



West Kent LEADER

Local Development Strategy 2015 - 2020

West Kent LAG
August 2014



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

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Executive Summary

Following the acknowledged success of the first West Kent LEADER programme, which supported 62 local projects and resulted in over £3 million investment in the rural economy, the existing Local Action Group now wishes to build on its approach and secure further funding to support the West Kent rural economy for a further six years. Whilst many of the issues that need to be addressed remain and some of the objectives and priorities of the first programme are to be carried forward, this Local Development Strategy (LDS) acknowledges that this is a new programme and will build on the experience gained from the first programme and seek to address the new National Delivery Framework.

The Local Action Group (LAG) is aware that many key issues and challenges to the West Kent rural economy remain to be addressed:

- A continuing decline in employment in the land-based sector
- A land-based economy characterised by low profitability, high levels of self employment and the use of short term casual labour
- A sector facing pressure from the CAP reform and the globalisation of agricultural markets.
- Low profitability in many areas of farming including horticulture and livestock
- Poor income generation from existing woodland.

The ongoing challenge for the future for farmers and foresters is with the changes introduced by the basic payment scheme, greening and the changing emphasis on sustainability.

Farming, forestry and vibrant rural businesses, however, play a significant part in maintaining the quality of life for the people of the West Kent area, providing employment, local wealth creation, a diverse range of foods and helping to maintain valued open spaces and countryside of high visual and ecological value.

In rural West Kent there are some excellent examples of good forestry management but overall many woodland areas are under-managed. There is potential for improvement through initiatives adding value to coppice products, such as fencing and building products, as well as larger sustainable projects for biomass and renewable energy, particularly on a collective basis.

West Kent has a culture of entrepreneurship and a wealth of tourism opportunities. Both of these play a vital role in contributing to the rural economy and helping to sustain vibrant rural communities. Small and micro enterprises (SMEs) play a very important role in the rural economy of West Kent with 84% of employees in firms of 10 or less

To address these issues and to continue to build on the investments made during the first LEADER programme, the Local Action Group intends to continue to give high priority to projects which support the growth of local farming and forestry enterprises. We intend to encourage bids for funding which seek to focus on the promotion of economic growth and local job creation through projects which add value to existing farming and forestry products, those that aim to diversify the range and type of those products and the creation of new opportunities for new business development via farm diversification. We will also focus on helping to develop new or expanded existing small and medium-sized rural enterprises across the West Kent rural area. Particular emphasis will therefore be placed on projects which add value to the rural economy and create additional local employment opportunities.

Large areas of the countryside in West Kent have landscape designations (AONB, Green Belt, Ancient Woodland, SSSIs, Local Nature Reserves). Sustainable farming and woodland management is essential for maintaining this precious West Kent asset, including its value for leisure and recreation, tourism and quality of life for rural and urban communities.

Rural West Kent, despite some affluent areas, has deprivation issues to address, particularly in relation to low income and high housing costs. There are higher numbers of adults with no qualifications or level 1 qualifications and in low income elementary occupations, than the average in the South East. The loss of employment land to housing is a significant issue for the rural communities and has also led to a narrowing of employment availability in recent years. Home ownership is often out of the reach of local people with average house prices in West Kent more than double those in East Kent for a similar type of property. Adequate rural service provision is also a vital element of sustainable rural communities and the Local Action Group will work with communities across the area to encourage bids which address local deficiencies in provision or which provide opportunities to create new services that are of value to local people.

For the above reasons, the Local Action Group now wishes to maintain and carry forward the over-arching priority of the first LEADER programme - to promote sustainable business growth and job creation within the land based and rural economies in the area. Further investment through the new LEADER programme is intended to improve the long term viability of rural businesses, create economic growth and additional local employment.

For the new LEADER programme, the Local Action Group's proposed key objectives are therefore to:

- Improve competitiveness and financial sustainability of West Kent's farming and forestry
- Encourage innovation and diversification in West Kent's land based sector
- Support new and existing rural businesses and promote entrepreneurship in rural West Kent
- Encourage the development of local heritage and rural tourism-related businesses
- Promote the provision of additional rural services to encourage vibrant rural communities
- Ensure best practice in land management and promote sustainable development

Given the needs profile of the rural West Kent area and carrying forward the adopted priorities of the first LEADER programme, the Local Action Group intends to continue to give a high priority to supporting farming, forestry and rural businesses. It will aim to direct 70% of the programme's grant resources to these key areas and the remaining 30% of funds will be available for supporting tourism, culture and heritage and rural services, with particular priority being given to projects which add value and growth to the local economy and have the potential for job creation.

The West Kent Partnership (WKP), the economic and strategic partnership operating across Sevenoaks District and the boroughs of Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge & Malling, will continue to provide overall management and support for the new LEADER programme. The West Kent Partnership has endorsed the priorities as set out in the Strategy.

Sevenoaks District Council will continue to act as the accountable body and will employ the Programme Manager and Support Officer, alongside the West Kent Partnership co-ordinator. As previously, the LAG will have strategic management support from the West Kent Partnership with continuity of involvement of organisations and individuals across both the West Kent and LAG partnerships.

1. The West Kent Local Action Group Partnership

1.1 *Membership*

The West Kent Local Action Group (LAG) continues to be the responsible partnership for the Local Development Strategy (LDS) under the authority of the Accountable Body and has been the driving force behind the development of this strategy and its future implementation. The wider LAG has developed over the course of the last LEADER programme and currently consists of 59 members from across all sectors including local community, public sector, private sector and civil society with a strong landowner / farmer involvement. Membership of the LAG as a dynamic body is open and flexible and will continue to evolve throughout the course of the programme. The wider LAG is very representative of the local area and reflects the funding priorities in West Kent, which are to largely support the landbased sector and rural business, but in some cases members will also be representing pan Kent, regional and national bodies, which will ensure that there is joined up thinking across the region with complementary working. This group also has strong links back into the rural communities and will play a key role in bringing forward projects and ensuring ongoing engagement. The wider LAG will be consulted in drawing up and rolling forward the business plans to ensure the programme continues to meet local priorities and responds to changing circumstances.

The LAG currently includes 59 representatives membership from the following 49 public, private and civil sector organisations:

Action with Communities in Rural Kent, Taywell Ice Cream, RAMSAK, Penshurst Place, Kent Farmers Market Association, NFU, Gravesham Borough Council, Sevenoaks District Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, SE LEP Board, Weald Granary, ESUS Forestry, Produced in Kent, National Trust, Giles Dadd Associates, Hadlow Place Farms, Mitchell and Peach, Scotney Castle, Commonwork, Hussey Estates, Natural England, Tonbridge & Malling BC, Robinson Escott, Hugh Lowe Farms, South East Wood Fuels, rural consultant, New Park Farm, Smiths Gore, Kent Downs AONB, Batchellor Monkhouse, FWAG Advice, Arena Pursuits Ltd., Tourism South East, Westerham Brewery, Faulkners Hill Farm, High Weald AONB, Environment Agency, Court Lodge Farm, Omega, Hadlow College, Castle Farm, Forestry Commission, Kent Association of Local Councils, West Kent Partnership, Ashes Plantation, Kent County Council and independent rural consultants.

