Lancashire West
Local Development Strategy

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The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas

LEADER

Lancashire County Council

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1. Introduction

The new Lancashire West Local Action Group (LAG) is based upon a coherent economic area, utilising a slightly different footprint to the previous Lancashire West LAG. The rationale for the change is based upon the socio economic make up and coherence of the area and the commonalities within the farming / horticultural sectors and coastal relationships. For example, three of the Districts that make up the LAG area have above average rural populations compared to the rest of Lancashire and all have borders with the Irish Sea.

The new area has been proposed following an extensive consultation exercise with over 300 businesses, organisations and individuals. The LAG area consists of the Lancashire Districts of Fylde, Wyre (part), Preston and West Lancashire and the total population is 95,533. Within this LAG area are the two market towns of Kirkham and Ormskirk.

The Lancashire West LAG is seeking £1,970,000 of resource to deliver the LEADER programme based upon our understanding of the area and its ability to create jobs and sustained growth. The allocation requested is the optimum level to be able to make a significant impact upon the local economy and allow for flexibility in delivering a combination of large and small projects in order to address a range of local economic issues. The priorities for delivery are based upon the LEADER methodology of a bottom up approach and by utilising the information gathered during consultation we have been able to identify the particular needs / priorities of the Lancashire West area within the framework of DEFRAs six themes. This is supported by independent economic research.

We have analysed data from the previous programme including processes, procedures, performance and marketing to identify areas of strength and those for development.

The proposed budget is based upon the maximum level of funding available as indicated by Defra which will optimise the impact of LEADER funding.

- Total - £1,970,000
- Direct to business / organisation grants – £1,674,500
- Management and animation – £295,500

The proposed outputs will be:

- 62 jobs created
- 89 jobs safeguarded
- £4 million total investment
- £2 million increase in GVA
- Minimum of 50 projects supported (Our proposed outputs are based upon experience of delivery of the previous Lancashire LEADER Local Action Groups and programme evaluation).

The Strategy has been produced by the Economic Development Service, Lancashire County Council, on behalf of local partners.

2. Geographic and Economic Context

The Lancashire West Local Action Group area contains the rural populations and businesses of the Lancashire Districts of Fylde, Wyre (part), West Lancashire and Preston. The rationale for the LAG is due to the high quality agricultural land that is common across the area, proximity to the coast and similarities in terms of economic profile. It encompasses the Lancashire and Amounderness Plain National Character Area.

The Lancashire West LAG area is distinguished by its diverse rural and coastal environment. It is predominantly rural with the main population centres primarily market and coastal towns, as well as smaller villages and hamlets. The rural population exceeds 95,000 and over 37,000 hectares of land in the area is designated Green Belt, predominantly in West Lancashire.

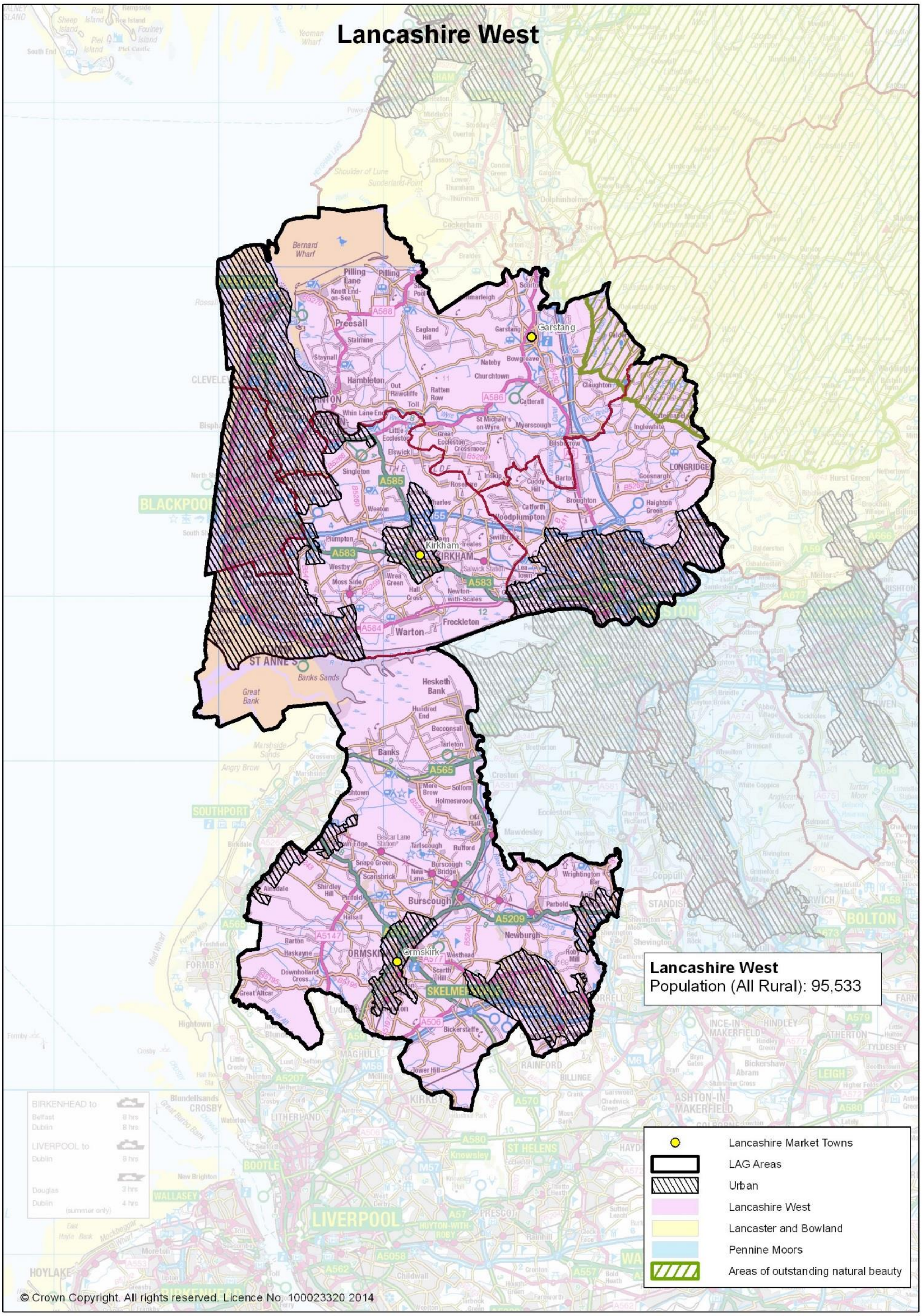
The LAG area has a large amount of top-grade farmland that supports intensive arable cropping and an important horticulture sector. Much of the agricultural land in the area is classified under Grade 1, 2 and 3, capable of growing a wide range of crops. This higher quality land in Fylde, West Lancashire and Wyre together represents the largest concentration of top quality farmland in Lancashire. Woodland cover in the Lancashire West area is 2,544ha is significantly lower than the Lancashire average hence the rationale for a relatively small allocation to the forestry theme.

The LAG areas economy is rooted in the traditionally strong sectors of agriculture, tourism and rural businesses as well as manufacturing and key service sectors. The high quality agricultural land and farming activity supports a large food and drink production sector, with a cluster of related services including food processing, packaging and freight and a supply chain for larger food manufacturers. The attractive rural and coastal environment provides the catalyst for a significant Visitor Economy, capitalising on strong tourism and cultural heritage assets. Service sectors are also key to the success of the local economy, with business services and property sectors particularly prominent in the area.

The business base is dominated by small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs), in particular micro enterprise with fewer than four employees, although West Lancashire has a higher concentration of larger businesses, and offers the opportunity for sustaining and diversifying the economy in the rural LAG area. The area has a higher density of working age population residents than other parts of Lancashire. However, overall employment rates tend to be at the national average across the area (about 93%) but in Wyre and West Lancashire especially these fall below the national average. The highest concentration of residents with low skills are in the rural areas of Wyre and West Lancashire which correlates with low income levels. However, Wyre, West Lancashire and Fylde's rural residents have, on average, higher than Lancashire's average earnings which reflects the higher number of residents working in other areas and living in Lancashire West.

The high number of self-employed may manifest itself in more demand for business start-up and enterprise support. In addition there will be a number of opportunities based around Liverpool's Super port in the Southern end of the LAG area and as well as links to developments on the Fylde Coast (Visitor Economy and Manufacturing) and Lancaster (knowledge related) to the North. As a result joint working with other LAGs such as in Merseyside will be important.

Clearly, the LAG areas has number of strengths and opportunities that can be exploited to generate economic and employment growth. In turn this will seek to address the challenges that undoubtedly exist. The SWOT analysis contained in the Strategy provides more detail on the specific issues to be addressed.



Lancashire West
Lancashire West
Population (All Rural): 95,533
Lancashire Market Towns
LAG Areas
Urban
Lancashire West
Lancaster and Bowland
Pennine Moors
Areas of outstanding natural beauty
Garstang
Kirkham
Ormskirk
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3. Priorities for Activity

3.1 Alignment with LEP activity

The draft Lancashire Rural Growth Strategy identified key opportunities for rural growth and prioritises them in the context of the Lancashire Growth Plan. It will provide the overall context for LEADER and will influence the direction of the Lancashire European Structural and Investment Funds including the LEP indicative allocation of EAFRD resources.

The European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) Strategy prepared by the LEP for prioritising activity and investment has been drafted as a basis for negotiations with Government. The strategy is required to be based upon the themes of the Common Strategic Framework and support the national Growth Programme. The Strategy has been drafted to support the objectives of the LEP's Growth Plan and sets out the LEP's key aims and objectives for funding over the period. It will provide investment to deliver key activities as part of an integrated approach to developing Lancashire's economic potential.

Lancashire's priorities for European Structural and Investment Funds are set out as 6 key themes:

- Investing in strategic infrastructure, development and environmental resilience
- Boosting business growth and innovation
- Promoting growth sectors and supply chains
- Encouraging inward investment and marketing
- Driving the skills for growth
- Creating opportunities for disadvantaged communities/groups.

Rural Lancashire hosts a number of indigenous features which will help maintain current activity and support further sustainable growth. Priorities for growth in rural Lancashire link across the LEP Growth and ESIF Programme, the Rural Growth Strategy and LEADER. It is intended that projects and activities will be commissioned strategically and will be mutually supporting to maximise the total potential investment available across the full range of funding streams.

Sector Development

Sector Development	**LEP Growth Programme/ESI Priorities**	**Rural Growth Strategy Priorities**	**LEADER Priorities**
Food and Drink			
	Promoting growth sectors and supply chains	Focus on food clusters and key markets	Supporting and growing local food producers and food networks
		Growing food exports	Supporting diversification Supporting high quality products and local provenance
	Smart specialisation	Agri-tech smart specialisation	Supporting technology to increase primary production Supporting precision farming
Visitor Economy			
	Increasing productivity and value. Attractions, accommodation and infrastructure. Key priorities being identified by Marketing Lancashire	Marketing Lancashire Key rural and cross cutting visitor economy priorities	Supporting diversification Supporting rural tourism Support for cultural and heritage activity

Meeting Business Needs

Business Need	LEP Growth Programme/ESI Priorities	Rural Growth Strategy Priorities	LEADER Priorities
Skills Development and Business Support			
	Lancashire Boost	Based on Boost, identified tailored rural support	Not directly eligible but led by other programmes, and linked where relevant to LEADER Enterprise and Rural Services priorities
		Roll out of virtual business support network following Wyre example	Not all activity directly eligible, but led by other programmes and linked where relevant to LEADER Enterprise and Rural Services priorities. Sustaining Lancashire Farmer Networks (if eligible).
	Superfast Broad Band business support services	Specific support for rural areas aligned with Lancashire's Strategic Framework for Digital Inclusion	Not directly eligible, but led by other programmes and linked where relevant to LEADER Enterprise and Rural Services priorities
Premises and Sites for Employment			
	Strategic sites for employment	Establish viability of rural business hubs to support business needs	Incubator premises for new start businesses if need and viability established.
Natural Capital, Land Management and Building Natural Resilience			
	Energy and Environment	Land management to build resilience. Management of energy resources	Land management schemes Support forestry businesses and forestry management schemes

In seeking to commission activity at a Lancashire level, the LEP will work to complement activity undertaken by LEADER and in particular, undertake more strategic activity with pan Lancashire significance.

3.2 SWOT Analysis

During the consultation events and the focus groups a number of local issues were identified, which resulted in the following SWOT analysis:

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Enterprise: - Proximity to urban centres, established and growing business support, high levels of business presence including major, high quality brands, entrepreneurial culture and high self-sufficiency, good transport links M6/M58/M61/M65, strong manufacturing sector, Edge Hill University Farming: - Class 1 agricultural land, strong food chain links established, Centres of Excellent close by (Myerscough College) Tourism: - Good transport links to tourism attractions and accommodation, coastal plain (good for cycling and accessible walks due to flatness), quality attractions including Rufford Old Hall and Martin Mere Wetland Centre Forestry:- Woodland apprenticeship scheme, Myerscough College courses Rural Services:- strong voluntary/community sector representation based upon local need, experience of delivering financial outreach support to isolated rural communities Culture & heritage: - Lancashire has strong traditions and heritage, particularly with the canals/waterways & industrial heritage	Enterprise: Unable to attract younger workforce due to poor transport access in some rural areas, access to finance for business expansion access to business support and advice, access to training advice. Farming: - Reliance on migrant workers and Seasonality Tourism: - Seasonality, few high profile tourism attractions, lack of quality accommodation in certain areas, lack of promotion and brand awareness, poor signage from train stations to cycle/walkways, lack of quality serviced accommodation near Edge Hill university Forestry: - Limited forestry offer, fragmented farm woodland largely untapped and unrecognised woodland resource Rural Services: - Isolation as a result of service reductions and lack of support for alternatives Culture & heritage: - Brand awareness outside of Lancashire and adjacent areas of Merseyside and Greater Manchester
Opportunities	**Threats**
Enterprise: - Start-up companies and expansion of existing small enterprises, proximity to Liverpool Superport and Lancashire Enterprise Zone, Improved access to funding (small grants and loans), fully utilise existing capacity in area and in Lancashire (Edge Hill University) Farming: - Local food and drink linked to export opportunities and enhanced supply chains, support for renewable energy and protection of local natural capital and resources, Farmer Networks Tourism: - To enhance the tourism offer in terms of quality and provision, links to other Visitor Deistinantions locally, number of longer distance footpaths and good cycling routes Forestry: - 70.5% un-managed woodland resource – 1.793ha – so although low cover over 70% not managed, which is a real opportunity, crossover of transferable skills, non-timber opportunities of woodland Rural Services: - Support service delivery through support for local initiatives and enterprises (Links to Local Impact Fund to be supported through ESF) Culture & heritage: - Build upon existing heritage and sporting attraction e.g. golf, Ribble Coast and Wetlands	Enterprise: - Access to finance, business support & marketing Farming: - Foreign imports, Feed / fuel / energy prices, reduction in agricultural land quality Tourism: - Other areas have a stronger marketing pull, level of funding a business can access, spoiling the countryside Forestry: - Lack of management, lack of opportunity to bring unmanaged woodlands back into play, poor funding for apprenticeship scheme, tree disease Rural services: - Might not be economically viable to take over the provision of services previously funded via local government due to economies of scale Culture and heritage: - Not taking advantage of the opportunities presented

