



Central Warwickshire Villages LEADER



BUSINESS PLAN 2010/2011

1 DELIVERY MECHANISM

1.1 Delivery Mechanism Overview

The Central Warwickshire Villages LEADER programme aims to promote community cohesion and create a strong sense of place in the rural parishes of Warwick District and Rugby Borough. It will promote projects that bring people together within these rural communities and stimulate demand for services as well as promote a sustainable economic base to community activities. The primary themes are community growing projects, community arts projects and events and projects that bring communities and the land based rural industries together across the area. The programme aims to be flexible, accessible and accountable to community groups in the target parishes and villages.

The delivery of projects through groups and organisations will be through an open bid method to attract both organisations and smaller groups to come forward with suggestions against specific calls for action. This “bottom up” approach is at the heart of the LEADER programme, although we do recognise there is a need for a proactive approach from the Local Action Group (LAG). It is a major role of the Programme Management Team to ensure the community’s needs are delivered through these contracts.

The purpose and remit of the LAG is to develop the Local Development Strategy (LDS) and ensure that it is delivered. It is also responsible for oversight of the delivery programme, monitoring progress and ensuring accountability. The LAG Forum comprises interested parties and individuals drawn from the target areas. The LAG will report to the Forum on a half yearly basis and on an annual basis the Forum will approve any changes to the Local Development Strategy and the Business Plan for the following year. In order to provide an effective decision making framework within the programme, the LAG may appoint smaller, but representative, sub-groups which will report back to, and be accountable to the LAG.

The project commissioning process within the programme is directed and monitored by the LAG. The LAG, comprising 15-20 members, drawn from, and representative of, the wider LAG Forum, the Accountable Body and the regional development agency, Advantage West Midlands (AWM). It meets regularly to approve programme development, project details and provide guidance to programme staff. A key sub-group is for the appraisal of projects put forward for funding under the programme. This sub-group meets regularly, in order to scrutinise projects for eligibility under LEADER and RDPE rules as well as suitability for funding under local programme criteria and reports directly to the LAG. The membership of the Appraisal Sub Group(s) varies according to call theme and availability of trained appraisers.

The LAG is supported by a two member Programme Management Team responsible for the day to day running of the programme. The full time Programme Manager will support one part time Animator or project engagement officer who will facilitate project development by working with community groups. Garden Organic provides administrative support to the Programme Management Team and Warwickshire County Council (WCC) provides support as the Accountable Body. The programme staff ensure that all appropriate administration and reporting procedures are in place for the programme.

1.2 Staffing and Establishment

- **Staff Complement**

The Programme Management Team will be centred at Garden Organic and comprise of one full time Programme Manager and one part time (21 hours) Animator (Community Engagement Officer).

- **Job descriptions and person specifications**

Garden Organic, the LAG and AWM have agreed the job descriptions and both posts have been appointed to. Performance will be measured against these criteria.

- **Staffing and Employment Structure**

The project is delivered through a tripartite agreement between Garden Organic, Warwickshire County Council and the LAG. This relationship and the reporting arrangements within each is demonstrated in Appendix 1

- **Key roles**

It will be for the Programme Management Team, in conjunction with WCC to draw up the necessary processes and procedures to ensure necessary compliance with the funders regulations . This will be done by developing their own processes and using those developed by the Rural Payments Agency and AWM.

- **Employment costs**

WCC Local Government employment costs and rates are used for the programme officers and were arrived at after a comparison with other LAGs in the region. The programme officers will be paid according to experience on this salary scale.

- **Physical establishment and equipping of the LAG office**

The Programme Management Team are based at Garden Organic, near the village of Wolston, in a rural location and central to the project area. The costs of phone and utilities will be borne in overheads. Garden Organic will provide administrative support. Computing equipment and server facilities will be facilitated through current Garden Organic facilities.