1.2 *Structure and decision making process*

Under the last LEADER programme, an Executive Group (ELAG) was identified from within the wider LAG comprising of people who are able to give an enhanced time commitment to the development of the LAG, give additional support to the programme manager and help co-ordinate and deliver the programme. This approach has worked well and will be carried forward into the new programme. The membership of the ELAG currently numbers 23, which as participants are volunteers, ensures that at any meeting there is an attendance, on average, of 10 – 12 representatives, from the full cross sector of interests, with a wide range of experience and expertise, with no one interest group having more than 49% of the voting rights

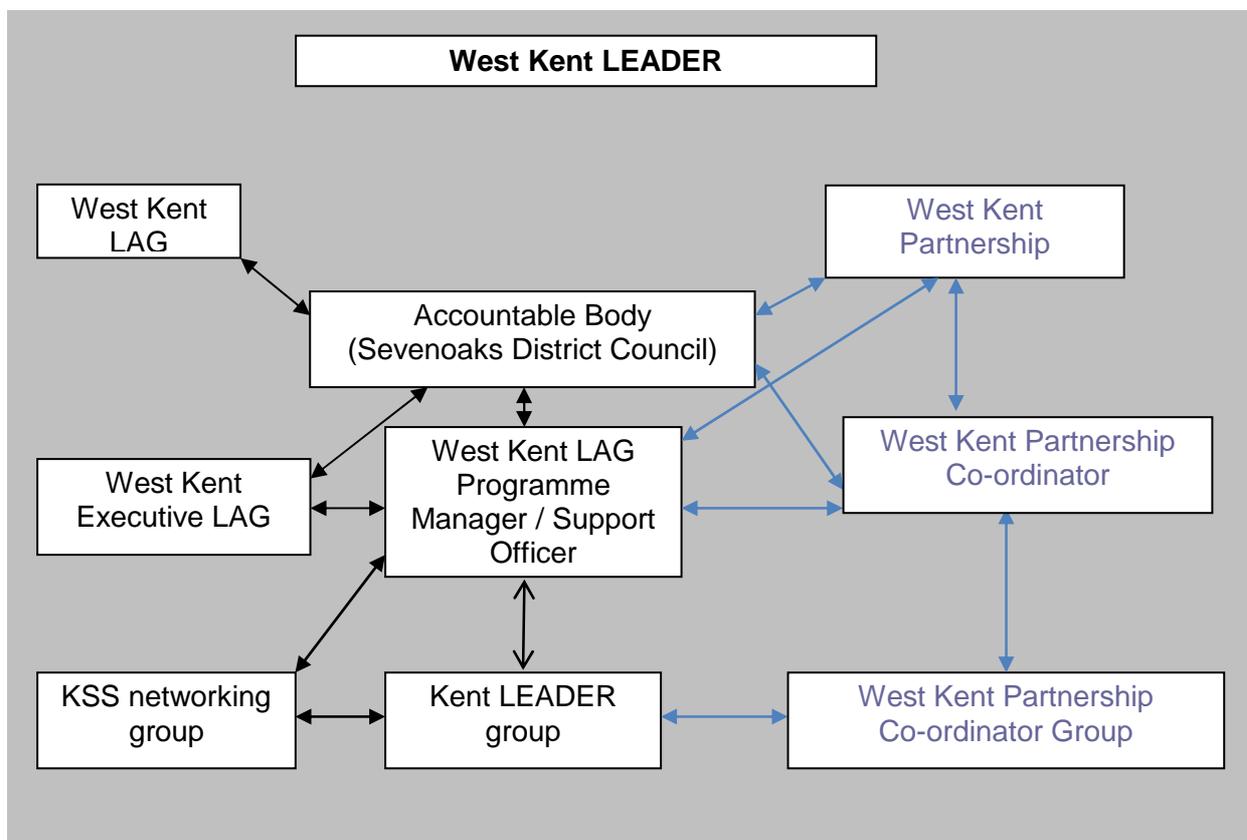
The ELAG will be the main decision making body and operates under agreed Terms of Reference (ToR), including recording any declarations of interest at meetings. The Chairman of the LAG, who is also the Chairman of the ELAG, is currently from the private sector and this post is elected annually. The ToR will be reviewed at the start of the new programme to ensure they are fully compliant with the new National Operating Manual and to also include any additional sections if required on the Behavioural Code of Conduct.

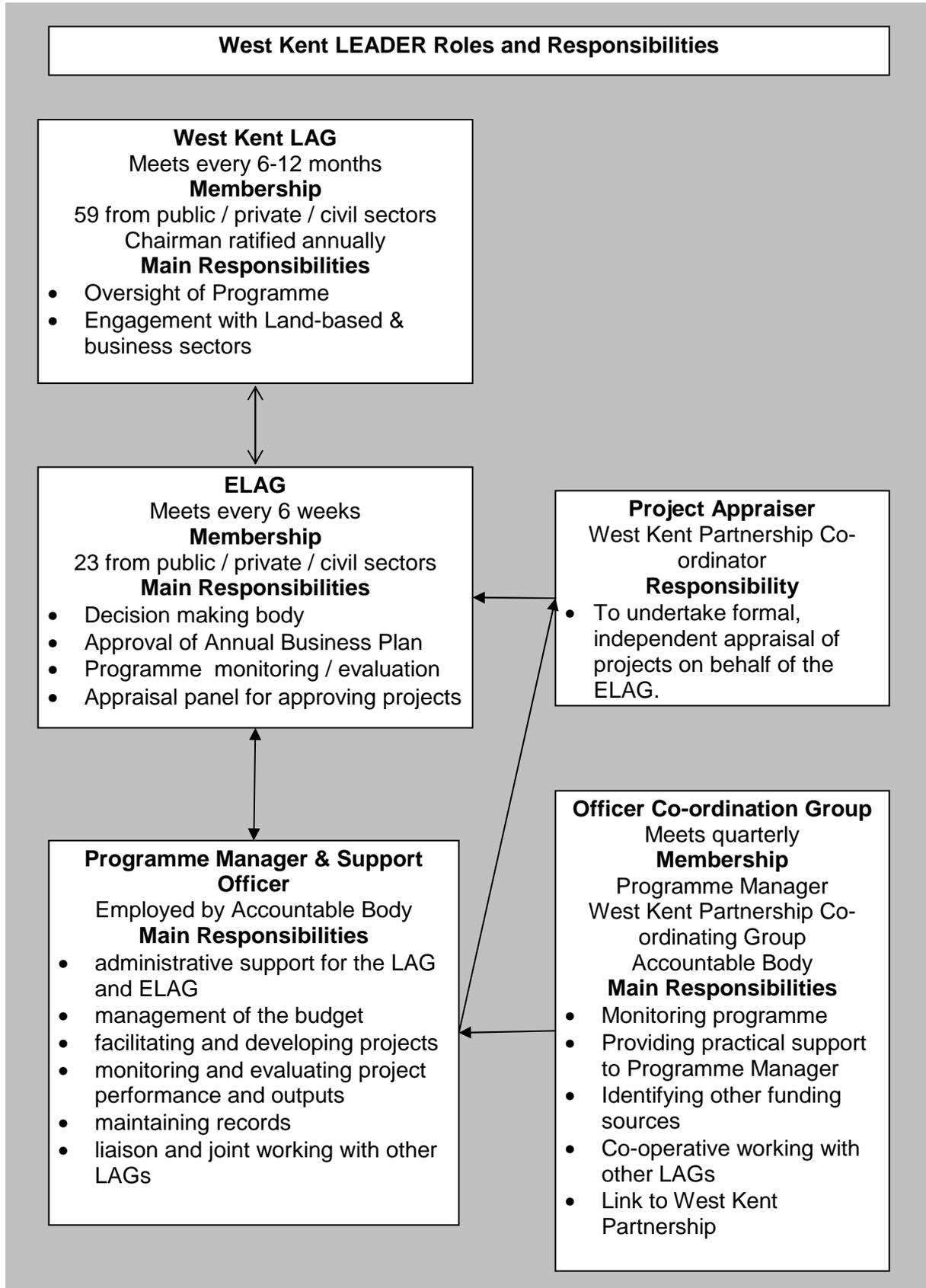
The ELAG will therefore be responsible for:

- approval of projects according to the criteria of the LDS objectives and targets
- approval of the annual business plan
- approval of any strategic or operational reports as required
- oversight of the West Kent LEADER budget
- monitoring and evaluation of the programme

Support to the Executive Group will be available by the lead officers from the three district councils of the West Kent Partnership with additional support from Gravesham Council.

The organisational structure for West Kent LEADER is as follows:





1.3 Local Action Group staff, numbers and job descriptions

There are two members of staff for the West Kent LAG (1.6fte equivalent), who are employed by the accountable body in accordance with their terms and conditions.

