



Oxfordshire LEADER Programme 2015-2020

Local Development Strategy

DRIVING RURAL ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH INNOVATION

Foreword

A very successful LEADER rural funding programme operated across the southern part of rural Oxfordshire from 2008 to 2013. A Local Action Group awarded £1.2 million in grants, brought in more than £2.5 million in private sector and other funding and supported the growth of more than sixty businesses.

Defra and the European Union are now inviting bids for the next funding programme from 2015 to 2020 and this strategy sets out how LEADER funding could be used to continue the success of the previous programme and extend its benefits to a wider area of rural Oxfordshire. The themes of our strategy for 2015 to 2020 are:

- Revive the River Thames – encouraging more people to use the river rather than pass by it
- Get growing, get selling, get eating more local food – improving the processing and marketing of local food
- Unlock the potential of woodland – actively managing woodland and developing the local distribution network for woodfuel, timber and wood products
- Vibrant villages – creating more economic activity in villages to stop them becoming dormitories with limited opportunities.

Rural Oxfordshire has the potential to make a more significant contribution to the continued economic prosperity and competitiveness of the county. However it is important that increased rural business activity helps to maintain the vitality of our villages, encourages investment in our countryside and creates and safeguards local jobs. This strategy will encourage this kind of activity. However the strategy will not be successful if there is no funding to influence business activity.

We trust that Defra will fund our strategy so that we can successfully encourage the economic growth that is appropriate for our communities.

Handwritten signature of Elizabeth Gillespie in black ink.

Elizabeth Gillespie
Chair
Transition Local Action Group

Handwritten signature of Suzanne Malcolm in black ink.

Suzanne Malcolm
Economic Development Manager
South Oxfordshire District Council
(Proposed as the accountable body for the
Oxfordshire LEADER funding programme)

Contents

Introduction.....	1
The Local Action Group membership (LAG)	2
LAG structure and decision making process	4
LEADER programme management staff	6
Training requirements	6
Equal opportunities statement (the public sector equality duty).....	7
Involvement of the community in the preparation of this strategy	7
Map of LEADER area	8
Economic profile of LEADER area	9
'SWOT' analysis of the LEADER area	13
Alignment with Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP)	13
Our strategy and local priorities	15
Grant examples from the Southern Oxfordshire LEADER programme 2008 to 2013	17
Programme of activity	18
Targets, results and outputs 2015 to 2020	20
Sustainability appraisal	21
Proposed co-operation activity.....	21
Management and administration.....	21
Marketing and communications	23
Financial plan	26
Overall funding profile	28
Use of grants, procurement or other types of financial support	28
Risk assessment.....	29

Appendices (separately attached)

- 1 - List of the Census output areas that make up the proposed Oxfordshire LEADER area
- 2 - Outputs submission table
- 3 - Report of the sustainability appraisal panel meeting
- 4 - Local Action Group terms of reference
- 5 - Marketing and communications strategy
- 6 - List of stakeholder groups
- 7 - Draft job description for programme manager
- 8 - Letter of endorsement from Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership

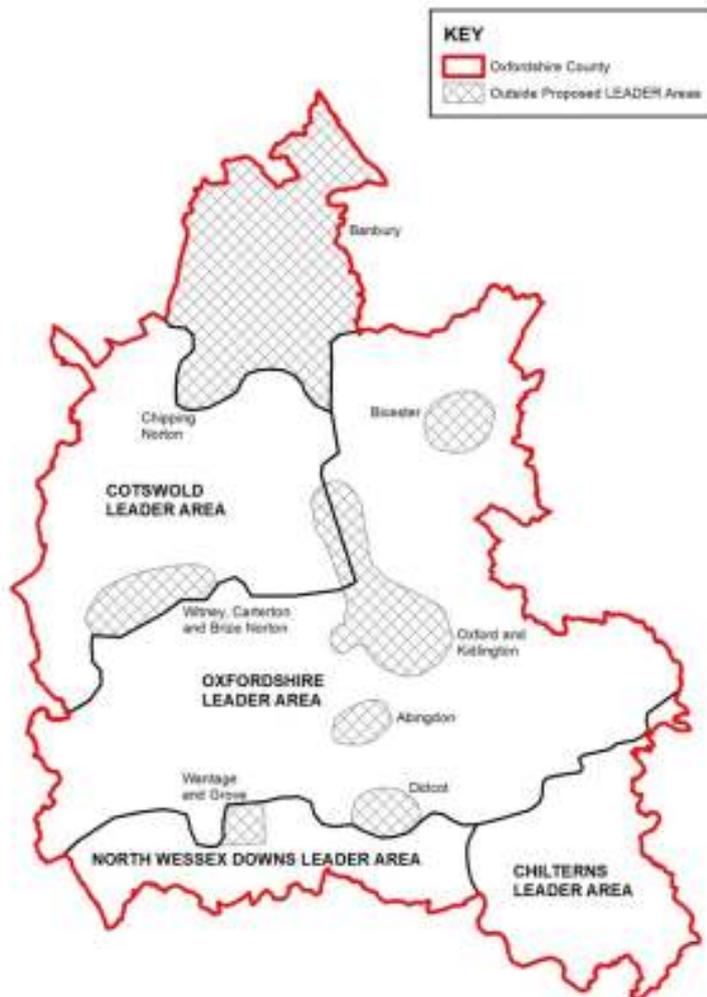
Introduction

The proposed Oxfordshire LEADER programme will provide funding and support to promote innovative economic growth within a defined area of rural Oxfordshire from 1 January 2015 to 2020. The population of a LEADER area cannot be more than 150,000 and the population of the proposed Oxfordshire LEADER area will be 149,716.

The area includes a large part of the River Thames and some of its tributaries which provides opportunities for tourism businesses. It has a highly productive agricultural sector but there are still many ways in which productivity could be improved. It is near to Oxford, Reading and Swindon which provide good market opportunities for the area's businesses. There are also opportunities to develop innovative projects through collaboration with the area's world class universities and research organisations.

It should be noted that other potential LEADER programmes cover the majority of the remaining area of rural Oxfordshire. The proposed programmes are Chilterns, Cotswolds and North Wessex Downs. A small part of Oxfordshire will not be within a LEADER area. However the whole of rural Oxfordshire is eligible for grant aid from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). EAFRD is managed by the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP).

The map below gives an indication of possible LEADER coverage in Oxfordshire. Proposed areas are subject to approval by Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)



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The LEADER programme is funded by Defra and the European Union through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE).

Community-led local development is the key principle behind the use of LEADER funding. Local people form a local action group (LAG) to agree and deliver a local rural development strategy. The LAG is made up of public, community and private sector representatives.

The strategy is designed to build on the community's social, environmental and economic strengths or "assets" rather than simply compensate for its problems. The area covered by the strategy is relatively small as this ensures that the priorities in the strategy are relevant to everyone in the area.

Once the strategy had been agreed by Defra the LAG has delegated powers from Defra and the European Union to seek out, support, fund and monitor projects that are in line with the local strategy and RDPE objectives.

The RDPE sets out six national priorities for LEADER strategies:

- Support for increasing farm productivity
- Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification¹
- Support for rural tourism
- Support for rural services
- Support for cultural and heritage activity
- Support for increasing forestry productivity.

In addition Defra has specified that 70% of projects must directly support rural economic growth and the remaining 30% of projects must also contribute to jobs and growth.

Defra has advised that LEADER cannot be used to fund superfast broadband or skills development. OxLEP is proposing to use EAFRD to close superfast broadband gaps across rural Oxfordshire. It will use its allocation from the European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to support skills development.

Given the focus for LEADER activity on jobs and growth and the need to join up with other activity locally it is important that the local strategy for LEADER supports and complements the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership's (OxLEP) strategy for economic growth across Oxfordshire.

Oxfordshire LEADER funding will be less than £2 million over six years. Therefore if the funding is going to make a real and long lasting difference it is important that it supports projects that demonstrate new ideas to increase rural economic activity and productivity – innovative projects that show the way for others.

The Local Action Group membership (LAG)

The LAG is a dynamic body which adapts itself to local needs. It is not a formally constituted group and its members are volunteers. As such it operates under a set of Terms of Reference (TOR) but as a body it has no legal responsibility or liability. The accountable body is South Oxfordshire District Council and is responsible for the delivery of the programme on behalf of the LAG.

LAG membership is open and flexible, ensuring representation of the key sectors including farming, forestry, rural businesses and rural communities. An emphasis is placed on the private/community sector rather than representation from public bodies, with no one sector making up more than 49% of the membership. This model puts the responsibility for local action with local people, acting in partnership with other organisations. It also helps to ensure that a balanced mix of local knowledge and other relevant expertise is brought together to deliver the programme's strategy.

¹ Small businesses employ less than 50, have a turnover of less than € 10 m and a balance sheet of less than € 10 m. Micro-businesses employ less than 10, have a turnover of less than € 2 m and a balance sheet of less than € 2 m.

A maximum Local Action Group membership of 25 will ensure that the group can effectively represent the broad range of interests across the area, whilst allowing all members to fully participate in meetings. Non-members can be invited to observe meetings.

There is no fixed length of term for LAG members and members are encouraged to remain engaged for the lifetime of the programme. However, if members do step down, replacement representatives will be recruited from the appropriate sector. New members will also be welcomed to join the LAG throughout the programme's delivery, especially if they bring a particular skill, background, interest, or knowledge to the group that will support the programme's delivery.

The LAG will regularly reflect on the group's membership and meeting attendance to ensure that it actively represents the local area, its communities and their needs.

A Local Action Network will act as a forum to engage with other stakeholders from across the LEADER area. The Network provides an opportunity for new LAG members to come forward.

If interest warrants it, a formal membership election could be coordinated at a Local Action Network meeting to ensure that the LAG membership represents the wider local area. The need for such an election will be reviewed on an annual basis.

