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The Clay Vales LEADER Local Action Group

Covering Aylesbury Vale, Rural Milton Keynes and South Northamptonshire

Local Development Strategy

September 2014

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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The objectives for the Clay Vales LEADER by 2020 are:

Vision	By the end of 2020, Clay Vales LEADER will have helped to establish a thriving local rural economy, underpinned by a strong tourism offer and supported by high-quality local food businesses. LEADER will be considered the first port of call for rural start-up businesses, farm diversification and rural tourism in the area.
Aims and Objectives	6 out of 10 randomly chosen rural businesses in the Clay Vales LEADER area will have heard of LEADER and think it's a good thing. The tourism accommodation offer in the area will be benchmarked and the businesses surveyed will show a 5% increase in the number of bed nights over the course of the programme. LEADER will have developed a connected forestry sector within the area where timber processors and woodland owners are communicating more efficiently, leading to a 5% increase in woodlands managed under forestry commission schemes as well as a 5% increase in woodfuel sales. Local food producer networking will be improved, with at least 30% of new BRBN members being food producers; total member numbers of the North Bucks Rural Business Network will have increased to around 200.
Outcomes	The rural economy will be improved overall, with a particular emphasis on local tourism, food and forestry sectors.

1.1.2 The Clay Vales Local Development Strategy (LDS) has been developed specifically to address structural weaknesses and potential market opportunities in the rural economies of Aylesbury Vale, rural Milton Keynes and South Northamptonshire.

1.1.3 The Clay Vales LEADER Local Action Group (LAG) will be a proactive, growth and jobs-led force for change in this area.

1.1.4 By the end of 2020, the Clay Vales LEADER programme will have helped to establish a thriving local rural economy, underpinned by a strong tourism offer and supported by high-quality local food businesses. Innovative new businesses will develop under the support of LEADER.

1.1.5 Through the Clay Vales LEADER programme, the LAG and accountable body plan to generate 300 expressions of interest for funding from businesses/community groups seeking to generate growth in the Clay Vales rural economy. This will assist businesses with growth, support over 50 projects, and create over 50 new FTE jobs and 15 new businesses/products. This number is likely to be made up of 10 tourism businesses, 15 farm diversification businesses, 10 micro businesses, 10 forestry businesses, 5 community businesses and 10 food-related businesses.

1.1.6 Collectively, we forecast the activities planned to be implemented through this LDS will improve the economic performance of the rural economy with a particular emphasis on local tourism, food and forestry sectors.

1.1.7 As the Clay Vales LDS builds on the past successes/experience of the AVMK LEADER programme, it is believed the forecast outputs, outcomes and impact are highly realistic.

1.2 The CLAY VALES Local Action Group

1.2.1 The Clay Vales Local Action Group (LAG) builds on the strong partnership established under the AVMK LEADER programme, which has operated very successfully in the 2007-2014 programming period.

1.2.2 Because current proposals cover a larger geographic area and because the aims of the programme have changed, we have deliberately set out to refresh the current LAG membership to invite a number of new people to join the LAG who were not involved in the previous programme.

1.2.3 In particular, the private sector/large company representation has been strengthened with the addition of Nick Parsons from Arla Foods. Links with Local Enterprise Partnerships (to ensure the development of a close working relationship with the EU Growth Programme) and the representation from South Northamptonshire have also been strengthened by the addition of Greg Ward from South Northants District Council and Laurence Conisbee, a South Northants-based farmer.

1.2.4 Strengthening the governance model to ensure adequate representation in terms of geography, age, gender, expertise/skills and ethnicity whilst maintaining a strong backbone of private sector leadership has been a major consideration of the LAG in the preparation of this LDS.

1.3 The Clay Vales LAG Area

1.3.1 The Clay Vales LAG area largely covers the administrative areas of Aylesbury Vale, South Northants and rural Milton Keynes. It also includes the hub town of Buckingham and the market towns Winslow and Princes Risborough. The map in Appendix 1 of this document shows the precise geography of the proposed Clay Vales LEADER area.

1.3.2 In developing the proposals for the Clay Vales LEADER area, both size[1] and rural coherence have been considered. This has provided an area of sufficient scale to offer sufficient human, financial and economic resources to support a viable development strategy and to allow local rural communities to become actively involved in the development and delivery of this strategy.

1.3.3 Under the current proposals, the Clay Vales LEADER area has an eligible population of 162,272. Clearly, the ability to operate with a LEADER area of this size is dependent on DEFRA being successful in securing the European Commission's approval to the proposed derogation for LEADER groups to cover areas with an eligible rural population of under 200,000, rather than the 150,000 proposed in the original regulation.

1.3.4 If DEFRA's derogation is not approved, it is recognised that it will be necessary to review the proposed LAG area to ensure it comes in under the 150,000 population proposed in the original regulation. Current thinking about how to achieve this is likely to focus on removing some of the 'urban city and town' areas in the current proposals to reduce the overall eligible population of the LAG area.

1.4 The Clay Vales LEADER Strategy

1.4.1 In developing this strategy, a SWOT analysis has been developed (see section 4) which is based on a robust understanding of the rural economy, landscape and social characteristics of the Clay Vales area. These elements have been widely consulted upon and support and input has been received.

1.4.2 The intervention logic underpinning this strategy has been developed in response to this analysis and is wholly consistent with the national RDPE intervention logic and the national framework for integrating FFPS, NELMS, LEADER and the Growth Programme.

Weaknesses/ Opportunities	Strategic Thrust of Investment	Activities to be Supported
• Need to improve performance & sustainability of agricultural holdings • Need to improve animal health & welfare	**Enhancing Farm Productivity**	• Alternative on-farm fuel projects (e.g. growing energy crops) • Support for projects improving biodiversity or bio-digestion • Support for innovative collaborative food and woodland management initiatives, e.g. deer culling and processing
• Need to promote	**Support for**	• Farm diversification projects (e.g. adding value to

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[1]The population of any LEADER area shall be not less than 100,000 and not more than 150,000 inhabitants, although this may be capable of being flexed under exceptional circumstances, with the agreement of DEFRA and the European Commission.

sustainable economic development in rural areas • Need to contribute to increasing employment in rural areas	**SMEs and Farm Diversification**	produce, tourism projects offering relevant accommodation, shops, woodfuel) • Encouraging and supporting better marketing and business planning • Supporting the promotion of innovative branding of local products; Clay Vales grass-fed and fattened livestock and associated networks • Supporting and encouraging local food networks (e.g. working with the Bucks Tourism strategy group) • Encouraging business support for local food businesses, particularly where innovation is found (e.g. Ten Mile Menu or Happy Herefords/ processing and marketing) • Helping retail growth and innovation in rural areas as these places often act as social and community hubs • Supporting sustainable (economic or environmental) manufacture in rural locations • Encouraging more new start-ups and business innovation to stop people in rural areas commuting • Supporting micro-businesses showing strong connections to agriculture and forestry (feed businesses, etc.) to enhance the efficiency and profitability of primary businesses
• Need to add value to the tourism industry in rural areas • Need to promote sustainable growth in the rural tourism sector • Need to help conserve and enhance the natural rural heritage	**Strengthening Rural Tourism, Culture & Heritage**	• Working to create opportunities for rural tourism offers to benefit from joint promotion and destination branding eg Visit Buckinghamshire, Destination MK • Linking farm food, pubs and farmers' markets to tourism through existing networks or encouraging the start-up of new networks • Developing and supporting existing local food networks (e.g. by attending events and talks promoting LEADER) • Helping to promote sustainable tourism projects (cycling, walking, etc.) • Transport solutions to major tourism offers (e.g. Buckingham to Stowe) • Supporting accommodation provision where need is proven
• Need to improve/ maintain the well-being of rural communities • Need to diversify the rural economy • Need to improve rural service provision	**Enhancing Rural Services**	• Supporting economically* viable projects (shops, village pubs, etc.) • Encouraging economically* sustainable community services • Supporting community transport as well as village halls and community buildings where facilities do not exist • Recognising the challenge of an ageing population for services and business opportunities • Supporting community projects that are recognised in Neighbourhood Plans *'Economically' might not necessarily mean 'financially'; ie wider cost benefit impact

	Enhancing Forestry Productivity	• Supporting education/tourism linked to woodlands (e.g. camping in woodlands)
• Need to improve the overall performance and sustainability of forestry		• Encouraging the purchase or management of shared capital equipment
		• Strengthening links between forestry/woodland contractors and landowners as well as other local businesses (e.g. a boiler installation company arranging a contract with a forestry business for local log deliveries to customers)
		• Supporting low-carbon heating projects (e.g. several buildings sharing a woodfuel boiler or ground source heat pump)
		• Providing support for forestry as a flood defence factor
		• Supporting business skills and marketing in the forestry sector
		• Supporting contractors seeking to manage un-managed woodland
		• Promoting economically viable, innovative fuel projects

1.4.3 This strategy has also been developed through discussion with the current AVMK LAG and a range of wider national, regional and local partners. In developing this strategy, we have sought to co-operate with this wider partnership in the development of priorities and actions for the rural economy in order to ensure activities compliment, rather than compete with, their own plans.

1.4.4 A minimum of 70% of all projects supported by the Clay Vales LEADER programme will directly support the rural economy (e.g. through creating and developing micro and small-sized rural businesses), with the remaining 30% of community projects also demonstrating that they are contributing to improving the local rural economy.

1.5 Management and Administration

1.5.1 In accordance with the new common provisions regulation, the Clay Vales LAG is proposing to spend 18% of the LEADER grant on management and admin (M&A), giving a 73 /27% management and administration/animation split. How we will achieve this is set out in Appendix 2 of this strategy.

1.5.2 Our nominated accountable body is Ngage Solutions, an organisation which has a long track record in the successful delivery of EAFRD and ERDF/ESF funding, having been the accountable body for the Chiltern Hills and AVMK LAGs in the previous programming period and having successfully delivered over £10m of ERDF/ESF over the last 8 years.

1.5.3 By utilising an operating model which is based on a shared back office between the Chilterns and the Clay Vales LAGs, we have sought to keep the running costs to a minimum and push a greater proportion of LEADER funding into helping rural businesses.