Post	Job description
Programme Manager	Management support for the LAG and ELAG Management of the LDS delivery Management of the budget Facilitating and developing projects Monitoring project performance and outputs Processing of project claims Processing of M & A claims Maintaining records Liaison and joint working with other LAGs Liaison and joint working with the SE LEP Liaison with Defra and other appropriate bodies
Programme Support Officer	Admin. support for the programme / LAG / ELAG Applicant support Project inspections Processing of claims Maintaining files and records Maintaining database

Additional accountable body staff who will provide their time are as follows:

Post	Job description
WKP co-ordinator	Project appraisals Reporting to ELAG on appraisals WKP co-ordinator group
Chief Housing Officer	Line Manager for Programme manager Member of ELAG Claim authoriser WKP co-ordinator group
Chief Finance Officer	Financial management / audit Claim authoriser
Principal Legal Executive	Contractual and general legal advice

1.4 Equal opportunities statement

The West Kent LAG, as a decision making body, has adopted the Equality & Diversity policy of its accountable body Sevenoaks District Council.

In 2012, the three local authorities of the West Kent Partnership (Sevenoaks District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) adopted shared aims and commitments in response to the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty. These commitments apply in all areas of the authorities' work including this LDS. In line with these commitments, we will:

- Take informed decisions when allocating funding which are governed by criteria which have due regard to the three aims of the public sector equality duty; and
- Provide information about how to apply for funding in accessible formats.

Further information about our aims and commitments can be found at: <http://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/services/community-and-living/equality-and-diversity>

1.5 Involvement of the community and consultation activity undertaken

LAG staff and members of the ELAG have undertaken over 17 discussions, workshops, presentations and sector specific meetings since February 2014 to engage with all areas of the rural economy to define the local needs and challenges of West Kent. These have ranged from having a stand at the Kent County Show and the Chamber of Commerce B2B events, to meetings with the AONB units, Hadlow College, large estate owners and participation in the CAP reform meeting at Ashford Livestock market.

- Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce meeting
- Hadlow College sounding board meeting
- Produced in Kent sounding board meeting
- SE LEP rural workshop
- SDC economic development consultation workshop
- West Kent Partnership meeting
- B2B workshop x 2
- Meeting with KCC
- High Weald / Kent Downs AONB meetings
- CAP reform meeting
- SE LEP rural workshops
- Kent County Show
- NELMS consultation workshop
- Birling Estate meeting / Squerreys Estate meeting

We have also undertaken a consultation survey by email, of contacts compiled by West Kent LEADER of, Local Action Group members, previous grant applicants, local stakeholders and other interested parties with over 50 responses. Access to the consultation document has also been made available to anyone through the West Kent LEADER website www.westkentleader.org.uk and promoted through the regional NFU bulletin circulated to all their members, through the CLA website and local authority websites.

The ELAG have met on three occasions since January 2014 to add their comments and input to each stage of the consultation process. We have also held five Kent, Surrey, Sussex (KSS) networking meetings, where West Kent have shared their experiences and best practice with their neighbouring LAGs with regards to the consultation process and we have had two separate meetings with the other Kent LAGs, to liaise on the wider pan Kent issues.

1.6 Training requirements

As identified in the Lincoln report, the success of a LAG is heavily dependant on the calibre and commitment of its members and staff. All existing ELAG members undertook training on the use of the operating manual for the 2007 – 2013 programme and also on the process of appraising projects. This training will be renewed to cover any changes brought in by the new National Operating Manual, when this is released, including equality training on Public Sector Equality Duty under the new Equality Act 2010. It is also proposed that any training required for the existing LAG / ELAG members could be undertaken with the other Kent LAGs, to reduce costs and create efficiencies for both the LAG members themselves and the Defra RDT staff.

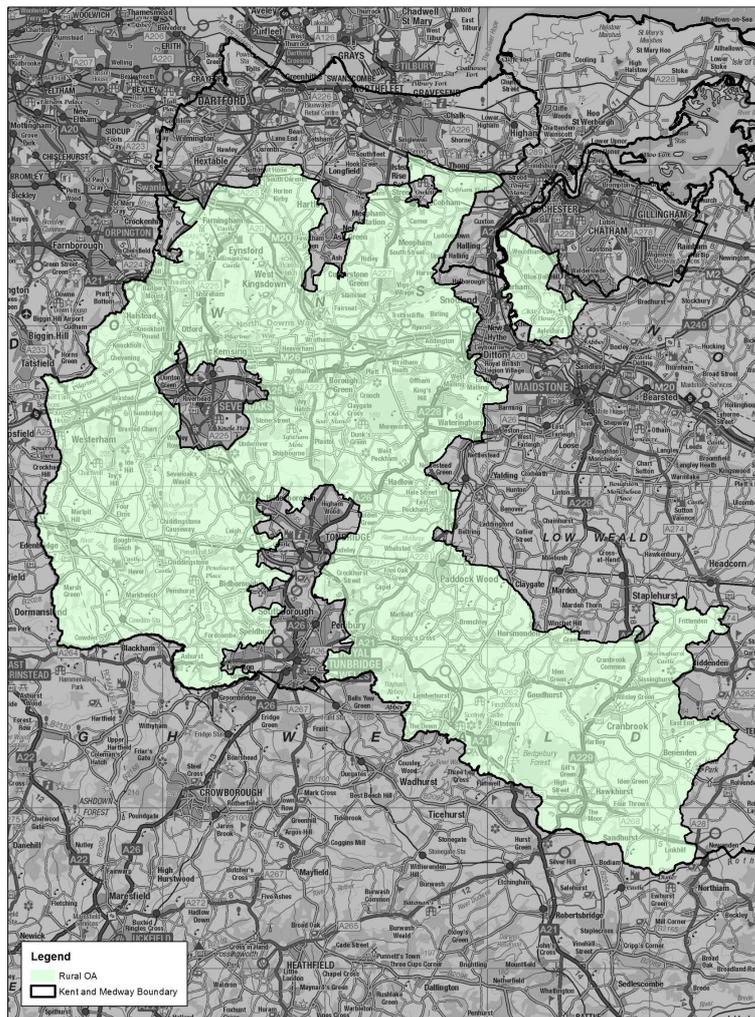
Both the Programme Manager and Support Officer having successfully delivered the last LEADER programme will work closely with Defra on any new training required for the programme staff, especially once the new National Operational Manual is available and the CAP-D IT system is launched in 2015. The appraiser will attend specific appraiser training for the programme. They have already undertaken generic appraisal training and undertook the appraisals for the last programme.

2. The West Kent LAG area

Geography

West Kent LEADER lies within the three local authority areas of Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells plus parts of Gravesend south of the A2. In total this is an area of approximately 550 square miles and represents some 38% of Kent. West Kent is a cohesive area in geographical, economic and social terms with many organisations and businesses operating across the area and incorporating West Kent in their names. Local residents also tend to have an affinity with the term 'West Kent' as distinct from eastern and northern parts of the County.

2. Map of the area



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West Kent Leader



2.2 Rural population covered

The rural population of the West Kent LEADER area is 149,360 (based on the 2011 census as defined by Defra rural statistics unit). This accounts for 38% of Kent's total rural population.

3. The Strategy

The Wider West Kent Economy:

West Kent is a distinct economic area overseen by The West Kent Partnership and recognised by both Kent County Council and SE LEP as such. The wider strategic economic work undertaken by the Partnership has informed the development of this strategy. The continuing involvement of the Partnership in West Kent LEADER is a valuable asset to the programme. Through the economic expertise on the Partnership, West Kent LEADER will be enabled to keep abreast of other opportunities for funding for applicants and generic business support available in the area. West Kent LEADER will also benefit from a broader understanding of strategic economic issues for the area and access through the Partnership to the SE LEP Director and KCC Cabinet Member for Regeneration who are both Partners.

The West Kent Partnership has adopted the West Kent Priorities document (January 2014) which builds on the 2010-2015 Investment Strategy and Action Plan. This guides its work on addressing economic issues and has recently been influential in setting out the area's needs in relation to SELEP funding opportunities and provides the context for the economic priorities as set out in this LDS. The Investment Strategy indicates that, over the past 10 years, the West Kent economy has benefitted from the following key advantages:

- high levels of inward investment such as King's Hill, North Farm Industrial Estate and Blighs with scope to attract high value businesses relocating from London
- a number of fast-growing key sectors including software and media, science and engineering, and the knowledge economies
- a strong base of very highly skilled and motivated workers.
- consistently low levels of unemployment assisted by targeting unemployment hotspots and apprenticeship initiatives
- a strong and resilient SME sector
- good local quality of life, striking an appropriate balance between accommodating growth in a sustainable way whilst recognising and continuing to protect the area's high quality and sensitive local environment.

