

Making the most of woodlands in LEADER

A guide for potential Local Action Groups

LEADER is a funding programme in specific sub-regional areas that assists rural communities to improve their local area through innovative approaches. LEADER funds are distributed through Local Action Groups (LAG). As a potential cross-disciplinary LAG, you will be considering projects needed in your area. This note will help you understand the kind of woodland and forestry projects that could deliver outcomes required against the funding guidelines. It also highlights some of the successful woodland and forestry projects that have been previously funded through LEADER+.

For further information on the LEADER approach and setting up a LAG see:
http://www.seeda.co.uk/Work_in_the_Region/Rural_Issues/Rural_Development_Programme_for_England

How can woodland and forestry projects help the LAG deliver its objectives?

LEADER is a great opportunity to secure the future of the woodlands in your area. The South East is England's most wooded region. Woodlands cover over 14% of the South East, in some areas up to 22%. Trees and woodlands play an important part in our quality of life, environment and local economies. We have 40% of England's ancient woodlands. Two thirds of woodlands are within our protected landscapes (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks), showing how woodlands contribute to some of our most treasured assets.

Valuations show that our woodlands could be worth over £1 billion per year to the region¹. However much of this value does not return directly to the land managers and a substantial proportion of our woodlands are undermanaged. Forestry businesses are rural businesses and these skills need to be retained in the rural areas. Support and understanding for woodland management also needs to be built up amongst the general public, with encouragement for them to visit woodlands for their recreational and health benefits.

The Regional Implementation Plan picks up strongly on the priorities of 'Seeing the Wood for the Trees' - the Regional Forestry and Woodlands Framework. The Framework outlines what is important about the region's woodlands at www.seeingthewoodforthetrees.org.uk



The current priorities for delivery are:

Theme	Priority Topic
Better places for people to live	Sustainable Communities
Enhanced environment and biodiversity	Ancient Woodlands
A stronger contribution to the economy	Renewable Energy
A secure future for our woodland resources	Skills

These priorities are of relevance throughout the region. However LEADER gives an opportunity to develop targeted sub-regional projects that deal with these priority topics in their local context.

¹ RFF Information Note 2 - "How much are the woods of the South East worth?"
<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-6ggh73>

What does the Rural Development Plan for England require from LEADER LAGs?

LEADER programmes are cross disciplinary and must deliver across all three axes of RDPE.

Axis 1 – Improving the competitiveness and sustainability of farming and forestry

Axis 2 – Enhancing the environment and countryside

Axis 3 – Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy

These axes are described in more detail in the Regional Implementation Plan for RDPE at http://www.seeda.co.uk/Work_in_the_Region/Rural_Issues/Rural_Development_Programme_for_England

However compared to previous LEADER programmes, there is an increased potential to integrate environmental actions with social and economic support.

What does this mean in regards to woodland and forestry projects?

Firstly local forestry and woodland projects or local Forestry Commission representatives could be key partners in the Local Action Group partnership. Indeed currently in the West Oxfordshire Network there is representation on the Steering group from such a project.

Secondly recent LEADER guidance from SEEDA suggests that the following types of activities could be considered in relation to forestry and woodlands:

- Conserving environmental and heritage assets and local character
- Fostering innovative approaches to linking agriculture, forestry and the local economy, thereby helping to diversify the economic base and strengthen the socio-economic fabric of rural areas
- Piloting of new products and approaches including dissemination of best practice
- Support for innovation and entrepreneurship

To outline further the key priorities from the Regional Forestry and Woodlands Framework:

Sustainable Communities: Sustainable communities require good access to natural greenspace, including woodlands. There are particular efforts to develop green infrastructure around new developments, and to ensure people have access to woodlands for health related activities and other community projects

Ancient Woodlands: The most important irreplaceable woodlands in the region are ancient, with continuity of woodland cover since at least AD 1600. Wide ranging support is required to ensure their future sustainable management and secure protection through Planning.

Renewable Energy: Wood as fuel can make a significant contribution to local heating needs and ensure that woodland management has a stronger economic base.

Skills: The workforce required for sustainable management of our woodlands is reducing in size and aging. There is a diverse range of skills required, yet business are struggling to take on and train new entrants.

Further suggestions of project activities from SEEDA, which the forestry and woodlands sector could deliver, include

- Forestry diversification
- Rural Tourism and crafts, including Hidden Britain type projects
- Protection and enhancement of environmental assets and local character in their local communities.
- Working with landowners to develop new opportunities in the countryside
- Enhancing biodiversity and landscapes
- Encouraging the development of products and activities that make best sustainable use of natural resources, including new energy production methods and responsible use of local ecology, habitats and biodiversity as tourism attractants
- Meeting gaps in skills and training to improve access to employment and shortages in scarce skills.
- Improve the capacity of rural communities to develop and enhance their own living environment and quality of life.
- Better preventative medicine including encouragement of walking (through better countryside access), healthier eating (through access to fresh local foods) and sense of community.
- Working in urban-fringe areas to address their specific needs

What forestry and woodland related activities have been previously supported by LEADER?