- **Strategic/operational complementarity and cooperation**

All project staff and the LAG will be encouraged to think about the strategic context of the LEADER programme and how it fits in with (for instance) parish plans, community group activities and activities of the community development, arts development and economic development teams in the target programme area. The programme will seek to actively cooperate with any groups or activities in the target area and encourage them to think how LEADER can provide additional resources for community cohesion and community sustainability. WCC as the accountable body will also provide a level of backstopping and support to the LAG that will facilitate programme activities.

1.3 Finance and Administration

The programme will be managed day to day by the Programme Manager. The LAG will provide oversight and the Programme Manager working with the Animator will ensure delivery of the programme projects together with community groups and delivery organisations. Garden Organic will provide administrative and basic IT support and will provide personnel support to the programme team.

- **Structure and responsibilities**

Garden Organic (GO) lead on the Management and Administration of the project with WCC acting as accountable body. A legal tripartite agreement has been signed between WCC, GO and the LAG to cover each of their responsibilities additional to that covered in the contract between WCC and AWM. WCC has carried out this role for many projects over recent years and has the skills and knowledge necessary to ensure programme compliance and delivery in line with European and Defra regulations. The remaining projects will be administered by the organisations or groups that the LAG decides to contract with. It will be for WCC and the Programme Manager to ensure that all of their records are also compliant.

The responsibility for the finance and administration of the programme lies with the Programme Manager. WCC through their Programme Assurance Officer will give advice and guidance and work together with the Programme Manager to ensure that programme compliance is maintained and that resources are spent on eligible expenditure. WCC guarantees the financial accountability of the programme to AWM.

Responsibilities		
Organisation	Role	Responsibilities
Warwickshire County Council	Accountable Body	Establish and maintain processes and procedures. Check for eligibility or other compliance issues. Check individual project compliance Build good relations with funding partners. Check for financial irregularities. Assist in reporting on budgetary performance. Financial accountability of the programme. Help prepare and sign off quarterly claims to AWM Assist in developing of projects.
Garden Organic	Project Lead	Establish suitable system management processes. Maintain and retain financial records as required by the Accountable Body. Keep inventories including assets register. Build good relations with funding partners Check and authorise claims from applicants and authorise payments. Check for financial irregularities. Secretarial function to the LAG, Forum and sub-groups Report on budgetary and output performance to LAG. Submit change controls to AWM as necessary. Prepare monthly claims to WCC.
Advantage West Midlands	LEADER funding body	Advise on any financial issues arising. Attend project approval meetings of LAG. Process grant claim forms from the programme

- **Procedures**

Procedures will be put in place with each project to ensure that all expenditure and income is accounted for separately. Payment and output evidence will be kept together for ease of monitoring and audit at a later date and a copy of the European document retention policy kept on file. Individual project files will be kept for each grant submission so as to keep an audit trail through original application, advice, approval, completion and outcomes.

All grant claims will be administered through GO prior to approval by WCC. WCC should verify these claims, check compliance and then have them signed by WCC's Financial Director. The claims should only detail costs for activities that have been approved in their application and only include actual costs incurred and paid. Payment of these claims will be made by the RPA to WCC who will then pass it on to the project. As appropriate WCC will advance funds to facilitate cash flow of a project.

There will be a staged process for a project to pass before it reaches the decision making body. Most projects will be contracted through an open bid method with the Expression of Interest returned to the Programme Manager, followed by appraisal by a panel and consideration by the LAG before the Full Application is completed. There may be some innovative or one-off projects that will stand alone outside of the open bids although the appraisal process itself will be the same.

The Programme Assurance Officer on at least an annual basis will fully monitor each project by taking a whole quarter to ensure that proper records are being kept, payments authorised correctly against the programme specifications, outputs evidenced and funding drawn down in a timely manner.

Records will be kept justifying the calculations for overhead allocations to the projects with the management and administration function kept separate in the accounts from the remaining allocation so as to ensure project compliance.

- **Reporting**

On a quarterly basis reports will be taken to the LAG detailing performance to date for outputs and cost against targets. This will measure both output and budgetary performance with any variations against the programme and recommendations for a corrective course of action. A risk and issue log should accompany this budgetary report. On a periodic basis (bi-annually) it will also forecast future expenditure and consider the programme for the year ahead.

