The North Wessex Downs LEADER ran from March 2009 and completed at the end of December 2013. It delivered funding under the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) with a project grant budget of £1.419m. Grants were awarded to 65 projects - to farms, small businesses and rural communities across the North Wessex Downs AONB which covers a population of approximately 125,000. Combined with match funding, we have facilitated a total investment of more than £3million. Grants have ranged from £3.5k to £57k and have averaged £21.8k.

We focussed on 4 themes:

- **Farming, food and forestry** – £598k awarded to 25 farming and forestry related businesses - farm modernisation, farm diversification and woodland management projects.
- **Business Transformation and Community Development** – £376k awarded to create and develop other businesses. At least 59 existing small rural enterprises have benefitted either directly or indirectly so far and we have helped start 5 new ones. We’ve spent £192k on projects to help develop and improve community services and facilities.
- **Challenges and Opportunities for Climate Change** – 13 projects have involved sustainable woodland management or renewable energy. All our projects are encouraged to be as sustainable as possible via waste management and energy use.
- **Enjoying the North Wessex Downs** – £162k awarded to 12 tourism related projects either by developing attractions or creating holiday accommodation. Another 6 projects involved improvements to our cultural heritage (£90k).

86% of the grant money awarded should help grow the economy – developing business, creating jobs, improving competitiveness and encouraging tourism. We estimate that the grants have helped create 36 new jobs and safeguarded 82.

**North Wessex Downs Economic Outputs - December 2013**

- New jobs created: 36
- Existing jobs safeguarded: 82
- Existing enterprises benefitted: 119
- New business start ups: 5
- Farm based projects: 14
- Forestry based projects: 11

**North Wessex Downs Community Benefits - December 2013**

- Rural population benefitting from improved services & facilities: 13,040
- New & existing village halls & community centres supported: 4
- Community shops supported: 3
- New & existing recreational & educational facilities supported: 4
- Number of different villages directly benefiting: 15
Planning a Future Programme
Project Case Studies 2009-2013

Farming / sustainable agriculture

Biddesden Farm Partnership, Hampshire – modernisation of the dairy. The existing vacuum pumps were upgraded to a ‘vacuum on demand’ system to allow more efficient use of energy. A cluster flushing system was installed to prevent the transmission of mastitis between cows in the parlour and to complement the farm’s mastitis control strategy.

Yattendon Estates Ltd - to purchase a GPS auto-steer system to allow for reduced fuel consumption, more accurate application of fertilizers and reduced soil compaction.

Tourism / the Visitor Economy and Culture and Heritage

New Shepherd Hut - The Wilton Windmill Society, Wiltshire

Two very small dilapidated shepherd huts installed in the early 1900s were replaced by a bigger, purpose built shepherd hut designed to be in keeping with the windmill to enable
greater use by schools and visitors. It provides an all weather modern visitor centre. The Society had the hut ready for use for the busy Easter weekend in 2012. By encouraging more visitors the Society hopes to ensure the long term future of the Windmill as well as providing a creative learning environment for local schools.

**David and Carol Oliver at Barrow Farmhouse Lettings** - to support the conversion of a garage/barn to a small 2 bedroomed holiday let. This involved building and ground works, some fitting out and marketing.

**Sonia Wright at Buckerfields Nursery** - to convert an underutilised building on the nursery land to form 4 self-catering holiday lets designed to combine if required, to provide 2 family lets.

**North Wessex Downs AONB “Love Your Landscape” project** - to realise the potential of the North Wessex Downs as a short break destination and raise the profile of landscape character among visitors. ‘Love Your Landscape’ has created a set of high quality marketing materials that can be used by tourism businesses. The toolkit forms the basis of a new online resource for tourism – please see [www.visitnorthwessexdowns.org.uk](http://www.visitnorthwessexdowns.org.uk)

**Marc Hart** - to help him restore and re-open the Alan Liddiard Forge in Aldbourne. Extensive improvements have been made to the blacksmith shop, the shoeing house and the blacksmith’s yard behind so that they can be used for their original purpose.
Linden Cottage Holiday Let, Streatley – for the erection of Structurally Insulated Panels and insulation for the walls and floors of her new holiday let building. The owner has created an attractive and sustainable building as well as one which has access for people with limited mobility.

The Earth Trust to purchase display boards and computer hardware / software to allow for the development of a web-based mapping system that will demonstrate and interpret the integration of land use (particularly farming and forestry), heritage and wildlife features.