LEADER+ supported a number of woodland projects. The general scope of projects across all the rural development activities included supporting community training facilities in the local area, community transport, local food initiatives, rural tourism.

Many of these general approaches can be delivered by the forestry and woodlands sector – for example ensuring local woodland products are included in farmers markets, making the link between managing important habitats and our local rural economy, or ensuring local access to forestry training. Woodlands contribute to our accessible natural greenspace, so projects to increase visitors to the countryside, and broaden their understanding of the rural environment should aim to include the local woodlands.

Project Name	Who led it	What they did	Current LEADER + area
FC New Forest Apprenticeship Scheme	Forestry Commission, National Trust, Sparsholt College	4 new apprentice forest workers were given on the job training alongside being assessed for NVQ level 2 in forestry management. The training provided gave core practical skills to sustainably manage the New Forest across a range of habitats and also in recreation management. The apprentices were from the local area and have all gone on to work in forestry.	New Forest
Pondhead Coppice	Local contractor	A local woodland contractor is reworking an area of hazel coppice and to establish a small business selling the produce.	New Forest
Agri-Industrial Shed	Weald Woodnet	Project to develop designs and produce a planning application for a real commercial building, using locally-sourced and low-value timber. The processes were recorded and combined with design information, in the form of a workbook. This will be available to public use as a template guide, so further examples could be built in the region.	Wealden and Rother Rural Partnership
Business Advice	Weald Woodnet	This provides a pilot programme of advice and training linking woodland management to sustainable timber production and added-value timber processing. It offers free outreach visits and subsidised training for businesses. It will support the growing demand for wood as a low-carbon and renewable energy source.	Wealden and Rother Rural Partnership
Wychwood Parish Conservation Scheme	The Wychwood Project	Communities have been encouraged to play an active part in countryside conservation. The capacity of individuals and communities is improved in regards to dealing with environmental issues, through direct conservation work. Records and surveys were combined with local anecdotal information on environmental quality to inform the priorities and community action.	West Oxfordshire Network
Wychwood Ancient Habitats Programme	The Wychwood Project	This project focuses on a specific set of inter-linked habitats - the ancient woodlands, ancient trees, species rich hedgerows and remnants of ancient wood pasture - that are of particular importance to both the landscape and wildlife of the Wychwood area. Work includes detailed mapping, ecological surveys, providing advice on habitat management, engaging volunteers in this work and examining links between conservation and marketing products for sale in the local area	West Oxfordshire Network

Further information and contacts:

For further information on applying to be a **Local Action Group** see:

http://www.seeda.co.uk/Work_in_the_Region/Rural_Issues/Rural_Development_Programme_for_England

If you are based in or near an **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**, there are Accords in place between the AONBs and the Forestry Commission. These short documents outline the issues of particular importance in these sub-regional areas, and could be used to target your work. These can be downloaded from www.forestry.gov.uk/southeastengland

County Woodland Officers and Woodland Initiatives – the following Counties have woodland officers and Woodland Initiatives that could give advice on forestry projects in your area:

County Woodland Officers

Hampshire – Jonathan Rau - 01962 845995 or jonathan.rau@hants.gov.uk

West Sussex – Julie Bolton -01243 756888 or julie.bolton@westsussex.gov.uk

Oxfordshire – Eric Dougliss - 01993 814141 or forestry@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Buckinghamshire – Nick Keighley 01296 382061 or nkeighley@buckscc.gov.uk

Woodland Initiatives

The Oxfordshire Woodland Project – David Rees - 01993 814140 or owp@oxfordshire.gov.uk

The Wychwood Project – Nick Mottram- 01993 814143- wychwood@oxfordshire.gov.uk

The Chilterns Woodland Project – John Morris - 01844 355503 or woodlands@chilternsaonb.org

South Downs – Nick Heasman – 023 92571381 or nick.heasman@hants.gov.uk

Weald Woodnet – David Saunders -01273 477978 or davids@woodnet.org.uk

The Blean (Kent) – Liz Humpage - 01227 862015 or blean.initiative@canterbury.gov.uk

For further details on any of the above, please contact Jane Hull, Framework Development Officer, at:

Forestry Commission South East England Conservancy
Berks, Bucks and Oxon Area Office
Upper Icknield Way
Aston Clinton
Aylesbury, Bucks
HP22 5NF

01296 696543 / 07747 622783

jane.hull@forestry.gsi.gov.uk