It is proposed that the initial membership of the LAG will be made up of:

Organisation or interest	Sector	Name
Faringdon Area Partnership	Community	Daphne Saunders
Faringdon Folly Trust	Community	Eddie Williams
Earth Trust	Community	Jayne Manley
South Oxfordshire Community Action Groups	Community	John Gordon
Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust	Community	Mark Phillips
Oxford Ditch Cruising Club	Community	Philip Sachse
Oxfordshire Rural Community Council	Community	Tom McCulloch
The Sylva Foundation	Community	Paul Orsi
NFU	Private	Annie Vernon
Farmer	Private	Jane Bowler
Tourism South East	Private	Jeanette Howse
CLA	Private	Andrew Ingram
Jennings	Private	Mike Jennings
Farmer	Private	Philip Chamberlain
Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership	Private/public	To be advised
South Oxfordshire district councillor	Public	Elizabeth Gillespie
West Oxfordshire District Council	Public	Dene Robson
Cherwell District Council	Public	Steven Newman
South Oxfordshire District Council/Vale of White Horse District Council	Public	Suzanne Malcolm

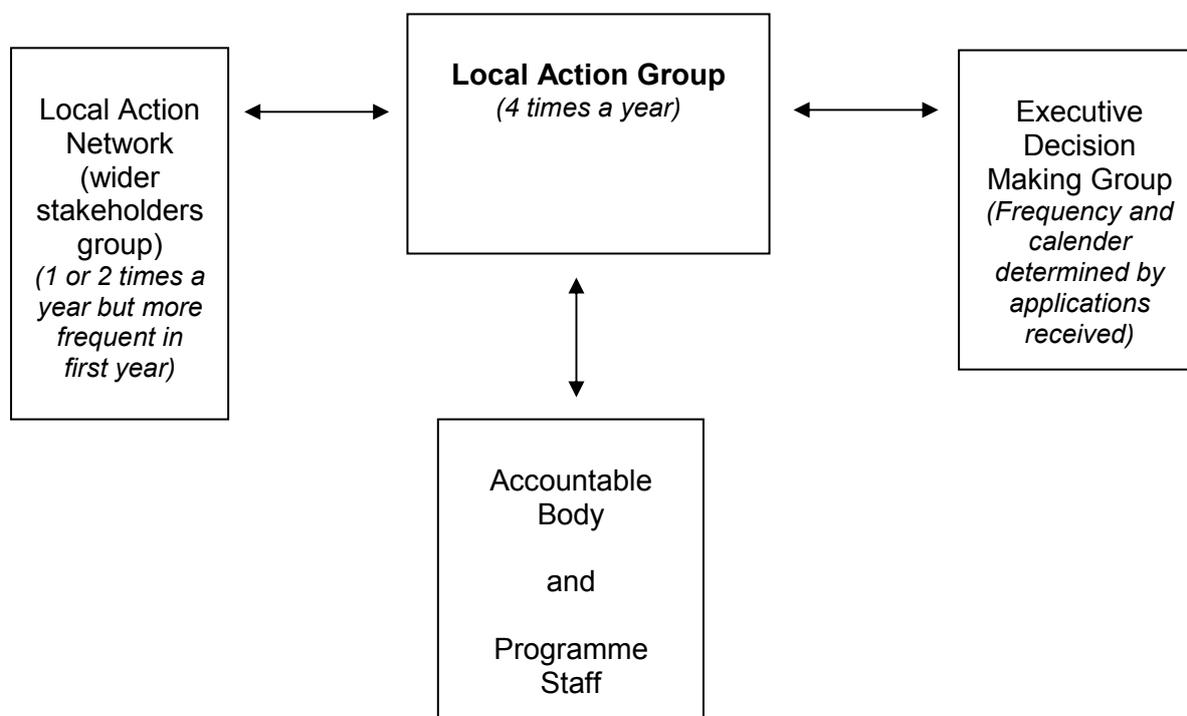
Regular meetings of a Local Action Network in different parts of the LEADER area, will provide the opportunity for others, particularly those who cannot afford the time required for LAG membership, to become involved in the development and delivery of the Oxfordshire LEADER programme.

Most of the Local Area Network meeting will be thematic and they will provide an opportunity to encourage under-represented groups to become involved in LEADER.

LAG structure and decision making process (see Appendix 4 for full terms of reference)

Structure

'The organisational structure of the LAG and the Decision Making Group (DMG) worked well, as did the mixture of volunteer skills provided by LAG members' (Southern Oxfordshire LEADER Programme 2008-2013 Evaluation, April 2013)



LAG role and responsibilities (see Appendix 4 for full LAG terms of reference)

- Encourage the community to come forward with innovative projects that will help to deliver the strategy
- Oversee the strategic direction, coherence, and effectiveness of the Oxfordshire LEADER programme
- Oversee delivery of the local development strategy and ensure activity is relevant to the strategy's priorities and objectives
- Ensure the programme takes full account of local needs and opportunities
- Help to develop and endorse the programme's annual business plan
- Oversee the programme's over-arching delivery including:
 - financial budget
 - outputs and outcomes delivered
 - monitoring and evaluation
- Oversee the programme communications strategy, within this:
 - Publicise and communicate the invitation for grant applications
 - Utilise own networks to raise awareness of the programme and to create community involvement
- Work with Defra to ensure compliance with LEADER and RDPE rules and regulations
- Work with the accountable body to maintain accurate and timely financial management.
- Support and guide the programme manager's work
- Support programme delivery by offering insight and expertise, for example;
 - Support projects within a member's own field or sector in order to develop strong applications
 - Offer technical advice or expertise during the appraisal stage of the application.

- Offer monitoring advice and ongoing support to successful projects
- Provide knowledge of key policy matters to the LAG
- Build strategic links with appropriate partners and encourage joint projects that build collaboration with similar and complementary interests.

Accountability of the LAG and members' conduct

- LAG members commit to attending LAG meetings
- LAG members will ensure that the sector that they represent has an effective voice at meetings. However LAG members commit to act in the interest of the programme, and not just their own organisations or personal interests.
- LAG members will listen and take into consideration views and concerns expressed by others when making decisions
- All LAG members will take joint responsibility for decisions made by the group
- The LAG must be able and willing to justify decisions to others if needs be
- LAG members will work effectively with the Accountable Body and Defra and follow the Defra Code of Conduct for working well together.

Executive Decision Making Group - A small Executive Decision Making Group makes funding decisions and reviews applications. This group consists of a maximum of six members of the LAG, including members representing farming, forestry or rural communities. Members are selected by the chair on an annual rotating basis, with agreement of the LAG.

- There is a minimum quorum of three for any decision making meeting
- All members have an equal vote
- The outcome of the vote will be taken on a majority, in the event of a tied vote every effort will be made to resolve issues and come to a consensus by discussion. As a last resort the chair will have the casting vote.

Executive Decision Making Group role and responsibilities:

- To consider project full application and appraisal reports, and related recommendations (Members need to have gained a technical understanding of the projects being discussed)
- To consider presentations by project applicants and ask the applicant and appraiser relevant questions about the project
- To approve or decline applications in line with established procedures (as set out in the Defra National Operating Manual)
- To feedback to the full LAG, to ensure all members are aware of decisions made.
- To undertake monitoring by carrying out project visits and inspections.

Role of Local Action Network (wider stakeholder network):

- To encourage the community to come forward with innovative projects that will help to deliver the strategy
- To provide networking opportunities for all partners / stakeholders within the LEADER area.
- To encourage knowledge exchange and learning, and the sharing of best practice.
- To act as a consultative body to ensure the scheme is taking full account of local needs and opportunities and delivering on behalf of the area's rural communities and businesses.
- To act as an awareness raising network, to increase understanding of the Oxfordshire LEADER programme and the role of the Local Action Group.
- To raise the area's community capacity, and provide opportunities for joint working.

Role and responsibilities of accountable body (South Oxfordshire District Council):

- Ensure compliance with RDPE operating procedures including; selection and approval of individual projects and processing grant payments against approved claims

- Responsible for maintaining records of each project to provide an audit trail, and regularly monitoring the progress of the projects
- Responsible for evidencing decision making process e.g. minutes of meetings, attendance lists etc
- South Oxfordshire District Council will provide:
 - Project management skills
 - Financial management skills
 - Ability to employ staff
 - Ability to procure.

LEADER programme management staff

The programme will have the equivalent of two members of staff, the Programme Manager and the Finance Monitoring Officer. They will be employed and managed by the accountable body in accordance with the accountable body's terms and conditions.

They will be responsible for the day to day activities of the programme including all of the grant applications and claims administration, communicating with applicants and stakeholders and keeping the LAG, Accountable Body and Defra briefed on all programme activities.

Programme manager key responsibilities (see Appendix 7 for draft job description):

- Development, facilitation and co-ordination of the LAG
- Successful delivery of programme action plan
- Compliance with Defra guidance for delivery of programme
- Promote as widely as possible the programme to ensure wider awareness and understanding of the programme via press releases, social media, website etc
- Encourage all sectors of the community to participate
- Build capacity of local farmers, foresters and representatives in the local rural community to apply for funding
- Support applicants with the development of project applications and clarifying the project application process and feedback
- Ensure projects are delivered to agreed outcomes, budget and timescales
- Liaison with neighbouring LAG groups.

Finance monitoring officer key responsibilities:

- Produce offer letters for successful applicants and ensure all applicants are fully conversant with the requirements of the reporting and grant claims process
- Receive, calculate and process claims in accordance with the programme criteria and both internal/external audit requirements
- Ensure all post approval project monitoring and financial information is input into management information system.

Training requirements

In line with the recommendation of the Southern Oxfordshire LEADER Programme 2008-2013 Evaluation, there will be training for LAG members, project assessors and programme staff, before 1 January 2015 on project selection criteria. This initial training will help to ensure that there are no delays in approving projects as soon as the programme starts and therefore there will be significant grant expenditure in the first half of the programme.

Initial training will include:

- Introduction and background to the LEADER 2015 – 2021 programme
- The rules and regulations associated to the delivery of European funding
- Economic growth and employment needs and opportunities
- Project innovation and sustainability.

Training will be organised in collaboration with neighbouring LAGs to ensure that there is a consistency of approach for areas that share strong socio-economic links (e.g. a shared interest in reviving the

Thames). Joint training will also allow costs to be shared and will ensure the effective use of the time of the Defra and Rural Payments Agency staff that provide support for the training.

The Local Action Network will provide awareness training to stakeholders who are well placed to promote the benefits of the Oxfordshire LEADER programme.

LAG members and project assessors that join after the start of the programme will receive training from the programme staff.

Further training will take place if there are any significant changes to the selection criteria during the lifetime of the programme, or if the LAG identifies the need for training as part of its annual review of the strategy.