The West Kent Priorities document recognises the importance of the rural economy to the area and identifies the strengths of the local economy including a culture of entrepreneurship and a wealth of tourism opportunities both of which play a vital role in contributing to the rural economy and helping to sustain vibrant rural communities. It also highlights a number of key future challenges which are particularly relevant to the rural economy including:

- the high cost of affordable housing in rural areas impacting on recruitment
- a large proportion of the local workforce lack basic qualifications and work readiness skills which is a barrier to growth, with higher level skilled staff out-commuting
- the need to support local market towns and for high speed broadband service to all rural communities
- a major decline in employment in the land-based sector which is characterised by low profitability and high levels of self-employment and short term casual labour.

The West Kent Priorities document highlights that the West Kent economy underperforms in comparison with the South East region. In 2008, West Kent GVA per capita was only 74% of the South East region average. It identifies that to continue to thrive, further targeted investment to support the West Kent economy is now needed. West Kent LEADER provides a vehicle to deliver on this through its overarching principle – to promote sustainable business growth within the land based and rural economies in the area. LEADER investments will be focused to improve the long term viability of rural businesses, create economic growth and additional local employment.

3.1 SWOT analysis

(As identified by the LAG, consultation events, West Kent Priorities for Growth (WKP 2014), and analysis of the other evidence base.)

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality landscape (including two AONBs) making it an attractive destination for visitors as well as a desirable location to live. • Large area of woodland (broadleaved and coniferous) • Excellent cultural and leisure facilities with local attractions for both residents and visitors • A strong base of very highly skilled and motivated workers. Over 38% of workers in the area have qualifications at NVQ4 and higher level. This is far above the UK and South East average • Consistently low levels of unemployment • Affluent, high spending peri-urban population • Accessible markets: being in close proximity to London, M25 and Europe • Strong 'Garden of England', 'Produced in Kent' brands • Productive horticultural base especially in the top fruit and soft fruit sectors • Quality hops for local brewery businesses • Increasing direct sales to public, and through farmers' markets • Excellent established networking with neighbouring LAGs • Close working and support from Hadlow College - a specialist, high quality, land-based college. • Entrepreneurial track record and culture • Attractive sites for relocating businesses • Embedded and successful economic partnership (West Kent Partnership) and strong LEP alignment • Resilient SME sector with 84% of employees in West Kent in firms of 10 or less • Good business start up rate with high survival rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weald farms are small, almost half farm holdings less than 20 ha • Higher proportion of rented farms than other parts of Kent (mostly in private ownership) • Declining number of people employed in agriculture • Relatively low numbers of young people entering the sector or succeeding to family business • Ageing demographic profile of farmers (average. age 59) • Misconception that West Kent is uniformly prosperous • Low incomes in West Kent rural area – high proportion of social renting households • Lack of affordable housing in rural areas • Green belt / planning constraints restricting diversification • Planning policy not keeping up with changes in the rural economy • Declining farm incomes • Traditional economic strengths under erosion • Infrastructure investment elsewhere in county • High level of environmental constraints • Significantly lower GVA than South East average • Pockets of deprivation that can fall below radar • 20% of workforce lack NVQ level 1 and basic work readiness skills • High levels of out commuting for work • Relative shortage of good quality sites and premises • Lack of investment in north south road links leading to congestion • Poor mobile / broadband coverage in rural areas

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing public awareness of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ health benefits of fully traceable fresh food ○ climate change and sustainability ○ local purchasing ○ benefits of exercise and recreation • Build on the local entrepreneurial culture and longstanding West Kent farming tradition to diversify and develop new business opportunities • Strong rural SME sector with growth potential • Vibrant local food and drink production sector looking for capacity to grow • Provide facilitation to aid the development of collective activities and ongoing support to farmers • Development of alternative energy sources • Widen quiet access to the countryside • Encourage good environmental management to conserve landscape features, woodland, and habitats • Development of timber markets for woodfuel / biomass / sawn timber • Close working with East Malling Research, the leading research institute in the UK in horticultural and environmental sciences. • Assist in the quality of development projects to make them more acceptable to the environmental constraints • Attractive relocation sites for businesses • A21 dualling will relieve local congestion • Cross LAG project development • Good potential for growth in the home-based business sector • Adding value to farm products creating differentiated products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reluctance of landlords to put resources into diversification • Low profitability giving rise to low levels of reinvestment • Dependence on seasonal migrant workers especially in the horticultural sectors • Dominance of supermarkets in market further depressing prices • High cost of housing • Competition from lower cost producers in enlarged EU • Impact of climate change / water shortages • Investment buyers of farms and woodland • Public sector funding cuts reducing services in rural areas • Animal and tree health / disease risks • Difficulties for small rural businesses to access funding from banks etc. to achieve growth and expansion • Loss of employment sites eg through new permitted development rights for change of use from agricultural buildings / office to residential • Lack of rural transport as a barrier to employment especially for the younger age groups • Most farm produce enters undifferentiated commodity markets, which leaves small businesses vulnerable to changing global market prices

3.2 Evidence of alignment with LEP activity

The West Kent Partnership has taken a lead role in ensuring that the economic needs of the West Kent area have been taken into account by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP). As the South East LEP operates on a federated model, the West Kent priorities first needed to be adopted by the Kent and Medway Partnership. The West Kent Partnership therefore prepared a 'West Kent Priorities for Growth' statement setting out future infrastructure and economic needs of the area. This statement highlighted the need for further support to be provided in respect of the rural economy of West Kent including both rural-based businesses generally and specifically those in the land-based sector. This West

Kent statement also highlighted that a second LEADER programme for West Kent was a major priority alongside other rural-focused initiatives such as business advice services and support for local food production activity led by Produced in Kent.

Extensive discussions have been held with representatives of the South East LEP and LAG members have been involved in the consultation and development of both the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and the European Structural and Investment Fund Strategy (ESIF). Members of the West Kent LAG also sit on the LEP board and the rural workstream working group.

At a rural consultation event held in July by the SE LEP, where our LAG members and staff were participating, one of the main priorities was directly looking at the alignment of the LEADER funds with the LEP growth funds. There is also still work in progress on the Thematic programmes of the SIF and we are currently working with the LEP's consultants, along with the other Kent LEADER groups, on the development of this rural chapter of the ESIF.

A key role of this LDS is to ensure that the LEADER funds are used to complement those of the LEP, as well as the other RDPE schemes (NELMS / FFPS) and other investment funds at both national and local levels, all of which can provide added value to any LEADER delivery.

The South East LEP has been allocated £14.5m EAFRD funds to support economic growth in rural areas. Within their current ESIF programme document (May 2014) priorities for these funds include:

- Critical infrastructure including digital and mobile connectivity
- Access to finance to support business growth
- Optimising the take-up of new technology and supporting innovation
- Continued diversification, including the growth of agri-tech, energy production and tourism

Some of the specific projects types that they seek to prioritise include:

- Agri-tech Innovation Centre - East Malling Research, Lee Valley glasshouse project/Food security institute, Thanet Earth, Writtle College, U of E Sustainability Institute, Plumpton Agricultural College.
- Business Advice and support for micro businesses, to encourage businesses run from home
- Marketing and export of food products
- Broadband - last mile investment
- Small scale renewables - e.g. SDNP project, Forestry Commission, Forestry Wood Fuel, rural business parks and community facilities.
- Tourism

The SE LEP has acknowledged the previous success of all the SE LEP area LAGs and has indicated their wish to support this approach in delivering support to businesses in rural areas. Whilst the LEP funds are targeted at larger more strategic projects, to assist in delivering locally-targeted support appropriate to the businesses across the LEP, they have proposed to pass a proportion of the funding directly to the LEADER Local Action Groups to allocate alongside their LEADER funding. The mechanism to do this is still in discussion, but will probably be on the basis of each LAG in the SE LEP area being able to bid for up to £500,000 of the SE LEP EAFRD allocation.