1.6 Financial Plan

1.6.1 Our detailed financial plan is shown in Appendix 3. In accordance with the indicative allocation, it proposes an overall LEADER budget for the Clay Vales LAG of £1,763,000, with our total Management and Administration costs being £250,399. Section 4.5 of this strategy shows how we propose to allocate these funds across our strategic priorities.
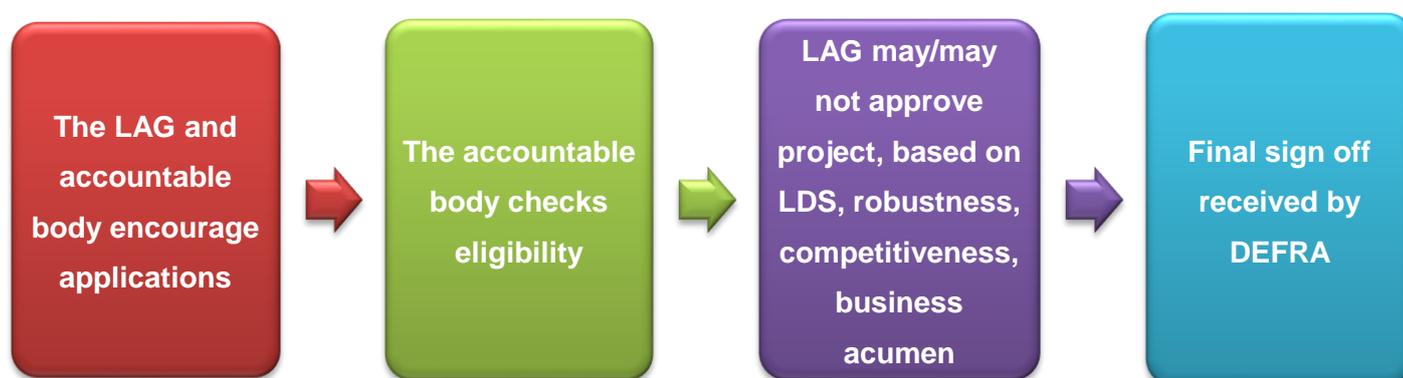
2.0 The Local Action Group

2.1 Governance Structure and Decision-Making Processes

2.1.1 The Clay Vales Local Action Group is the responsible partnership for the LDS under the authority of the accountable body. It is responsible for the overall management and strategic direction of the LDS, and will monitor the progress of the programme by examining the reports it receives on individual projects and the LDS as a whole. As a LAG, we will undertake the roles with dedication and a commitment to the core values of the civil service: integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

2.1.2 The Clay Vales Local Action Group (LAG) is committed to:

- Build the capacity of local people to develop and implement suitable LEADER projects
- Establish a non-discriminatory, transparent, objective and efficient appraisal process to select LEADER projects, which avoids conflicts of interest, allows project selection to be undertaken by written procedure or meeting, and is based on a balanced governance model (i.e. at least 50% private sector)
- Select and prioritise LEADER projects according to their contribution towards the objectives and targets set out in the Clay Vales Local Development Strategy (LDS)
- Prepare and publish calls for proposals or accepting applications on a rolling basis, making the selection criteria clear at all times
- Receive applications for support and assessing them
- Select or target projects or sectors and fixing the amount of support under each measure
- Appraise/approve projects after eligibility criteria have been reviewed by the accountable body and before final verification of eligibility by the RDT team
- Monitor the implementation of the strategy[2].

The LAG and accountable body encourage applications	→	The accountable body checks eligibility	→	LAG may/may not approve project, based on LDS, robustness, competitiveness, business acumen	→	Final sign off received by DEFRA

2.1.3 Meetings of the Clay Vales LAG will be arranged ensuring they are as accessible as possible to all members of the LAG. Initially, meetings will be held every 4-6 weeks, arranged with a minimum of one month's notice, and in time extending to quarterly. Normally the times of meetings will alternate between daytime and evening. An agenda will be issued to the LAG members at least five working days in advance of all meetings. Special meetings can be arranged at shorter notice at the discretion of the Chair.

2.1.4 At least 60% of permanent Clay Vales LAG members must be present at a LAG meeting to implement key decisions about budget, expenditure, staffing and grant applications. Every effort will be made to reach consensus on decisions. If voting is required, it will be by a show of hands unless otherwise decided by the group. Decisions will be by a majority of those voters present.

2.1.5 All LAG meetings will be minuted by the accountable body and those minutes will be freely available. The LAG welcomes members of the public and individuals from community organisations and public agencies to attend meetings as observers. Any contributions from observers will be through the Chair. Wider engagement and dissemination meetings will take place at least annually.

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[2] http://new.eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32013R1303

2.1.6 Members of the Clay Vales LAG are not excluded from applying for grants, but each member will be required to declare any direct pecuniary interest in any matter before the group and will take part in the related proceedings at the discretion of the other members, but will not be allowed to vote on issues related to the declared interest. Such declarations for pecuniary interest will be recorded in the minutes. Where a grant application by a LAG member is under consideration, they may not be present in the room while the decision is being made.

2.1.7 Only members of the LAG who cannot claim expenses from their employing organisation will be entitled to claim reasonable travel expenses for attendance at meetings, etc.

2.1.8 In delivering this Local Development Strategy, the Clay Vales LAG will:

- Ensure staff deliver exemplary customer service, representing the programme, DEFRA and the LAG positively at all times
- Co-operate with DEFRA to solve policy and operational problems around LEADER delivery and respond positively to the challenges of LEADER delivery by recognising we share a common goal which is to use LEADER to secure benefits to local communities
- Establish a clear framework of responsibilities/accountability and monitor activities against these metrics, including the effectiveness of the implementation of the behavioural code of conduct
- Work with DEFRA effectively to improve the quality and cost effectiveness of delivery
- Act professionally and respectfully to DEFRA, avoiding grievances and ensuring any disputes that the LAG have with DEFRA are dealt with professionally and privately and not be aired with applicants and grant recipients
- Share information with DEFRA to help improve our approach and ensure delivery of a co-ordinated and compliant programme
- Adopt a flexible approach and be open to new ways of thinking, helping to find new solutions to delivery/policy and operational problems
- Ensure that any changes to the programme are explained to relevant parties.

2.1.9 In addition, we will participate in an annual review with our DEFRA RDT lead to discuss progress with our LDS and to resolve any operational issues.

2.2 Membership of the LAG

2.2.1 Following a review of the membership of the AVMK LEADER LAG, membership of the Clay Vales LAG has been strengthened to better represent stakeholders from across the LEADER area (especially regional representation and business representation from the new areas), to address weaknesses and to ensure a balanced representation from a range of sectors. The refreshed membership of our Local Action Group is shown in the table below.

Individual	Expertise / Interest / Connections	Sector
David Campbell OBE	Charity Founder and Director, Farming Adviser	Private
Tom Morrison	International Development Director, Farmer	Private
Virginia Stollery	Farmer / NFU	Private
Annie Vernon	Regional NFU	Private
David Grainger	Farmer / NFU	Private
Ray Challinor	Bank Director, Charity Business Advisor, Community Organisation Adviser	Private
Jan Phillips	Milton Keynes Council, Equestrian, Smallholder	Public
Philippa Batting	Ngage Solutions (observer)	Private
Kate Mason	Farmer, Rural Business Training Company Founder/Adviser	Private
Chris Schmidt- Reid	Rural planning, Farmer	Public
Susan Nash	Farmer, Tourist Operator, marketing	Private
Nigel Sims	Bucks County Council (environment), energy use, community	Public
Llew Monger	Councillor, Charity Founder, Community Project Advisor	Public
Jim Sims	BTVLEP	Public

Greg Ward	South Northants District Council	Public
Laurence Conisbee	Farmer	Private
Nick Parsons	Arla Dairies, Supermarket Contracts Director	Private
Richard Pearce	Forestry Commission, tourism, marketing (NT)	Public

2.2.2 These members attend the LAG in their own right, yet retain strong connections with larger organisations through employment or association. The LAG has a proactive role in promoting LEADER, acting as ambassadors and supporting the executive in delivery. This responsibility may include speaking at events, visiting applicants, signing off completed projects, etc.

2.2.3 LAG members will champion their specific sectors (e.g. marketing, tourism, woodlands, etc.) and actively engage with people to get them involved. LAG members will attend meetings as individuals and sector champions, not as organisation representatives.

2.2.4 The proposed group brings together cross boundary representation, knowledge of the local area, business acumen, experience of partnership working and dealing with grant regimes. The LAG is and will continue to be business-focused, seeking to add value and encouraging innovation, job creation and business growth.

2.3 The Clay Vales LAG Chair

2.3.1 The current AVMK LAG is chaired by David Campbell OBE, who will conduct the meetings of the LAG as well as the executive group, and act as an important point of contact with the accountable body.

2.3.2 David Campbell OBE is a Fellow of the Royal Agricultural University, a former council and executive committee member of the Royal African Society, member of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) and the Development Studies Association, and an independent consultant working in the developing world and the UK. Other relevant experience includes:

- Agriculturalist with 30 years' experience of working with small farmer communities in Africa and Asia
- Co-founder and Executive Director (1985-1999) of the agricultural development NGO FARM-Africa
- Co-founder of the African Fellowship Trust & African Land and Food Fellowship Programme at the Royal Agricultural University (2006)
- CEO of the African Fellowship Trust (2006-present)
- Vice Chair of the Buckinghamshire Rural Affairs Group (2006-present)
- Chair of RODI–Working with Prisoners in Africa (2005-present)
- Chair of Buckinghamshire Community Action (2004-9)
- Considerable experience of NGO management
- Wide contacts in Africa at all levels from village to government, and in the international development community
- Former Business Editor of Farmers Weekly
- A consultant working in rural affairs in the UK as well as internationally; first-hand experience of countryside issues.

2.3.3 David is assisted in his role by the Vice Chair, Tom Morrison, a farmer and advisor to the World Bank and several international development agencies specialising in EU-funded agricultural business development.

2.3.4 As per the regulations, the LAG will hold an annual review process for the appointment of Chair. Where there is more than one candidate, appointments will be made by voting. The Chairperson will preserve order, ensuring partners are given a fair hearing, and will rule on matters of order, competency, relevancy and urgency. The Vice Chair will deputise as and when appropriate.

2.4 Executive Groups Within the Clay Vales LAG

2.4.1 The Clay Vales LAG has an appraisal committee who meet to approve applications on an ad-hoc basis.

2.4.2 The LAG has also developed subgroups in order to specialise and develop skills. These subgroups are populated by members who have specific skills and experience:

- The marketing subgroup members are Susan Nash, Annie Vernon and David Grainge
- The financial audits subgroup members are David Campbell OBE, Ray Challinor and Virginia Stollery
- The appraisal subgroup meet to approve projects on an ad-hoc basis.

2.4.3 Additionally, we have appointed experts to advise on a range of specialist areas:

- Equestrian: Jan Phillips
- Farms: David Grainge/Tom Morrison
- Tourism: Susan Nash/David Campbell OBE
- Forestry: Richard Pearce/David Grainge.

