

# The Leader Programme 2014-2020

## Background and Context

The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) LEADER Programme is a European Union rural funding approach, with grant funds available from January 2015 to December 2020.

Leader monies can be used on local issues, identified by people living in those areas. The community-led identification of local issues leads to delivery of local projects based on economic, social, environmental and land based sector needs from within the LEADER area.

Funding decisions are made by the Local Action Group (LAG) for the LEADER area. The LAG is made up of local private, public and strategic groups. Each LAG develops a Local Development Strategy (LDS) for its area and this describes what the LAG aims to achieve based on locally identified priorities and actions. The LAG has delegated powers to bring forward, assess and fund projects that meet their LDS objectives and which address local priorities in an innovative, inclusive and locally specific way through planning and implementing their LDS.

Under the last RDPE 2007-2013 Kent was covered by two LEADER areas – West Kent Leader and Kent Downs and Marshes Leader. Both were successful over the life of the programme providing support for 116 projects with a total investment of £7.65m, creating 83 jobs, safeguarding 377 jobs as well as supporting over 500 rural businesses plus 14 start-ups.

Funding under LEADER is available to rural business, 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 their local area.

In this development or transition phase of the RDPE LEADER programme, 86 potential bids have been identified nationally and this will be reduced to 70 and the process of elimination will be based on the strength of Local Development Strategies and those which clearly respond to the emerging key programme priority which is to increase **jobs and growth**.

## The new RDPE LEADER Programme for Kent 2014-2020

Former programme LEADER areas West Kent Leader and Kent Downs and Marshes Leader will be joined by a new East Kent Leader and all are currently preparing their respective Local Development Strategies for funding under the new 2014-2020 Programme. Each LEADER area is restricted to a maximum rural population of 150,000 people and in establishing maximum geographical coverage and acknowledging economic cohesion it should be noted that the administrative area of Swale has been split between two of the three proposed LEADER areas. The advantage of this approach to Swale is that it gives maximum coverage but the disadvantage is that maximum coverage may not be achieved if one of the bids which include Swale fails.

**West Kent Leader** will cover the rural areas of Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells, Sevenoaks and part of rural Gravesham.

**Kent Downs and Marshes Leader** will cover the rural areas of Ashford, Maidstone, Medway, Swale (west of Faversham) and the Romney Marshes.

**East Kent Leader** will cover the rural areas of Thanet, Canterbury, Dover, Swale (East of and including Faversham) and Shepway (north of the Romney marshes).

The three LEADER areas in Kent based on economic coherence (rather than administrative boundaries) will be bidding for over £5m of EU and Defra funding to be used to support rural and land based businesses and local communities. Success will be determined on coherence and evidence-based Local Development Strategies that address local issues and opportunities and respond to the key priority around jobs and growth. If all three bids are successful then almost 97% of rural Kent will be able to benefit from LEADER funding from January 2015 but this is a competitive process and there are inevitably inherent risks in the strategic approach proposed. Defra are seeking efficiencies or economies of scale and whilst there will be two LAG's established for Kent Downs and Marshes and East Kent it is proposed that they will share an administrative team.

Within the new LEADER, Defra has included four new hub towns or 'service centres' with their populations contributing towards the population count – Sheerness, Minster, Faversham and Sevenoaks. The hubs are seen as catalysts or drivers of economic activity supporting the core LEADER agenda around jobs and growth in rural areas and whilst not bringing additional funding to the LEADER area, applicants from within the hub towns will also be eligible to benefit from grant support (see attached map).

### **Local Development Strategy (LDS)**

The emphasis within each strategy will be on providing Jobs and Growth. This is a requirement set down by Defra and each LAG will deliver 70% of project funding directly in support of jobs and growth in the rural economy using the six priorities for the new RDPE LEADER Programme for Kent 2014-2020 which are:

- Support for increasing farm productivity
- Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification
- Support for rural tourism
- Provision of rural services
- Support for cultural and heritage activity
- Support for increasing forestry production

The LDS for each LEADER area must be submitted by 5 September and a decision will be made on awarding funds to the successful LEADER areas by early November. The successful LEADER groups will be able to work up and assess projects for support and provide funds from January 2015. As with all evolving funding programmes there will be further guidance available as the launch date nears.

There is currently a call-out for project ideas and to business and organisations who feel they can help shape the emerging strategies or wish to become part of the LAG in the local LEADER area. Further information can be obtained from the Programme Managers in the proposed LEADER areas:

Kent Downs and Marshes LEADER: [huw.jarvis@kent.gov.uk](mailto:huw.jarvis@kent.gov.uk) (tel: 01622 696940)  
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