Micro and Small Businesses and farm diversification

Ridgeway Biologicals Ltd specialises in the production of veterinary autogenous vaccines for use in food making animals. A LEADER grant was used to purchase new equipment and allow minor building works. The new equipment is being used primarily for the production of vaccines to control bovine mastitis and digital dermatitis – common diseases in dairy cattle and associated with high vet costs. The company estimate that the selling price to dairy farmers will be £5 per vaccine.

Cakes by Cocochoux cake manufacturing and retail business in Kintbury. Laura O'Brien carried out some property development work, bought new equipment and improved her business marketing and advertising. She has also taken on a young apprentice.
Cosy Paws Cattery, East Garston, Berkshire

Carole Ruse set up Cosy Paws Cattery in East Garston with a LEADER grant to provide a service for people with cats along the Lambourn valley and surrounding villages. Carole’s business has been a great success with turnover increasing year on year since 2010 and occupancy now running at near full capacity across the year.

Cosy Paws is not just about a “business” of looking after cats, but about cat welfare too; they liaise with local cat welfare charities and help and advise people about looking after cats. Cosy Paws uses local businesses for services and supplies. Carole has left the public sector to run the cattery full time, she says LEADER funding was the best thing that happened to her in a long time – it changed her life.

Castle Piece Stables, Eastbury, Berkshire

Sam Stronge runs a pre-training and rehabilitation centre for race horses at Eastbury. A grant helped him to develop his pre-training facilities including a block of 10 additional stables and a ménage for schooling and rehabilitation. The project helps to maintain and promote Lambourn as a world renowned race horse industry area and it is anticipated to create 3.5 new jobs as the business expands.

Laser Engraving and Design Ltd, Moulsford, Oxfordshire - to help purchase a new fibre optic laser which has helped the company go from strength to strength. They have been able to offer existing companies a wider variety of services and also picked up new
customers because of the new laser. This has secured the company and increased turnover and allowed the company to take on three new part time employees.

Workshop Extension and Purchase of Briquette Press - Holgate and Pack Ltd, Great Bedwyn, Wiltshire

Holgate and Pack Ltd is a high quality furniture making business based in Great Bedwyn. They received a LEADER grant to extend their workshop to allow more space to expand their business and to buy a briquette press to convert their own and other businesses' waste material into wood pellets. These carbon neutral pellets will be sold in local villages for burning rather than the waste chippings and sawdust being sent to landfill.

Garry Winter at Merryground Farm Juicing to build a juicing unit at his orchard near Pewsey. He also completed some hard standing and a hard track to allow better all year round access to the building. After a very poor harvest in 2012 he has reported a very good harvest in 2013 and will be selling his juice in local outlets.

Wildflower Turf Ltd, Hampshire for the design and construction of a custom built tractor powered and trailed machine which performs a number of the processes to establish soil-less wildflower turf: laying out a plastic growing surface; laying out netting on top; and then spreading pre-seeded substrate seeded with native wildflower and grass seeds onto the surface and netting.
Saddleback Farm Shop, M M Whidborne and Sons Limited, Brightwalton, Berkshire - farm diversification. A former piggery has been converted into a farm shop together with associated facilities such as cold storage, car parking and a tea room.

The farm shop prides itself on locally sourced produce, including the farm's own beef, eggs and game; indeed a condition of planning is that the shop must sell a minimum of 20% of the farm's own produce. The new shop will employ 3 full time members of staff and will help safeguard 2 existing jobs.

Richard Edwards at Wadwick Farm - to purchase a mobile sawmill, a Wood-Mizer, to allow him to manage his own woodland and sell his timber produce. He can also provide a contracting service to other local woodland owners.

Forestry

Inker Tree Surgery, Fencing and Landscapes, Hampshire - to purchase additional machinery so that larger forestry related contracts could be taken. A specialist tractor with grab, a timber / woodchip trailer and forklift were purchased. These will allow the removal of large quantities of timber from woodland efficiently and with minimal damage to the ground. The longer lengths are processed at a local sawmill reducing costs and transportation.
Seasoned Timber Company Ltd, Berkshire – to establish a woodfuel business. The grant helped them buy equipment including a firewood processor, a log deck, a log splitter and a wood chipper. As well as being able to grow their business, the project also encourages more effective woodland management since timber is sourced from local estates, farms and woods. Seasoned timber offers high quality firewood resulting in a high level of repeat business and word of mouth referral.

John Hawkins Forestry to purchase additional items of kit, a stroke de-limber and forestry crane to allow him to expand his business. The stroke de-limber cleans a previously felled tree of its branches. Currently this work is done by hand and is not cost effective. The crane mounts on an existing tractor to feed the stroke de-limber and enables more efficient usage of the applicants’ equipment at multiple sites as the crane provides a new unit for wider forestry operations and avoids unnecessary and costly movements of machinery.

Greentips Sustainable Woodfuel - to purchase forestry machinery to help grow and develop the Greentips Sustainable Firewood business. The project aims to extract and process firewood more efficiently using a small tractor, weight spreading low impact trailer and firewood processor.
Rural Services and Connectivity

The Community Junction – Aldbourne Youth Council, Wiltshire – the award winning Aldbourne Youth Council received grants to create “The Community Junction” in Aldbourne. This involved significant rebuilding and refurbishment of a dilapidated cottage in the middle of the village.

They have created a building which will act as a multi-purpose venue for youth activities, meetings, lectures, cinema, and workshops for the whole community and for all ages. The building houses a larger kitchen which can be used for cooking demonstrations, lessons and an after school café; a charity shop which will sell recycled goods, provide an opportunity for young people to gain work experience and provide paid local employment; an upstairs chill zone for older youths; a recycling area and community garden with outdoor table tennis and pool table.

Hampstead Norreys Community Shop, Berkshire

The village of Hampstead Norreys had been without a shop for 11 years before local residents took matters into their own hands. A LEADER grant was awarded to help construct a village community shop out of the existing farmyard and buildings at Manor Farm, owned by the Betts family. In addition, separate LEADER grants supported thefitting out of the shop.

The community shop now provides a really important ‘social hub’ for villagers, has three members of staff and 60 volunteers from the village and around the area. It provides an opportunity to buy good local food without the need of a car and acts as an additional outlet for local Berkshire farmers and producers.
What is LEADER?

LEADER is a bottom-up, community-led approach to the delivery of RDPE funds. The planning, decision making and implementation is done at a local level, carried out by a Local Action Group (LAG), made up of private, public and community sector volunteers representing a wide range of experience and knowledge of local rural issues. These LAG members play an important role in encouraging innovative and sustainable responses to rural issues and helping to improve life in rural areas.

The Rural Development Programme for England aims to: safeguard and enhance the rural environment, improve the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors and foster competitive and sustainable rural businesses and thriving rural communities. RDPE is administered by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

How does the North Wessex Downs LAG operate?

- The LAG is the “board” of the LEADER funding and is the decision making body. Its primary roles are to:
  - devise overall strategy and bid for LEADER funding based on the Local Development Strategy
  - monitor and review the effectiveness of LEADER funding; and
  - make decisions on individual funding applications.

- The LAG are supported by a Programme Manager whose main responsibilities are to provide advice and support to the LAG, manage the programme budgets and administration and to work with applicants and project holders to help ensure their projects are effectively delivered. Working with the Accountable Body, the Programme Manager ensures compliance with LEADER Programme rules.

- The LAG consists of 20 members: 5 from the public sector; 15 are from the private, community and voluntary sectors and represent various “constituencies”. 10 of the latter are filled by election. We estimate that, on top of the vast number of hours involved in setting up the Programme initially, our LAG members have spent approximately 1700 hours in meetings and fully appraising 76 projects. This demonstrates the strong commitment of the LAG members to successfully running the Programme for the benefit of businesses and communities within the North Wessex Downs.

- Larger applications, over £20k, are appraised by an independent external consultant and considered by the LAG at quarterly meetings. Smaller grants are similarly externally appraised but can be approved electronically by a smaller group of LAG members so that processing / approval time is minimised.

- Overall we have received 212 Expressions of Interests over the last 4 years. 36% of these progressed to the project appraisal stage. 90% of the projects appraised were approved by the LAG for LEADER funding.

What Next?

The Local Action Group has established a Transition Group to look at options for securing future funding under the next Rural Development Programme 2015 – 2020. The LAG has secured funding from Defra to keep LAG members and the Programme Manager in place during 2014 to develop a new Local Development Strategy (LDS) for 2015-2020. The LAG is talking with a range of rural stakeholders to ensure the LDS reflects local community and business needs. We would welcome your involvement – please contact us via the North Wessex Downs LEADER website: northwessexleader.org.uk or by email: nwdleaderprogramme@wiltshire.gov.uk. You can also speak directly to Dawn Hamblin, Programme Manager on 01488 680458.