There have also been early discussions on pan Kent projects involving the LEP and the other Kent LAGs (see section 3.6) around Forestry, Food and Farming hubs.

(A letter of endorsement from the SE LEP of the West Kent LDS is attached to this document.)

3.3 Local priorities and programme of activity

The West Kent LEADER programme has an overarching principle - to promote sustainable business growth within the land based and rural economies in the area. Investment through the LEADER programme is intended to improve the long term viability of businesses and to reduce their reliance on future support funding. LEADER will help add value and ensure and enhance sustainable development, promote energy efficiency, as well as build on the resilience of the rural communities, whilst recognising the important part to play of the high quality landscape of the area.

The focus of the West Kent LEADER programme under this overarching principle will be on jobs and growth, with over 70% of the projects / funds directly supporting the rural economy and the remaining 30% having to demonstrate that they are contributing to the local economy.

The key objectives which have emerged for West Kent are:

- Improve competitiveness and financial sustainability of West Kent's farming and forestry
- Encourage innovation and diversification in West Kent's land based sector
- Support new and existing rural businesses and promote entrepreneurship in rural West Kent
- Encourage the development of local heritage and rural tourism-related businesses, particularly where projects support the local economy and create or sustain employment
- Promote the provision of additional rural services to encourage vibrant rural communities
- Ensure best practice in land management and promote sustainable development

Improve competitiveness and financial sustainability of West Kent's farming and forestry:

In the West Kent area there are 639 businesses within the agricultural, forestry and fishing SIC codes (equating to nearly 28% of the total in Kent). The levels of profitability of farming enterprises in West Kent varies, but many have been operating at a loss for a considerable period of time, with over half of the farms being under 50ha and the average age of farmers increasing. Falling incomes is a major issue in many areas of horticulture and livestock and income generation from existing woodland has also been depressed. As Kent is known as the Garden of England, the top fruit and soft fruit sector is particularly strong in west Kent and will benefit further from investment in new technologies including processing and packing. The introduction of new alternative crops in the area, not just for food production, but including biomass and medicinal / essential oil production, shows innovation which needs to be encouraged and supported. Improvements by modernisation and improved efficiency of plant and machinery will assist to increase the productivity of businesses, as will the development of new cooperative ventures (eg machinery rings) and encouragement of on-farm renewable energy. The establishment of marketing hubs and improved local branding will add value to produce and assist the smaller businesses to benefit from economies of scale.

Activity and project ideas that have come forward include forestry cooperatives for timber / woodfuel markets; improvements to apple storage: processing of alternative crops (eg cobnuts, aronia berries); cheese production; marketing hubs for growers, farmers and producers; improved irrigation systems; distillation / bottling of essential oils; farm shop to support PYO enterprise; forestry harvesting / extraction equipment; log processing equipment.

Encourage innovation and diversification in West Kent’s land based sector:

To support the competitiveness of the land based businesses in West Kent, innovation and diversification will play a key role. Targeted training and skills can be delivered through the LEPs Growth programme and the FFPS, but there will be the need to signpost businesses to these opportunities. There is also a need to support capital investment for the conversion of buildings to alternative workspace, as this can be hampered for the high proportion of tenant farmers in the area with private sector landlords less willing to invest in diversification. The majority of farm businesses are already aware of the need for innovation and that this is not just around food production, but also renewable energy and the environment. Food production is a key sector of West Kent and the county of Kent is identified as one of three food clusters in the UK, already hosting over 500 food companies employing over 18,000 people.

Potential activity identified includes on farm butcher shop expansion for sausage production; equine facilities; conversion of buildings for cider production; development of winery; glamping facilities; conversion of redundant buildings to light industrial units / workshops; improvements to lakes for leisure purposes (fishing); barn conversion to self catering accommodation

Support new and existing rural businesses and promote entrepreneurship in rural West Kent:

Closely linked to diversification on farms, especially to provide workshop space, small and micro enterprises (SMEs) play a very important role in the rural economy of West Kent. More small firms survive for longer and grow here than in other parts of Kent and there is scope for higher value home-based businesses to be created due to the number of local higher skilled residents. Businesses are also keen to locate here due to the excellent quality of life and accessibility to markets. Both broadband speed and mobile connectivity still need to be improved in some places, which will have an impact on the ability to attract businesses into these rural areas. (West Kent Priorities for Growth)

Activity to be included in this area will aim to promote growth and create and sustain rural employment through a range of business support activities including networking and business workshops to provide essential support especially for start-ups; cooperative solutions to media and IT (a private firm is currently investing £1.1 million into improving rural broadband in the rural parishes of West Kent). LEADER funding will aim to provide capital investment for new and expanding SMEs for new or modernised infrastructure and equipment to enable those firms to increase their competitiveness and so add value to the rural economy. Projects identified include equipment purchase for expansion to homemade confectionery business, improvements to various retail outlets, equipment for wood fuel businesses, farmers markets and machinery for expansion of fencing business. This priority has been profiled as the highest from the local knowledge of the ELAG and experience of the type of projects that came forward in the last programme.

Encourage the development of local heritage and rural tourism-related businesses:

Tourism is a vital part of the rural economy of West Kent with many high quality historic and visitor sites providing scope for further tourism initiatives. The attractive countryside and opportunities to buy and eat local produce are also rated very highly amongst visitors with

the Kent Breakfast initiative (a previous successful LEADER funded project) promoting the use of local produce. Where tourism is popular, it underpins local commercial activity and services and contributes to rural regeneration

Several project ideas have already come forward for targeted activity including the development of a visitor centre and retail outlet for a local brewery including the local brewery heritage and history; self catering business support; local produce discovery trail; North Downs Way national trail; Darent Valley interpretation project; rural access enhancement; expansion of existing tourism attraction business;

Promote the provision of additional rural services to encourage vibrant rural communities:

Rural West Kent, despite some affluent areas, has deprivation issues to address particularly in relation to low income and high housing costs. Home ownership is often out of the reach of local people with average house prices in West Kent more than double those in East Kent for a similar type of property.

Development and enhancement of social facilities and support for community and parish planning are identified as key areas of activity as well as support for essential local businesses such as village shops, pubs and post offices. Opportunities to support small scale renewable investments recognising the importance of mitigating climate change will also be explored. Projects in the pipeline include upgrading of village store; village hall development; Community safety partnership Rural Specials 4x4 vehicle; Paths for Communities projects

Ensure best practice in land management and promote sustainable development:

West Kent is characterised by a very high quality environment with much of the area designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Farming and forestry play a significant part in maintaining the quality of life for the people of the West Kent area, providing a diverse range of foods and helping to maintain valued open spaces and is also the backbone of a thriving rural tourism sector. Farming and forestry have shaped the landscape – landscapes are semi-natural and dependant upon management such as grazing by livestock and woodland management.

There are over 18,000ha of woodland in West Kent much of which is under managed, however the potential yield from this resource if 2/3rds was bought back into management would be over 55,000 m³ per year, with the energy equivalent of over 9 million litres of heating oil. A key area of activity will be to support the future management of woodlands by assisting through projects such as the existing Woodfuel Pathfinder; purchase of forestry and timber processing machinery and development of a marketing hub

In the area of the High Weald AONB an initiative *Restocking the Weald: Securing the future of livestock farming in the High Weald's working landscape*, is looking at encouraging farmers to reverse the decline in livestock numbers, create space for young and aspiring farmers, and thereby help secure the Wealden working landscape which is vital to the rural economy of the area. Projects supporting this initiative are to be encouraged including purchase of stock handling equipment and co-ordination and infrastructure for linking graziers to land and marketing of branded "Wealden" meat / products.

The following table indicates the linkages of the West Kent Priorities to the national LEADER priorities, as well as their alignment with the current SIF objectives (with the LEP objective of "Access to finance to support business growth" overarching across all the priorities).