Equal opportunities statement (the public sector equality duty)

The Accountable Body, South Oxfordshire District Council is committed to equality. It has due regard to the general duty when exercising its functions in order to:

- Eliminate any potential for unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- Advance equality of opportunity in service delivery and employment between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Accountable Body will work with the LAG to ensure that as many sectors of the community as possible can participate in the delivery of the strategy through the development of project ideas and plans.

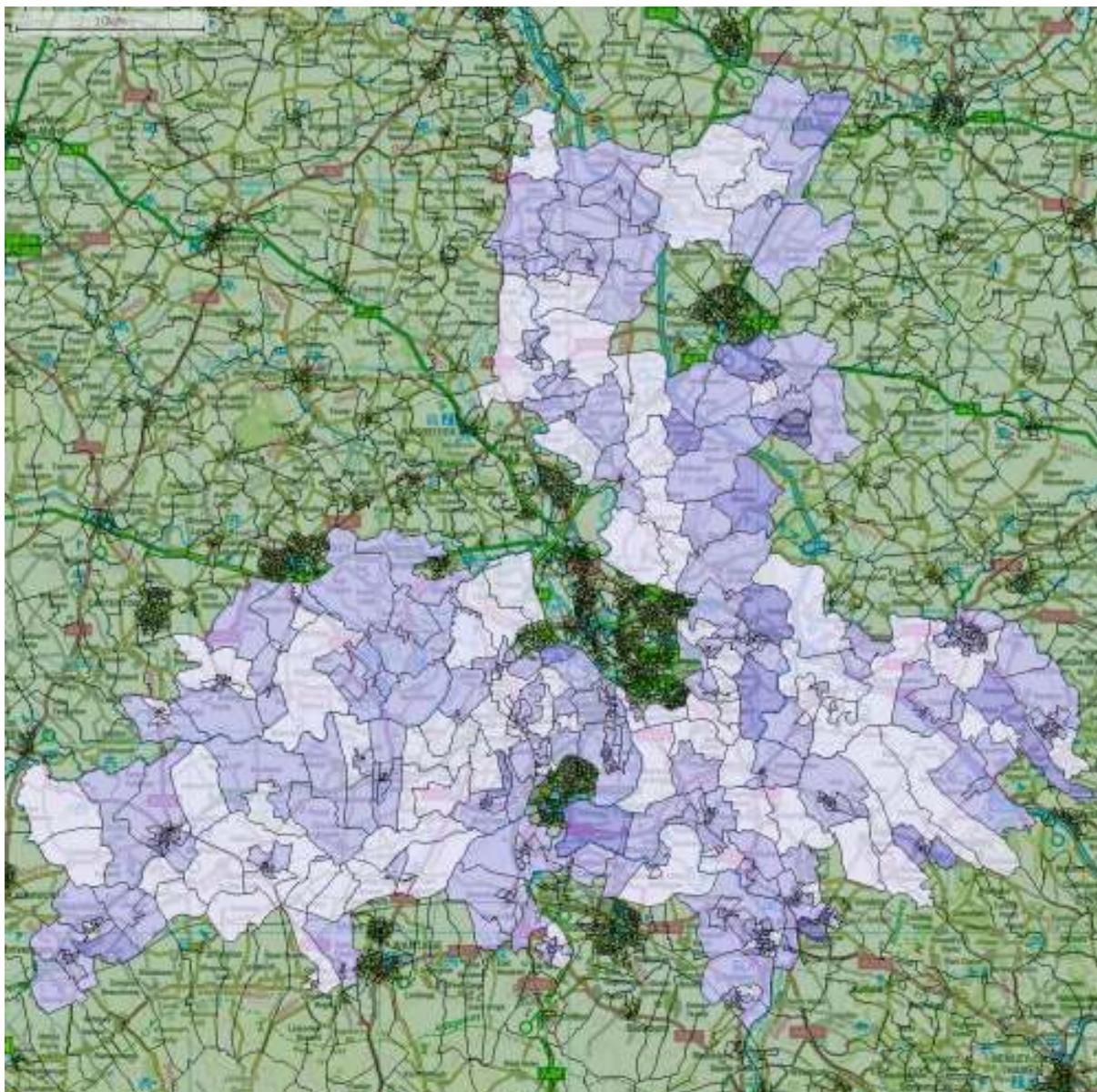
Involvement of the community in the preparation of this strategy (see Appendix 6 for list of stakeholder groups involved)

Activities and participation

- 6 June 2014 – LEADER project launch event; a video report of the event was released see <http://youtu.be/H0W5dA-YuVE> The event press release was picked up by the Oxford Mail, see www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/11271334.Joint_bid_for_funding_to_improve_the_rural_economy/?ref=var_0
- 12 June 2014 – Briefing for Oxfordshire branch of Country Landowners Association
- 20 June 2014 – Project launch featured in 'Vision' the economic development newsletter for South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse. The newsletter is distributed to 528 people, mainly businesses.
- 23 June 2014 – Participation in Berks, Bucks & Oxon NFU CAP briefing meeting attended by approximately 80 farmers.
- 4 July 2014 – Public consultation workshop; 32 people from the private, public and community sectors took part in the workshop and discussed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) in the LEADER area, and how the SWOT affects the delivery of strategic priorities.
- 18 July 2014 – Meeting with Thames Valley Farmers' Market members at Abingdon Farmers' Market
- Public consultation on draft strategy from 1 to 22 August 2014, see www.southernoxfordshireleader.org.uk/news_detail.php?id=30 and www.southoxon.gov.uk/news/2014/2014-08/how-would-you-boost-rural-economy and www.heraldseries.co.uk/news/11402186.Rural_grant_bid/. Fourteen written responses were received. Respondents were generally supportive of the strategy and made a number of comments that have helped to strengthen the strategy.
- As a result of the consultation activity the transition programme management team has already received details of a number of innovative project ideas that have the potential to become early applications for funding.

Map of LEADER area

The proposed Oxfordshire LEADER area



The population within the proposed Oxfordshire LEADER area is 149,716. In accordance with Defra requirements the area is made up of census output areas rather than parishes or council wards. A list of Census output areas is attached in Appendix 1.

Census output areas are the lowest geographical level at which census estimates are provided. They are designed to be of a similar population size and household type. Urban/rural mixes are avoided where possible. The average population of a census output area in England and Wales is 309. Census output area boundaries fit with county and district boundaries but do not necessary fit with parish boundaries.

The area does not include the larger built up areas such as Oxford, Bicester, Abingdon, Didcot and Wantage and Grove, but smaller market towns like Faringdon, Thame and Wallingford have been included in the area to help in creating a coherent area rather than a piecemeal area. The population of these towns is principally classified as urban by the Office of National Statistics.

The population in the LEADER area classified as rural is 105,791 and the population classified as urban is 43,925.

The socio-economic links to Oxford and the River Thames and its tributaries (with a connection to the Oxford Canal) are specific features that help to create a coherent area.

The proposed Oxfordshire LEADER area joins up with the proposed Chilterns, Cotswolds and North Wessex Downs LEADER areas, all of which extend into Oxfordshire.

Economic profile of the LEADER area

LEADER funding is allocated to boost sustainable² rural economic growth and this section of the strategy reviews the LEADER area's rural economy, in order to help in identifying opportunities for the effective use of the funding.

Wherever possible information solely about the LEADER area is presented in this section. However because the Oxfordshire LEADER area crosses district boundaries and covers parts of districts it is not possible to present all statistical information based solely on the LEADER area. In these instances information is presented for the closest geography to the LEADER area, on the basis that it provides a good indication of the situation within the LEADER area.

Employment

Employment by sector in the Oxfordshire LEADER area (All usual residents aged 16 to 74 in employment the week before the 2011 Census)³

Industry	All persons
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1,275
Mining and quarrying	84
Manufacturing	5,966
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	378
Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	638
Construction	6,300
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles	10,552
Transport and storage	2,436
Accommodation and food service activities	3,316
Information and communication	4,589
Financial and insurance activities	1,744
Real estate activities	1,089
Professional, scientific and technical activities	7,781
Administrative and support service activities	3,293
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	6,894
Education	9,522
Human health and social work activities	8,211
Other	4,017
Total	78,085

Home working has increased in Oxfordshire as whole since 2001: the number of residents usually working from home rose by 11,300 to 43,100. The increase in home working has been greater than the

² We define sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

³ Nomis – official labour market statistics, datasets KS605EW to KS607EW

national rate. 12.9% of Oxfordshire residents usually worked from home in 2011, compared to 10.3% in 2001.⁴

Agriculture

Oxfordshire has a very effective agricultural sector. In 2012/13 the output per worker was £114,464 compared to £90,919 for South East England.⁵ It has an agricultural Gross Value Added (GVA) of £91 million p.a. Total value of output is £236 million, profitability is £72 million and farmers are directly spending £145 million in the supply chain. Oxfordshire has 192,754 hectares under farmland, out of total area of 260,500 hectares, equating to 74% being farmland. By farmed land, 56% is down to cereals, with the next biggest proportion being livestock grazing (roughly 30%). 63% of the farmed land is currently under agri-environment schemes.⁶

However food self-sufficiency is falling, as is farmers' share of the value of a basket of food items. The Food Production to Supply Ratio (commonly referred to as the "Self Sufficiency Ratio") in the UK is estimated to be 60% for all food in 2013 and 73% for indigenous type food. This compares with 62% and 77% respectively in 2012.⁷ Farmers' share of the value of a basket of food items has dropped from 47% in 1988 to 36% in 2013⁸:

Also the UK farming population is getting older. In 2000 only 5% of "agricultural holders" were under 35 years old, compared to 7% in 1990. Farmers are older than people in other self-employed occupations. 52% of farmers are 55 or older, compared to 27% of rural self-employed and 22% of urban self-employed.⁹ The age structure of the farming community is on average older than in the EU 28: in the UK only 4.1% of farmers are under 35 years old (7.5% in EU-28), while 28.4% are older than 64 (30% in EU-28).¹⁰

Tourism

The Oxfordshire LEADER area is an attractive visitor destination adjacent to the world heritage city of Oxford. There are opportunities to build the local visitor economy and attract a range of new visitors, bringing with them associated spend in the local economy. These opportunities lie around the development of rural tourism, building on the area's natural features, the Thames and its tributaries, walking and cycling routes and links with the neighbouring AONBs in the Cotswolds, North Wessex Downs and Chilterns. Theme-related tourism is identified as the key growth area in tourism by VisitBritain and in the Oxfordshire LEADER area offers strong potential around history, literature and film links. The challenge is to develop these visitor opportunities to encourage the conversion of day to staying visitors, which will bring in additional expenditure and support job creation.