2.4.4 The appraisal subgroup's members have been trained and are experienced in appraising rural projects.

2.5 Key LAG Processes

2.5.1 The LAG will draw up a Local Development Strategy (LDS) for the area and be responsible for its implementation. It will be responsible for the overall management of the LEADER programme and associated local policy issues in the Clay Vales LEADER area. Specifically, it will:

- Invite and approve grant applications in support of the LDS (following appraisal)
- Set up and review appraisal, monitoring and evaluation procedures
- Advise on communication and publicity strategies
- Oversee the provision of information on the LEADER programme to the wider community
- Approve and direct the successful delivery of the annual implementation plan and budget
- Encourage and assist the appropriate agencies to act on the implementation plan
- Review the delivery of the implementation plan against agreed milestones in order to meet the monitoring and reporting requirements of DEFRA/the RPA
- Ensure that the finances and financial records of the LAG are monitored and managed effectively
- Support and manage the Project Manager to identify sources of funding to supplement LEADER funding
- Ensure that the funding distributed achieves maximum benefit for the rural communities in the Clay Vales LEADER area
- Ensure the LAG investments integrate fully with other RDPE investments such as LEP ESIF strategies, the Farm and Forestry Productivity Scheme and the New Environmental Land Management Scheme.

2.5.2 The LAG members will provide overall guidance on policy matters and support the marketing and promotion of the LEADER programme locally by encouraging the ideas of local people, encouraging community involvement, partnership and innovation.

2.5.3 The LAG and the accountable body will consider the staff resource requirements to deliver the programme against the eligible expenditure regulations, co-financed by LEADER.

2.5.4 The LAG will delegate dealings with the media to the Programme Manager. Members will take care in dealing with the press and media generally, and will report any dealings at the next meeting of the LAG. Wherever possible, prior approval of the Chair should be sought in dealing with the media. The members will have regard to confidentiality of information, data and material which the group handles, especially as it relates to financial, planning and commercial matters.

2.5.5 The LAG will seek to ensure that equal opportunities are central to the delivery of the programme.

2.5.6 A large number of organisations have expressed an interest in being involved in the LEADER process, yet (due to restrictions about the structure and size of the LAG) it has not been possible

for them all to be represented directly. In many cases the same type of organisation exists separately within each of the three local authority areas of Aylesbury Vale, South Northamptonshire and Milton Keynes. Only a selection will become members of the LAG. With this in mind, and in order to engage with a wider set of stakeholders, we will establish a Clay Vales LEADER stakeholder forum which will meet at least annually.

2.5.7 Any alteration to these terms of reference shall receive the consent of not less than two-thirds of the total permanent members. At least ten days' notice in writing to the Chair is required for a meeting of the group to discuss the proposed alteration.

2.6 Local Action Group Staff, Numbers and Job Descriptions

2.6.1 Our key people possess the appropriate competencies, skills and resources to manage complex grant management programmes, generate and manage LEADER development processes at the local level, and market rural development programmes like LEADER.

2.6.2 Our staff structure is shown below.

2.6.3 Overall responsibility for ensuring the accountable body delivers against its commitments will fall to Philippa Batting, the Managing Director of Ngage Solutions.

2.6.4 The Head of Projects at Ngage Solutions will be responsible for line-managing the team which will be funded to deliver the Clay Vales LEADER programme. This will include a full-time Programme Manager and a Rural Project Officer which will be shared across the Clay Vales and Chiltern LAG areas.
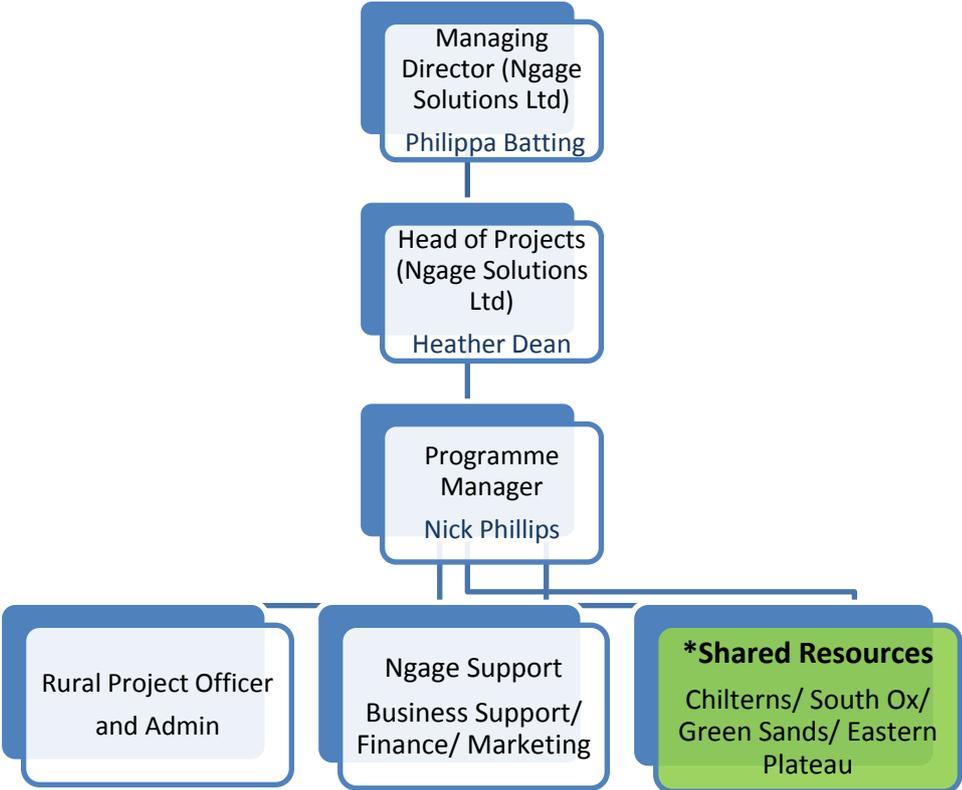
*For shared resources see section 4.4.4

The LEADER Programme Manager

2.6.5 The existing LEADER Programme Manager has 5 years' experience of successfully running LEADER programmes and will be responsible for overseeing the successful delivery of two LEADER funding programmes (Clay Vales and the Chilterns), in accordance with the respective Local Development Strategies and delivery plans developed in the two LAG areas.

2.6.6 The Programme Manager will be responsible for ensuring the smooth running of the Local Action Group by assisting it in selecting, appraising and approving individual projects, as well as facilitating a working LAG including organising training for LAG members and ensuring compliance with operating procedures. He will also support the on-going development of the LAG to equip them with the skills and confidence needed to implement their role in allocating project funding, and will maintain a register of potential conflicts of interest among LAG members.

2.6.7 The Programme Manager will support the development and submission of appropriate project proposals to the LAG to secure budget spend on projects that meet the priorities for the individual LAG areas. This will include co-ordinating promotional activity of the availability of LEADER funding to encourage a broad range of project proposals, undertaking appropriate responses to expressions of interest ensuring QC process is implemented on those undertaken by Project Officers, undertaking technical assessment of applications ensuring appropriate eligibility checks of both applicant and activity, drawing up contracts and overseeing claims and payments between the accountable body and the projects, ensuring projects are delivered to agreed outcomes, budget and timescales, implementing monitoring of projects and regular reporting on their progress, and carrying out physical checks on project expenditure.

2.6.8 The Programme Manager will act as the authorised officer of the accountable body in liaising with DEFRA and the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) to issue returns to DEFRA/RPA including quarterly progress reports, oversee claims to DEFRA/RPA, prepare and issue annual delivery plans on behalf of the LAGs for the coming year for DEFRA/RPA approval, follow DEFRA/RPA guidance in respect of any appeals process, and submit monthly progress reports to DEFRA/RPA with each grant claim.

2.6.9 In addition to the above, the Programme Manager will be responsible for:

- Promoting LEADER and rural business needs to develop rural networks and establish communication links within the rural community
- Working with the finance and management teams within Ngage Solutions to ensure the LEADER projects deliver the necessary outcomes/outputs on budget and on time
- Undertaking line and functional management of the LEADER Project Officer(s) ensuring all activity is compliant with due process
- Providing regular reports and updates on the progress of LEADER-funded projects to relevant organisation such as the County and District Councils, Chilterns Conservation Board, stakeholders, etc.
- Liaising with other local LAGs and any other relevant organisations to ensure a joined-up approach to LEADER funding
- Undertaking day-to-day programme management, financial controls and monitoring processes associated with the LAGs and LEADER funding.

The LEADER Project Officer

2.6.10 The LEADER Project Officer will provide support to the Programme Manager in both the Clay Vale and the Chilterns LAG areas. Their role will essentially be focussed on:

- Assisting the Programme Manager in the Chilterns and Clay Vales LEADER contract delivery
- Ensuring the programme complies with the operational procedures laid out by DEFRA/RPA
- Maintaining proper financial records as required by the Programme Manager and DEFRA/RPA
- Updating finance records and monitoring records
- Maintaining the DEFRA/RPA database for Chilterns and Clay Vales, updating as required on a daily basis or as project status changes
- Promoting the project by a variety of means in accordance with the Chilterns and Clay Vales promotional and marketing plan to ensure wider awareness/understanding of the programme
- Making presentations to various local farming and community groups
- Supporting applicants with the development of project applications, clarifying the project application process including provision of pre-application clinics
- Ensuring compliance with DEFRA/RPA guidance for delivery of all casework from inception to completion, ensuring the operational procedures laid out by DEFRA/RPA are followed
- Carrying out physical checks on project expenditure as directed by the Programme Manager

- Supporting the Programme Manager to develop and facilitate the LAG
- Liaising with neighbouring LAG Project Officers
- Building the capacity of local farmers, foresters and representatives in the local rural community to apply for funding
- Monitoring and reviewing projects via regular contact with applicants, including site inspections in adjacent LEADER areas as directed by the Programme Manager
- Maintaining accurate records of projects in accordance with requirements, including accurate budget management for purposes of quarterly outturns
- Taking minutes and record meetings as required for both LAG areas
- Undertaking such other tasks as may be required from time to time.

2.6.11 Our current animation and project facilitation staff have extensive experience of running successful LEADER programmes. They play a particularly important role in encouraging the less active beneficiaries and areas of the community to participate in the local development process, helping local project holders develop their ideas into projects eligible for financial support.

2.7 Equal Opportunities Statement

2.7.1 The Clay Vales LAG will act in accordance with the LEADER regulations and as directed by the RDPE Programme Monitoring Committee. The LAG will support delivery of the RDPE, having due regard for the impact on equalities throughout in accordance with the public sector equality duty, and making recommendations as to mitigating measures where appropriate.

2.7.2 The composition of the LAG reflects the breadth of partners in the locality, and we will regularly review membership to ensure it remains representative of the population of the Clay Vales area.