National Priorities	Support for increasing Farm Productivity
Budget	20%
WKL Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve competitiveness and sustainability of West Kent's farming and forestry • Encourage innovation and diversification in West Kent's land based sector
WKL LAG indicative priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve efficiency / sustainability of plant and buildings • On-farm renewable energy • Growing of alternative crops • Investing in facilities to enable capital equipment machinery sharing • Processing / packaging • Local product branding • Development of new co-operative ventures
Alignment with LEP SIF objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimising the take-up of new technology and supporting innovation • Continued diversification, including the growth of agri-tech, energy production and tourism

National Priorities	Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification
Budget	40%
WKL Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support new and existing rural businesses and promote entrepreneurship in rural west Kent • Encourage innovation and diversification in West Kent's land based sector
WKL LAG indicative priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting with the purchase of new equipment • Development of lakes / ponds for fishing, other leisure businesses • Tourism diversification • On-farm retail developments • Processing facilities for bio-diesel • Building conversion for workshop units • Provision of business workshops to farmers and rural businesses • IT support for rural businesses
Alignment with LEP SIF objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical infrastructure including digital and mobile connectivity • Optimising the take-up of new technology and supporting innovation • Continued diversification, including the growth of agri-tech, energy production and tourism

National Priorities	Support for rural tourism
Budget	15%
WKL Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the development of local heritage and rural tourism related businesses • Ensure best practice in land management and promote sustainable development
WKL LAG indicative priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension of self catering accommodation • Marketing and promotion of the area, specific sites, networks • Projects promoting local distinctiveness / local food • New on-farm tourism facilities • Investment in recreational enterprises / environmental interpretation
Alignment with LEP SIF objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued diversification, including the growth of agri-tech, energy production and tourism

National Priorities	Provision of rural services
Budget	5%
WKL Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the provision of additional rural services to encourage vibrant rural communities
WKL LAG indicative priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for post office network / village shops / pubs • Small scale renewable investments • Development / enhancement of social facilities
Alignment with LEP SIF objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical infrastructure including digital and mobile connectivity

National Priorities	Support for cultural and heritage activities
Budget	5%
WKL Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure best practice in land management and promote sustainable development • Encourage the development of local heritage and rural tourism related businesses
WKL LAG indicative priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small scale environmental management projects • Cultural / heritage projects which enhance economic activity / jobs to the area.
Alignment with LEP SIF objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued diversification, including the growth of agri-tech, energy production and tourism

National Priorities	Support for increasing forestry productivity
Budget	15%
WKL Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure best practice in land management and promote sustainable development • Improve competitiveness and sustainability of West Kent's farming and forestry
WKL LAG indicative priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purchase of machinery to improve woodland habitats / harvesting / in forest processing of wood fuel • Woodland co-operatives for development and storage of woodchips / timber etc.
Alignment with LEP SIF objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimising the take-up of new technology and supporting innovation • Continued diversification, including the growth of agri-tech, energy production and tourism

3.4 **Targets, results and outputs**

The primary focus of the Programme is on jobs and growth in the rural areas of West Kent. The programme of activity outlined above is designed to deliver this through target outputs of 70 projects completed and 74 new jobs created.

Our projections for jobs created within the national policy priority areas of '**Support for increasing farm productivity**' and '**Support for increasing forestry productivity**' represent value for money against the benchmark figures provided, but they are also very challenging. There is awareness that the number of direct jobs created by the investments in these areas may not be that high and indeed this was reflected in the evaluation and statistics from our past programme. However, it is clear in West Kent that investment in these priority areas does result in creating **indirect** jobs. One example of this in West Kent in the last programme was the grant to an applicant for diversification into cheese making, creating 1 new job (recorded as an output). However, the project also resulted in an additional herdsman position being created in the dairy unit, following the increased demand for milk supply, but this is not recorded against the investment in the project.

Jobs are however also sustained through spend in these two priority areas, as investment is often for greater automation of processes for micro enterprises leading to efficiency savings, economic cost savings or energy savings, resulting in a more profitable and therefore viable business.

We will look to revisit these output figures and targets once the West Kent LDS has been approved, confirmation of the budget allocation received and taking into account any further information from the National Operating Manual.

(The completed outputs submission table is attached to this document)

Monitoring and Evaluation:

Further guidance is expected on the new common monitoring and evaluation system (CMES) which will assess the progress, efficiency and effectiveness of the programme. The output indicators identified against the national policy priorities and measures will be recorded through the CAP-D IT system and the ELAG will monitor the progress of the West Kent programme against its targets, for both budgets and outputs, on a regular basis. However it is also expected that the programme of activities will result in other outputs and outcomes than those included in the new CMES and the ELAG will look to identify and record these, to highlight the successes and achievements of the programme as well as to learn lessons from what has not worked so well.

Projects will be monitored and evaluated in line with the Defra guidance; it is anticipated that basic requirements for this will be set out in the contract letters issued to successful project applicants but the Programme Staff will also have a responsibility to remind project operators of their responsibilities so that monitoring and evaluation can be made as efficient a process as possible.

There will be an ongoing evaluation of the programme. The LAG will evaluate its own work and the progress of the Programme against objectives on an annual basis and make any changes in policy and direction as necessary through the annual business plan.

3.5 Sustainability appraisal

The sustainability appraisal of the LDS looks at the economic, environmental, and social effects of the plan.

The over-arching principle of the LDS is to promote sustainable business growth to the rural economy of West Kent. In developing the LDS the ELAG has worked closely with local and regional stakeholders in embracing environmental sustainability as part of the strategy, as it is recognised that there is a balance to be maintained between economic growth and environmental sustainability. A key concern in West Kent is the impact on the local environment of a depressed land based sector, with knock-on implications for tourism and quality of life issues.

The key issues for the West Kent area have been identified as:

Economic:

- Ensure a future for the key economic activities that maintain the character of the area;
- Help businesses to expand contributing to long-term growth;
- Identify new ways that additional economic activity can be brought into the area
- Improve the viability of businesses to reduce reliance on future support funding.

Environmental:

- Ensure that the integrity of sensitive landscapes such as AONB are conserved and enhanced through appropriate management
- Promote adaptation to the environmental challenges of climate change and sustainability
- Promotion and support of renewables
- Promotion and support of landscape and biodiversity enhancement

Social:

- Work with businesses in the rural areas to reduce their environmental impact by developing better work-life balance practices
- Encourage the use of technology to reduce business travel and support home-working

From these issues and taking account of the recent sustainability appraisal for the Kent Downs AONB Management Plan 2014-19 the following objectives have been produced:

- To promote the development of a viable economy that supports social and environmental benefits including encouraging innovative technological solutions
- To create more vibrant, cohesive, safe and mixed communities
- To protect and enhance the quality and character of individual settlements, communities and landscapes
- To mitigate the impact of climate change through reducing the need and desire to travel by car and supporting renewable, low carbon and decentralised energy solutions
- To promote resilience and adaptation to future changes in climate including protecting the environment, people and properties from flood risk
- To minimize the consumption of natural resources including fossil fuels, minerals, land take and water
- To conserve and enhance biodiversity and the natural environment
- To promote healthy lifestyles and develop better work-life balance practices
- To raise standards of education and training and promote employment skills

Potential projects and schemes coming forward will be tested against our over-arching principle and these objectives.

It is anticipated, subject to the new National Operating Manual, that all projects will be required to complete a sustainability checklist as part of the application process and the role of the ELAG, with expertise on sustainability issues within its existing membership, will be to ensure that applicants have addressed this sufficiently for an application to be approved.

3.6 Proposed co-operation activity

In 2009, West Kent LEADER set up the Kent Surrey Sussex (KSS) networking group and since then we have regularly met to share good practice and to identify and resolve common issues. This collaboration has proved extremely useful and has continued during the Transition year. We are committed to continuing the Kent, Surrey and Sussex LEADER network during 2015-20 and will in particular be exploring opportunities for joint working and sharing of costs, including marketing and promotion.

We have also agreed to provide support to the WARR LAG, initially for the first six months, so that they can make a prompt start to the new programme, whilst they recruit new members of staff and start with a new accountable body.

The three Kent LAGs will be discussing further opportunities to share the appraisal function between them, with the programme manager from another Kent LAG appraising projects on a reciprocal basis and reporting to the LAG appraisal panel. This would help make better use of the resources available, help to promote awareness between programme managers of potentially complementary / best practice projects underway in neighbouring LAGs and allow the sharing of the different skills and areas of expertise of the programme staff in different subject areas.