Oxford benefits from the largest share of visitor trips (32%), overnight stays and expenditure but the tourism sector is also significant in the rural parts of Oxfordshire. In 2012 just over a fifth of all domestic overnight trips were spent in West Oxfordshire (22%). Cherwell accounted for 17%, South Oxfordshire 17% and the Vale of White Horse 12%.

⁴ Oxfordshire County Council 2011 Census Insight insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/2011-census-briefing-travel-work-and-homeworking-february-2013

⁵ Farm Business Survey www.farmbusinesssurvey.co.uk/DataBuilder/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=Results&rqREF=008148

⁶ Defra 2010: www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/structure-of-the-agricultural-industry-in-england-and-the-uk-at-june

⁷ Defra 2013 www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/315103/auk-2013-29may14.pdf

⁸ Defra 2013 www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/315103/auk-2013-29may14.pdf

⁹ Defra 2004 www.archive.defra.gov.uk/evidence/economics/foodfarm/reports/documents/Entry.pdf

¹⁰ European Commission 2014 www.ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-in-your-country/pdf/uk_en.pdf

Cherwell accounted for 27% of visitor day trips (A significant volume of day trips to Cherwell were to the retail outlet Bicester Village), South Oxfordshire and the Vale received 17% of the day trips and West Oxfordshire 15%.

Of the total tourism spend of £1.76 billion generated in 2012, 38% of total spend was received by businesses in Oxford. Businesses in Cherwell received 21% of the total spend. Businesses in West Oxfordshire received 15% of spend. 14% of total spend was received by businesses in South Oxfordshire and the remaining 12% benefited businesses in the Vale.¹¹

Projects focusing on the many attractions of the River Thames have the potential to boost visitor spending across the county. Many projects will involve collaboration with river-related businesses in Oxford, as it is a key location on the river, where many trips start and finish.

Forestry

Oxfordshire has 23,397 hectares of woodland compared to 21,298 hectares in Buckinghamshire and 20,835 hectares in Berkshire. South Oxfordshire has 9,184 hectares, West Oxfordshire 6,413 hectares, Vale of White Horse 4,595 hectares and Cherwell 2,949 hectares.

The vast majority of Oxfordshire's woodland is privately owned. It is estimated that about 47% of woodland, mostly in private ownership, is not well-managed and Government has an aspiration for two thirds of England's woodland to be managed by 2018¹². Additional management input would bring economic, social and environmental benefits. In Oxfordshire the estimated yield of woodfuel in energy terms could be 113,887 megawatt hours per year; the equivalent of 11,388,747 litres of heating oil.¹³ The Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment Community Woodfuel Programme helps local communities to increase their supply and demand for woodfuel and in doing so, reduce their carbon footprints, improve their biodiversity, and reduce their 'fuel miles'.¹⁴

There is an opportunity for Oxfordshire to lead the way in encouraging innovative and sustainable ways of managing private woodland, including the re-establishment of ancient woodland.

Landscape and countryside

The proposed Oxfordshire LEADER area includes the Vale of White Horse, the Aylesbury Vale within Oxfordshire, the Midvale Ridge, the Upper Thames Vale (outside the Cotswolds Area of Natural Beauty) and part of the Cotswolds (outside the Cotswolds Area of Natural Beauty).¹⁵

The guidance document 'Biodiversity and Planning in Oxfordshire'¹⁶ points out that 'Oxfordshire's green spaces, rights of way, rivers, lakes, canals, commons and wildlife habitats are important assets. They have a wide range of benefits not just for wildlife but also for people, e.g. quality of life, recreation, access to nature, attracting businesses and visitors, maintaining land value, and climate change adaptation.'

A 2012 survey into satisfaction with access to Oxfordshire's countryside found that people regularly spend money whilst out and about in the countryside. The amount of spending at between £5 and £20 would indicate that spending is relatively small scale and regular – such as a couple of pints of beer and

¹¹ The economic impact of tourism on Oxfordshire 2012, Tourism South East

¹² www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/221023/pb13871-forestry-policy-statement.pdf

¹³ Forestry Commission

¹⁴ www.oxonwoodfuel.org.uk

¹⁵ Oxfordshire Wildlife & Landscape Study

www.owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wps/wcm/connect/occ/OWLS/Home/Oxfordshire+Biomap/

¹⁶ www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/environmentandplanning/countryside/naturalevironment/Wwholedocument.pdf

sandwiches/light meal whilst out on a walk or ride. Higher spending rates are noticeable for food at a pub – possibly linked to group walking.¹⁷

The extent of countryside of a similar character within the LEADER area, with its network of footpaths and bridleways (including the Thames Path national trail), creates opportunities for projects involving a number of businesses that promote the benefits of the countryside and attract visitors.

Deprivation

Following the 2011 Census, the Office of National Statistics has classified a number of households in the LEADER area as deprived in one or more dimensions of deprivation. A household is deprived in a dimension if they meet one or more of the following conditions:

- Employment: any member of a household not a full-time student is either unemployed or long-term sick,
- Education: no person in the household has at least level 2 education, and no person aged 16-18 is a fulltime student,
- Health and disability: any person in the household has general health 'bad or very bad' or has a long term health problem, and
- Housing: Household's accommodation is ether overcrowded, with an occupancy rating -1 or less, or is in a shared dwelling, or has no central heating.

A household is classified as being deprived in none, or one to four of these dimensions in any combination.¹⁸The following table shows the number of households with some measure of deprivation in the Oxfordshire LEADER area.

Total number of households in LEADER area	Household is not deprived in any dimension	Household is deprived in 1 of the 4 dimensions	Household is deprived in 2 of the 4 dimensions	Household is deprived in 3 of the 4 dimensions	Household is deprived in all 4 dimensions
59,237	32,549	17,746	7,605	1,231	106

The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007 (IMD 2007) is the Government's official measure of multiple deprivation at small area level. The table below shows the most deprived rural lower super output areas (LSOAs) in the Oxfordshire LEADER area. The IMD rank ranges from 1 (the most deprived area in England) to 32,000 (the least deprived). The IMD decile identifies whether each area is in the most deprived 10%, 10-20%, 20-30% and so on.¹⁹

LSOA Code	IMD Rank	IMD Decile
Berinsfield E01028604	12,809	30-40%
Berinsfield E01028605	15,864	40-50%
Launton E01028500	17,407	50-60%
Kirtlington E01028498	18,254	50-60%

Access to services is an issue for many residents of rural Oxfordshire. A higher proportion of people live more than 10km from a job centre in rural areas in Oxfordshire (43%) than across rural England as a whole (30%). There are 10,420 households in rural areas in Oxfordshire with no access to a car or van.

¹⁷ www.consultations.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consult.ti/countrysidesurvey2012/consultationHome

¹⁸ Nomis – official labour market statistics, dataset QS119EW

¹⁹ Deprived areas in rural Oxfordshire, Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion [OCSI] and Oxfordshire Rural Community Council [ORCC], 2011

In the most deprived rural areas in Oxfordshire, 21% of households have no access to a car or van. These people are likely to face particular challenges to accessing key services and amenities.²⁰

‘SWOT’ analysis of the LEADER area

The following ‘SWOT’ analysis was prepared at a public consultation workshop on 4 July 2014. The workshop involved 32 representatives of the private, public and community sectors.

Strengths	Weaknesses
River Thames and its tributaries Productive agricultural sector Rural area but close to Oxford and London People want to work and live here Many people highly qualified Science Vale hi-tech business cluster High percentage of volunteers Large number of community enterprises Lots of home based businesses	Hidden pockets of rural deprivation High house prices Cost of business premises Out commuting from villages Village pubs and shops closing Slow broadband speeds Poor mobile reception Lower salaries in tourism and land based sectors Thames boating businesses badly affected by flooding and poor summers Lack of access to finance for micro start ups Poor road infrastructure and traffic congestion High energy costs, particularly in areas away from gas network
Opportunities	Threats
Growing demand for local food Pub is a shop Community owned pubs, shops and other businesses Investment in rail network Collaboration with the Universities of Oxford, Oxford Brookes and Reading Promoting Thames in cooperation with Cotswold and Chilterns LEADER areas Geological and paleontological tourism linked to mineral extraction Tourism potential of churches Agatha Christie and Midsomer Murders tourism Making more of woodland Village based supply chains Growing population Better use of footpath and bridleway network Events on the Thames and elsewhere Using village halls to support home based businesses	Reductions in public transport subsidies Changes in public service delivery Aging population Economic uncertainties of farming Agricultural land being allocated for residential development Price of farmland discouraging new entrants Online shopping threatening village shop Farmers markets have to compete with big supermarkets Climate change Low unemployment creates skills shortages Impact of more frequent flooding on businesses

Alignment with Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP)

Oxfordshire has come together to create a vision for the future to realise our potential for ourselves and our country. The Oxfordshire LEADER strategy is being drawn up against the backdrop of the much broader Strategic Economic Plan for Oxfordshire that has been developed by OxLEP. LEADER funds are an important source of funding and support for rural Oxfordshire. A City Deal and Growth Deal have been agreed with Government and there will be soon be agreement on the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) deal for Oxfordshire.

²⁰ Access to services in rural Oxfordshire, Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion [OCSI] and Oxfordshire Rural Community Council [ORCC], 2011

The Oxfordshire LEADER strategy will directly support the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan's programme for growth, in particular the objective to support innovation led growth.

The strategy for LEADER will also complement the strategy for ESIF which will help to provide training, business advice and town centre revitalisation. ESIF will also add value to the Better Broadband Oxfordshire programme by helping to bring fast broadband to the most remote parts of Oxfordshire.

Within ESIF Oxfordshire's EAFRD (European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) funds are to be split between two of the four themes identified as potential priorities for the programme:

- Funding small scale renewable and broadband Investments in rural areas, focused on renewable schemes with long term viability and job creation potential (£700,000), and to close superfast broadband gaps (£1.4m).
- Support for tourism activities in rural areas (£700,000) again focused on viable and employment generating schemes. OxLEP is also planning to fund tourism marketing (with matched contributions from Oxfordshire's businesses) to attract new visits from high growth, high spend markets.