2.7.3 The project will encourage participation from underrepresented groups and will proactively act to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people with and without a protected characteristic. In order to ensure full equality of opportunity, the following actions and monitoring will be implemented:

- Ngage Solutions will regularly maintain and develop their own policy to ensure adherence with equality legislation. It will ensure this project operates in full compliance with relevant legislation and best practice.
- All partners will be expected to adhere to and implement their policies to ensure no potential job applicant, employee or project beneficiary is discriminated against either directly or indirectly on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic or national origin, religious belief, political opinion or affiliation, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, age or disability.
- The policy will be communicated to all contractors reminding them of their responsibilities towards the equality of opportunity, and this will be applied to any contractual arrangement with external parties.
- All equal opportunities targets for recruitment and beneficiaries' successful participation will be set before the start of the project, and will be monitored at a senior level in the organisation. Monitoring may involve the collection and classification of information regarding race in terms of ethnic/national origin, the sex and disability of all beneficiaries, and the success rate of the projects. We will maintain data about recruitment, training and promotional records of all employees, as well as of the decisions reached and the reason for those decisions.

2.7.4 The LAG will ensure that any promotional and marketing material conforms to legal requirements and uses positive images of people from different backgrounds. This will also enable the project to positively demonstrate the value and broader social benefits that diversity can bring.

2.8 Involvement of the Community and Consultation Activity Undertaken

2.8.1 In addition to having actively engaged with the community in the delivery of LEADER in the previous programme (2007-13), the accountable body has also recently delivered a number of local workshops to refresh the LDS and re-engage with local communities.

2.8.2 Collectively, this has identified a number of potential LEADER applicants in the Clay Vales area who are keen to bring projects forward in the next programme. In total, we have sent out over 50

Expression of Interest forms to interested applicants in the last two months alone, and interest in the project is building.

2.8.3 The 'naturally occurring' projects that are seeking support generally tend to be projects wanting to add value to primary production/local food, as well as community enterprise, tourism accommodation and on-farm retail/visitor activity projects.

2.8.4 In addition to the above, we have also engaged extensively with a range of rural partners including the NFU, CLA, Buckinghamshire County Council, South Northants District Council, Aylesbury Vale District Council, the National Trust, The Forestry Commission, The FSB, Women in Rural Enterprise, SEMLEP, BTVLEP, Buckingham Town Council, Bucks New University, Aylesbury UTC, Community Impact Bucks and all of the neighbouring LAGs.

2.8.5 Because the LAG and accountable body recognise community involvement and ownership of this strategy is key, the content has been widely consulted on. That said, this development period has taken place during a holiday period, so we will be continuing our consultation activities post bid submission.

2.9 LAG Training & Development Requirements

2.9.1 A review of the Clay Vales LAG's strengths and weaknesses shows a very balanced LAG membership which is strongly embedded in the rural business sector. The LAG has significant links to key rural organisations such as the NFU, CLA, local councils, the Rural Forum, the Bucks Rural Affairs Group, and many others.

2.9.2 We have undertaken an audit of the key skills of the LAG and identified a number of training and development requirements, including:

Training and Development Need	Proposed Action
Forestry	Whilst the Clay Vales LAG area is not heavily wooded, there is significant evidence to suggest this is a strong potential growth opportunity. In order for the LAG to have the potential to realise this opportunity, we will ask the Forestry Commission to run an internal training course.
South Northamptonshire	Whilst the LAG has a good understanding of the area, we believe it would benefit from a more detailed knowledge of the locality. We will address this issue by means of a familiarisation tour.
Appraisal	Whilst the LAG has a solid base of trained appraisers, any new LAG members will need training in appraisal skills.

2.9.3 In addition to the above, we will keep a register of training needs and ensure this is reviewed regularly to assess the LAG's training and development requirements.

3.0 The Clay Vales LAG Area

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The Clay Vales LAG area largely covers the administrative areas of Aylesbury Vale, South Northants and rural Milton Keynes. It also includes the hub town of Buckingham and the market towns of Winslow and Princes Risborough. Buckingham has been included as a hub town as it is the historic administrative centre for the county, has roots deeply embedded in the rural community, and provides the major marketplace for many rural businesses in the locality.

3.1.2 In developing our proposals for the Clay Vales LEADER area, we have considered both size[3] and rural coherence. We believe this has given us an area of sufficient scale to offer sufficient human, financial and economic resources to support a viable development strategy and to allow local rural communities to become actively involved in the development and delivery of this strategy.

3.1.3 Following a review of the geographically eligible population of LEADER areas, the AVMK LAG decided it made sense to expand their geography and offer LEADER grants to rural businesses and community groups in South Northamptonshire. The reasons for this decision are varied:

- The continuity of landscape, business structure and historic farming relationship is obvious and recognised in numerous historical reports and maps. The entire area of Aylesbury Vale, rural Milton Keynes and South Northants has always been known as the lamb-fattening belt of England, and the area was also known as the Upper Thames Clay Vales, with Aylesbury Vale, rural Milton Keynes and South Northamptonshire sharing common landscape and grazing conditions[4].

- The mapping work we have undertaken, combined with our negotiations with neighbouring LAGs, has led us to believe that adopting this approach will enable us to achieve near 100% coverage of the rural population of the LAG area, without any significant 'white spaces' appearing between our LAG area and neighbouring LAG areas.

- Adopting this approach also enables us to maximise the number of rural beneficiaries that are potentially eligible for LEADER support, secures good integration with our neighbouring LAGs and ensures the more rural areas on the borders of our LAG area are not overly disadvantaged.

3.1.4 Under current proposals, the Clay Vales LEADER area has an eligible population of 162,272. Clearly, our ability to operate with a LEADER area of this size is dependent on DEFRA being successful in securing the European Commission's approval to the proposed derogation for LEADER groups to cover areas with an eligible rural population of under 200,000, rather than the 150,000 proposed in the original regulations.

3.1.5 If DEFRA's derogation is not approved, we recognise we will need to review our proposed LAG area to ensure it comes in under the 150,000 population proposed in the original regulations. We have identified areas that we would withdraw. Our approach to doing this would include removing some or all of the 'urban city and town' areas in our current proposals to reduce the overall eligible population of the LAG area to 149,382.

3.2 Map of the Area

3.2.1 The map in Appendix 1 shows the proposed Clay Vales LEADER area.

3.3 Rural Population Covered

3.3.1 The rural population of the Clay Vales area is 162,272 which includes the population of Buckingham (12,890) as a hub town. This can be broken down as follows:

	Population (Total)	Eligible Population (Total)	Ineligible Population (Total)
Rural hamlets and isolated dwellings	12,362	12,360	2
Rural town and fringe	77,494	77,406	88
Rural village	57,003	56,998	5
Urban city and town	64,773	15,508	49,265
TOTAL	**211,632**	**162,272**	**49,360**

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[3]The population of any LEADER area shall be not less than 100,000 and not more than 150,000 inhabitants, although this may be capable of being flexed under exceptional circumstances, with the agreement of DEFRA and the European Commission.
[4]http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/jca108_tcm6-5360.pdf

3.4 The Economic Conditions of the Area, Key Issues & Evidence of Need

General Background

3.4.1 The Clay Vales LEADER area is a predominantly rural area with plenty of green space and a relatively low population density. Also referred to as the Upper Thames Clay Vales, the LAG area possesses common landscape and grazing conditions[5] [6] and was historically known as the lamb-fattening belt of England.

3.4.2 The Clay Vales LEADER area has a total population of 211,632 with just under 70% of residents (162,272) living in rural areas. 7.62% of residents in the LEADER-eligible population live in rural hamlets and isolated dwellings, 47.70% live in rural towns and fringes, 35.12% live in rural villages, and 9.56% live in areas classified as 'urban city and town'.

3.4.3 Aylesbury Vale in Buckinghamshire is 350 square miles of largely rural geography. Aylesbury is the principal town, with the smaller settlements of Buckingham, Wendover and Winslow and many smaller villages nearby. The population of Aylesbury Vale is 177,800[7] with close to 60% of residents living in rural areas and 30% aged over 65. 49% of jobs and 43% of registered businesses in Aylesbury Vale are found in rural areas, with 14% being self-employed[8]. 88% of businesses are considered micro-businesses in rural Buckinghamshire.

3.4.4 South Northants in Northamptonshire is 243 square miles of mainly rural geography with a population of 86,400[7]. The district contains two market towns, Brackley (with a population of around 14,000) and Towcester (with a population of around 10,000). Over 70% of people live in rural areas and 20% of the population are aged over 65.

3.4.5 Whilst economic, social and environmental performance indicators for the Clay Vales LEADER area would suggest the area performs above average on a significant number of indices of deprivation, these kind of metrics can hide wide distributions of deprivation within a particular area. For example, whilst household earnings in the area are 10% higher than the national average, housing costs are also extremely high, and the average house cost in the Clay Vales area corresponds to 10 times the average yearly income.

3.4.6 Significant evidence on affordable housing, access to basic services, public transport, capacity of community organisations, youth engagement, landscape and village character, voluntary sector skills, and journey times to work all support the case that many villages are becoming 'dormitories' for city workers, reducing social cohesion. In addition, earnings by residency are greater than earnings by workplace in the area, indicating that local employment opportunities are not sufficiently attractive and many residents are commuting out of the area to find better paid work.

Access to Basic Services & Impact on Community Cohesion

3.4.7 Absence of development and major infrastructure results in a characteristic sense of remoteness across much of the area, with a 2007 CPRE study defining it as amongst the most tranquil in England. According to 2011 Census data, when compared to all local authorities in England, South Northants has the 36th lowest population density in the country (with 1.3 people per hectare) and Aylesbury Vale has the 68th lowest (at 1.9 people per hectare). However, this remoteness brings major challenges.

3.4.8 25 SOAs in the LAG area are classed as deprived areas for access to basic services, making access to public transport, banks, GPs, jobcentres, libraries, petrol stations, post offices, supermarkets and schools a challenge. Most residents have limited or no access within 4km of their home. In an area with such a high proportion of rural residents, direct community development support is also limited. The current pattern of support organisations for the voluntary and community sector in the area is complex and changing, with limited resources available for rural support, patchy rural delivery and lack of integration.

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[5] http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/Images/jca108_tcm6-5360.pdf
[6] The Aylesbury Vale Landscape Character Assessment recognises the similarities between South Northants and rural Aylesbury Vale, Jacobs (May 2008) for Aylesbury Vale District Council & Buckinghamshire County Council
[7] ONS, Mid-year estimate 2012
[8] Aylesbury Vale Economic Development Strategy 2008

3.4.9 Research by OCSI shows that whilst an average number of residents work within the LAG area, their journeys to work are appreciably further than the average. In addition, many residents are commuting some distance outside the area to earn their living.