We have also been working very closely with the two other Kent LEADER groups to promote the “LEADER in Kent” initiative, holding joint drop in sessions as part of the consultation process and working with stakeholders on looking at pan Kent projects across the Kent Downs AONB and the High Weald AONB. We will be build on the Kent LEADER approach through looking at sharing of resources, representation at meetings and events, marketing, websites,

There are existing links with LAGs in Spain and Sweden, with whom experiences and best practice have been shared, which can be developed further and we will also look at working together with our Kent partners on any trans-national activity that comes forward, where there are benefits to our LAG area.

During the last programme West Kent delivered 3 cross LAG projects within the KSS group area, as well as one project with North Notts LEADER and therefore has good experience at working cooperatively.

There are three exciting larger cooperation ideas in the pipeline for the Kent LEADER groups, working jointly with the LEP, where the strategic input to provide the project infrastructure could be from LEP investment, whilst the LEADER funds can provide capital support to the individuals and businesses, for example in equipment purchase. These are as follows:

- Forestry hub –

With West Kent being one of the most wooded areas of the country, a large proportion of which is undermanaged, there is a vast underutilised resource for renewable fuel as well as sawn timber, but much of it is on relatively small parcels of land. With Estover due to become operational in the next couple of years, the demand for local timber will increase dramatically and the need to create an infrastructure to link up the suppliers to the demand is of prime importance. Estover have already expressed an interest in this project.

The Forestry Commission proposals to the SE LEP for revenue support towards training / apprenticeships / supply chain hubs / machinery rings and feasibility studies to develop new business ideas / options, can also be supported by capital investment from LEADER towards purchase of machinery and equipment for forestry businesses, more suited to the smaller and more sensitive woods of West Kent, as well as primary processing investment (eg kilns / handling facilities)

- Food hub – Produced in Kent initiative

This proposal is about creating jobs and promoting economic growth through ‘pump-priming’ finance for new and existing businesses within the highly entrepreneurial SME food and drink sector and build on the global reputation the UK enjoys for excellence in both food production and agri-tech innovation.

The aim is to create an infrastructure that will encourage up-scaling and allow the rural business landscape to work with the physical landscape and the valuable rural tourism sector, as well as build upon export opportunities. Produced in Kent is well placed to guide this initiative with its extensive track record, being a known brand and with a record of collaboration in the area. Investments in this area will for example include looking at addressing the lack of capacity in production and supply, through, a network of incubator units providing professional kitchen space, shared cold storage, preparation areas. Designed to be available for short term rent, from 1 day to 1 month, the purpose is to prepare small companies for scaling up production and meeting requirements for the international market place and to test recipes, production methods and varieties.

- Farming hub – Restocking the Weald

The proposal to be developed over the coming months is to connect start-up farmers with the pasture of non-farming landowners, creating opportunities for new young farmers to enter into livestock farming and to improve the productivity of the existing grassland resource. The High Weald is an excellent place for red meat production and is well located for the markets of the south east, London and Europe. Additional benefits include the protection of the important Wealden landscape and its associated tourism activity and that managed grassland can be an important part of climate resilient agriculture. The importance of livestock grazing also applies in the Kent Downs AONB where the number of sheep have nearly halved since 1990.

Investment is required not only in the infrastructure, support for co-ordination and training / mentoring for new entrants, but also in shared equipment, such as for handling stock and animal health. As the proposal is still in its early stages funding is being investigated through the LEADER programme, the LEP and the FFPS as appropriate, to ensure complementary support.

4. Management and Administration

4.1 *Accountable body*

The Accountable body will be Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) who have an excellent track record in this role, which includes being responsible for the successful delivery and conclusion of the last West Kent LEADER programme (2007-2013). SDC also has previous experience of running a SRB programme and Big Lottery funding and is the accountable body for the West Kent Partnership.

SDC are committed to cultivating, 'pride in the District of Sevenoaks by working with the Community as a whole, to sustain and develop a fair, safe and thriving local economy.'

To support this aim they have developed five core promises that represent their commitment to residents:

- We will provide Value for Money
- We will work in partnership to keep the District of Sevenoaks safe
- We will continue to collect rubbish weekly, efficiently and effectively
- We will protect the Green Belt
- We will support and develop the local economy

As the accountable body for the West Kent LAG, these principles will also apply to the LEADER programme where appropriate.

As accountable body, SDC is responsible on behalf of the West Kent LAG for a number of functions including:

- Project development through animation with local stakeholders
- Ensuring compliance with the RDPE operating procedures through the new National Operational Manual.
- Appraising, selecting and approving (issuing grant offers) for individual projects,
- Maintaining records of each project (up to 10 years)
- Monitoring the progress of the projects and carry out inspections
- Process grant payments and submit payment recommendations through the Defra CAP-D IT system
- Account for and keep records of all running costs of the LAG

SDC also provides the following functions (without charge to the LAG) for the support of the programme and its staff:

- Nominated manager to line manage the Programme Manager for appraisal / pastoral purposes and be a member of the LAG executive
- Provision of office space, IT / telecoms support, internal training and development opportunities for programme manager
- Access to financial management, legal and project management skills
- Provides the legal platform for LAG activities such as employing staff.
- Provides help with the procurement of some services and activities
- Involvement in delivery of complementary activities and initiatives.

Some of the accountable body functions are delivered by the Programme Manager and some by the Finance Officer designated to provide financial services to the Programme.

4.2 Project development and assessment procedures

Subject to any major changes introduced by the new National Operational Manual, the project development and assessment procedures are proposed to be based on those successfully used throughout the last programme which proved to be open and transparent, thorough and fair to all applicants.

The Accountable Body role in the development of projects will be supporting the LAG to stimulate local interest, as well as facilitating regular meetings, providing business advice and working with applicants in project development. Work and briefings will also be had with other local support organisations to ensure opportunities to access the programme are maximised. Further information is provided in section 4.4 Communications and Publicity.

As in the last programme, it is intended that we will be open for applications throughout the life of the programme and will not undertake deadline calls for EOIs. This will ensure a fair and equal opportunity for all to submit an application, regardless of the current stage in thought and development of a project idea.

Project Development and Assessment procedures (subject to further guidance from Defra) therefore are as follows:

- Call for projects (see 4.4 below)
- Initial discussion (phone or email) by LAG staff with applicant
- Applicant submits Expression of Interest (EOI)
- LAG staff acknowledge receipt / record on Defra database (currently ROD until new CAP-D IT system available)
- Check project for eligibility etc. based on operating manual / Defra guidance
- Further discussion with applicant (or visit if necessary)
- Confirm eligibility and advise to proceed to full application (or reject if not eligible)
- Record outcome on database
- Applicant receives advice and support from LAG staff if required
- Full application received
- LAG staff acknowledge receipt / record on database
- Checks undertaken against all information provided / state aid / etc.
- Site visit to applicant by LAG staff to collate any further information required
- Sent to Appraiser
- Appraised application submitted to next ELAG approval panel
- If supported by the panel, sent to Defra for confirmation (if rejected applicant can appeal / withdraw / resubmit)
- Contract for project drawn up by Accountable body
- Project completed / LAG staff inspect project
- Claim submitted by applicant / checked and processed by Accountable body
- Input through CAP-D / outputs recorded

All the above stages will be carried out in accordance with the new National Operational Manual and will ensure that the activity is compliant with the regulatory key and ancillary controls set out therein, (e.g. separation of duties, conflicts of interest, audit requirements) as well as meeting the objectives of the LDS.

At all times throughout the process, the programme staff will be available for advice and support to the applicants with regards to the development of the project as well as the preparation of the application itself. We will look to signpost to additional resources / agencies / professionals where appropriate.

4.3 Claims and payments

As in section 4.2 above in the absence of the new National Operational Manual, it is proposed to base the claims and payments system as in the previous programme. All claims for grants will be processed using the proposed new CAP-D IT system on the receipt of the appropriate forms from the applicant, including a progress report on the project against the items of expenditure and outputs identified in the contract.