3.3 Local priorities for intervention & associated outputs

Although the consultation events provided an excellent opportunity to engage with all sectors and identify issues which are relevant to the rural areas of Lancashire we felt that further sector specific engagement was required to enable us to determine specific priorities that we are able to fund in the new programme. The main consultation events highlighted a number of issues and market failures which could not be addressed by LEADER but potentially could be addressed by other funding streams. Based upon the evidence acquired using this bottom up approach we suggest the following 9local outputs in italics):

Themes	Sector Consultation Summary	Lancashire West Priorities	Local outputs based on local evidence
Support for increasing farm productivity			**30% of total budget £502,350**
Measure 4: Investments in physical assets Measure 6: farm and business productivity	Much of the discussion focused around training, in particular ICT, broadband and marketing including social media. Support for networking was identified as an important area for sharing ideas, including knowledge transfer. We will explore farmer networks as part of our cooperation activity by looking at other more experienced networks to learn from best practice	• **Investment in technology to increase primary production –** *including support for precision farming and supply chains* • **Adding value to produce –** *based upon locally based production to reduce supply chains lengths and improve energy efficiency* • **Projects which seek to reduce the business impact on the environment / reduce energy consumption –** *need to ensure that we do not duplicate what is already in existence. Focus should be on supporting activity that is not already being funded and complementing other activity e.g. ESIF supported interventions* • **Projects creating jobs or increasing productivity –** previous experience and local consultation indicated a focus on maintaining and enhancing productivity to be the most important priority therefore the cost per job will be higher than it is for other themes. • **Investments in crop storage** – to improve the quality of the product e.g. specialised storage, insulation, ventilation, refrigeration.	10 projects supported (based on an average of £50k per project) *11 Holdings benefitting* *11 businesses benefitting* *22 individuals benefitting* 12 jobs created *20 jobs safeguarded*
Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification			**40% of total budget £669,800**
Measure 4: Investments in physical assets	Discussion focused on support for business planning and providing support for and removing obstacles to growth. The main consultation events highlighted a number of issues and market failures which	• **Encouraging new business start-ups** – *particularly projects linked to sustainable food production and as well as enhancing the local tourism offer / digital and creative starts ups and the knowledge economy utilising the 'Wyred Up' model / environmental technology especially renewables (linked to ongoing onshore & offshore energy development) / niche manufacturing*	26 projects *4 holdings benefitting* *14 businesses benefitting*

Measure 6: farm and business productivity	could not be addressed by LEADER but potentially could be addressed by other funding streams.	• **Development of existing small & micro enterprises –** *linked to significant job creation and GVA increases* • **Use of redundant buildings to create incubator type premises for new start businesses –** *although this came out of the consultation events there needs to be a local awareness of what exists already and there the focus should be on creating local business hubs utilising existing premises unless demand demonstrates otherwise.* • **Social enterprises –** *especially those providing essential rural services and linked to social enterprise support under the ESIFs.*	*28 individuals benefitting* 38 jobs created *60 jobs safeguarded*
Support for rural tourism			**10% of total budget £167,450**
Measure 4: Investments in physical assets Measure 6: farm and business productivity Measure 7: basic services and village renewal in rural areas	Marketing Lancashire invited key tourism businesses from across Lancashire to add to the priorities already raised at the consultation events	• **Accommodation upgrades & provision of new accommodation where there is a proven demand** – *Lack of serviced accommodation around Ormskirk to service Edge Hill University.* • **Enhanced use of e-tail and e-booking systems to support business productivity and marketing–** *in support of business product and increased marketing opportunities* • **Shops, Catering services, Restaurants & Cafes** – *only those using local food and drink and/or supporting employment growth/visitor spend* **Investments in green infrastructure** – *can include cycle and bridle ways, canal paths amongst others* **Signage and interpretation** – *linked with local food and drink, green infrastructure and local natural / built capital (environment)* • **New and improved visitor attractions** – limited *capital investment* • **Support for events and festivals** – *new only and operating in a different manner in order to support innovation and additionality*	4-projects *3 existing tourism activities supported* *1 new tourism activities supported* *300 potential additional overnight stays*
Provision of rural services			**10% of total budget £167,450**

Measure 4: Investments in physical assets Measure 7: basic services and village renewal in rural areas	A wide range of discussion took place reiterating some of the common issues that arose at the general consultation events including broadband, mobile phone coverage and access to skills and training. One of the main issues related to capacity building and a communities ability to recognise a need and access funding to address the need. Whilst we cannot fund training per se we may be able to offer more of a hand holding role to these groups once the funding is launched including Leadership and Management support.	• **Capital grants for community buildings especially where the project benefits the whole community** – *a number of village halls are seeking investment with a view to becoming more sustainable. In addition to capacity building we may seek to work in partnership with Community Futures to develop additional support following completion of the project including how to market the facilities, target marketing, social media, managing bookings, pricing structure etc. Also interested in multi-use facilities including bringing back services into rural communities including shops, post office, and library and possibly services to help vulnerable members of the community. This can complement activity related to social inclusion undertaken through the ESIF.* • **Supporting young people – provision of services / facilities for younger people** – *in particular support for business creation around after school care and holiday provision supporting parents/carers to work* • **Provision of IT support** – *offering ICT support to rural communities particularly to those seeking to start their own business* **Community activities –** *especially those aimed at younger / older members of the community in support of employment and training*	*3 businesses benefitting* *5 villages/ communities benefitting* 2 jobs created *4 jobs safeguarded* *1000 Population benefitting*
Support for cultural and heritage activity			**5% of total budget £83,725**
Measure 7: basic services and village renewal in rural areas	Contributions to the culture and heritage theme were received via email from a range of organisations who participate in and contribute to the cultural and heritage of Lancashire	• **Support for conservation and appropriate restoration and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage features** – *key landscape features and natural heritage sites* • **Support for events and information to help local communities, businesses and visitors to connect with the area's landscape and countryside** – *events, cultural activities, signage and interpretation* • **Capital grants for enhancements to visitor facilities** – *key gateway sites for countryside visits*	3 projects *2 facilities benefit* 2 jobs created *4 jobs safeguard* *500 Population benefitting*
Support for increasing forestry productivity			**5% of total budget £83,725**

Measure 4: Investments in physical assets Measure 6: farm and business productivity Measure 8: Investments in forest area development and improvement of the viability of forests	In addition to the theme specific consultation and general events FC have kindly provided a research paper to assist the LAGs to develop the forestry sector in Lancashire as well as attending a theme specific focus group along with forestry businesses. One of the priorities identified related to skills support which is required across all sectors but having been advised by Defra that we cannot fund these as they will be funded Nationally they have been left out of the main priorities. The following priorities have been identified:	• **Business start-ups & development of existing businesses –** *woodland owners need the services of reliable and professional contractors to undertake operations in their woods* • **Capital investment in and out of the wood** *–investment in machinery appropriate to the woodland types and terrain of the local area. Individuals whose machinery will be deployed across many land ownerships have the potential to deliver greater economic impact.* • **Supporting the construction of access points, stacking areas and loading bays particularly where these can serve several woodlands** *– consider supporting the construction of access points, stacking areas and loading bays particularly where these can serve several woodlands.* • **Invest in developing local venison markets through support of the transport, handling, processing and marketing of venison –** *through support of the transport, handling, processing and marketing of venison.* • **Development of commercial tourism offers related to woodland through investment in infrastructure, structures and equipment** *– through investment in infrastructure, structures and equipment.* • **Helping services that deliver co-operative working, such as woodland associations and timber marketing groups -** *services that deliver cooperative working, such as woodland associations and timber marketing groups.* • **Woodland management plans -** *for all in the supply chain including community led groups (owners/agents plans will be funded under NELMS)*	3 projects *3 forests /woodlands/holdings benefitting* 4-jobs created *5 jobs safeguarded*