3.4.10 In light of this evidence, LEADER has an important role to play in overcoming potential isolation by maintaining community facilities and supporting the creation of more local jobs, thereby creating a more sustainable economy.

Characteristics of the Farming Sector

3.4.11 Except for isolated pockets, the soil classification of Aylesbury Vale shows a greater proportion of poor soil quality (Grade 4 or worse) when compared to other parts of the South East and the East Midlands. The majority of the remainder across the LAG area is classified as good to moderate (Grade 3). Grassland is the main land use type with 58% arable crops/bare fallow, 5% temporary grass, 33% permanent grass, 0.5% rough grazing, and 4% farm woodland. Soil type and topography have a major influence on the structure and type of farms.

3.4.12 Overall, there are 1470 holdings across the Clay Vales LAG area, with approximately 80% of the area being actively farmed[9]. Typical farms are modestly-sized, traditional, family-owned mixed units on heavy land. Across the whole of Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, 8% of farms are smaller than 5ha, 32% are between 5 and 20ha, 23% are between 20 and 50ha, and 36% are bigger than 100ha. Further evidence of consolidation is in the number of smaller and medium-sized farms decreasing and larger farms increasing. 65% of the land is owner-occupied, which is more than the regional averages. The number of full-time farmers in the area is now marginally higher than part-time, and this trend is increasing slightly.

3.4.13 Average gross profit per farm is lower in Northamptonshire than in any other county in the UK at £103,200 pa. By comparison, Buckinghamshire is £150,543. However, National Farm Accounts data for Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire shows that the return on own capital invested in the farm business to risk and entrepreneurship is -£32,780 and -£11,988 respectively.

3.4.14 Generally speaking, farm diversification, agri-environment activities and single farm payments remain important elements of maintaining farm profitability[10]. This evidence supports the case for LEADER having an important role to play in supporting diversification projects that maintain the sustainability of local farms.

Characteristics of the Forestry Sector

3.4.15 The National Inventory of Woodlands and Trees (2002) records that there are 7,743 ha of woodlands across the LAG area. The majority of woodland is concentrated in large blocks which, nonetheless, are under-managed and declining in quality. The LAG area includes important concentrations of ancient, historically important woodland in the former royal hunting forests of Bernwood, Whittlewood and Whaddon Chase.

3.4.16 Forestry Commission estimates suggest that current woodland in the Clay Vales area could generate a sustainable annual yield of 34,088m^3. However, with the identification of the Clay Vales as a possible area for increased woodland creation for flood alleviation, the expectation is that the sustainable yield will increase in future years.

3.4.17 The presence of large, historically significant but under-managed woodlands presents opportunities for LEADER support to be used to stimulate the rural economy, e.g. by developing woodland management capacity based, primarily, on woodfuel production, and promoting the heritage of the royal hunting forests to generate tourism income. The added value from redressing biodiversity losses through improved woodland management (e.g. for the nationally rare black hairstreak butterfly) and climate change adaptation through reduced flooding impact is hard to quantify, but not inconsiderable.

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[9] Structure of the agricultural industry in England and the UK at June 2014, DEFRA
[10] Draft Farm Account: by County, Farm Business Survey 2012/13

Rural Tourism &The Visitor Economy

3.4.18 Nationally, the tourism sector is forecast to grow by £50 billion over the next 10 years, when it will be worth £225 billion and support an additional 225,000 jobs.

3.4.19 Consumer spending on tourism in Buckinghamshire in 2008 was estimated to have totalled £526m pounds, or £509m when spending made as part of outbound travel was excluded. This was made up of £50m spent by inbound visitors, £67m by domestic overnight visitors, £392m by domestic day trippers, and an additional £17m spent in Buckinghamshire by those taking overseas trips[11]. In the same year, the largest share of consumer spending on tourism in Buckinghamshire came from domestic day visitors (75%) and domestic overnight visitors (13%). Whilst Buckinghamshire's number of domestic day visitors is significantly higher than the national average (42%), the number of overnight visitors was lower (18%). In contrast, only 10% of tourism expenditure in Buckinghamshire came from inbound visitors, which is two thirds of the national proportion (15%). At only 3%, the share of tourism expenditure derived from outbound travellers is significantly below the national average (24%). Out of the total £526 million spent on tourism in Buckinghamshire (including spend on outbound travel), £39 million was on accommodation, £157 million on food and drink, £14 million on transport, £39 million on cultural, sporting and other recreational services such as visitor attractions, and £277 million on other products. In Buckinghamshire, the direct GVA of tourism (the amount contributing to the economy of Buckinghamshire by 'direct' tourism sectors such as hotels and visitor attractions) is £0.21bn. This equates to 1.87% of the county's total GVA, indicating that the contribution of tourism to the Buckinghamshire economy is just over half its contribution across the UK economy as a whole (3.47%). Whilst this is, perhaps not surprisingly, significantly lower than a number of the 'higher added-value' sectors evident in the Buckinghamshire economy, it's worth noting that 9.5% of all employment in the county derives from visitor economy-related industries, and that many of Buckinghamshire's current benefit claimants possess the prerequisite skills to operate in the sector. For example, according to April 2012 figures[12], 1,508 benefit claimants had previously been employed in sales occupations,1,444 had previously been employed in elementary occupations, and 1,431 were seeking jobs as sales and customer assistants. Because the number of young people (aged 18-24) seeking jobs as sales and customer assistants (33.7%) and the number of young people who have been claiming benefits for over six months (39%) is particularly high, it's not unreasonable to assume the stimulation of the visitor economy could have a significant impact on addressing the current high levels of youth unemployment. Key attractions include Stowe Landscape Gardens, Silverstone Race Circuit, Buckingham Old Goal and Museum, Claydon House and Waddesdon House, which is the most visited attraction in Buckinghamshire.

3.4.20 South Northamptonshire has one of the strongest tourism offers in the area with around 14% of its workforce employed in tourism-related industries (compared to a county average of 6.8%). The district benefits from its attractive market towns, quiet historic villages and beautiful countryside. Attractions include Silverstone, Towcester Racecourse, Stoke Bruerne, Sulgrave Manor and Castle Ashby. The district also benefits from its close proximity to the Cotswolds. It employs more people within the visitor economy as a percentage of its workforce than better-known tourism destinations of Bournemouth and the New Forest.

3.4.21 Both Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire's destination management organisations are active in promoting rural tourism. In addition, both localities are going to be challenged to maintain visitor numbers during the HS2 development. Collectively, the data supports the case for increased investment in rural tourism, to ensure the Clay Vales LEADER area is capable of capturing its share of the forecast growth in the national visitor economy by maximising the potential of its natural assets. Based on its indigenous strengths, particular priorities for the Clay Vales LEADER area should include the enhancement of local attractions, strengthening the cultural and heritage offer, increasing overnight visitor accommodation, enhancing and linking local food to the visitor economy, and enhancing the visitor experience.

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[11]What is the value of tourism? Understanding the value of tourism at a regional and sub-regional level, Visit England, 2010

[12]Claimant Count and Vacancies, Buckinghamshire Business First, April 2012

Health & Wellbeing

3.4.22 The majority of the UK population – more than 6 out of 10 men (66%) and more than 5 out of 10 women (57%) – are overweight or obese; it has become the 'norm'[13].

3.4.23 Northamptonshire has the fifth highest percentage of overweight people in England, with more than two thirds (67.5%) of people being classed as overweight or obese. In Buckinghamshire, it is estimated that over 60% of the population are overweight or obese, with 21% of these people defined as obese[14].

3.4.24 Health Survey for England data estimates that 31% of Buckinghamshire adults consume a healthy diet. However, this measure is based on fruit and vegetable consumption alone, so it only reflects one aspect of a healthy diet. Buckinghamshire scores higher than the national average, but lower than some of its statistical neighbours, and a long way away from the England best.

3.4.25 Obesity is important because of the significant risk increase for negative health outcomes such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. Other potential problems include respiratory disease, chronic musculoskeletal problems, depression, obstetric complications and infertility. The Department of Health has estimated that if diets matched national nutritional guidelines, around 70,000 deaths in the UK could be prevented each year and the health benefits would be as high as £20 billion each year[15].

3.4.26 The natural environment and the LEADER programme have an important part to play in addressing both obesity and diet. Encouraging communities to get more involved in growing and producing local food has been shown to have a positive impact on their consumption patterns. Similarly, encouraging people to get out into the great outdoors has been shown to improve health and wellbeing.

Climate Change, Fuel Poverty and Energy Security

3.4.27 Much of the Clay Vales LEADER area is low-lying and vulnerable to flooding. Researchers predict that the impact of climate change will result in 30-35% wetter winters and 45-60% drier summers in the future, potentially impacting on outdoor housing periods for livestock, reducing crop yields and stocking densities, and leading to soil and nutrient management issues.

3.4.28 Businesses and communities are very exposed to rising fossil fuel prices. Recent feedback from some UK businesses indicates that their energy bills are almost twice as large as their European competitors'[16]. Latest government estimates indicate that energy prices will rise by over 30% by 2017. In Buckinghamshire, only 3.2 % of the county's energy needs are met from renewable sources at present. This is well below the government's national target of 15% of UK energy needs being met by renewable energy by 2020. The Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership's strategic economic plan also identifies the 'relatively low levels of resource efficiency in the production of waste and low levels of renewable energy generation' as a major weakness in the local economy.

3.4.29 Collectively, these issues present both opportunities and threats for the land-based sector in the Clay Vales LEADER area. Whilst LEADER will struggle to fund renewable installations because of the potential negative impact on FITs and RHIs, it can support some of the ancillary investments in on-farm energy generation and energy efficiency measures. It can also support the sector to be better equipped to supply this growing market and realise some of the emerging business opportunities.

Additional Priorities Recognised as Important, but Deferred to Others to Fund

3.4.30 In addition to those key areas identified above, we also recognise there is much to do in the field of skills development (both general management and land-based skills), improving broadband and mobile coverage, enhancing business support (particularly helping businesses become investment-ready), encouraging greater environmental stewardship, encouraging animal welfare, and supporting farm and forestry productivity.

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[13] National Obesity Observatory adult Obesity data Slides 2012 http://www.noo.org.uk/slide_sets

[14] Health Profile for Buckinghamshire SEPHO 2012 http://www.apho.org.uk/resource/view.aspx?RID=50215&SEARCH=B*

[15] Food Standards Agency. (2007) Low income diet and nutrition survey. Summary of key findings

[16] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-northamptonshire-23230814

3.4.31 However, recognising these issues are key priorities for the other elements of the Rural Development Programme, we will largely be deferring to others to address these issues. That said, we are keen to collaborate and work in partnership to ensure these programmes are successful.

