

Kent Downs and Marshes Leader Programme

Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) Leader is a way of spending money on local rural issues, identified by people living in the local area. This bottom up identification of local issues leads to locally tailored opportunities based on the social, economic, and environmental and land based needs of the Leader area.

The Programme is;

- An area based fund of £2.25 million allocated by the EU and DEFRA via SEEDA. The programme started in late 2008 and runs until 2013.
- Managed by KCC and its Leader- wide partnership the Local Action Group (**LAG**).
- Designed to deliver the Local Delivery Strategy, a **locally determined strategy** for development. The objectives of the LDS are;
 1. Developing a pioneering and sustainable rural economy.
 2. Fostering vibrant rural communities.
 3. Valuing the rural environment.

The funding is designated to;

- Add value to local products (with particular focus on the land-based sector)
- Foster sustainable rural tourism (building on the unique landscape-assets base of the area.
- Assisting rural communities (including businesses) in managing change.

There are also a number of cross cutting principles considered;

- Proactively manage change (helping businesses and communities to cope with the effects of economic, climate and other change).
- Identifying new ways of working (helping businesses and communities come up with innovative solutions to problems).
- Encouraging local development (Helping businesses and communities come up with ideas that make the most of the local area).

Kent has two Leader areas, **West Kent** and **Kent Downs and Marshes**, covering a total of more than 283,000 rural residents, and with a combined project budget of almost £3.5m

Kent Downs and Marshes Leader covers a broad swath of rural areas across the middle of Kent. It has a population of 149,300 and total available projects spend of £1.8m.

The money is locally controlled, with decisions about which projects are funded being made by the LAG. This group is made up of representatives from organisations from across the Kent Downs and Marshes Leader area representing the interests of the whole community.

Projects for decision are submitted to a nine member **LAG Executive** which meets every six/eight weeks. The LAG Executive also deals with management decisions and monitoring the programme.

To date nine projects have been approved with total spend around £236,954. Two projects are currently deferred (£57,480) and one project has been rejected.

Grants of up to **£50,000** are available to fund projects for rural business and communities and are designed to address those issues that threaten to undermine future sustainability of rural communities.

The funding is divided into a range of measures, designed to fulfil specific needs. Which measures are available depends upon the aims of each LAG's LDS.

Projects have to fit into one of these measures and all projects require some degree of match funding. The percentage of funding that Leader can provide (the intervention rate), varies according to the measure, and ranges from 20% up to 100% (in exceptional circumstances).

Funding is available to rural businesses, farmers, foresters, growers, landowners, environmental organisations, cultural, heritage and community providers as well as voluntary and charitable organisations to develop projects that will assist, strengthen and develop themselves and the local community.

A good Leader project will;

- Fit with the LDS.
- Be eligible.
- Be a good project i.e. innovative; is needed; offers value for money; is match funded; will work; is sustainable.

When applying for Leader, applicants should consider the following;

- Funding is paid retrospectively. Leader does not provide up front funding. Proof is needed that upfront costs can be covered.
- All planning consents and permissions are in place.
- Prove that the funding is needed and the project will not happen otherwise.
- Leader is a competitive programme, and that funding is not guaranteed.
- Requested grant amounts must not exceed £50,000 and fit the eligible intervention rate.

'A guide for Leader applicants' further sets out the objectives, priority areas and cross cutting themes of the Local Delivery Strategy.

The Kent Downs and Marshes Leader webpage can be found at;

<http://www.kentruralnetwork.org.uk/leader>