



Evaluation Report of **LEADER Transition 2014**

Background context

LEADER is a programme that originated in Europe, and stands for Liaison entre actions de developpement rural - integrated action for rural development.

The programme can fund farmers, growers, foresters, other local rural businesses and rural community organisations to help:

- create jobs
- develop rural businesses
- support the rural economy.

To be successful, applications must contribute to one or more of Defra's six priorities for LEADER, which are to:

- increase farm productivity
 - support micro and small businesses and farm diversification
 - boost rural tourism
 - provide rural services
 - provide cultural and heritage activities
 - increase forestry productivity.
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What were the project successes?

SDNPA provided £10k to the Fieldfare LEADER group and £10k to the two Sussex LEADER groups for the calendar year 2014 from the Major Projects fund.

The funding was used to secure staff continuity between the 2008-2013 programme and the planned 2014-2020 programme, which enabled both groups to retain core staff and to produce their Local Development Strategies (LDSs) and their (successful) bids to Defra for the new programme.

The funding was split over financial years with the groups receiving £2k each (£4k in total) during financial year 13/14 and £8k each (£16k in total) during financial year 14/15.

Both Fieldfare and the Sussex Local Action Groups (LAGs) retained two staff each. Their knowledge of the LAG areas and the LEADER system was critical in shaping the bids for the 2014-2020 programme.

For the 2014-2020 programme, nationally 80 bids were successful. Each was awarded a 'base' £1m plus additional funds relating to the quality of the bid.

We had considerable local success, which represents an excellent return on the initial SDNPA investment.

- Fieldfare LEADER are to be contracted to deliver a ~£1.6m programme of grant aid

- Central Sussex LAG is to be allocated ~£1.7m.
- Sussex Downs & Coastal Plain LAG have ~£1.49m.

[The awards are in Euros and will vary with the exchange rate].

Not all bids were successful, for example the Isle of Wight LAG's LDS was rejected.

For further information <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/rural-development-programme-for-england-leader-funding>

What were the unintended outcomes, desirable or undesirable?

Although the national LEADER programme was intended to commence in January 2015, the timetable has slipped. The LAGs are expecting to receive contract letters from Defra imminently with the programmes opening for grant applications in October after a Ministerial launch at the end of September.

The successful LAGs have been able to make interim claims for running costs to cover the delay. The Accountable Bodies have managed these costs downwards by, in one case, not filling a post that became vacant (this has now been advertised) and in another by seconding a staff member to another project for 6 months.

Hence there was no further call on SDNPA funds.

This time slippage has created a degree of pent-up demand and some frustration amongst potential applicants and LAG members.

However the extra time has allowed staff to prepare systems and processes and to arrange training for LAG members.

What factors hindered the achievement of the outcomes?

The main hindrance has been the delay in programme start-up, which is outside the control of the LAGs. This created uncertainty for the two accountable bodies – Winchester City Council for the Fieldfare LAG and West Sussex County Council for the two Sussex LAGs.

The lessons I learnt that will be of help to other projects are;

Theme	Lesson learnt
Timescales	<p><i>Despite the LAGs meeting all their milestones the programme was delayed due to external factors relating to the Funding Body and the Managing Authority. A mitigating action would be to have a prepared 'Plan B' with identified strategies to cope with the impact of time delays e.g. set up costs and managing customer expectations.</i></p> <p><i>In this case the financial costs of the delay have fallen on the two accountable bodies.</i></p>

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