4.0 The Strategy

4.1 A 'SWOT' Analysis of the Local Area

4.1.1 The table shows the SWOT analysis undertaken by the Clay Vales LAG on the LEADER area. This SWOT has been developed in consultation with a range of local stakeholders.

Strengths	Weaknesses
- Generally high quality of life / countryside - Space for residents - Proximity to major markets and conurbations including London - Residents interested in local food and the environment - Low population density and relative tranquillity - Strong agency support; area is part of the Milton Keynes / South Midlands growth area - Historic buildings/landscapes as tourist attractions - Grass-fed livestock - Access to affluent markets - Support from organisations eg Transition Towns	- Poor access to basic services - Majority of farmland is of average to poor quality (Grade 3 to 5) - Principal farm type (arable/grazing livestock) is comparatively unprofitable and very dependent on subsidies - Lack of high-quality visitor accommodation - High levels of commuting for many rural residents - Private car use, domestic power consumption and electricity use all above national average - Poor outreach of community support organisations - Lack of visitor attractions (other than historic buildings and landscape)
Opportunities	**Threats**
- Increase in added value to local food by sharing marketing opportunities, particularly promotion of grass-fed and fattened livestock in the Clay Vales - Development of renewable energies to reduce carbon footprint and fuel poverty - Diversification of farming businesses to create new economic, social and environmental enterprises - Strengthening of the area as a leisure and business tourism destination - Regeneration of rural facilities and services to improve social cohesion - New jobs/ markets from the Growth Agenda - Capturing of new markets on the growing peri-urban fringe around Clay Vales - Common offer of grass-fed animals - Modern farming techniques - Adaptation of farming techniques to climate change - Rural tourism - East West Rail / Bernwood Project – opportunities for funding and collaboration - Close working relationship with Natural Environment Partnership organisation	- Potential flooding of low-lying areas and potential drought due to climate change giving rise to poor crops and stock (majority of the area is inherently low-lying) - Further reductions in single payment subsidy leaving family livestock farms in real difficulty - Impact of livestock diseases including TB on core farming activity in the area - Planning development controls preventing entrepreneurial activity - Growth Agenda may draw vital resources and human talent away from rural areas - Road congestion of arterial routes - Concerns over electricity supply into Aylesbury Vale - HS2 and industrial development - Re-emphasis of subsidies driving farmers to diversify

4.2 Evidence of Alignment With LEP Activity

4.2.1 In developing this strategy, the Clay Vales LEADER executive has maintained an active dialogue with Buckinghamshire Thames Valley LEP, SEMLEP and Northamptonshire LEP (via BTVLEP). Letters of support from Local Enterprise Partnerships are included in the appendices. The LAG recognises the importance of broadband and tourism which are identified in the LEP's growth plan.

4.2.2 In developing this strategy, the Clay Vales LAG has sought to be guided by the integration model developed by DEFRA. In complying with this framework, we will be looking to our LEP partners to lead on the commissioning of training, skills and business advice. Similarly, we shall be looking to lead on forestry.

4.2.3 In addition to the above, recognising that LEPs do not have any M&A funding, they are being encouraged to commission large programmes and the regulations do not allow LEPs to appraise their own projects (so they will struggle to invest at the level of the firm), the Clay Vales LAG feel LEPs are more likely to commission larger scale programmes.

4.2.4 Given this situation and recognising the limitations of our own budgets as well as the fact that the LAG has delegated authority to appraise projects locally, we feel the Clay Vales LAG is better placed investing at the level of the firm with smaller grants of under £50,000.

4.3 Our Local Priorities

4.3.1 Following our analysis of the local economic conditions and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats impacting on the area, the Clay Vales LAG has identified that major opportunities to stimulate additional jobs and growth in the local rural economy are likely to be built around:

- Strengthening the rural tourism, culture and heritage offer
- Adding value to local food
- Strengthening farm productivity through diversification
- Strengthening forestry productivity
- Improving access to markets and employment by enhancing supply chain linkages
- Strengthening the provision of rural services, particularly those delivered by community enterprises.

4.3.2 The issues identified by stakeholders as holding back the rural economy of the Clay Vales LAG area largely mirror the issues identified by BRAG in its previous strategies and those raised in DEFRA's 'Rural Proofing' paper of July 2013.

4.3.3 Further categorisation of these opportunities according to the LEADER policy priorities has resulted in the Clay Vales LAG prioritising the following:

Support for Increased Farm Productivity	Clay Vales Priorities	Measure
Measure 4: Investments in physical assets **Measure 6:** Farm and business productivity	• Alternative on-farm fuel projects (e.g. growing energy crops) • Support for projects improving biodiversity or biodigestion • Support collaborative food and woodland management initiatives, e.g. deer culling and processing	• Number of projects • Holdings benefitting • Businesses benefitting • Individuals benefitting • Jobs created/ safeguarded
Support for Micro and Small Enterprises and Farm Diversification	**Clay Vales Priorities**	**Measure**
Measure 4: Investments in physical assets	• Farm diversification projects (e.g. adding value to produce, tourism projects offering relevant accommodation, shops, woodfuel)	• Number of projects • Holdings benefitting

Measure 6: Farm and business productivity	• Encouraging and supporting better marketing and business planning • Supporting the promotion of Clay Vales grass-fed and fattened livestock • Supporting and encouraging local food networks (e.g. working with the Bucks Tourism strategy group) • Encouraging business support for local food businesses, particularly where innovation is found (e.g. Ten Mile Menu or Happy Herefords/ processing and marketing) • Helping retail growth and innovation in rural areas as these places often act as social and community hubs • Supporting sustainable (economic or environmental) manufacture in rural locations • Encouraging more new start-ups and business innovation to stop people in rural areas commuting • Supporting micro-businesses showing strong connections to agriculture and forestry (feed businesses, etc.) to enhance the efficiency and profitability of primary businesses	• Businesses benefitting • Individuals benefitting • Jobs created/ safeguarded
Support for Rural Tourism	**Clay Vales Priorities**	**Measure**
Measure 4: Investments in physical assets **Measure 6:** Farm and business productivity **Measure 7:** Basic services and village renewal in rural areas	• Working to create opportunities for rural tourism offers to benefit from joint promotion and destination branding eg Visit Buckinghamshire/ Destination MK • Linking farm food, pubs and farmers' markets to tourism through existing networks or encouraging the start-up of new networks • Developing and supporting existing local food networks (e.g. by attending events and talks promoting LEADER) • Helping to promote sustainable tourism projects (cycling, walking, etc.) • Transport solutions to major tourism offers (e.g. Buckingham to Stowe) • Supporting accommodation provision where need is proven	• Total amount of investment • Number of projects • Existing tourism activities supported • New tourism activities supported • Potential additional overnight stays • Jobs created/ safeguarded
Provision of Rural Services	**Clay Vales Priorities**	**Measure**
Measure 7: Basic services and village renewal in rural areas	• Supporting economically* viable projects (shops, village pubs, etc.) • Encouraging economically* sustainable community services • Supporting community transport as well as village halls and community buildings	• Total amount of investment • Number of projects • Number of facilities

		benefitting
	• Recognising the challenge of an ageing population for services and business opportunities • Supporting community projects that are recognised in Neighbourhood Plans • (*'Economically' might not necessarily mean 'financially'; consider wider cost benefit impact)	• Jobs created/ safeguarded • Population benefitting
Support for Increasing Forestry Productivity	**Clay Vales Priorities**	**Measure**
Measure 4: Investments in physical assets **Measure 6:** Farm and business productivity **Measure 8:** Investments in forest area development and improvement of the viability of forests	• Supporting education/tourism linked to woodlands (e.g. camping in woodlands) • Encouraging the purchase or management of shared capital equipment • Strengthening links between forestry/woodland contractors and landowners as well as other local businesses (such as, for example, a boiler installation company arranging a contract with a forestry business for local log deliveries to customers) • Supporting low-carbon heating projects (e.g. several buildings sharing a woodfuel boiler or ground source heat pump) • Providing support for forestry as a flood defence factor • Supporting business skills and marketing in the forestry sector • Supporting contractors seeking to manage un-managed woodland • Promoting economically viable, innovative fuel projects	• Total amount of investment • Number of projects • Number of forests/woodlands/ holdings benefitting

4.4   Programmes of Activity

4.4.1 Aspects of this strategy which we believe are particularly innovative include:
- **Forestry Tourism** - To encourage applications from woodland owners to utilise their woods for tourism such as forestry camping, bush craft, etc. rather than leaving woodland under-utilised
- **Local Woodfuel** – To improve integration in the woodfuel vertical supply chain, and encourage foresters to work with boiler installers and woodland owners to tie in fixed contracts for the supply and delivery of timber once a woodfuel boiler is installed, as opportunities develop associated with RHI payments; LEADER will stimulate new business in the woodfuel market
- **Local Food Projects** – To work with Transition Towns to help develop local food projects, whilst also encouraging higher-level collaborations
- **Rural Tourism** – To promote rural tourism linked to Silverstone; working with all rural businesses on the periphery of Silverstone Race Track, already having had past applications from farms seeking to offer camp sites and cafes to those offering additional entertainment (horse riding etc.)
- **Branding Opportunities** – eg. Bernwood Project – tourism/food/products linked to local theme.

4.4.2 The Clay Vales LDS will also seek to make integrated and multi-sectorial investments to establish strong links between 'horizontal' priorities (i.e. between different rural themes - for example, local

food and rural tourism) and 'vertical' priorities (i.e. along supply chains - for example in the renewable energy sector). For this reason, we have included supply chain development as one of our key priorities.

4.4.3 In addition to the above ideas, the Clay Vales LAG is keen to work with DEFRA to further scope ideas for small-scale grants, utilising an 'umbrella project' model. Ultimately, we await further information from DEFRA on how this might work.

4.4.4 Working with neighbouring LEADER teams, the Clay Vales LAG will share resources such as appraisal support, adding to the shared good practice and division of duty.

4.5 Targets, Results and Outputs

4.5.1 The objectives of this strategy address the needs we have identified and set concrete, measurable outcomes, focusing on long-term development to solve specific development challenges in the area. We have sought to ensure community involvement and ownership of the strategy by carrying out the SWOT and the development of the strategy in a participative way.