Whilst LEADER does not directly fund skills development and training the strategy recognises that skills and training are very important for the successful delivery of funded projects. The Oxfordshire Skills Strategy 2020 sets out a number of priorities for the creation of a local skills infrastructure. Project providers will be encouraged to assess training needs for the successful delivery of their project and work with training providers to upskill their workforce.

Oxfordshire's allocation from the European Social Fund (ESF) and European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) will help to deliver the 'Innovative People' objective of the Strategic Economic Plan "Delivering and attracting specialists and flexible skills at all levels, across all sectors, as required by our businesses, with full, inclusive employment and fulfilling jobs'.

The strategy for LEADER will also complement the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan which focuses on the priority localities of Science Vale Oxford in the south, through Oxford, to Bicester in the north of the county - the Oxfordshire Knowledge Spine. The plan acknowledges that 'Whilst our focus is to increase economic growth centred around the largely urban knowledge spine we are equally cognisant of the significant contribution our rural and visitor economy makes to our economic success and the unique quality of life on offer in Oxfordshire.'

The Strategic Economic Plan provides the context in which specific issues can be addressed in order to unlock Oxfordshire's full economic potential and thus, continue to support the UK economy as it moves back into sustained growth. Investment in Oxfordshire will further cement our ambition to be at the forefront of global economic competitiveness, bringing direct benefits to the country through increased economic activity, productivity and innovation.

OxLEP appreciates that Oxfordshire's rural areas are also home to a range of innovative institutions and businesses, all of which are candidates for support under the ESIF business support and skills programmes. FAI farms for example operates from the old University of Oxford farm, and combines innovation in research on agricultural techniques and methods alongside education and consultancy, with an increasingly global reach and reputation for demonstrating UK expertise in a sector with significant growth potential in the global food market.

Oxfordshire is also home to initiatives championing new approaches to green (environmental) and blue (water use) management, spurred by both the county's natural environment assets, and its pressures, such as propensity to flooding. The strength of innovation and potential businesses from emerging methods such as catchment area management, innovative renewables and sustainable exploitation of natural resources such as woodlands positions this sector well for both generic innovation support, as well as specific low carbon programmes.

To support OxLEP's rural priorities LEADER will prioritise funding to innovative projects that increase economic activity and productivity and link with low carbon and renewable initiatives. Tourism projects should contribute to the aim of attracting new visits from high growth, high spend markets. Projects involving new build or conversion of existing buildings will be expected to include the installation of ducting for broadband fibre.

LAG membership will be available to an OxLEP representative and the LAG will welcome comment on and support for its activities from the new Oxfordshire Growth Board which is being set up to facilitate collaboration between local authorities on economic development, strategic planning and growth. A letter of support and endorsement from OxLEP is attached as Appendix 8.

Our strategy and local priorities

Our strategy will focus on rural Oxfordshire's strengths and opportunities in order to overcome weaknesses and threats.

We will make the most of one of our key assets - the River Thames and its tributaries - as it has the potential to act as a catalyst for the growth of the area's tourism sector and help farmers add value to their produce through local food marketing.

Our strategy will have four key strategic themes:

- **Revive the River Thames** – encouraging more people to use the river rather than pass by it. The upper reaches of the Thames, outside Oxford and well-known riverside towns, are an overlooked visitor attraction. As a result river related businesses have not generally prospered. However the Oxfordshire Local Action Group considers that the Thames has great potential. The river and its associated landscape and history can satisfy a wide range of visitor interests. The surrounding countryside is also ideal for walking and cycling. The Local Action Group wants to encourage innovative projects by new and existing businesses that will use the potential of the Thames to create sustainable economic growth.
- **Get growing, get selling, get eating more local food** – improving the processing and marketing of local food. Farmers are receiving a smaller share of the value of a basket of food. National distribution of food creates a very large carbon footprint and more and more people, even in rural areas, do not fully appreciate the contribution of farming to the local economy and environment. The Oxfordshire Local Action Group wants to reconnect local farmers and local people, shortening the food chain and retaining more of the added value from processing and marketing in the local economy.
- **Unlock the potential of woodland** – actively managing woodland and developing the local distribution network for woodfuel, timber and wood products. Additional management of Oxfordshire's many privately owned woodlands can create new economic, social and environmental benefits. The Oxfordshire Local Action Group wants to encourage private woodland owners to work with fencing businesses, community woodfuel groups and craft businesses to stimulate demand for local wood products.
- **Vibrant villages** – creating more economic activity in villages to stop them becoming dormitories with limited opportunities. Businesses based in villages not only create jobs but also bring the village to life during the working day. They also sustain local services such as shops and pubs. The Oxfordshire Local Action Group wants to encourage businesses to expand in villages. It will also encourage projects that help to attract and retain businesses in villages; from business support services in a village hall to community run pubs and shops.

We will support projects that are innovative and make a difference by creating new products and markets and using new technologies. We will favour projects that tap into the knowledge and creativity provided by the area's world class universities and research organisations.

The new OxLEP business support service (www.oxfordshirebusinesssupport.co.uk) will help project applicants to connect with the expertise that is needed to develop and deliver innovative projects.

We will support projects that are sustainable and make a difference by creating local job and skills opportunities, encouraging fewer car journeys by residents and visitors and reduce the carbon footprint of new buildings and converted buildings.

We will favour projects that encourage the participation of all sectors of our community.

The following table sets out why we have chosen our strategic themes, what we want to achieve and how it can happen. Further detail is also available in Appendix 2 – Outputs Submission Table.

National priority and local themes	What we want to achieve with LEADER (objectives and outcomes)	Our local evidence for the change needed (challenges and opportunities)	How are we going to deliver the change? (the type of projects we want to support)
<p>National: Support for increasing farm productivity</p> <p>Local: Get growing, get selling, get eating more local food</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. encourage the production and marketing of good local food to support the local economy and reduce our carbon footprint 2. encourage an increase in the percentage of farm income derived from the marketplace 3. help to safeguard and create land based jobs <p>Target 5 new jobs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. highly productive area 2. UK food self-sufficiency falling 3. farmers share of basket of food falling 4. aging workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - resource efficient farming - flood resilience - welfare management changes - on farm processing, storage and marketing
<p>National: Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification</p> <p>Local: Get growing, get selling, get eating more local food</p> <p>Vibrant villages</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. encourage reuse of redundant farm buildings to support farm diversification and micro-enterprises 2. encourage an increase the percentage of farm income derived from the marketplace 3. encourage innovative business activity in villages 4. encourage businesses and community enterprises that serve the local community 5. help to safeguard and create rurally based jobs <p>Target 45 new jobs</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. farmers share of basket of food falling 2. out-commuting from villages 3. loss of village shops and pubs 4. areas of deprivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - on farm processing, storage and marketing - conversion of redundant buildings to provide micro-business units - refurbishment of pubs and shops - community shops and pubs
<p>National: Support for rural tourism</p> <p>Local: Revive the River Thames</p> <p>Vibrant</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. encourage businesses that promote cycling, boating and walking 2. encourage businesses that promote good local food, support the local economy and reduce our carbon footprint 3. encourage businesses that 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. wide variety of existing visitor attractions and numbers 2. many potential visitor attractions (e.g. cycleways) 3. farmers share of basket of food falling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - accommodation upgrades - investment in green infrastructure (e.g. signage on cycleway) - support for events and festivals

National priority and local themes	What we want to achieve with LEADER (objectives and outcomes)	Our local evidence for the change needed (challenges and opportunities)	How are we going to deliver the change? (the type of projects we want to support)
villages	work with others to promote local heritage 4. encourage projects that promote and enhance the Thames and its tributaries as a visitor destination 5. help to safeguard and create rurally based jobs Target 8 new jobs		
National: Provision of rural services Local: Vibrant villages	1. encourage facilities that serve businesses as well as residents 2. encourage projects that help residents with family commitments to take up employment 3. help to safeguard and create rurally based jobs Target 2 new jobs	1. increasing number of home workers 2. areas of deprivation	extension or alteration of village hall, pub or church to provide space for childcare, business or retail services
National: Support for cultural and heritage activity Local: Vibrant villages Revive the River Thames	1. encourage activity that creates or enhances a visitor destination 2. help to safeguard and create rurally based jobs Target 2 new jobs	1. wide variety of natural and built heritage attractions and places	- conservation and enhancement of existing attractions - enhancement of new attractions (e.g. church) - support for events and festivals
National: Support for increasing forestry productivity Local: Unlock the potential of woodland	1. encourage an increase in the supply and use of local wood and reduce our carbon footprint 2. encourage an increase in the demand for local wood 3. help to safeguard and create land based jobs Target 2 new jobs	1. extent and potential of woodland 2. existing community woodfuel programme providing advice	- woodland management plans - processing storage and marketing of wood products - wood fuel supply chains linked with the Oxfordshire Woodfuel Programme

Grant examples from the Southern Oxfordshire LEADER programme 2008 to 2013

The following are examples from the previous Southern Oxfordshire LEADER programme of the kind of projects that will help to deliver the strategy for the proposed new programme.

Support for increasing farm productivity

Step Farm - grant for energy efficiency aspects of a new milking parlour and facilities for increased educational visits to the farm, see www.southernoxfordshireleader.org.uk/case_studies_detail.php?id=9
Cost: £38,050 , Grant: £17,220
Outcomes: five individuals benefiting, use of new technology

Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification

Shotover Brewery - grant for a new commercial microbrewery in a redundant agricultural building in Horspath, see www.southernoxfordshireleader.org.uk/images/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20Shotover%20Brewery.pdf
Cost: £34,043, Grant: £20,425
Outcomes: two new jobs

Stainswick Farm Oil - grant for sign-written vehicle to deliver and advertise oil seed rape oil processed and bottled on farm, see www.stainswickfarm.co.uk/index.asp?m=1&t=Home
Cost: £10,685, Grant: £4,718
Outcomes: two jobs safeguarded

Support for rural tourism

Clays Organic Market Garden - grant for cafe and farmshop, see www.southernoxfordshireleader.org.uk/images/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20Lilys%20farm%20shop%20and%20tea%20room.pdf
Cost: £53,526, Grant: £31,045
Outcomes: two new jobs

Support for rural services

Brightwell cum Sotwell Community Village Stores - grant for new community-run village shop. The project included extending the village hall, developing the community enterprise as an Industrial Provident Society and establishing a volunteer team to run the shop, see www.southernoxfordshireleader.org.uk/images/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20Brightwell%20cum%20sotwell%20shop.pdf
Cost: £168,000, Grant: £30,000
Outcomes: two new jobs

Support for cultural and heritage activity

Immense Productions Ltd – grant for the film ‘Tortoise in Love’. A film produced by and starring residents of Kingston Bagpuize , see www.southernoxfordshireleader.org.uk/case_studies_detail.php?id=10
Cost: £38,460, Grant: £10,000
Outcomes: village benefited from increased local spending during filming, increased visitors after film release and increased sense of local identity

Support for increasing forestry productivity

AH Cornish - grant for firewood processor to allow farm to manage own woodland and sell firewood locally.
Cost: £35,605, Grant: £17,803
Outcomes: two individuals benefiting

Programme of activity

As soon as Defra confirms funding for the Oxfordshire LEADER area the recruitment of programme management staff will commence.

