden.

- Sustainable Village Enhancement Scheme – project aims to improve the impact of villages/settlements with regard to enhancing the level and range of local population’s facilities and to support the local economy by encouraging local tourism in terms of longer stays and increased tourist volume. Partnership, including youth and community involvement in design is important to the ethos of the projects included. Areas are identified through local community forums, community councils and other representative groups.
- Open Churches Network Pilgrim Trail (Wrexham) – to link a network of 16 rural churches (brought together via a LEADER+ project) in a joint marketing project to publicise the network to tourists, bringing them into rural areas.
- Flinthire Wheels to Work – to provide scooters and associated equipment to enable young people living in rural Flintshire to access employment opportunities.
- Erlas Walled Garden (Wrexham) – to renovate Victorian glasshouse, walled garden and outbuildings to provide a facility to enable the sale of produce and crafts to the public. This builds on the original ESF funded project to provide accredited training and work experience in horticulture to people with learning difficulties.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

22. The WDA, working with the various Partnerships, the Assembly and WEFO is developing a performance monitoring framework for the rural programmes in Wales. It must be recognised that the value of such programmes cannot adequately be captured by quantitative measures alone. There is also a need for qualitative assessments of these programmes to be made.
23. An independent evaluation of the rural programmes has also been commissioned which is due to report next month. It is

intended that the findings of that report feed into the development of the next Rural Development Plan for Wales.

CONCLUSION

24. LEADER+ and Article 33 provide valuable support alongside Rural Community Action and other programmes to assist in the development and delivery of community led project in rural areas. Such measures are important to assist in the broader regeneration of rural communities in an integrated manner encompassing economic, environmental and social objectives.
25. Whilst the Rural Development Regulations largely provide support for the land based industries, the LEADER+ and Article 33 measures allow for support to be provided to assist with broader rural regeneration outside of the agriculture and land based sectors.
26. WDA look forward to meeting with the Committee to discuss the future implications for Wales of the Rural Development Plan

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