4.5.2 New areas have been taken into account to define targets/allocations of funds as shown below:

LEADER policy priority based on project budget £1,763,000	RDPE expenditure per FTE job created (£)	Average RDPE grant size (£)	Relevant CMES output indicators for LDS application	End of programme forecast (by December 2020)
Support for increasing farm productivity	61,011	29,884	Total RDPE expenditure	£88,150 (5%)
			Number of projects supported	3
			Jobs created (FTE)	1.5
Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification	11,931	19,951	Total RDPE expenditure	£617,050 (35%)
			Number of projects supported	30
			Jobs created (FTE)	51
Support for rural tourism	32,477	31,764	Total RDPE expenditure	£352,600 (20%)
			Number of projects supported	11
			Jobs created (FTE)	11
Support for culture and heritage activity	55,991	28,165	Total RDPE expenditure	£88,150 (5%)
			Number of projects supported	3
			Jobs created (FTE)	1.5

Provision of rural services	33,272	23,378	Total RDPE expenditure	£352,600 (20%)
			Number of projects supported	15
			Jobs created (FTE)	11
Support for increasing forestry productivity	77,045	21,788	Total RDPE expenditure	£264,450 (15%)
			Number of projects supported	12
			Jobs created (FTE)	3.5

Based on a total budget of £1,763,000, we forecast we will create 79 new FTE jobs. (Although the projections above are made against the national statistics supplied by DEFRA, our last programme suggests a regional difference in job creation in the micro-business sector, and our own analysis points to a figure of £23,000 per FTE job.)

4.6 Sustainability Appraisal

4.6.1 The Clay Vales LAG have considered how they can best influence the sustainability of projects. A strategy and robust check list has been developed with the assistance of sustainability project managers working for Ngage (the accountable body).

4.6.2 Applicants, where possible, will need to complete a clear environmental impact assessment of their project in a way that enables the appraiser and the LAG to properly consider the environmental impact in their assessment. The applicant will need to complete a checklist focusing on the scoping approach covering Scoping 1 and 2 where possible (Scoping 1 relates to all energy use on-site and Scoping 2 relates specifically to electricity that is produced off-site).

4.6.3 Applicants will need to show an estimate of their current environmental impact in terms of their own fuel consumption and water use while running the business. The applicant will need to estimate how the annual environmental impact will be monitored over a five-year period and make their own recommendations as to how they will reduce this impact.

4.6.4 A new and challenging but user-friendly sustainability checklist has been developed with the assistance of project managers working in the field of environmental impact assessment and mitigation (Eco Innovations, Low Carbon Workspaces, and Sustainable Routes). Furthermore, Ngage have undertaken to develop a simple calculator/ready reckoner to help applicants understand the environmental impact of their businesses.

4.7 Proposed Co-operation Activity

4.7.1 Through the development of this strategy, the Clay Vales LAG has identified a number of areas and themes which would benefit from collaborative action. In terms of neighbouring LAGs, we have already developed a strong relationship with the Chilterns, Colne Valley, South Oxon, Greensand Ridge, Eastern Plateau and North Northants LAGs.

4.7.2 In addition to the above, the LAG foresees strong opportunities for transnational cooperation projects between member states and are particularly keen to see whether LEADER could provide a platform to stronger collaboration in other EU funds for some of the beneficiaries of LEADER and for the LAG itself.

4.7.3 Used appropriately and strategically, the LAG envisage that LEADER could provide opportunities for beneficiaries to secure investment from a range of funds including Interreg, Life, Horizon 2020, etc.

4.7.4 The Clay Vales LAG recognise that later in 2014, DEFRA will publish a UK-wide approach to co-ordinating LEADER co-operation activities in the next programme, which will make bi-annual calls for all co-operation activities, assess proposals and offer financial support from a central co-operation funding pot. The LAG is keen to participate in any calls which fit our priorities.

4.8 Monitoring and Evaluation

4.8.1 Project monitoring will be undertaken by staff not directly involved in the delivery of each project. This will enable the accountable body to ensure funds are being distributed appropriately. It will also ensure integration and synergy with other business support services, thereby ensuring opportunities are maximised to sustain projects beyond the lifetime of LEADER funding.

4.8.2 Projects will be inspected at least once during their lifetime, using staff trained in this activity. Targeted inspections will also be undertaken when concerns arise about the progress or activity of a particular project. Projects will need to provide all the necessary statutory certificates in relation to their projects at the appropriate stage, e.g. planning permission decision notice prior to an application being assessed, and food hygiene, HACCP or H&S certificates on completion.

4.8.3 The accountable body will adhere to DEFRA & the RPA's reporting requirements via the CAP-D system that DEFRA is developing, to record all project activities (including claims, irregularities etc.) so that the RPA can extract performance reports in an efficient and effective manner.

4.8.4 Progress reports will be submitted as appropriate. Budget forecasts will be updated monthly, records and business processes will be made available for on-the-spot inspections, routine and compliance inspections and visits by external auditors. Each year, a formal review of performance will be undertaken with DEFRA.

4.8.5 At the close of the project, the LAG will commission a formal independent evaluation to assess the its effectiveness in delivering the outcomes/outputs/impact specified as part of this LDS.

5.0 Management and Administration

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 Our approach to management and administration of the LEADER programme seeks to build on the good practice established by the AVMK LEADER LAG in the last programme, and takes into account learning and experience acquired through the national and local evaluation work undertaken as part of the last programme.

5.2 Running Costs and Animation

5.2.1 Whilst the new common provisions regulation allows for up to 25% of a LAG's allocation to be spent on M&A costs (including facilitation/animation activity), we understand applications allocating more than 18% to M&A will not be accepted. We recognise that adopting this approach will enable a greater proportion of LEADER funding to be used for the support of beneficiaries.

5.2.2 In accordance with these regulations, the Clay Vales LAG is proposing to spend 18% of the LEADER grant on management and admin (M&A) costs and 4.85% of the LEADER grant on animation activity (giving a 73/27% management and administration/animation split).

5.2.3 Our proposed breakdown of M&A and animation costs is shown in Appendix 2.

5.3 Our Accountable Body

5.3.1 The Clay Vales LAG's nominated accountable body is Ngage Solutions, which was the accountable body for the previous AVMK and Chilterns LEADER programmes and has a long track record of efficient, effective and prudent delivery.

5.3.2 Whilst the LAG is responsible for the delivery of the programme, the accountable body is financially responsible for the delivery programme on behalf of the LAG. The accountable body holds itself responsible for successful conclusion of the programme, and undertakes to ensure that financial propriety and compliance is observed in its management and administration of the programme. It is also responsible for the tasks set out in the following paragraphs.

5.3.3 As an accountable body, Ngage Solutions will carry out its responsibilities in accordance with the National Operational Manual. Ngage Solutions as the accountable body will hold accounts and bank statements for eligible expenditure and revenue. All monies received or raised by, for example, accrued interest from bank accounts will be applied to further the objects of the LEADER programme and for no other purpose.

Project Development

5.3.4 The LAG has already developed a draft communications strategy which we will be seeking to align with the wider national strategy for promoting the programme as it develops. Ngage will be responsible for implementing this communications strategy, designed to stimulate local interest in rural development and encourage applicants to bring forward ideas and projects.

5.3.5 The draft Clay Vales LEADER communications strategy is included in section 5.4.

Project Assessment

5.3.6 Under the guidance of DEFRA RDT, the Clay Vales LAG is responsible for selecting projects which meet the objectives of the Local Development Strategy and the RDP Programme Document. In undertaking this task, the LAG will ensure that there is openness and transparency in the design of project selection criteria, the analyses of project proposals and the selection of projects.

5.3.7 It is recognised that there are secondary benefits to those applicants whose projects are not approved for grant payment in that considerable support will have been received regarding business planning.

Project Monitoring

5.3.8 Ngage's internal audit function will check that the correct procedures are being carried out by all 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 LAG.

5.3.9 Ngage will undertake monitoring to identify possible weaknesses or risks in the operation of projects and provide for corrective measures to be taken to eliminate weaknesses. This may include checking claims and progress reports, undertaking routine and targeted inspections and monitoring the projects' progress by any other means.

5.3.10 Ngage will not agree any variations over a fixed value, or commit any expenditure on such variations, without obtaining the prior approval of DEFRA RDT. Ngage will also notify to DEFRA RDT all variations below the fixed value within a prescribed period. Additionally, Ngage will notify DEFRA RDT within a prescribed period 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 a period of up to 5 years after the final grant payment, and if the business ceases trading.

5.3.11 Ngage will inform DEFRA RDT of all irregularities that have taken place and seek guidance on how to proceed. The LAG will assess the seriousness of irregularity against criteria set out in the National Operational Manual. We will apply financial penalties to projects and recover funds from them if required by the programme regulations.

5.3.12 DEFRA will perform an annual performance check of Ngage's work which will include a sample of management and administration (M&A) claims as well as project activity. In addition, DEFRA reserves the right to inspect Ngage at any time, or to request project file documentation for review.

Processing Grants

5.3.13 Ngage will undertake the calculations and checks of grants due to be paid to projects, and ensure that projects maintain a register of assets in a format approved by DEFRA, including items funded or part-funded by monies received from the programme. We will also perform management checks and inspections as laid out in the National Operational Manual.

5.3.14 Ngage will process grant payments for the programme using the new CAP-D IT system which is scheduled to be launched in 2015. This will ensure that the payments are eligible and evidenced

by scrutinising the financial claims submitted by project deliverers; payment must only be recommended where satisfactory progress of the project has been confirmed.

5.3.15 Ngage will not submit a payment recommendation for any applicant or project deliverer where we believe that a project is not being delivered in a satisfactory way, or where we have reason to believe that the correct procedures have not been carried out. Ngage will advise the LAG when we do this and give reasons for the decision. The LAG or anybody acting under their authority cannot overturn the accountable body's decision in this regard, which must then be referred to DEFRA for investigation.

Record Keeping

5.3.16 Ngage will account for the income and expenditure of the LAG. Ngage will make project and running costs (management and administration) documents available for inspection or audit as required by DEFRA, RPA or any audit body empowered by the regulations.

5.3.17 Ngage will provide evidence of all payments (to bank statement level) with all project claims (including our management and administration claims) and consider how all projects will do this in accordance with regulatory requirements.

5.3.18 Ngage's IT information systems policy (Appendix 4) sets out our retention period for data (hard copy and IT), financial transaction processes and the payment process for any accountable body transactions that are associated with RDP grant funding.

5.3.19 Ngage will hold project-specific information including claims, inspections and irregularities and copies of all project-related information (application, appraisal, offer letters plus any variations, claims and inspections) for a minimum of 7 years from the end date of the project, or 10 years if state aid applies.

5.3.20 Ngage will be responsible for archiving electronic records and hardcopy documents associated with LEADER.

5.3.21 An agreement has been reached with adjacent LEADER groups that appraisal skills may be shared where appropriate to enable sharing of best practice and additional division of duty which will create extra accountability.