At the same time the LAG will meet to formally agree its membership and terms of reference. The LAG will also meet with business support organisations to discuss and agree the kind of support that farmers

and micro-businesses will require in order to make eligible and successful applications for LEADER funding.

An early activity planned for December 2014 will be the launch of the strategic 'Revive the Thames' theme. A special Local Action Network meeting will bring together river-related businesses, river users, business support organisations and statutory agencies to discuss the challenges and opportunities that the river faces. The following table shows our programme of early stage activity and key milestones.

Further special Local Action Network meetings will take place early in 2015 to promote the other themes (Get growing, get selling, get eating more local food, vibrant villages and unlock the potential of woodland)

The following table shows our programme of early stage activity and key milestones:

November 2014	Defra award funding
November 2014	First meeting of new Oxfordshire LAG
November 2014	Meeting with business support organisations to agree support requirement
November 2014	Briefing for OxLEP, local government and statutory agencies
November 2014	Celebration event to create awareness of funding and encourage applications
November 2014	Website for programme launched
November 2014	Media activity to create awareness of funding and encourage applications
November 2014	Recruitment of Programme Manager and Finance Monitoring Officer
December 2014	Appointment of Programme Manager and Finance Monitoring Officer
December 2014	Training of LAG
December 2014	Training of programme staff
December 2014	Preparation of 2015 action plan
December 2014	Advice surgeries/1-2-1 support for grant applicants
December 2014	Revive the Thames Local Action Network meeting
December 2014	First applications submitted
January 2015	Get growing... Local Action Network meeting
January 2015	First meeting of Decision Making Group
January 2015	LAG meeting
January 2015	First applications approved
February 2015	Advice surgeries/1-2-1 support for grant applicants
February 2015	Vibrant villages Local Action Network meeting
March 2015	Unlock the potential of woodland Local Action Network meeting
March 2015	Decision Making Group meeting
March 2015	Advice surgeries/1-2-1 support for grant applicants
April 2015	LAG meeting with review of progress to date
April 2015	Advice surgeries/1-2-1 support for grant applicants
May 2015	Decision Making Group meeting
May 2015	Advice surgeries/1-2-1 support for grant applicants
June 2015	Advice surgeries/1-2-1 support for grant applicants
July 2015	Advice surgeries/1-2-1 support for grant applicants
July 2015	Decision Making Group meeting
July 2015	LAG meeting
August 2015	Advice surgeries/1-2-1 support for grant applicants
September 2015	Meeting of Local Action Network with keynote speaker
September 2015	Advice surgeries/1-2-1 support for grant applicants
September 2015	Decision Making Group meeting
October 2015	LAG meeting
October 2015	Advice surgeries/1-2-1 support for grant applicants
November 2015	Advice surgeries/1-2-1 support for grant applicants
November 2015	Decision Making Group meeting
December 2015	Advice surgeries/1-2-1 support for grant applicants
December 2015	Defra annual inspection
January 2016	First annual LAG meeting

January 2016	Decision Making Group meeting
January 2016	Advice surgeries/1-2-1 support for grant applicants

Targets, results and outputs 2015 to 2020

The following output targets are based on the minimum funding allocation that the Oxfordshire LEADER area could be allocated if 70 LEADER groups across England are funded as part of the 2015 to 2021 programme (£1,352,180 after an 18% allowance is made for management and administration costs). Outputs targets will be amended if more or less funding is allocated.

Programme outputs will be monitored by the programme and reported to the LAG. If the outputs fall below target the programme team will investigate the reasons for the drop in performance and make recommendations on corrective action.

Projects and benefits	Project numbers	Businesses benefiting	Individuals benefiting
Support for increasing farm productivity	10	10	22
Support for micro & small enterprises & farm diversification	27	27	50
Support for rural tourism	12	18	34
Support for rural services	3	3	6
Support for cultural & heritage activity	3	6	12
Support for increasing forestry productivity	6	6	12
Total	61	70	136

Jobs	Created	Safeguarded
Support for increasing farm productivity	5	18
Support for micro & small enterprises & farm diversification	45	36
Support for rural tourism	8	18
Support for rural services	2	2
Support for cultural & heritage activity	2	2
Support for increasing forestry productivity	2	9
Total	64	85

Tourism	Activities supported	Additional overnight stays
Support for rural tourism	12	100

Investment	LEADER investment	Other investment
Support for increasing farm productivity	£270,436	£540,872
Support for micro & small enterprises & farm diversification	£540,872	£1,081,744
Support for rural tourism	£270,436	£540,872
Support for rural services	£67,609	£135,218
Support for cultural & heritage activity	£67,609	£135,218
Support for increasing forestry productivity	£135,218	£270,436
Total	£1,352,180	£2,704,360

Wider benefits	Villages benefiting	Population benefiting
Support for increasing farm productivity	6	20,000
Support for micro & small enterprises & farm diversification	12	40,000
Support for rural tourism	6	20,000

Support for rural services	3	5,000
Support for cultural & heritage activity	2	5,000
Support for increasing forestry productivity	3	10,000
Total	32	100,000

Sustainability appraisal

The sustainability appraisal of this strategy has been carried out by a panel of local government officers who have not been involved in the preparation of the strategy. See Appendix 3 for report of sustainability appraisal panel meeting.

The strategy has been assessed in terms of its impact on:

- Economic sustainability
- Environmental sustainability
- Social sustainability.

The panel considered that the proposed strategy was appropriate for the proposed LEADER area and would not have any negative sustainability impacts. However the panel pointed out that a positive impact is dependent on the successful delivery of a programme of projects that support the strategy.

The panel would like the LAG and programme management team to be pro-active in identifying appropriate projects and animating and coaching members of the rural community, so that they can successfully deliver projects that support the strategy. They welcomed the use of the Local Action Network to do this.

The panel stressed that the project assessment process must fully assess the environmental and social impact of projects, as well as the economic impact. The panel drew particular attention to the need to assess if project applicants had fully considered measures that will mitigate the risk that a project could encourage additional car usage. The assessment should also carefully check that a project will not have a disproportionate impact on any group.

Local Action Network meetings and programme guidance documentation should include information about how the economic, social and environmental sustainability of projects can be enhanced.

Proposed co-operation activity

Cooperation activities will support the implementation of the strategic priorities and joint working will be developed with adjacent LEADER areas - in particular the other LEADER areas that cover parts of Oxfordshire and the River Thames. Such cooperation would align closely to the identified strategic objectives and proposed actions in the strategy. One proposal could be the organisation of joint LAG meetings and/or events as well as encouraging and supporting project promoters to develop joint projects. Finally, cooperation beyond these areas in England, the UK and Europe will also be developed focusing on the delivery of strategic priorities.

Management and administration

Accountable body

South Oxfordshire District Council will undertake the role of accountable body on behalf of the LAG. The programme management staff will be employed and based with the accountable body to ensure effective administration of the public funds.

The council acted as the accountable body for the Southern Oxfordshire LEADER Programme 2008-2013 and the evaluation report of this programme noted that a survey of LAG members provided a number of very positive comments about the performance of the accountable body: 'The link with SODC as accountable body worked well, both in terms of work done and value, and this relationship delivered more than just its statutory function.'

The accountable body will ensure that all LEADER activity complies with RDPE operating procedures. The accountable body will account for the income and expenditure of the LAG and has an appropriate accounting system. The accountable body will also take responsibility for maintaining and retaining records of each project to provide an audit trail, regularly monitoring the progress of the projects and carrying out physical checks on project expenditure. The accountable body will ensure full compliance with all project monitoring and record retention requirement after the programme ends in 2020.

South Oxfordshire District Council is ideally suited to performing the role of the accountable body as it offers a wide range of capabilities including project management skills, financial management skills and the ability to employ staff and to procure. The council offers best practice from its experience with other community and project involvement. The council also has suitably robust financial and IT systems and processes in place to abide by requirements of the programme.