- **Audit Provisions**

The Audit Commission has carried out the financial audit of WCC's Accountable Body projects for a number of years and will continue to do so. Any agency audits will be facilitated by WCC in cooperation with GO.

- **State Aid**

The Project Assurance Officer has experience and training with State Aid. This knowledge and experience will be used to ensure that compliance is maintained throughout the programme.

2 PROJECT APPLICATION AND APPROVAL PROCEDURES

All projects will be expected to meet project criteria and follow the established appraisal process as outlined below. The Central Warwickshire Villages LEADER programme envisages developing three distinct types of project applications. One will be individual, innovative stand-alone projects in specific villages or parishes, a second will be small projects requested by a number of communities across the target area and, a third, will be larger projects that are expected to impact and bring together communities across the wider programme area. The approach to these is discussed under project criteria below.

2.1 Project Development

- **Receiving Applications**

The developing and commissioning of projects will be on an on-going basis with a rolling application process after an initial programme roll out. The Animator, supported by the Programme Manager, will actively work to promote the programme in the target area within the project themes.

Community groups will be encouraged to use the programme website to develop their ideas. Application forms will also be available for download and as hard copy so that they can be completed and returned electronically, or by post to the Programme Manager. We will use the common application form developed for all LAGs across the West Midlands region.

Groups will be able to seek the advice and help of the Animator in completing and returning their project applications. The Animator will be fully trained and knowledgeable about the wider aims and objectives of the LEADER and Central Warwickshire Villages LEADER

programmes. The Animator and the Programme Manager will be aware of alternate sources of funding for rural development projects and will help projects to access these where appropriate.

2.2 Project Appraisal

Appraisal criteria will be available on the programme website and programme staff will draw these to the attention of all applicants in the development phase of projects. Applications will be assessed for suitability as regards the suggested project themes and conformity with the programme aims as defined in the LDS and wider LEADER strategic criteria. However this is not intended to be onerous for applicants and a successful appraisal will also depend on the active involvement of the Animator. The programme officers will be seeking to create an atmosphere of innovation in the development of all projects and this will be one of the appraisal criteria applied to all projects.

Criteria will be set and approved by the full LAG who will delegate project appraisal to a quality appraisal panel. The LAG will also establish a set of local criteria arising from the LDS against which projects need to be judged. The suggested criteria and the criteria framework are presented below.

- **Responsibility and procedure**

The Programme Management Team will be responsible for publicising the programme and the application criteria for projects within the programme. They will also be responsible for helping communities to develop their projects and ensuring they can meet the criteria. Community groups will be expected to complete their application forms and submit them to the Programme Manager who will check that they have been completed satisfactorily before referring them to a LAG sub-group responsible for project appraisal. The Programme Management Team will be encouraged and expected to make plans for extending the programme to ensure that during project development applicants show consideration and plans for the life of the project beyond the LEADER funding period.

- **Technical, Quality and Local Criteria**

Applications will be checked against both technical and quality criteria which include:

Technical Criteria:

- consistency of proposed project with eligible scope of the Central Warwickshire Villages LEADER programme as defined in the programme documentation.
- permissions, consents and letters of support for the project
- capacity to administer and deliver the project
- need for project
- state aid compliance

Quality Criteria:

- inclusion of LEADER and local target groups
- contribution to RDPE, LEADER and local policies and plans (e.g. district policy and parish plans)
- anticipated impact of the project and contribution to achievement of LDS goals
- integration with other complementary activities
- evidence of need and demand
- degree of innovation
- thought given to longer term sustainability of the project
- attention given to equality of opportunity
- value for money

Local criteria:

We expect projects commissioned in the Central Warwickshire Villages LEADER to broadly fall into three categories:

1. Project applications from individual communities which meet project criteria and which generally stand alone as innovative projects in specific village or parish communities.
2. Larger project applications on a common theme which has emerged from a cluster of several smaller project ideas across a large part of the target area.
3. Larger strategic projects that could be expected to benefit all the communities across the target area and generally promote the project aims and objectives in all communities. They would need to demonstrate that they are likely to bring about wider community cohesion and rural sustainability in the programme target area. Sums in excess of £50,000 would be subject to extra scrutiny by the LAG and would need to demonstrate a high likelihood of contributing to the programme aims and objectives.