Targets, results and outputs

The following targets are based upon previous experience of the delivery of economic development and employment growth projects whilst also being mindful of the DEFRA guidance on costs per job. These are scalable according to final budget settlement (M&A currently 15% but would increase to up to 18% should the allocation be reduced)

Leader Policy Priority	RDPE expenditure per FTE job created	Average RDPE grant size	Relevant CMES output indicators for LDS application	End of programme forecast (by December 2020)
Support for increasing farm productivity	£40,000	£50,000 (The average Lancashire West grant in previous programme was £69,126. This figure has been reduced to support increased programme performance)	Total RDPE expenditure Number of projects supported Jobs created FTE	£502,350 10 12
Support for micro and small enterprises/farm diversification	£17,500 (the Lancashire West - average in previous programme was £24,000 per job created. This figure has been reduced to support programme performance).	£25,000 (The Lancashire West average grant in previous programme was £40,280 and this has been reduced to support programme performance)	Total RDPE expenditure Number of projects supported Jobs created FTE	£669,800 26 38
Support for rural tourism	£32,477	£40,000 (the average Lancashire West - grant in previous programme was £56,769 and this has been reduced to support programme performance)	Total RDPE expenditure Number of projects supported Jobs created FTE	£167,450 5 4
Support for culture and heritage activity	£55,991	£28,165	Total RDPE expenditure Number of projects supported Jobs created FTE	£83,725 3 1
Provision of rural services	£33,272	£23,278	Total RDPE expenditure Number of projects supported Jobs created FTE	£167,450 7 5
Support for increasing forestry productivity	£77,045	£21,788	Total RDPE expenditure Number of projects supported Jobs created FTE	£83,725 3 1
Total Programme			Total RDPE expenditure Number of projects supported Jobs created FTE	£1,674,500 53 62

Percentage split between themes

Theme	Percentage	Rationale
Enterprise	40%	In the previous programme the Enterprise Measure had the highest demand and we had to vire funds from other Measures to satisfy demand. In the new programme a 40% allocation will enable us to achieve a high proportion of the jobs and growth targets via direct to business grants. Discussions at the consultation events have supported this approach.
Farming	30%	Due to the number of agricultural / horticultural businesses within the Lancashire West area the proportion of funding allocated to farming is higher than in the Lancashire North and Bowland and Pennine LAGs
Tourism	10%	Whilst tourism is seen as a priority for the LEP we have only allocated 10% of the overall budget. The rationale for this is that the Enterprise pot can also be used for tourism projects and is more flexible.
Rural Services	10%	In the previous programme the allocation for rural services was approximately 10%. Discussions at the consultation events indicated that this was an acceptable allocation
Forestry	5%	The majority of forestry projects could potentially be eligible to apply for funding via the Enterprise theme therefore it was felt that a 5% allocation specifically was adequate given the size of woodland coverage in the area.
Culture & heritage	5%	As this theme would not directly contribute to jobs and growth it was suggested by attendees of the consultation events that 5% would be sufficient

If permitted we may also consider a small grants scheme where appropriate but this would be dependent upon a simplified application process.

3.4 Programmes of activity

A LAG Executive panel will be selected prior to the end of the transition period to ensure that we are in a position to launch at the earliest opportunity. In addition we will also schedule a launch event for early 2015. The activity will be as follows:

Timescale	Activity
December 2014	Recruitment of LAG staff & training
Ongoing	Recruitment of LAG members
November / December 2014	Recruitment of Executive Members
December 14/January 2015	Training of Executive members
November 2014 onwards	Implementation of the communications strategy including launch events commencing in early 2015 – calls for projects are detailed within the communication strategy

3.5 Sustainability appraisal

Lancashire County Council is committed to ensuring a better quality of life by providing, developing and promoting a healthy, safe, diverse, clean and attractive environment for residents and businesses. This will be achieved by a focus on legislation, climate change, natural resources and waste, landscape, wildlife and heritage and education implementation and monitoring. Activities under each of these strands include ensuring LCC meets its environmental legislative and regulatory requirements, monitoring and minimising the Council's use of energy, minimising the amount of waste produced by the Council and encouraging greater reuse and recycling. Other activity includes the conservation, restoration and re-establishment of habitats and wildlife on land managed by the County Council and also a number of initiatives around education and implementation including the consideration of environmental factors in County Council decisions and activities and the development of environmental objectives and targets to reduce environmental impacts.

Based upon experience of the previous LEADER programme, and feedback from partners and from DEFRA, the Lancashire North and Bowland LAG has been designed to ensure that the programme is managed effectively over the full life cycle of the project, is able to maximise the impact of LEADER resources by levering other funds and encourages and sustain partner engagement in both project development, approval and monitoring.

3.6 Proposed cooperation activity

In anticipation of the new programme Lancashire has undertaken joint discussions with a number of other English Local Action Groups to discuss potential cooperation activity. We are particularly keen to work with other Lancashire and Northern LAGs to develop project ideas and some of the ideas that have been discussed include:

Visitor Payback Scheme – exploring examples of best practise and learning from the experience of others to implement similar schemes in Lancashire.

Lancashire Farmer Networks – successful mature farmer networks exist in other LAGs throughout the UK. We want to explore what makes a network successful with a view to implementing best practise and supporting the Lancashire farmer networks.

Food trails – Lancashire has a strong food presence with the West of the County being known for the production of fresh fruit and vegetables. How can we capitalise on this?

Lancashire plan to host a cooperation event in early 2015 inviting members from 20 LAGs across the UK to attend. Although we have discussed potential cooperation ideas the ideas need to be driven by LAG members rather than project officers therefore ideas will be discussed and decided upon by LAG members.

4. The Local Action Group Partnership

4.1 Membership

Our approach to developing LAG membership and engagement by partners is based upon our experience of the previous LEADER programme and an evaluation of the operation of previous Lancashire Local Action Groups highlighting strengths and weaknesses in the previous approach. The evaluation highlighted that all engagement by partners was good at the start of the programme it waned over time and we believe that one of the reasons membership may have declined is due to the lack of effective communication between the delivery teams and LAG membership Having recognised the need to improve our communication we have already implemented more effective lines of communication by identifying a wider range of stakeholders and issuing a quarterly newsletter, which has been positively received and we are keen to build upon this into the new programme.

In addition we have engaged with the owners of businesses owners who benefitted from LEADER funding from the last programme with a view to their long term involvement and this has generated interest from a number of sectors and business types. We have undertaken a range of consultation activity, details of which can be found in 4.5. At the consultation events we have promoted LAG membership and encouraged attendees to sign up. The uptake has been extremely promising. From the wider LAG a new LAG Executive group will be formed.

We would like to retain the knowledge and expertise of some of the previous LAG Executive members but we also to recruit new members according to the skills and knowledge required to deliver the priorities within each theme (as highlighted through the evaluation of the previous programme),. So, for example, in the previous programme the Forestry sector was represented on each LAG but as an observer rather than a voting member. Given that forestry is now a theme it would make sense to have a voting forestry sector representative.

4.2 Structure and decision making process

Local Action Group
The LAG will meet once possibly twice per year. The role of the LAG member is to:

- Set the strategic vision and direction of the Programme
- Enable a locally led approach to rural development
- Consider and review the Local Development Strategy
- Promote and raise awareness and understanding of issues affecting the rural economy
- Promote the funding to their wider networks

LAG Executive Group
The LAG Executive usually meet 4-6 times per year. The role of the LAG Executive is to:

- Initiate project ideas
- Recommend projects for approval – personal and prejudicial interests of any LAG Executive member will be noted prior to any decision being made using a written policy based on that previously used under the 2007-2013 RDPE Programme
- Ensure spend and output targets are achieved
- Report to the LAG on progress of the RDPE programme and individual projects on a regular basis.
- Assist the Development Officer with technical knowledge and expertise

All activity will be in accordance with the National Operational Manual, which is due to be produced by Defra prior to delivery. At Executive meetings in the previous programme LAG Executive members were provided with an Investment Decision Form for each application presented, which was a summary document of the full application. It was agreed at the outset that members did not need to view the full application, business plan and associated documentation. It was felt that as the project had already been subject to a rigorous appraisal there was no need to spend time analysing what had already been done.

The Investment Decision Form sets out what the project is, how much funding is required, what the target outputs and milestones will be, followed by the appraisers comments. We already have processes and procedures in place from the previous programme including Terms of Reference, a Conflict of Interest Procedure including a Declaration of Interest form and in order to be quorate we need a minimum of five attendees plus the LAG Chair.

All existing Executive members will be given the opportunity to be re-elected at the next LAG meeting, which will be held in autumn 2014. At the meeting we will nominate a LAG Exec Chair, a vice chair and membership of the Executive will consist of:

- 5-6 x public sector
- 4-5 x community / voluntary sector
- 5-6 x private sector

We will ensure that there is a balance of age and gender. There will also be a need for non-voting member representation from both the Accountable body and Defra. Executive members will be chosen based upon their skills/knowledge/experience ensuring as wide a representation as possible and ensuring the knowledge addresses the six themes.

The LAG Development Officer will meet with the LAG Chair (or Vice Chair) prior to LAG meetings to ensure they are fully briefed, if required. We will also ensure that there is regular engagement with the LEP.

4.3 Training requirements

All Executive members were asked to complete an online questionnaire as part of the evaluation process in the previous programme. One particular question related to the training requirements and many of the current members are keen to renew their knowledge on the decision making process and the application and appraisal process. Once Defra have confirmed that we have been awarded funding we will organise training workshops to address this. We anticipate that workshops will be held at the end of December 2014 or early 2015 once we have received the confirmation of funding. The majority of existing LAG Executive members have expressed their interest in remaining on the LAG Executive and we are keen to retain their knowledge and expertise. However, there will be a need for some members to change LAGs due to the changes in geography of the previous LAGs.

We are currently reviewing the National RDPE website and if any appropriate events come up we will notify LAG members so that they are able to attend if they wish, however this was not a real priority. We have already arranged two joint events in 2014 involving the three Lancashire LAGs and plans are underway to host a joint LAG events with a number of Northern LAGs in the New Year, which meets with members requirements to undertake further networking activity. The proposed training activity is as follows:

<u>Lancashire County Council – Internal training</u>

Appraisal Training - All staff undertaking project appraisals will be required to undertake appraisal training. The training will be delivered by an experienced LAG Officer and will include a detailed breakdown of the appraisal questions using projects from the previous programme as live examples.
Project Development - Any new staff members will undertake training by shadowing an experienced Development Officer on site visits.
Claims Processing and Monitoring - Anyone undertaking the processing of claims or monitoring visits will also receive training and support via an experienced Project Officer.

<u>Local Action Group Training - External</u>
Decision Making Process including appraisal and approval – LAG Executive Members
All new LAG Executive members will be required to undertake training regarding the decision making process. Some existing members have also expressed an interest in this training. As previously mentioned the Lancashire LAGs do not provide members with the full application details. At the Executive meeting members are given an Investment Decision form, which is a summary document of the full application and appraisal. The aim of this workshop will be to:

- Discuss the application process step-by-step;
- Go through the appraisal questions using a live example from the previous programme to demonstrate how rigorous a process it is;
- Highlight the queries that might arise from the appraisal and the steps we put in place e.g. special conditions;
- Detailed discussion around their role at the Executive meetings. The aim is to approve the project rather than re-appraisal;
- What happens following approval e.g. offer letter issues, offer letter accepted, claims, outputs etc.

<u>Applicant Business Planning and Application Training – External</u>

In the previous programme we found that the business plans varied immensely in quality. Also, if applications were prepared by external consultants we found that in some cases applicants were not clear on what they had signed up to in terms of record keeping, outputs and special conditions. Although there will be some applicants who will recruit a consultant we believe that all applicants should be provided with the opportunity to put together their own business plan and application. Although each applicant is provided with one-to-one support and advice from the Development Officer it would be impossible to go into this level of detail with each applicant therefore we propose to hold business planning and application workshops. The workshops will be held bi-monthly or quarterly depending upon demand. If possible, to minimise costs, the Development Officers will run the workshops. However, if workload dictates that this is not possible we will follow due process and recruit externally. The workshops will include:

- How to complete an application form
- Information to be provided within the business plan
- Procurement
- The types of questions asked at appraisal
- What happens at the LAG Executive Meeting
- The offer letter including milestones, special conditions etc.

Claims Workshop for applicants – external

- How to complete a claim form
- When to submit claims
- Audit trail and record keeping
- Monitoring visits
- Exit reports

4.4 Local Action Group staff, numbers and job descriptions

Staffing support for the Local Action Group will be based upon a shared administrative and financial service within Lancashire County Council delivering efficient and effective programme management. This service will support all three Lancashire based LAGS (the others being Lancashire Pennine Moors and Lancashire North and Bowland). The service will be based upon the model used successfully in the previous LEADER programme in Lancashire. The shared service will comprise a LEADER Programme Officer and a LEADER Finance Officer (FTE). We have a strong track record in delivering not only RDPE funding but also a wide range of other funding streams, such as the European Regional Development Fund and the Growing Places fund and as a result we have robust financial and programme management systems in place. Lancashire County Council also has its own internal audit capacity which will be used to ensure that the systems used to support LEADER are as effective and efficient as possible.

In order to support the Local Action Group itself, undertake project animation/marketing and support for businesses the Local Action Group will be allocated a dedicated member of staff at Senior Project Officer. Previous LEADER experience has indicated that this is the most effective way of ensuring the correct level of support for the delivery of the programme. The implementation of Local Development Strategies and management of LEADER resources across the three Lancashire based Local Action Groups will be overseen by a Head of Service within the County Council.

In addition training will be undertaken for Lancashire County Council staff and partners in order to undertake appraisals and provide expert advice, such Business Planning or in specific sector, as appropriate. This will be separate from LAG membership in order to manage conflicts of interest (in support of previous recommendations from the North West RDT) and release capacity to support project and LAG development.

The County Council is currently undergoing a restructure process and as a result the Job Descriptions for the posts indicated above will not be available until later in the year. However, it is envisaged that job and salary levels will be at a level to those currently delivering the LEADER Transition projects across Lancashire

4.5 Equal opportunities statement

In order to understand the impact of the Local Development Strategy on the community, we will be undertaking a full equality analysis using the principles of the Lancashire County Council Equality Analysis Toolkit. The toolkit has been devised to ensure that due consideration has been given to groups sharing certain protected characteristics such as age, race, gender etc. when strategies are developed. The analysis will consider, for example, the information gathered to support the development of the strategy, stakeholder engagement and consultation and the impact, positive or negative, of the strategy on various groups within the community. As part of this, consideration will also be given to any activity required to mitigate the potential negative impact of strategies.

4.6 Involvement of the community and consultation activity undertaken

The change has been proposed following an extensive consultation exercise with over 140 businesses and organisations. All those not able to attend a consultation event have been given the opportunity to complete an online consultation form. The draft LDS has been presented to the LAG and to all those that took part in the consultation activity.

Although the consultation events provided an excellent opportunity to engage with all sectors and identify issues which are relevant to the rural areas of Lancashire we felt that further sector specific engagement was required to enable us to determine specific priorities that we are able to fund in the new programme. The main consultation events highlighted a number of issues and market failures which could not be addressed by LEADER but potentially could be addressed by other funding streams.

From this bottom up consultation approach we have determined the priorities for spend in the new programme. In partnership with existing stakeholders we identified a further list of new potential stakeholders. We have now been in contact with over 300 individuals and organisations, as well as a number of partner organisations who are able to share the information through their networks. The events have been promoted via:

- NW Livestock Programme
- Creative Lancashire
- National Farmers Union
- Lancashire County Council mail out to 90 Commercial Agents
- CVS Central Lancashire and West Lancashire
- Myerscough College
- Local Authorities

In preparation for the new Rural Development Programme four rural consultation events were held across Lancashire. The aim of the events was to capture the views of local businesses, organisations and residents to ensure that the Local Development Strategies reflect a bottom up approach. The information obtained at the four events has been collated. The top five priorities from each event are listed under each theme, in addition we have also included other discussion points. Where there were common priorities raised at more than one event we have highlighted the background, for example below you will note that business support and advice were listed in the top five priorities at all four events and this has been highlighted in yellow. Marketing and promotion were raised at three out of the four events and this has been highlighted in green.

Enterprise

Priority	Enterprise – Pennine (Grindleton Pavilion)
1	Flexibility in programme – delivery in urban but supporting rural / prescriptive nature of activities
2	Business support through the application process e.g. Boost (LEP ERDF supported High Growth Business Support Programme)
3	Broadband – any would be good
4	Different ways of promoting and marketing the programme
5	Mechanism to allow better connectivity with other funding and Lancashire wide agencies (innovation

Priority	**Enterprise – North (Old Holly Farm)**
1	Extend into tourism activities – e.g. camping pods
2	Sustainable transport links for employees
3	Greater understanding of the range of funding and advice available
4	Work with planners to bring back redundant buildings
5	Support for marketing / social media workshops
Priority	**Enterprise – West (Mere Sands Woods)**
1	Improve business support offer – including retail/awareness of SE options. Business start-ups and scale ups
2	Capital investment – manufacturing/machinery (spin offs)
3	Employment support – recruitment, up skill, apprenticeships, transport, housing
4	Added value existing businesses – café, incubators
5	Tap into Corporate Social Responsibility of some of the larger local companies
Priority	**Enterprise – Brockholes**
1	Business support – improving awareness of Boost gateway, delivery based on lower level rather than high level support
2	Marketing – awareness raising, signposting, direct grants to support, training
3	Access to finance – still an issue, especially capital. Need to broaden support to include rural and non- high growth businesses
4	Networking – physical and online, knowledge and information transfer
5	Access to new markets, local, national and export

Business support and marketing are the key issues affecting rural businesses. There does not appear to be anywhere for rural businesses to access free independent advice and support unless they qualify for support under the Boost programme, which is aimed at high growth sectors. Other issues which arose are:

- Incubator premises for rural areas – use under-utilised rural businesses
- Support planning process
- Awareness of social enterprise, marketing/awareness – support through the process
- Business start-up and scale ups – support through process, mentoring, handholding
- Community groups in transition phase – social enterprise and trade
- Transport schemes to support apprenticeships

The RDPE budget will be significantly reduced compared to the previous programme therefore there would not be enough funding available to deliver this type of support in addition to capital grants especially when considering the need to create jobs and growth. However, although we will not be able to fund this activity the issues raised will be fed in the Rural Growth Strategy.

Farming

Priority	**Farming – Pennine (Grindleton Pavilion)**
1	Help farmers produce more and increase primary production by investing in new technology
2	Group activity and knowledge transfer
3	Joint marketing activity
4	Sharing apprentices
5	Services to farmers – admin and advice
Priority	**Farming – North (Old Holly Farm)**
1	Training for staff – including train the trainer and creation of mentoring programme across relevant sectors.
2	Support for Marketing and development marketing plans
3	Independent advisory service – to address both general business advice but also specialist areas such as soil balance testing and animal welfare

4	Lab testing for soil and slurry linked to reducing fertiliser use and run off effects to water course
5	Investment to improve bio security – e.g. double fencing
Priority	**Farming – West (Mere Sands Woods)**
1	Rural business support/skills training – direct to farmers & foresters
2	Strengthening the business and making it competitive rather than 'innovation'
3	Adding value to produce e.g. washing potatoes
4	Small scale forestry extraction and processing equipment
5	Security initiatives/measures for rural businesses in remote locations
Priority	**Farming – Brockholes**
1	Capital grants for investment both small – £1-5K and larger grants
2	A comprehensive one stop shop for independent advice on general business development and specific support for grant application
3	Skills programme to address a range of business skills including marketing, IT and basic skills
4	Support for development of marketing and promotion plans and to fund the initial costs
5	Specific farming sector succession planning programme addressing all options to support older / retiring farmers and new / younger farmers to enter the sector.

A number of common themes arose at each of the events particularly around increasing and improving productivity, business support/training/knowledge transfer and marketing activity. However, other issues raised include:

- Investment in flood defence and drainage
- Support for precision farming
- Grants and project development support
- Improved broadband / mobile coverage
- Animal welfare and nutrient management programme for Lancashire farmers
- Support to meet best practice standards for the diary sector – i.e. stocking rates – links to possible export markets
- A mobile phone text service to get key info to the farming community as many farmers tend to be IT illiterate and unable to access email but they are used to using mobile phones therefore this is a very effective way to communicate with the hard to reach farmers.
- Support to develop and extend the Lancashire farmers network
- Apprenticeships in horticulture

Forestry

Priority	**Forestry – Pennine (Grindleton Pavilion)**
1	Investment in forestry equipment to support the growth of the processing sector
2	Support, training and equipment for small woodland management covering all three forestry types broadleaf, mixed and coniferous
3	Creation / support for better working & cooperation between small woodland owners to develop joint management and felling
4	Support to develop and extend supply chain demand for timber from Lancashire Woodland
5	Support for planting new and re-planning felled woodland
Priority	**Forestry – North (Old Holly Farm)**
1	Creation of a micro forest programme get owners of small unviable forest to work co-operatively to joint manage and develop woods
Priority	**Forestry – West (Mere Sands Woods)**
1	Rural business support/skills training – direct to farmers & foresters
2	Strengthening the business and making it competitive rather than 'innovation'

3	Adding value to produce e.g. washing potatoes
4	Small scale forestry extraction and processing equipment
5	Security initiatives/measures for rural businesses in remote locations
Priority	**Forestry – Brockholes**
1	Access to Finance and support
2	New entrants, existing assets
3	New entrants, new people, locating Growth Business
4	Communication and transport links
5	New technology investment

Cooperation and supply chain were common discussion points. There are lots of unmanaged woodlands in Lancashire which could be better utilised if cooperation activity were encouraged and promoted. Capital investments to support extraction and processing were also topical as was skills training. Other ideas included:

- FSC registration and affiliation
- Transport
- Advisory service – advice on support
- Access to finance, with relationship management support
- Communication and transport links into rural areas
- Routes to market – disconnect, connections
- Case studies, demonstrations
- Technologies
- Issues around certification, registration
- Facilitation
- Replanting →restocking
- Mapping and engagement at school level and beyond, bringing young people into the sector, apprenticeships programmes

Tourism

Priority	**Tourism – Pennine (Grindleton Pavilion)**
1	Marketing – signage & social media (training in)
2	Targeted business support and networking opportunities
3	Cash flow
4	Spread of accommodation provision (presume in terms of quality?)
5	Pump priming organisation i.e. Bowland Experience – make the public purse go further by running 'visitor giving' schemes
Priority	**Tourism – North (Old Holly Farm)**
1	Improved marketing and publicity – social media "sense of Lancashire" branding – identify key offers
2	Ways of bringing people in from further afield and encouraging them to spend more – raising the profile of the area
3	Broadband and mobile coverage
4	Destination management – advice, training, support, marketing (including social media)
5	Infrastructure – transport – sustainable routes – extension of Lune Track
Priority	**Tourism – West (Mere Sands Woods)**
1	Capital Investment – both conversion of current buildings and new builds - majority of funding allocated here
2	Development of consortium to pull together tourism attractions / activities / events in a small locality. Offer visitors the opportunity for money off vouchers etc.
3	Schools education programmes for tourism attractions

4	Signage / brown signs
5	Internet connection / SFB
Priority	**Tourism – Brockholes**
1	Capital – priority for funding. Funding into a couple of large projects that will have the largest impact rather than in to lots of small projects
2	Marketing a destination – themes "heritage" "food" "cycling" "eco" someone to facilitate bringing it all together in a joined up approach
3	Promoting Lancashire as an all year round destination – improving existing jobs moving away from zero hour contracts and creating new jobs.
4	Training for social media / one central location (portal) for businesses to see what training is on offer – i.e. via the BOOST website
5	Specialist Advice – pre application stage

Again marketing and promotion were a common theme and was mentioned as a priority at all four consultation events. Training and advice is another common issue as Marketing Lancashire no longer provides the same level of support and advice to tourism businesses. Capital investment was one of the key priorities mentioned at two of the events.