Project development and assessment procedures

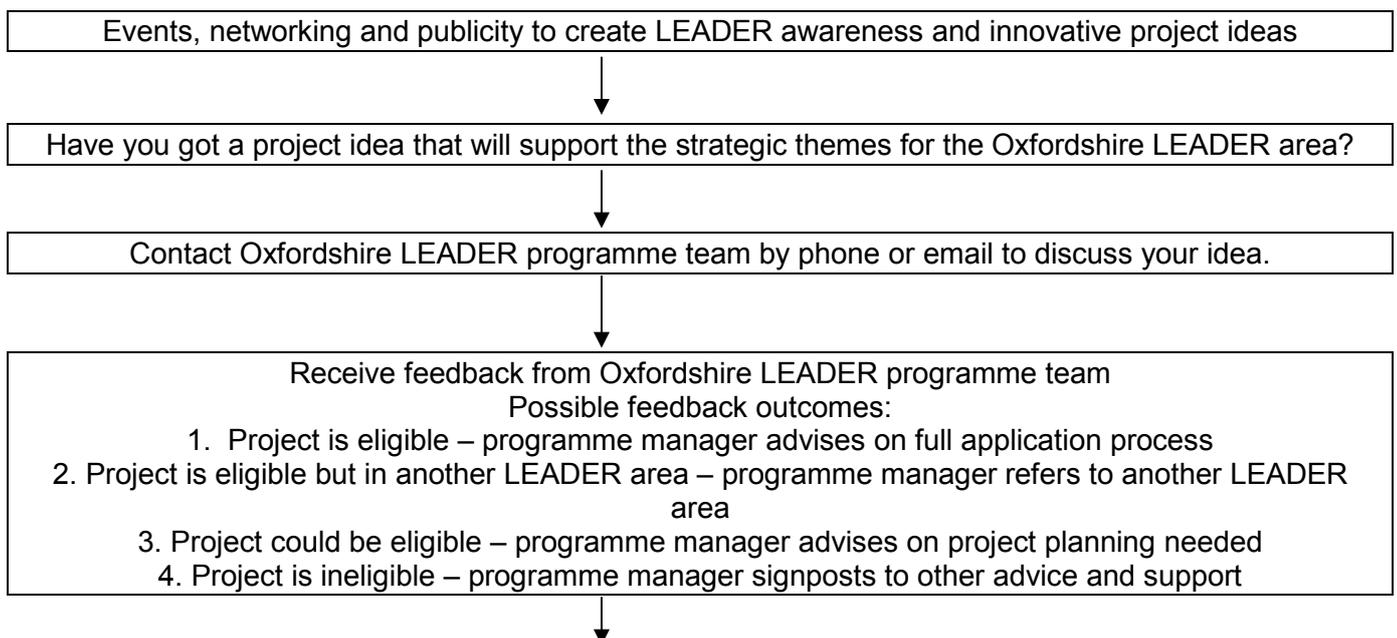
There will be openness and transparency in the design of project selection criteria, the analysis of project ideas and the selection of projects. Where a LAG member has a personal interest in a project they must withdraw from the decision making proceedings. A spreadsheet of potential conflicts of interest will be held by the programme manager.

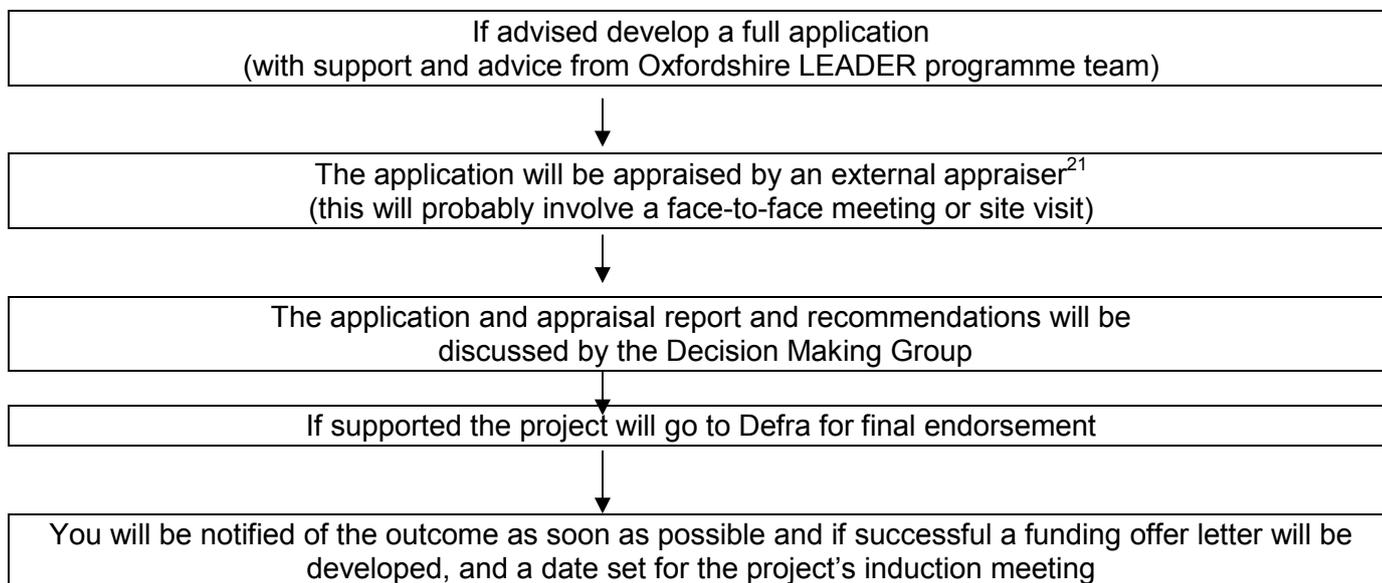
Checks will be carried out including:

- Eligibility of the proposed investment
- Conformity with selection criteria set out in the Rural Development Development Programme England (RDPE)
- Conformity with state aid and other obligatory standards
- Reasonableness of proposed activity
- Reliability of the applicant.

The accountable body will regularly check that the correct procedures are being carried out by all the parties involved in the programme, including examination of a representative sample of the projects themselves. These checks will include the appraisal and approval or refusal of projects, and the management of conflicts of interest within the accountable body and the Local Action Group. There will be a clear separation of duties for project appraisal, project approval, claim authorisation, post payment supervisory checks and project inspections.

It is proposed that the project development and assessment procedure will be as follows:





It is envisaged that the process from formal expression of interest to project application approval will take approximately 2 months.

Claims and payments

Following the issuing of the offer letter and the commencement of the project the Oxfordshire LEADER programme team will monitor the project to identify possible weaknesses or risks that could affect the success of the project. If issues are identified corrective measures will be discussed and undertaken to put the project back on track. Monitoring will include checking claims and progress reports and undertaking routine and targeted inspection visits.

No grant claims will be finalised until a progress report has been submitted. The programme team undertake the calculations and checks of grants due to be paid to projects

Any variations of project costs and claim amounts over a fixed value will not be agreed without obtaining the prior approval of Defra. The programme team will also notify to Defra all variations below the fixed value within a prescribed period.

Additionally, the programme team or accountable body will notify Defra without delay of:

- Any changes in the ownership of the business that applied for grant aid
- Any changes in the ownership of the grant aided items
- If any grant aided assets are sold during the period up to 5 years after the final grant payment
- If the business ceases trading.

Grant payment recommendations will entered onto the new Rural Payments Agency CAP-D IT system by the programme team ready for approval by Defra and direct payment to the project beneficiary.

The programme team will not submit a payment recommendation for any applicant or project deliverer where it is believed that a project is not being delivered in a satisfactory way, or where there are reasons to believe that the correct procedures have not been carried out. In these circumstances the programme team will report to the LAG and refer the issue to Defra.

Marketing and communications (see Appendix 5 for full marketing and communication strategy)

²¹ It is proposed that 10% of appraisals will be shared (reciprocally) with the neighbouring proposed Chilterns LEADER project manager

There is a clear need to ensure that the community is aware of the Oxfordshire LEADER programme and that project applications are submitted from all parts of the area. Marketing and communication is a critical tool not only to raise awareness of the programme but to encourage suitable applications. The communications and publicity strategy is therefore a key element of the overall strategy and the quality of its delivery will help to determine the overall success of the programme.

Aims

The Oxfordshire LEADER programme's marketing and communications strategy has the following overall aims:

- Ensure that the programme is effectively and transparently publicised, so that residents and businesses in the LEADER area are aware of the programme and the benefits that it provides to the rural community
- Encourage the submission of high quality applications from across the area that deliver a range of sustainable community benefits in a cost-effective way.

Objectives

The Oxfordshire LEADER programme's marketing and communications strategy has the following objectives:

- Create general awareness of the benefits of the LEADER programme
- Provide advice and support to potential applicants and their advisers
- Encourage potential applicants with relevant projects to act and apply for funding.

LEADER audiences

The audience for marketing and communication activity in support of the Oxfordshire LEADER programme can be broadly divided into three groups:

- i) Potential applicants:
 - Farmers and growers (including advisers)
 - Rural micro-businesses not involved in tourism (including advisers)
 - Rural tourism businesses (including advisers)
 - Parish councils, rural voluntary, community groups (including advisers)
 - Foresters (including advisers).
- ii) Residents living in the LEADER area
 - Councillors and opinion formers (e.g. press, managers and officeholders of business and community groups)
 - Other residents
- iii) Other LAGs interested in co-operation.

Communication channels

Taking into account the resources that are available and the lessons learnt from the previous programme the following communication channels will be used:

Website (communication objectives: awareness, advice)

A website was developed for the previous programme (www.southernoxfordshireleader.org.uk) and is being used as a communications portal for the transition period. It is managed by programme staff.

The website will be refreshed to take account of the new programme and will be a key tool for distributing information about the programme.

It will have links to stakeholders' websites in order to encourage collaboration. It will also have links to other sources of funding and advice. Stakeholders will be encouraged to have reciprocal links from their own website.

The website will also have a secure element for LAG members to access. This will be the key portal for the programme's management information and meeting papers.

An annual budget will be required for design amendments, hosting and maintenance.

Twitter (communication objectives: awareness, advice)

A Twitter account will be opened and managed by programme staff. It will be a key tool for distributing information about the programme, including details on the LAG membership, the LAG's priorities and objectives, Local Area Network meetings, how to apply, project updates and case-studies.

The use of this channel will not result in significant budgetary implications.

Printed leaflet (communication objectives: awareness, advice)

A leaflet is a passive form of communication but is a valuable way of creating awareness amongst audience members who do not initially have the time or interest to engage in face to face communication. A leaflet also acts as an aide memoir for audience members who have engaged in face to face communication.

A budget will be required for design and printing.

Press releases (communication objectives: awareness)

Press releases will be distributed at regular intervals throughout the programme. Their timing will be coordinated with other events and occurrences such as the programme launch and the calendar of wider stakeholder networking events (the Local Action Network).

The press release circulation and related media contact will also encourage multi-media coverage including local radio, and television, through which LAG members will be encouraged to represent the project.

The use of this channel will not result in significant budgetary implications.

Local Action Network (communication objectives: awareness, advice and support, action)

Local Action Network (LAN) meetings will be held to encourage improved understanding, the sharing of project ideas and collaboration across the Oxfordshire LEADER area. The LAN will also act as a consultative body to make sure the LEADER programme is taking full account of local needs and opportunities.

Most of the LAN meetings will be thematic and the meetings will be one way of encouraging under-represented groups to become involved in LEADER.

These meetings will be a key element of the marketing and communication strategy to publicise the programme and its activities to the broader rural community, businesses, and landowners across the LEADER area. The meetings will take place at least once a year (starting with a meeting at the end of 2014 to launch the programme). In order to maximise attendance the meetings will normally have a keynote speaker with a high local or national reputation in relation to rural development.