2.3 Project Approval

- **Responsibility**

The LAG will be responsible for approving projects. However, it will devolve the appraisal and recommendation process to an appraisal panel that will then report back to the LAG with their recommendations. The appraisal panel will reflect membership principles of the LAG as a whole (minimum 51% non-public sector membership), although either the accountable body (WCC) or lead partner (GO) will always be represented on the appraisal panel.

All LAG members are expected to undertake appraisal training and the panels will be selected before the close of each bidding call. This will allow the LAG to allocate their expertise accordingly.

- **Project Approval procedure and standards**

Once an application has been received by the Programme Manager. The project application will receive an individual number and the Manager will ensure that the documentation is complete. The project application will be passed to the appraisal panel that will use the established technical, quality and local criteria to appraise the project for eligibility and suitability under the programme. Standard appraisal checklist forms have been designed to ensure technical compliance of projects.

- **Use of subgroups and devolved authority**

The Programme Management Team will perform a basic eligibility check and ensure applications are complete and ready for appraisal. The appraisal panel will assess the technical compliance and quality of project applications submitted for LEADER support. They will be assessed for technical compliance with EU, LEADER and RDPE eligibility criteria and state aid and quality and local criteria. The appraisal panel will recommend approval, rejection or referring back of projects (with their reasons) to the LAG who will make the final decision.

- **Levels of approval**

There will be various levels of decision making in commissioning and approving projects which will ensure a separation of responsibilities and a fair and transparent commissioning and decision-making process. The levels of approval are summarised below.

- **The Programme Management Team** will ensure that the project application process is open, transparent and available to all potential applicants. The Animator will assist applicants in developing their applications. The Programme Manager will ensure that all documentation is complete before passing the documentation to the appraisal panel.
- **The Appraisal Panel** will technically appraise the project. The appraisal process will be in two steps. The first step will be to check the project for eligibility and compliance under EU and RDPE rules. The project application will then be checked for technical, quality and local criteria as well as the fit to the strategic objectives. The panel will come to a recommendation for the LAG. In all cases reasons must be given in a brief outline report on the application.
- **The LAG** will consider the appraisal group report and recommendation and make the final decision. They must append their reasoning to the application report so that full feedback can be given to the applicant. AWM, will be required to attend meetings at which projects are presented for approval.

- **Separation of responsibilities and Conflict of interests**

It is expected that conflicts of interest will arise within the programme as it develops. We would expect members of the LAG to be part of the community in the target area and for them to be promoting LEADER projects within their parishes and villages. To this end it is important that all members of the LAG and programme staff declare their interests in community groups or applications and an open register will be provided for this purpose. Within the project approval process no members of the LAG or delegated sub-groups will be able to vote on or appraise projects in which they have a direct interest. All LAG members are required to sign the Code of Conduct, and declare any conflict of interest at the start of any meeting.

- **Chart of Project Application and Monitoring Process**

Project approval procedures time line- Central Warwickshire Villages LEADER Programme				
Applicant	LEADER Staff Team	Appraisal Sub-group	LAG	LEADER Forum
	Promote LEADER programme		Approve selection criteria for projects	
	Put project application procedures in place			Agree selection criteria for projects
	Set up framework for project approval process with LAG Executive and appraisal group		Select appraisal sub group (to include accountable body representative)	
Make enquiry/ engage with programme	Facilitate and support development of ideas and application process			
Make application	Checks application material for completeness	Checks application for eligibility		
		Technical and quality appraisal and recommendation report on each project	Review Appraisal Panel recommendations and decide on support, conditional support or rejection	Receives reports of projects supported
	Issues contract to successful projects			
Implement projects maintaining contact with LEADER team	Support and monitor ongoing projects. Recommend remedial action where necessary.		Receive monitoring reports on projects, review progress and spend	Receive monitoring reports on programme themes and review progress and spend
Complete projects	Report outcomes of projects		Receive outcome reports	Monitor outcomes on an ongoing basis
	Generate publicity around projects and programme		Generate publicity for the programmes	Generate publicity for the programme