5.4 Communications and Publicity

5.4.1 The purpose of the Clay Vales marketing and communications activity will be to:
- Promote the availability of LEADER grants to all farmers, foresters and rural communities and encourage grant applications
- Nurture high-quality applications with maximum social and economic impact
- Demystify the application process and manage expectations
- Update key stakeholders on the LEADER project's developments and successes.

5.4.2 The target audiences for a successful LEADER project include:
- Potential applicants: Farmers and micro-businesses in the relevant geographies who have a project which supports one of the Clay Vales LEADER priorities
- Past applicants seeking to develop the next phase
- Intermediaries: Key influencers who can help sell the grant to eligible businesses, such as the National Farmers Union, Forestry Commission, Natural Environment Partnership, bank managers, accountants and other business support and intermediary organisations
- Local Action Group: Stakeholders who need to be kept informed about project successes, priorities and developments
- New partners in the new area of South Northants.

5.4.3 The key messages will need to be reviewed throughout the project lifecycle to support the changing requirements of the project team, LAG members, funders and applicants themselves. These messages will be targeted according to audience and channel but are likely to include:
- An early push to raise awareness that funding is available, which will be especially important in the geographies where the grant has not previously been offered
- An update on the impacts and achievements of the previous LEADER funding round

- A focus on the priority sectors and projects
- A clear explanation of the projects and types of business that the grants will support, using real-life case studies from past recipients
- Direct communication with those who have already expressed an interest
- A regular drip-feed of success stories to raise awareness of the availability of LEADER funding, encouraging expressions of interest and applications, particularly from priority projects/ geographies
- An overview of the support available to help prepare a successful application
- Recognition of the source of LEADER funding (DEFRA/RDPE).

5.4.4 As far as project literature is concerned, a new suite of marketing and promotional collateral will be developed to help the LEADER programme team and partners sell the grant to farmers and micro-businesses. This support and stakeholder communication pack will be jargon-free, easy to read and will use pictures to help explain the application process to potential recipients. Case studies will help bring the project to life, and these materials will help LEADER to develop a strong identity within the rural and wider business community in our target areas. This collateral is likely to include:

- Promotional flyers with key messages, example projects, case studies, contact information and benefits
- Pull-up banners to use at hosted and partner events
- Word, PowerPoint and case study document templates (to ensure a strong consistent identity) that the programme team can send to partners to help sell the grant through their own communications channels
- A logo support pack could also be developed for use by grant recipients, i.e. on display boards, plaques, window signage, letterheads, etc. to acknowledge support from LEADER and promote the grant more widely.

5.4.5 In addition to the LEADER project logo, all promotional material will include logos for DEFRA, RDPE and Ngage.

5.4.6 The LEADER project will benefit from the multitude of good news stories created by past projects, and a number of case studies can be developed to sell the benefits of the LEADER grant to a variety of different audiences. Case studies will focus on our key priority sectors and are most likely to include information on:

- How the grant has been used
- Successful application processes, from initial interest to completed implementation
- The wider benefits to the grant recipient and wider community.

5.4.7 The LAG will utilise 'critical friend' referrals to generate enquiries for the LEADER programme. There are a number of identified potential partners and routes to market that, with effective communication and information provision, may assist in the promotion and recruitment for the programme. Examples of such partners include members of the Local Nature Partnerships, local growth hubs, local authorities, previous grant recipients, other business support networks and community groups. An extensive PR plan will support the marketing activity throughout the programme and will target the following media with news releases, case studies and programme results:

- Local print, online and broadcast media
- Regional and national trade press – NFU, Forestry Journal, etc.
- Partner organisation publications –FSB, NFU, Buckinghamshire Business First, Visit Buckinghamshire, etc.
- Local networks, i.e. parish council newsletters
- Previous grant recipients.

5.4.8 At least one application workshop will be held in each area per year, inviting potential candidates (approximately 30-50 per session) to attend to find out what the grants will support and what the application process entails. These workshops will also help to create an FAQ page which can be hosted on the LEADER website and provide content for video tutorials.

5.4.9 A small budget will be set aside to enable the LEADER team to attend relevant industry events, such as food festivals, county shows, networking events, forums, conferences and exhibitions.

Information will also be provided to intermediary partners for them to include in their own event delegate packs and presentations.

5.4.10 There is a growing engagement with social media by second-generation farming businesses, and whilst we recognise there will be many potential recipients who will not be reached by online channels, it should be considered an essential part of the marketing mix.

5.4.11 LEADER AVMK (Clay Vales) & Chiltern's existing website (http://www.leader-programme.org.uk/) already appears at the top of relevant Google searches and will be kept updated, visually appealing and as jargon-free as possible. The project team and partners will be promoting the website through brochures and flyers, email marketing, social media and PR activity to our target audience.

5.4.12 Both Twitter and Facebook have a low set-up cost and offer relatively cheap and targeted advertising. Many farmers, foresters and rural businesses will have a social media presence, and the LEADER team can use these tools to raise awareness of the LEADER grant in existing online groups that potential recipients will be visiting. We may also look to the possibility of establishing online chat/Q&A sessions with team and/or LAG members (along the lines of Agrichat).

5.4.13 We have identified a number of areas in which videos could be used to support the communications activity, which include online tutorials like Ngage have deployed previously in delivering the Woodfuel WIG. These video guides will help to demystify the requirements of the application process and encourage a higher standard of application. In addition, we will use video case studies to provide social proof that the grants provide real value and encourage a 'can-do' attitude towards applications.

5.4.14 Ngage recommends direct marketing, such as e-shots, direct mail and telemarketing to businesses in relevant postcode areas, to advise potential applicants of the opportunities offered by LEADER in their area. Ngage has a database of businesses who can be contacted by email, this being the most measurable, targeted and low-cost method of reaching a large number of relevant businesses and creating 'warm' lists for telemarketing follow-up. This will also help to maintain a database of up-to-date contacts. Those who are non-contactable by email can be targeted by post, and this activity can be scheduled quarterly and adjusted to support the changing requirements of the project team.

5.4.15 All campaign activity will be tracked and measured, and results will be fed back to the programme manager in monthly activity reports. The effectiveness of the marketing plan will be monitored using various data, including numbers of press releases and articles published, numbers of events and attendees at meetings and events, budget expenditure, enquiry sources, and valid applications received. Web analytics tools will also be used to track the impact of social media, email marketing and website activity.

6.0 Our Financial Plan – See APPENDIX 3

Signed on behalf of Ngage Solutions (Accountable Body)

Signature

Name **PHILIPPA BATTING**

Position **Managing Director** Date: **4**th **September 2014**

Signed on behalf of Clay Vales LAG

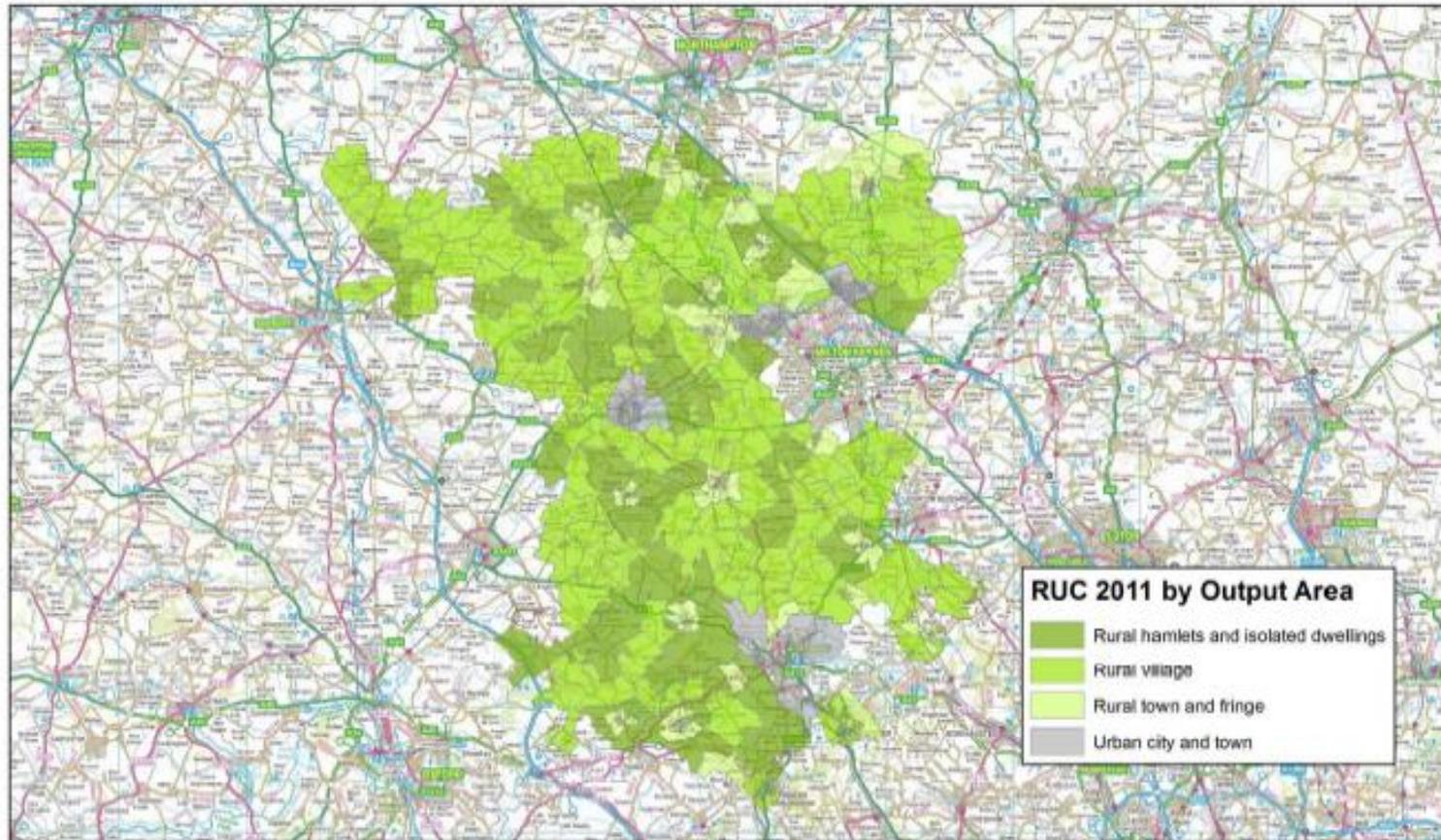**Signature**

Name **DAVID CAMPBELL**

Position **CHAIRMAN** Date: **4**th **September 2014**

APPENDIX 1   The Clay Vales LEADER Area