Checks to be undertaken by the LAG staff will include:

- All entries against grant contract details
- All calculations
- Verification of expenses by original invoices / bank statements
- Any amendments to original contract having received prior written approval
- Any irregularities

A site inspection will also be undertaken, before the above checks can then be quality controlled by a second member of the LAG staff and finally authorised for payment by one of the claim authorisers within the accountable body

4.4 Communications and publicity

As an existing successful LAG from the last programme, we have a reasonably high profile and there is considerable awareness of LEADER in the area, as shown by there being already over 40 potential projects registered with West Kent LEADER in anticipation of the next round of grants becoming available.

The Programme Manager will be responsible for the development and implementation of a marketing strategy for the programme, working closely with the ELAG and the West Kent local authority partners. Actions already confirmed include the following:

- Re-development and upgrading of the existing West Kent LEADER website including direct links to the other Kent LEADER websites as a key tool both for publicity and communication
- Use of social media such as twitter and facebook facilitated through the Accountable body
- Press releases facilitated by Communications Manager at SDC and distribution via all West Kent local authorities including promotion on the local radio station - Radio Kent
- Regular updates to the wider LAG by email
- Facilitation of networking opportunities for LAG and project applicants, especially to share best practice
- Email 'mailshots' through partners organisations on the LAG including the NFU / CLA / AONB
- Publicising successes through case histories
- Ensuring participation in the National Rural Network and other such initiatives
- Participation in land based and rural networks operating in West Kent

To maximise opportunities for Kent businesses, we will be working jointly with the other LEADER groups in Kent to market ourselves as Kent LEADER. We will also signpost applicants where appropriate to other funding available for rural businesses including RDP

funds through the SE LEP Growth programme, FFPS and NELMS schemes, as well as other alternative grants / loans schemes available in the area.

Throughout the life of the programme targeted marketing activities will take place with attendance at relevant trade and business events to include Bentley Woodfair, Fruit Focus, Edenbridge & Oxted Show, Heathfield Show, Ploughing matches, Livestock markets, Kent Show, Kent 20/20, and Kent B2B events.

Advertising and editorial in relevant trade publications will include the South East Farmer, Woodlots, and South East Business.

Action plan:

(This is subject to the dates as set out in the National Delivery Framework LEADER application timeline)

2014	
5 th September	Local Development Strategy submitted to Defra
October	ELAG meeting to review membership and identify any new members required to ensure all interests / sectors are included; ratify Chairman; review ToR; identify any group and individual training needs and review of the National Operational Manual
Early November	(If successful bid) Press release; update website; attend trade and business events / meetings to market the programme Contact all pipeline projects to prepare for submission of EOI
December / January 2015	(timescale dependant on receipt of contract) Official Launch, including meeting of full LAG First EOI's processed and moved forward to full application ELAG - development of business plan; review of processes
2015	
January	First projects appraised and contracts awarded
March	First projects completed and claims processed

5. Financial Plan

5.1 Expenditure for each year by measure

See attached financial template

5.2 Overall funding profile

The expenditure profile in the above template has been based on the mid-point figure, of £2,011,000, from the indicative allocation range as suggested in the letter from Defra of 20th June 2014.

With the existing experienced ELAG and LAG staff in place and projects in the pipeline, it is anticipated that West Kent LEADER can get off to an early start in January 2015 by approving the first project applications (subject to West Kent LAG receiving a contract from Defra by 31st December 2014).

5.3 Use of grants, procurement or other funding support

We are currently still awaiting further guidance on the intervention rates for the different measures, but based on the last programme it is assumed that the applicant will need to match fund their project in the region of 50-60%. The applicant will need to identify that the source of the match funding is in place before being awarded a grant, which can be from private sources (eg. own cash resources / bank loan) or can be other grant aid / public funds subject to state aid regulations.

Procurement:

The Accountable Body complies with the EU and national rules for public procurement. This applies even if the project is not in the public sector. Procurement processes and decisions are open to scrutiny and audit. They must be open, transparent, well documented and give value for money.

The LAG will work in accordance with the procurement principles of the Accountable Body, of best value, social value, sustainability, equality & diversity, collaboration and working in partnership and supporting local business and SMEs.

A grant applicant will be required to obtain three competitive quotes for expenditure within their project.

Running costs and animation:

As in the last programme, the three funding partners of the West Kent Partnership have expressed a commitment to support the costs of the new programme both financially as well as in kind. Additional financial support has also been provisionally agreed with Gravesham Borough Council and Kent County Council. As indicated earlier, further discussions will be had with our neighbouring LAGs on joint working to reduce marketing and promotion costs.

The table below identifies the projected costs for the operation of the LAG as follows:

- existing staff costs. (including 3.4% NI increase in 2015 and ongoing inflation)
- misc. expenditure for phone / marketing etc. based on the last programme
- Formal project appraisals, undertaken by the West Kent Partnership co-ordinator based on an average of 15 days pa @ £232.50/day

Projected West Kent LAG operational costs								
	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	Total
Programme Manager (1 fte)	12,625	53,000	53,800	54,600	55,400	56,200	42,822	328,447
Support Officer (0.6 fte))	4,966	20,848	21,161	21,478	21,800	22,127	16,844	129,224
mobile phone / marketing / website etc.	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	500	6,500
Appraisals								20,925
Accountable body financial services								58,000
Accountable body legal services								6,300
TOTAL cost								549,396

M & A @18% on indicative allocation mid-point								361,980
Accountable body in-kind match (finance & legal)								64,300
WKP funding partners								90,000
Other funding partners								33,116
TOTAL income								549,396

Costs of services provided as in-kind match are calculated as follows:

- The accountable body Finance Services team function of financial control and audit for the programme, based on average of 28 days pa @ £350/day
- The accountable body Legal team services based on 3 days pa @ £350/day

Additional costs to the programme provided as in-kind match by the accountable body not shown above:

- The programme staff costs above include the on-costs of NI and superannuation, but exclude the office support service costs (IT / HR / facilities etc.) These are normally accounted for at 42.59% of salary costs and therefore would equate to **£195,000** over the life of the programme.

Further in kind match will be provided by the ELAG members and their organisations through staff time, marketing opportunities, hosting meetings and event venue offers.

Value for money:

The allocation of no more than 18% of the mid-point indicative allocation for the West Kent LAG (£2,011,000) for the M&A costs of £361,980 have been met by the provision of over £180,000 match by direct and in-kind support as identified above.

Administration and management processes will be as streamlined as possible, with shared use of resources so that maximum time can be spent by the programme manager on supporting the facilitation and development of projects. Cross LAG working to deliver projects will result in savings in administration costs – only one LAG needs to monitor/support. As in the last programme we will use the secure facility of the Kent Connects portal, through the County Council website, to exchange confidential information within our LAG and across the Kent LAGs.

A robust project appraisal process will ensure that those applicants which secure funding, satisfy criteria requiring commercial projects to be of high quality at low cost and an ongoing performance monitoring of the project delivery will keep projects on track. Applicants will need to demonstrate a need for the funding and value for money. The emphasis will be on lower financial input for highest outcomes. This will be achieved through provision of pump-priming funding and an emphasis on capital rather than revenue projects and demonstrable efficiencies in delivery. All projects will have to demonstrate long term financial sustainability to ensure that projects supported have a long term legacy beyond the end of the programme.

References for evidence base:

1. West Kent Partnership (2014) West Kent Priorities for Growth
2. West Kent Partnership (2010) West Kent Investment Strategy and Investment Plan 2010-2015
3. Centre for Strategy & Evaluation Services (2009) West Kent Economic Profile
4. Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (2013) Kent and Medway Economic Review
5. Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (2013) Unlocking the Potential: Going for Growth
6. South East Local Enterprise Partnership (2014) European Structural and Investment Fund Strategy
7. South East LEP (2014) SIF Thematic programmes restructured 29 May final
8. South East LEP (2014) Growth Deal and Strategic Economic Plan
9. KCC (2012) Business Intelligence Statistical Bulletin: 2011 census ward level
10. Ed Martin, Produced in Kent (2014) Jobs and Growth in the rural economy A proposal for strategic investment in the South East LEP region 2014-2021
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SIGNED for and on behalf of **West Kent LEADER**, Local Action Group

Signature:

Name:

Position:

Date:

SIGNED for and on behalf of **Sevenoaks District Council**, West Kent LEADER accountable body

Signature:

Name:

Position:

Date: