

Cotswolds Local Action Group

Executive Group Terms of Reference

Overview

The Cotswolds Conservation Board and its partners have been successful in securing £ 1.998 million from the latest national LEADER programme managed by Defra and the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). The programme will operate over 5 years, from June / July 2015.

The 6 LEADER priorities of generating jobs and growth in their relative order of priority for the Cotswolds are as follows:

- Micro-enterprises and farm diversification,
- Rural Tourism,
- Increasing Farm Productivity,
- Increasing Forestry Productivity,
- Culture and Heritage,
- Rural Services.

The Cotswolds Local Action Group (LAG) and its Executive Group will invite, consider and determine grant applications and issue grant awards, supported by a small programme team. The programme team will monitor the grant awards and assess grant claims. The grant payments will be made by the RPA, (Rural Payments Agency).

Fuller details of the programme and its Local Development Strategy (LDS), the grant spend profile and the estimated investments, outputs and outcomes across the theme priorities are provided in the LEADER page of Cotswolds Conservation Board website; www.cotswoldsaonb.org.uk/leader

The Conservation Board is the Accountable Body for the programme and is employing the programme staff.

A map of the Cotswolds LEADER area is provided in Annex 1.

The LAG Executive Group

Main duties: The main duties of the LAG Executive Group will be to develop approaches to the stimulation of applications, to complete a thorough assessment and appraisal of applications, approve applications, provide feedback to successful and unsuccessful applicants, and monitor project progress against expenditure and outcomes and mentor projects to ensure successful deliver. The group will focus on ensuring the programme achieves its mission of jobs and growth.

Membership: 12 LAG Executive Group members, 6 of whom also sit on the Cotswolds Conservation Board but act in this capacity as individuals.

Members will represent the 6 themes of the LEADER Programme; tourism, micro business, culture & heritage, forestry, farm productivity and rural services. Membership will have a private sector majority in terms of backgrounds, knowledge and experience.

Members should have an interest in local economic development within its social, cultural and environmental context and have a thorough knowledge of and passion for the Cotswolds LAG area. The LAG and its associated structures will operate on an open and transparent basis.

The benefits of the LEADER approach are that local people:

- Have knowledge of the specific needs and challenges of the LEADER area;
- Are best placed to understand the benefits and abilities of project proposals to contribute to the needs of the LEADER area;
- Will develop a sense of ownership and commitment to the projects and local assets that are developed within the LEADER area;
- Strengthen local relationships and develop a joint and positive working relationship to the common benefit of all of the residents of the LEADER area.

Training: LAG Executive Group members will be expected to undertake an induction training programme to allow them to understand the delivery of LEADER, their roles and responsibilities. All LAG Executive Group members will be encouraged to engage with an on-going training programme. All LAG Executive Group members will be expected to take part in annual events and promotional activity for the group. Executive Group members with specific skills will be expected to deliver information sessions to the LAG covering their area of knowledge.

Time requirements: It is envisaged that the LAG Executive Group will require 1 day a month on average, with formal meetings every second month and a facility for urgent grant decision making via email and teleconference. It is envisaged that members will be prepared to serve up to a 3 year term.

Cotswolds LEADER Local Action Group Structure

The Cotswolds Local Action Group (LAG) will comprise members from the public, private and voluntary/community sector. The structure for the LAG and its associated groups is set out below:

Local Action Group

All appropriate stakeholders and groups eligible for membership in practical terms likely to be around 40 people

Cotswolds Conservation Board & Partner Organisations

(Meeting twice a year)

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Local Action Group Executive

12 LAG members, 6 of whom also sit on the Cotswolds Conservation Board but act in this capacity as individuals

Representing the 6 themes of the LEADER Programme (and with a private sector majority in terms of backgrounds)

Tourism, Micro business, Culture & Heritage, Forestry, Farm Productivity, Rural Services

(Meeting every second month with facility for urgent grant decision making via email and teleconference)

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LEADER Advisory Network

A network of officers and advisers from across the wider Cotswolds who will work with the Programme Team to promote the LEADER programme and help assess the feasibility and business case for individual grant applications

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LEADER Programme Team

1 Programme Manager (f/t)

1 Programme Assistant (p/t)

Officer support from Cotswolds Conservation Board and Stroud, Cotswold and West Oxfordshire District Councils

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Accountable Body: Cotswolds Conservation Board

Operational Arrangements – Meetings:

Meetings: Meeting every second month with facility for urgent grant decision making via email and teleconference.

Special meetings: Special meetings may be called at any time if the LAG Executive Group or Programme Team receives a request from partners setting out the purpose of the business to be considered at that meeting.

Quorum: At any meeting of the LAG Executive Group there must be a minimum number of 5 members present. If a quorum is not present 30 minutes after the time set for the start of the meeting, the meeting shall be adjourned to another time or to another date and time at the Chair's discretion and it will be recorded that no business was considered because there was no quorum. For purposes of the quorum, participation of partners by video-conferencing links will be considered as present.

Chairperson: The elected Chairperson, or in their absence, the Vice-Chairperson shall preside over the meetings of the LAG and LAG Executive Group. If both are absent, members will choose a member to preside. The Chairperson will be elected by the LAG at their first meeting and will step down or stand for re-election on an annual basis.

Declarations of interest: Where an interest has been declared from a group member as the applicant, then they should withdraw from the meeting while the item is discussed. For clarification, match funders, if they are not the applicant, are eligible to participate and vote on the discussions relating to the application. Where a LAG Executive Group member's organisation shares board members, directors or other senior officials with an applicant organisation, and is aware or is made aware of such a connection, that member should declare the connection as an interest. Where it is felt that this would not unfairly favour or prejudice the application, the remaining members present at the meeting may decide that the member declaring the interest need not abstain from the discussion of, and decision on, the relevant item. Members will also sign up to the working better together code of conduct in the LEADER National Development Framework, (Annex 3). These rules will also apply to the programme team.

Order of business: The main business of meetings will be the consideration of grant applications and to consider the progress of the LEADER Programme and strategic issues.

Notwithstanding this, the items of business will be considered in the following order:

- Those members present and apologies
- Minutes of previous meetings will be considered as a correct record
- Matters arising
- Progress Reports
- Declarations of interest by members
- Consideration of grant applications
- Urgent business

- Any other competent business
- Date, Time and Location of next meeting

Voting: Subject to compliance with the LEADER guidelines as laid down by the European Commission, all questions coming or arising before the meeting will be decided by a majority of the members present. Views from partner organisations submitted in writing or by e-mail prior to the meeting will be accepted and included as part of the decision making process. A vote may be taken by a show of hands. In the event of a tie, the Chairperson will have a second or casting vote.

Conduct of Members: Members will be expected to fulfil the Code of Conduct in regard to the principles of public life provided at annex 2 and Defra's behavioural code of conduct for LEADER LAGs provided at annex 3.

In fulfilling the duties of a LAG Executive Group member people will be privy to confidential information regarding potential projects and the allocation of public funding. Members will need to treat any information gained from being a LAG representative as Confidential. It is equally important that members are adequately protected and feel able to work with confidence on the set tasks required. For these reasons members will be asked to complete a register of interest in which they must list any business or commercial interests that they may have. It is then individual members' responsibility to ensure that this register is kept up to date.

Members must not seek to exploit a commercial benefit from any information gained through being a LAG Executive Group representative. Therefore when they receive an Agenda for a meeting the members will be responsible for ensuring that do not receive papers or take part in discussions on projects that fall within the scope of their register of interests. For example if you or any members of your family are a hotel owner you should immediately declare an interest and not either ask to see the papers or become in any discussions or decisions regarding a project that involves tourism accommodation. Members are expected to respect the equal opportunities statements which have been stated in the LDS.

Executive Group vacancies: As vacancies arise on the LAG Executive they will be advertised across the LAG network of partner organisations. The Chairperson of the LAG Executive and Programme Manager for Cotswolds LEADER will oversee the recruitment process.

Other Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations: Further to the above operational arrangements the LAG and LAG Executive Group will operate under the Constitution of the Cotswolds Conservation Board, as the Accountable Body for the LEADER programme.