2.4 Contracting

Once the LAG (including the AWM representative) has approved the project, a standard contract will be drawn up by WCC using the AWM template setting out the terms and conditions of providing the funding and the processes (e.g. procurement, publicity etc.) that will be required. It will state the provisions that will need to be adhered to including any outcomes or outputs and contributions expected from the beneficiary, whether cash or in kind. It will give an expected start and completion date and the financial arrangements in place. Once the contract has been signed a Project Engagement Visit (PEV) will take place after which the project can begin to incur costs and deliver the project.

3 MONITORING, REPORTING AND EVALUATION

Individual project performance and outcomes will initially be reported to the LAG and the LAG Forum with an explanation of variations from the agreed targets. The results of WCC or AWM monitoring will be reported to the LAG ahead of action being taken.

3.1 Routine Monitoring at Project and Programme Level

Appropriate and robust programme management processes have been set up by AWM. AWM have a responsibility to carry out regular Contract Monitoring Inspections where individual projects will be identified and subject to a full monitor. This will cover all aspects included in the contract and will certainly include checks on systems, claim forms and audit trail, defrayal of expenditure, management and overhead expenditure, outputs achieved and publicity including photographs of events. Action points will come out of these visits and expected to be put in place.

3.2 Accountable Body Monitoring

The Accountable Body would normally carry out their own monitoring at least once a year after the initial set-up process. This ongoing monitoring would usually include checking of processes and systems, that a proper audit trail is being kept from start to finish on the project files, systematic recording of documentation, as well as the checking the inclusion of all expenditure and outputs within one quarter of the year. All of this is designed to ensure project compliance and prepare the project for AWM monitoring.

The monitoring itself will be a full financial monitoring process so that it will also include all match contributions submitted so as to reconcile a particular quarter with the claims that have been made. The monitoring will highlight those projects that are over-performing and those where, for whatever reason, performance is not matching expectations. Any action points that arise from this monitoring will be included on the Project Monitoring Checklist and returned to the project.

The report and information from the monitoring will be used to verify compliance with the contract, improve the project procedures, update the risk analysis, find corrective measures when required, share best practice with other projects and report back to the LAG.

3.3 Compliance Monitoring

AWM will usually perform annual monitoring visits that would be arranged in advance so as to give WCC and GO the opportunity to prepare.

3.4 Evaluation

Constant monitoring will allow the LAG to evaluate the programme's performance as it progresses.

A mid term evaluation will be undertaken as an opportunity for the project to reassess its direction. This will be carried out by employing an independent consultant for a short review in close consultation with the LAG and the Programme Management Team at the end of 2010. The evaluation will review:

- Continuing relevance of the LDS
- Promotion of the LDS and take-up of resources
- Financial and physical progress
- Effectiveness of the Programme Management Team, the LAG, the Forum and programme processes
- Effectiveness of the LAG partnerships

4 MATCH FUNDING

- **Approach**

There is an expectation, from the whole LEADER programme, that successful proposals will contain a level of public, voluntary and private match funding, either in cash, in kind or both. The Central Warwickshire Villages LEADER will expect to see some level of community contribution to projects in their applications. The approach will be to ask communities to provide a reasonable amount of 'in kind' funding in keeping with any particular project and what it is trying to achieve. The most likely match funding is volunteer time; either in a professional or manual capacity. Projects will also be asked to think about what commitments can be made as regards, for example, equipment hire or loan and consumable materials that might reasonably be expected to be available within communities. Projects will be asked to think about the role of cash contributions from the community where appropriate, for example entry fees, although it is recognised that this should not be an impediment to commissioning projects or to barring entry to LEADER target groups (e.g. young people).