Rural Services

Priority	**Rural Services – Pennine (Grindleton Pavilion)**
1	Community infrastructure: assets and services as a platform / catalyst for other activity
2	Building on and fully utilise Super-Fast Broadband resource
3	Cash flow / development funding
4	Support for accessing and drawing down match funding
5	Capital funding for voluntary and community based buildings
Priority	**Rural Services – North (Old Holly Farm)**
1	Transport – key links with other themes including the provision of scooters for loaning to young people to enable them to access employment and training, access to services and access to leisure facilities for visitors
2	Supporting young people – provision of facilities for younger people and as above
3	Energy / Renewables – made mention of community renewables schemes for isolated communities currently reliant upon oil filled systems
4	Village Agent – who could provide support for a wide range of services to the over 50s
5	Broadband
Priority	**Rural Services – West (Mere Sands Woods)**
1	Place/ownership/value
2	Multi-use of existing buildings
3	Digital inclusion/broadband & mobile signals
4	Transport
5	Countryside education and asset maps
Priority	**Rural Services – Brockholes**
1	Transport – insofar as it can support residents in rural areas to travel out to access services, but also using transport to bring services into communities.
2	Services – in a general sense. This could mean different things in different communities – a post office in one, shop in another, affordable childcare elsewhere, but provided in such a way that groups of villages may have complementary services.
3	IT communications – enhanced broadband and mobile phone coverage principally for the 3% of the population who have poor provision, mainly in rural areas.
4	"Support workers" – individuals responsible for identifying and promoting details of services which are available within rural communities and employed to cover a wide geographic area. An understanding of the demographics of different communities would be a key part of this.

5	Village Halls as Community Hubs – for the provision of services. Again, this could mean different things in different communities, but would probably involve making investments which refurbished these community facilities in ways which improved their overall usability.

The rural services theme encouraged the most discussions and the most diverse range of issues and ideas. Some of the discussion points not captured within the top five priorities above are captured below:

- IT advice centre – drop in facility where villagers can access support to complete online forms or access online information
- Visiting services e.g. banks, NHS services
- Community activities
- Access to renewable energy
- Shared and community transport initiatives
- Collaboration between community assets
- Fostering good relations between recent residents and families who lived in the area for generations
- Transport within areas to more major shopping, transport hubs
- Combatting social isolation – older people, children and families
- Mixed Community services – benefiting whole communities
- Funding not retrospective
- Rural workspace
- Delivery of IT - Access / Maintaining & support
- Modernisation of Community buildings – and conversation e.g. closed schools
- Improved facilities for young people in rural areas
- Improved access to funding to enable community cohesion - many village inhabitants use it as a place to sleep not a place to live.
- Bigger share of funding to voluntary organisations
- Easier controlling funding (cash flow)

There was a discussion around the kinds of benefits which can be brought about when communities get to know each other and the benefits that can accrue by getting people to "care" about each other. Improved communication – possibly through the "support workers" detailed above – could be one way of achieving this, but need not be the only way.

Signage – to facilities, services and businesses was also discussed with the feeling that take-up would be increased if it was easier to get permission for signage within rural areas.

Rural energy generation was also discussed. The benefits of ground source heat pumps were the main area of discussion as well as other sources which reduced the reliance on coal and oil.

Culture and Heritage

Priority	**Culture & heritage – Pennine (Grindleton Pavilion)**
1	Local events
Priority	**Culture & heritage – North (Old Holly Farm)**
1	Use of apps
2	Interpretation and protection of rural historic features
3	Training of craftsmen
4	Improved signage and information
5	
Priority	**Culture & heritage – West (Mere Sands Woods)**
	Discussed with other priorities
Priority	**Culture & heritage – Brockholes**
	Discussed with other priorities

The culture and heritage discussions were relatively limited as discussions tended to be linked to other themes. However, we approached a range of industry specialists and local authority representation and asked for their opinions. Detailed information was provided by the Ribble Trust, Browsholme Hall, Hoghton Tower, Forest of Bowland AONB and Bowland Revealed. Key priorities around the preservation of our historic houses, the quality improvement of our waterways and preserving the AONBs within Lancashire were identified.

5. Management and Administration

5.1 Accountable body

Lancashire County Council is in an ideal position to be the Accountable Body of the Lancashire West LAG based upon its previous LEADER experience and financial capacity/experience as a large public authority with appropriate financial systems and framework. However, the County Council needs to have a clear understanding of the functions of the Accountable Role including operational and financial delineation between DEFRA/RPA and the County Council. As a result formal agreement of the County Council to be Accountable Body for the Lancashire West LAG is dependent upon further detail of the functions to be undertaken by Accountable Body included as part of the LEADER Operational Manual.

5.2 Project development and assessment procedures

We have a wealth of experience delivering RDPE funding in Lancashire having delivered over £6.5 million worth of funding via three LAGs in the previous programme. As such we already have robust systems in place to enable us to deliver the programme efficiently and effectively. The systems we have in place are:

Initial Enquiry – interested parties telephone or email to check eligibility in terms of location and type of project. We have already started to encourage potential applications to complete an online enquiry form in anticipation of the new programme, and where appropriate we are visiting those potential applicants to encourage them to begin activity which will aid their application e.g. market research, competitor analysis, obtaining planning permission, thinking about procurement.

Expression of Interest – as stated above we have already begun to invite expressions of interest but once Defra release the documentation for the new programme all future applicants from that point on will be required to complete an Expression of Interest form (EoI) which will enable us to formally assess eligibility. The EoI is assessed internally and an EoI assessment form is completed and placed on the applicants file. On completion of the EoI applicants are invited to proceed to full application. Note that the initial enquiry sifts out non eligible applicants and activity.

Development Officer Visit – all applicants benefit from a one-to-one support visit to discuss the project in more detail, discuss the application procedure and to answer any questions the applicant may have.

Full application and business plan - we will create a pack of support to assist applicants to complete their own business plan and application. A Business Planning information pack already exists from the previous programme however we can add further value to this to create a useful toolkit with templates for the following:

- Procurement strategy
- Risk assessment
- How to write a tender document / written specification of requirements

Development Officer Feedback – the applicant provides a draft copy of the application usually electronically but occasionally a site visit will be required. The Officer reviews the information and makes appropriate recommendations. The applicant then amends accordingly and submits a final application.

Appraisal – the application will be appraised by a team of appraisers from Lancashire County Developments Limited. All appraisers will be chosen for their business support experience and they will also undergo rigorous training. The appraiser will direct any queries resulting from the appraisal to the Development Officer who will liaise directly between the applicant and the appraiser. Once all queries have been addressed the appraiser will make a recommendation, which will be to approve, defer or reject the application. The application can then be presented to the LAG Executive.

LAG Executive – the meetings are usually set at the beginning of the year. An Investment Decision Form for each applicant is usually emailed to the Executive 1-2 weeks before the meeting along with an agenda and other appropriate documentation. The Executive considers each application using their knowledge of the area and also any specialist knowledge or expertise relating to a particular application. Normally decisions are made on the day however in some circumstances we may be required to go back to the applicant for clarity and a final recommendation may be made via the written procedures process.