Annex 1: Map of the Cotswolds LEADER area

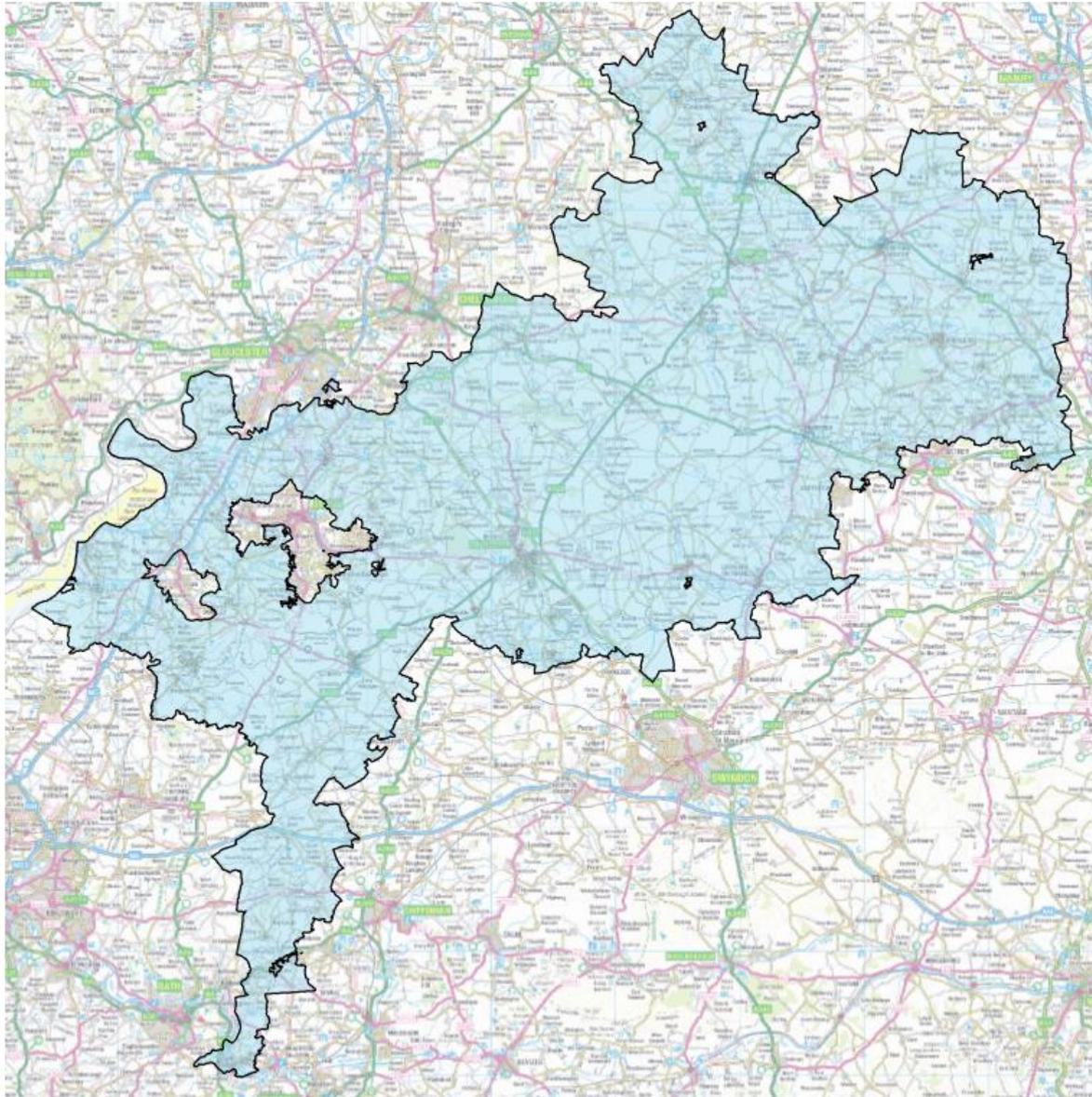
Annex 2: Code of Conduct

Annex 3: Defra LEADER Behavioural Code of Conduct – working well together

Annex 4: Summary of Roles & Responsibilities

Annex 1: Map of the Cotswolds LEADER area

Cotswolds LEADER-eligible area



Annex 2: Code of Conduct – principles of public life

All LAG members shall observe the following general principles of public life:

Selflessness: Members should serve only the public interest and should never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person.

Honesty and Integrity: Members should not place themselves in situations where their honesty and integrity may be questioned, should not behave improperly and should on all occasions avoid the appearance of such behaviour.