A budget will be required for venue costs and refreshments.

Stakeholder meetings (communication objectives: awareness, advice and support, action)

LAG members and programme staff will attend meetings of stakeholder groups on a regular basis. A list of stakeholder groups is included as an appendix to this strategy.

The use of this channel will not result in significant budgetary implications.

Farmers' markets (communication objectives: awareness, advice and support, action)

LAG members and programme staff will attend local farmers', local producer and county markets on a regular basis.

The use of this channel will not result in significant budgetary implications

Local events (communication objectives: awareness, advice and support, action)

LAG members and programme staff will attend a number of local events throughout the lifetime of the programme, including:

Thame Market
Town and parish council forums
White Horse Show, Uffington (August Bank Holiday)
Thame Show (September)
Newbury Show (September)
CLA, NFU and business networking events

A budget will be required for exhibition stand costs.

Financial plan

Defra has received initial funding applications for 86 LEADER areas across England. The applications are for a share of the national LEADER budget of approximately £138 million from 2014 to 2020. The final selection of areas will be made by a national panel in the autumn of 2014.

In the interim Defra has indicated how much funding the Oxfordshire LEADER area could receive, based on one of the following three outcomes in the autumn:

1. All 86 proposed LEADER areas are selected and funded from the available budget of £138 million.

For Oxfordshire this could be £1,454,000.

2. A minimum allocation if only 70 areas (including Oxfordshire) are selected and funded from the available budget of £138 million.

For Oxfordshire this could be £1,649,000.

3. A maximum allocation if only 70 areas (including Oxfordshire) are selected and funded from the available budget of £138 million.

For Oxfordshire this could be £1,899,000.

The indicative allocations are based on a minimum budget for each area of £1 million with a top up based on the rural nature of the area including the distribution and density of the population.

Indicative allocations could also change slightly if the boundaries of the indicative Oxfordshire LEADER area change slightly. For example if Defra determines that one of the areas selected to be within the overall area is ineligible because it is 'too urban' or is part of a built up area, the majority of which is outside the LEADER area.

Oxfordshire LEADER expenditure has been profiled evenly across the programme period from 1 January 2015. It is assumed that the programme will get off to a good start as the transition programme management team has already received details of a number of innovative project ideas that have the potential to become early applications for funding.

At this stage it is assumed that the proportion of the budget spent on management and administration will be 18%, which is the maximum allowable.

The remaining budget will be apportioned between the national priorities as follows:

Support for increasing farm productivity (20%)

- Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification (40%)
- Support for rural tourism (20%)
- Support for rural services (5%)
- Support for cultural and heritage activity (5%)
- Support for increasing forestry productivity (10%).

It is understood that there are no restrictions or guidelines on the proportion of the budget that can be allocated to capital or revenue expenditure. However if the Oxfordshire LEADER programme is going to make a long last difference it will need to direct the majority of its funding to capital projects that create longer lasting assets.

Expenditure for each year by priority

1. All 86 proposed LEADER areas are selected and funded from the available budget of £138 million.

Policy Priority	Expenditure Forecast (£)							Total programme
	Financial Year							
	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	
Support for increasing farm productivity	23,846	47,691	47,691	47,691	35,768	23,846	11,923	238,456
Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification	47,691	95,382	95,382	95,382	71,537	47,691	23,846	476,912
Support for rural tourism	23,846	47,691	47,691	47,691	35,768	23,846	11,923	238,456
Provision of rural services	5,961	11,923	11,923	11,923	8,942	5,961	2,981	59,614
Support for cultural and heritage activity	5,961	11,923	11,923	11,923	8,942	5,961	2,981	59,614
Support for increasing forestry productivity	11,923	23,846	23,846	23,846	17,884	11,923	5,961	119,228
Running costs and animation	39,258	39,258	39,258	39,258	39,258	39,258	26,172	261,720
Grand Total	158,486	277,714	277,714	277,714	218,100	158,486	85,786	1,454,000

2. A minimum allocation if only 70 areas (including Oxfordshire) are selected and funded from the available budget of £138 million.

Policy Priority	Expenditure Forecast (£)							Total programme
	Financial Year							
	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	
Support for increasing farm productivity	27,044	54,087	54,087	54,087	40,565	27,044	13,522	270,436
Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification	54,087	108,174	108,174	108,174	81,131	54,087	27,044	540,872
Support for rural tourism	27,044	54,087	54,087	54,087	40,565	27,044	13,522	270,436
Provision of rural services	6,761	13,522	13,522	13,522	10,141	6,761	3,380	67,609
Support for cultural and heritage activity	6,761	13,522	13,522	13,522	10,141	6,761	3,380	67,609
Support for increasing forestry productivity	13,522	27,044	27,044	27,044	20,283	13,522	6,761	135,218

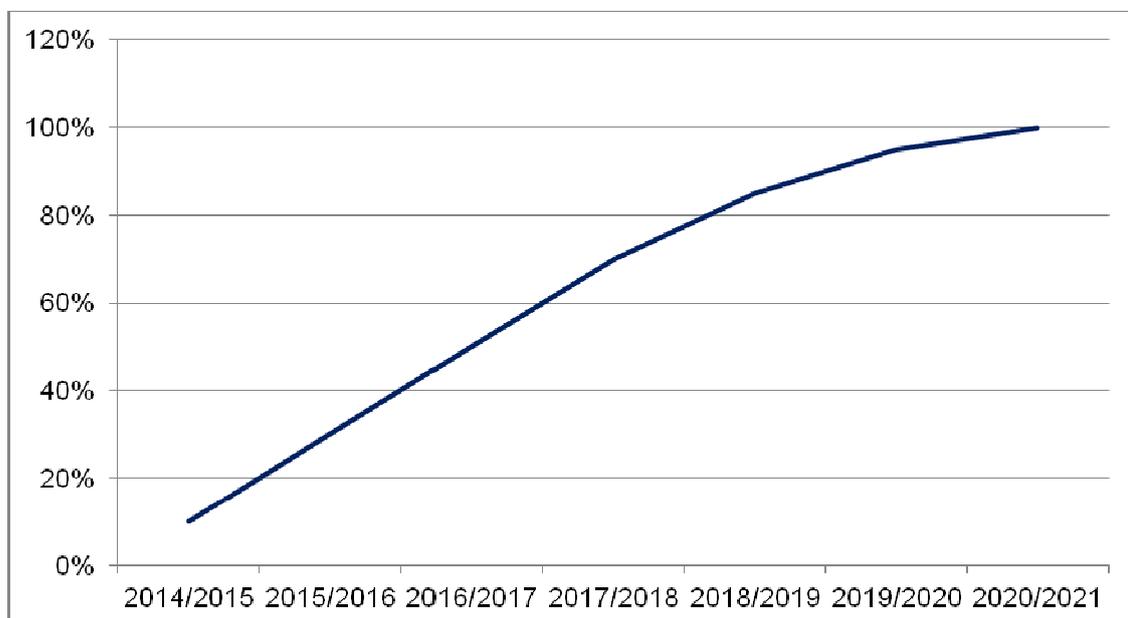
Running costs and animation	44,523	44,523	44,523	44,523	44,523	44,523	29,682	296,820
Grand Total	179,741	314,959	314,959	314,959	247,350	179,741	97,291	1,649,000

3. A maximum allocation if only 70 areas (including Oxfordshire) are selected and funded from the available budget of £138 million.

Policy Priority	Expenditure Forecast (£)							Total programme
	Financial Year							
	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	
Support for increasing farm productivity	31,144	62,287	62,287	62,287	46,715	31,144	15,572	311,436
Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification	62,287	124,574	124,574	124,574	93,431	62,287	31,144	622,872
Support for rural tourism	31,144	62,287	62,287	62,287	46,715	31,144	15,572	311,436
Provision of rural services	7,786	15,572	15,572	15,572	11,679	7,786	3,893	77,859
Support for cultural and heritage activity	7,786	15,572	15,572	15,572	11,679	7,786	3,893	77,859
Support for increasing forestry productivity	15,572	31,144	31,144	31,144	23,358	15,572	7,786	155,718
Running costs and animation	51,273	51,273	51,273	51,273	51,273	51,273	34,182	341,820
Grand Total	206,991	362,709	362,709	362,709	284,850	206,991	112,041	1,899,000

Overall funding profile

The following graph shows how funding to support projects will be spread relatively evenly across the lifetime of the programme



Use of grants, procurement or other types of financial support

It is assumed that the majority of funding that will be levered by the LEADER programme in the form of matched funding for grants, will be private sector funding provided by applicants. However in line with the need for innovation some applicants may be able to obtain match funding from universities,

research organisations or the Technology Strategy Board. Matched funding for rural service and cultural and heritage projects may come from local government, charitable trusts and lottery funding.

In line with the LEADER ethos that development is carried out by 'local actors' it is not envisaged that projects will be procured. Procurement rules can result in organisations based outside the area delivering projects.

Risk assessment

Assessment of Oxfordshire LEADER programme risks

Risk	Likelihood	Severity	Mitigation
LAG cannot recruit members from all sectors of the community	Low	High	The Local Area Network will help in building links with all sectors of the community and create the awareness and interest needed to recruit LAG members
The LAG and/or programme management team do not have adequate skills in place	Low	High	Ongoing training will be provided to ensure that the required skills are available
Breakdown in partnership between LAG and accountable body	Low	High	The LAG will work closely with the Accountable Body to ensure that there is full communication. The terms of reference and strategy will ensure that both the LAG and Accountable Body know what is expected of them.
Insufficient project applications are submitted	Low	High	The marketing plan will be key to raising awareness and ensuring that sufficient projects of good quality are brought forward. There will be a range of support available to applicants to help them prepare applications.
Applicants have problems in obtaining adequate matched funding	Low	High	The programme team will provide guidance where necessary as to how additional funds could be raised.
Project outputs are below target	Medium	Medium	Estimated and actual project outputs will be carefully monitored so that underperformance can be quickly identified. Marketing and funding will be directed at project types that are achieving or exceeding estimated outputs, based on performance in other LEADER areas as well as performance in the Oxfordshire LEADER area.
Changes in the political, physical and economic environment	Medium	Medium	The strategy and delivery plan will be reviewed annually and will be able to take account of changes in the external environment