Minutes and offer letter – following the meeting minutes and an offer letter are produced. The offer letter contains detailed information regarding milestones, outputs, amount offered, special conditions and legal obligations. The offer letter is drafted at LCC and then emailed to RPA.

The applicant is sent two copies of the application, one to retain and one to return to the LAG within 30 days of receipt.

Claims workshop – all applicants are required to attend the claims workshop. At the workshop they are provided with a file with file separators detailing the documentation they need to retain for audit purposes.

Monitoring visit – all projects receive at least one monitoring visit prior to the processing of their final claim. However, the number of visits depends upon the financial risk associated with the project. Therefore the higher the grant awarded the higher the financial risk.

Exit and evaluation report – the exit and evaluation report is usually conducted at the point where the applicant has stated they will have reached all their targets and outputs. For example, a self-catering business may be physically built by January 2016 but it will take a further twelve months for them to obtain accreditation, build up their bookings, and have their first annual set of accounts. In order to evaluate the success of the project we need to have all this evidence in place.

5.3 Claims and payments

Businesses will need to submit their individual claims as per their timetables in their contracts. It would be envisaged that the claims be on a quarterly basis so the finance team can plan this work into their timetables. The claims are submitted to a dedicated RDPE finance officer who has extensive RDPE experience. Original invoices/evidence need to be submitted and verified. Also each invoice is clearly marked with the following statement: ' This invoice has been used for RDPE purposes, date and signature' this is to ensure that the same invoice is not submitted twice, thus causing confusion and double funding. All original evidence is then copied and certified and returned to the business.

There will be a two way checking process of the claims. A first check will be carried out by a finance officer who will ensure all evidence is eligible and can be verified and the claim actually adds up: and a second check will be carried out by the RDPE finance officer to give assurance that all finances are eligible and accountable. Once these second checks have taken place the claim will be signed off by the second officer and submitted to the RPA for payment. Copies of the claims are held in the individual business file.

The M & A claim is completed by an experienced RDPE finance officer. These claims will be submitted as per the contract on a quarterly basis. All evidence is pulled together and a financial claim is built on all eligible defrayed expenditure. All original invoices and bank statements are seen, copied, and certified. The County Treasurer will sign off all M & A claims. The finance officer will keep all M & A claims together and once the project is completed an independent audit will be arranged by the finance officer who will then issue a certificate of verification.

The M & A claims file will be archived within the finance archive but is always readily available for inspection. Previous RPA inspection on the last programme was very complementary on our systems, hence the same system will be followed for the new programme.

5.4 Communications and publicity

Activity	Timescale
LAG Meetings including joint LAG events	
• A meeting of all the Lancashire LAGs was held to provide members with an update of the 2009-2013 RDPE programme.	4th Feb 2014
• A meeting of all the Lancashire LAGs was held to provide an update on the transition period	11th June 2014
• A meeting of the local LAG to formalise Executive membership and discuss next steps	November/December 2014
Consultation	
North Lancashire – Old Holly Farm	19th June 2014
Pennine Lancashire – Grindleton Pavilion	19th June 2014
Lancashire West – Mere Sands Woods	26th June 2014
All Lancashire - Brockholes	3rd July 2014
Tourism specific consultation	31st July 2014
Forestry specific consultation	7th August 2014
Enterprise specific consultation	5th August 2014
Rural Services specific consultation	29th July 2014
Farming specific consultation	30th July 2014
Culture and heritage consultation	Via email
Newsletters	
Issue 1	April 2014
Issue 2	July 2014
Issue 3	September 2014
Issue 4	December 2014
Further Issues	Quarterly basis
Web site	
Online enquiry form – has been actively promoted via our newsletter, at all our events and via partner organisations. All enquiries are assessed and, if appropriate site visits are conducted to discuss potential applications for the new programme	Ongoing from March 2014
Update on the previous programme – summary document highlighting the types of activity funded via the 2009-2013 RDPE programme	March 2014
Newsletters – added to the website once they are published	Quarterly
Consultation events – promoted prior to the events taking place. The results of those consultation events and also the theme specific consultation will be added to the web site following completion	June-July 2014
Tweeting – the consultation events were tweeted on the LCC web site. Further tweets will follow when we launch the programme	Ongoing from March 2014
Press releases	
Good news stories from the previous programme will be used to promote the good work undertaken from 2009-2013, which will also generate interest in the new programme e.g. Box Tree Farm – Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence. Will also promote the new projects as and when appropriate	Ongoing July 2014
Launch events – to be held in the New Year to promote the programme.	Early 2015 Early 2015 onwards

Call for projects – not all the themes will be launched at the same time. Some may be open calls whilst others may be called within a specific timeframe. All calls will be promoted via the press, partner organisations, web site etc.	
Networking & events	
Networking – working with stakeholders, including specialist rural consultants to identify any networking opportunities where we can promote RDP funding. **Events/meetings** – presentations at appropriate events and meetings to promote the programme. Or if a presentation is not possible having a presence by way of a stall/stand. E.g. Farmer Network meetings, NFU meetings, Made in Lancashire etc.	Ongoing 2014 Ongoing 2014
Launch events	
A high profile launch event will be held early in the new year to launch the following themes: • Enterprise • Tourism • Farming The following themes will be launched in 2016: • Rural Services • Forestry • Culture & heritage The events will be promoted via our stakeholders, press releases, via appropriate networking opportunities and via our web site. We have already begun to take enquiries from all sectors and some applicants are in the process of developing their applications in preparation of the new programme.	Early 2015 Likely to be early 2016 but to be confirmed with the LAG Executive
Training	
LAG Member Training – workshops looking at the appraisal and approval process and the decision making process need to be arranged **Internal Training** – for LCC staff involved in any of the processes e.g. LAG Development Officer, Appraiser, Finance (Claims) **External Training** – for project applicants e.g. business planning workshop, claims workshop	Early 2015 Early 2015 Early 2015 and then ongoing
Project Visits	
Site visits to projects that have benefitted from RDPE funding. Available to LAG members and potential project applicants. Minibus to be arranged from County Hall to one or more projects over a half/full day. Also invite members of the press if appropriate.	Annual or bi-annual dependent upon demand

6 Financial plan

Based upon the highest allocation of £1,970,000 however should we be allocated a lesser amount the programme will be scaled down accordingly.

6.1 Expenditure for each year, by measure

Policy Priority	2014/2015	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Total
Enterprise - 40%	£0	£150,000	£200,000	£200,000	£100,000	£50,000	£19,800	£669,800
Farming - 30%	£0	£100,000	£150,000	£150,000	£100,000	£2,350	£0	£502,350
Tourism - 10%	£0	£50,000	£50,000	£50,000	£17,450	£0	£0	£167,450
Rural Services - 10%	£0	£0	£50,000	£50,000	£50,000	£17,450	£0	£167,450
Forestry - 5%	£0	£0	£13,725	£30,000	£30,000	£10,000	£0	£83,725
Culture & heritage - 5%	£0	£0	£13,725	£30,000	£30,000	£10,000	£0	£83,725
M & A – 15%	£24,625	£49,250	£49,250	£49,250	£49,250	£49,250	£24,625	£295,500
Total	**£24,625**	**£349,250**	**£426,700**	**£609,250**	**£336,700**	**£169,250**	**£54,225**	**£1,970,000**

6.2 Overall funding profile

Not applicable

6.3 Use of grants, procurement or other type of financial support

In order to enhance the flexibility of the Local Action Group to maximise the impact of resources it would wish to allocate resources through a mixture of direct grants and , where appropriate , direct commissioning of activity on key activities.

References

Draft Rural Growth Strategy, Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership (2014)

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National Characteristic Areas Summaries (Natural England)

Consultation input from over 300 organisations and individuals (list available upon request)