Objectivity: Members should make decisions on merit, including when making appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards or benefits.

Accountability: Members should be accountable to the public for their actions and the manner in which they carry out their responsibilities, and should co-operate fully and honestly with any scrutiny appropriate to their particular office.

Openness: Members should be open as possible about their actions and those of their Board, and should be prepared to give reasons for those actions.

Personal Judgment: Members may take account of the views of others but should reach their own conclusions on the issues before them and act in accordance with those conclusions.

Respect for Others: Members should promote equality by not discriminating unlawfully against any person, and by treating people with respect, regardless of their race, age, religion, gender, sexual orientation or disability. They should respect the impartiality and integrity of the LEADER Programme Team and the Conservation Board's statutory officers, and its other employees.

Duty to Uphold the Law: Members should uphold the law and, on all occasions, act in accordance with the trust that the public is entitled to place in them.

Stewardship: Members should do whatever they are able to do to ensure that their authorities use their resources prudently and in accordance with the law.

Leadership: Members should promote and support these principles by leadership and by example.

Annex 3: The Defra LEADER Behavioural Code of Conduct – working well together

We want to see Defra and LEADER groups working effectively together. We believe that the quality and cost effectiveness of services can be improved significantly when organisations work well together.

We expect LEADER groups to be productive in how you work with Defra. The way in which we challenge each other should be professional, respectful and avoiding grievances. Any disputes you have with Defra must be dealt with professionally and privately and must not be aired with applicants and grant recipients. You are expected to create a good impression with customers, representing the programme, Defra and the LAG.

We expect you to co-operate with us and respond positively to the challenges of LEADER delivery. We have a common goal which is to use LEADER to secure benefits to your local communities. We will work with you to solve policy and operational problems around LEADER delivery.

We need to share information with each other to help improve our approach and ensure delivery of a co-ordinated and compliant programme.

We will expect you to have a flexible approach and be open to new ways of thinking, helping us find new solutions to delivery/policy and operational problems. With new policy priorities, changes to the delivery landscape and the introduction of the new CAP payments system, those that have been involved in LEADER in the past won't be able to do things as you've always done them.

Once an issue has been resolved, accepting this may mean a compromise has been made; all parties will ensure that this is explained to relevant parties in a measured and reasoned way, explaining the rationale for the collective decision that has been taken.

Annex 4: Summary of Roles & Responsibilities

LAG

- Raise awareness of the programme and encourage innovative projects.
- Oversee;
 - the strategic direction, coherence, and effectiveness of the programme,
 - the delivery of activity and its relevance to the strategy's priorities and objectives,
 - the development of the programme's annual business plan,
 - the programme communications strategy,
 - the monitoring and evaluation of the programme.

LAG Executive Group

- Raise awareness of the programme and encourage appropriate applications.
- Consider applications, appraisal reports and related recommendations.
- Approve or decline applications in line with established procedures.
- Support programme delivery by offering insight and expertise within a member's own field or sector in order to develop strong applications.
- Offer technical advice or expertise at the appraisal stage of an application.
- Provide progress updates to the full LAG.
- Undertake monitoring via project visits and inspections.
- Work with the Accountable Body to maintain accurate and timely financial and project management records.

Advisory Network:

- Raise awareness of the programme and encourage appropriate applications.
- Advise the LEADER programme team at the Expression of Interest (EOI) stage of the key strengths, weaknesses and scope for refinement of project proposals.
- Work with the programme team to appraise applications, utilising the expertise of individual Advisory Network members.
- Advise applicants who are unsuccessful in the first instance on the process of refreshing their proposals, where appropriate.
- Help monitor overall programme progress in relation to their particular areas of expertise.
- Support the development and implementation of the monitoring and evaluation framework within the programme.

Programme Team & Cotswolds Conservation Board as the Accountable Body:

- Ensure compliance with RDPE operating procedures including; selection and approval of individual projects and authorising of grant payments against approved claims.
- Maintain project records to provide an audit trail, and regularly monitor the progress of the projects.
- Evidence the decision making process.
- Employ the LEADER Programme Team.
- Procure activity or services for the LAG and LAG Executive Group.
- Bank roll the Management and Administration (M&A) costs between submission of grant claims and payment from the Rural Payment Agency.