- **Expectation and rationale**

The Programme Management Team will be expected to take steps to identify potential sources of match funding and investigate the possibility of incorporating this into funding applications for projects where possible. The Financial Tables below indicates that we expect the LEADER intervention to be highest in the mid project period when most projects will be commissioned under the programme.

There is a small level of match from the public sector, mainly the WCC assigning officers in their capacity as the accountable body, and the district councils assigning time to LEADER promotion and motivation as part of the role of their community teams. Project applicants will be encouraged to think of ways of demonstrating their community contributions to projects through match funding. We have conservatively estimated a total of £20,000 of in-kind contributions from community based projects per year but will hope to actually see higher levels than this. In kind labour and professional contributions will be costed at agreed rates (e.g. £10 per hour for manual labour and £20 per hour for professional services).

In addition to in-kind project contributions we expect a limited amount of community contributions to the running of the Forum, the LAG and the various sub-groups associated with these. Once again we have conservatively estimated at least £5,000 match in kind funding from community and interest group participation in the LAG.

The Programme Management Team and LAG will be encouraged to look for ways of sustaining programme activities beyond the LEADER funding period and in this case the LEADER intervention rate is expected to drop sharply in the last two years as new community enterprises are expected to begin generating their own revenue streams with the aid of the Programme Management Team.

- **Commitments**

Project applicants will be asked to estimate likely match funding amounts and the Programme Management Team will help to do this. In some cases where forecast match funding is from sources external to the Project applicant, letters of support will be asked for demonstrating that this commitment is likely to materialise. Match in materials or cash will need to be costed at market rates (in the former case) and letters of intent to supply will be needed.

5 PLANNED PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITY

- **LAG Development and LDS Implementation**

The LAG and Programme Management Team will develop and promote activities to deliver the LDS as described in the previous sections.

- **Annual Work Programme 2010-11**

Detail of the planned project activity has been largely described in the previous sections and is aimed at commissioning high quality projects, which will deliver the intended programme outputs as defined in the LDS.

When	Planned Activity	Lead responsibility
April 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue commissioning projects and managing application process • Commence bi-monthly newsletter production • Issue Business Plan for 2010-2011 	PMT, LAG, Appraisal sub-group PMT WCC, LAG
May 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AGM • Issue revised Local Development Strategy 	LAG, Forum WCC, LAG
June 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project commissioning, monitoring and evaluation • Newsletter 	PMT, LAG PMT
July 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing managing applications, commissioning projects, monitoring projects. 	PMT, WCC, LAG AWM

When	Planned Activity	Lead Responsibility
Aug 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter 	PMT
Sept 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum Meeting 	LAG, Forum
Oct 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter • Ongoing managing applications, commissioning projects, monitoring projects. 	PMT PMT, WCC, LAG AWM
Nov 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-Term Evaluation commences 	PMT, LAG, Forum
Dec 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mid-Term evaluation completed • Newsletter 	PMT, LAG, Forum
Jan 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing managing applications, commissioning projects, monitoring projects. 	PMT, WCC, LAG AWM
Feb 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletter 	PMT
Mar 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forum Meeting • Transnational Project 	LAG, Forum PMT, LAG

5.2 Annual Operational Plan

The Programme Management Team are in place and driving forward the medium term strategy agreed by the LAG. This has been developed into a schedule of activities (see above) and a financial plan to go with it that will enable the Local Development Strategy to be delivered

5.3 Financial Tables

- **Programme period**

The financial estimates for the financial year 2010/11 and beyond are shown in Appendix 1. They have been based on those open bids to date and are prudent on the amount of LEADER funding the LAG will draw down in 2010/11. This prudence recognises that there may be some considerable time-lag between the open bid process starting and the projects being contracted. These estimates will be reviewed throughout the year and any changes agreed with AWM and the LAG and brought to the attention of the Forum.

Matched funding in excess of what is required has not been included at this stage. The lifetime figure required is very modest (£175,000) and it is likely and desirable that considerably more than that is achieved.