

Washfens

Rural Development Programme

Delivered by the Wash Fens Local Action Group
through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) LEADER Approach

Funding Prospectus 2007 - 2013

Moving ahead with the times, without sacrificing the past

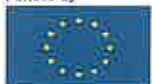


This guide sets out the grants that are available in South Holland and the Borough of Boston through the Wash Fens Rural Development Programme.

Grants are available to support micro businesses, farmers, tourism organisations and community/voluntary groups to fund innovative and enterprising projects that will bring wider benefits for the rural economy, communities and the environment.

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The European
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Rural Development:
Europe Investing in
rural areas



Rural Development Programme for England Business Support is part of Solutions for Business, the Government's package of publicly funded business support designed to help companies start and grow

Lincolnshire
COUNTY COUNCIL



Wash Fens Rural Development Programme

Funding Prospectus

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SECTION 1 – OVERVIEW

Introduction

This guide sets out the funding available through the Wash Fens Rural Development Programme. It also contains important information about the application process and the terms and conditions upon which grants will be offered.

If after reading this guidance, you would like to apply to the fund, please contact us to discuss your ideas and to obtain an Expression of Interest Form.

Contact: Frances McIntyre
Local Action Group Manager

Wash Fens Rural Development Programme
c/o Economic & Community Regeneration
South Holland District Council Offices
Priory Road
Spalding
PE11 2XE

Email: washfens@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Telephone: 01775 764496

Mobile: 07920 295150

Website: www.washfens-rdpe.co.uk

The Rural Development Programme for England LEADER Approach

The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) is a grant fund financed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (defra) and the European Union, through The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. It aims to strengthen and stimulate the rural economy, providing more opportunities and an improved quality for people in rural areas.

There are various elements to RDPE, some are being delivered on a regional basis and some locally, via a method called the LEADER Approach. The LEADER Approach allows local groups in selected areas to decide their own priorities for distributing grants within the framework of the main programme. The funding is delivered through a Local Action Group in line with an approved Local Development Strategy.

The LEADER acronym means 'Links between rural development actions' (from the French - Liaisons entre actions de développement rural). The LEADER Approach is thought to be an effective tool to assist rural communities to improve the quality of life and economic prosperity in their local area by:-

- Engaging communities in developing their own plans for the future
- Generating a bottom-up, participative approach to solving local issues
- Developing new business and social opportunities
- Improving local capacity and governance

In January 2009 a Local Development Strategy (LDS) for the Wash Fens, '*Moving ahead with the times, without sacrificing the past*' was successful in securing funding from the Rural Development Programme for England. The Wash Fens Local Action who put together the bid will deliver the RDPE LEADER approach against this strategy. A summary of the strategy can be found at www.washfens-rdpe.co.uk or the full LDS can be obtained from the LAG manager.

Wash Fens Local Action Group

The Wash Fens Local Action Group is a mix of representatives from the private and public sectors working together to boost the rural economies of South Holland and the Borough of Boston.

The current members include:

- Business Link East Midlands
- Environment Agency
- Heritage Trust of Lincolnshire
- Lincolnshire & Rutland Education Business Partnership
- Lincolnshire Chamber of Commerce
- National Farmers Union (Boston and Spalding branches)
- Natural England
- Whaplode Heritage and Educational Action Team
- Boston Borough Council
- South Holland District Council
- Lincolnshire County Council

Statement from the LAG Chair:-

"We see the Wash Fens as an area that has considerable potential to improve its economic, social and environmental position by capitalising on its key rural assets (landscape, waterways, coast, wildlife, heritage, food) and supporting those who live and work here to improve their economic prospects".

This is reflected in the LAG's vision statement:

To narrow the gap between the underperforming economic environment of the Wash Fens and the potential it possesses to become a modern, thriving rural area where people choose to live, work and visit.

SECTION 2 – FUNDING PRIORITIES

Our priorities for funding are set out in the Local Development Strategy. Our vision will be pursued by investing in projects that help the Wash Fens area to move forward economically, socially and environmentally, whilst recognising the need for sensitive and sustainable development to safeguard our rural heritage for future generations.

Priority 1: A prosperous economy

We want to create a strong, diverse economy by broadening the quality and range of jobs available; improving competitiveness, making full use of the economic capabilities of young people, migrant workers, women returners, the over 55s and community volunteers; and by encouraging more people to increase their skills and improve their economic prospects.

Priority 2: A great destination with an enviable quality of life

We want to capitalise on the area's key assets to sensitively take advantage of the potential economic impact that tourism brings and encourage healthier, thriving rural communities. We want to revive communities and services in decline.

Priority 3: A greener, sustainable environment

We want to encourage the local population to live and work in a sustainable manner by placing an increased emphasis on climate change mitigation and adaption and supporting actions that will protect, conserve and enhance the rural environment for future generations.

All projects applying to us for funding must align to one or more of the above priorities.

What type of projects will be successful?

Funding is competitive. We are seeking high quality projects from individuals, businesses and organisations to assist us in delivering our vision. We particularly want to encourage projects that have one or more of the following characteristics:

- Involve innovation and creativity in their approach or delivery
- Are entrepreneurial and 'lead the way' in their field
- Demonstrate partnership and collaboration

- Deliver additional wider benefits for the local economy
- Bring about closer integration between sectors in the rural economy
- Deliver integrated benefits e.g. socio-economic and environmental
- Demonstrate the best quality standards and environmental performance

Output targets

The programme is administered by Defra who will be closely monitoring how Local Action Groups invest their money and what economic impact they have achieved.

One way of measuring performance is through the achievement of rural based targets (also known as outputs).

The outputs that the Wash Fens Local Action Group will be measured against include:

- The number of new jobs created (or sustained)
- The increase in profitability in businesses supported
- The value (£) of private sector money being invested in the project
- The increase in overnight stays or day visitors (tourism projects)
- The number of population benefiting from improved services
- The number of people taking part in training
- The number of days of training received

We will therefore expect the projects that we fund to contribute towards the achievement of one or more of these outputs. The level of contribution made by a project will be one of the factors we consider when choosing the projects we want to support.

SECTION 3 – ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES

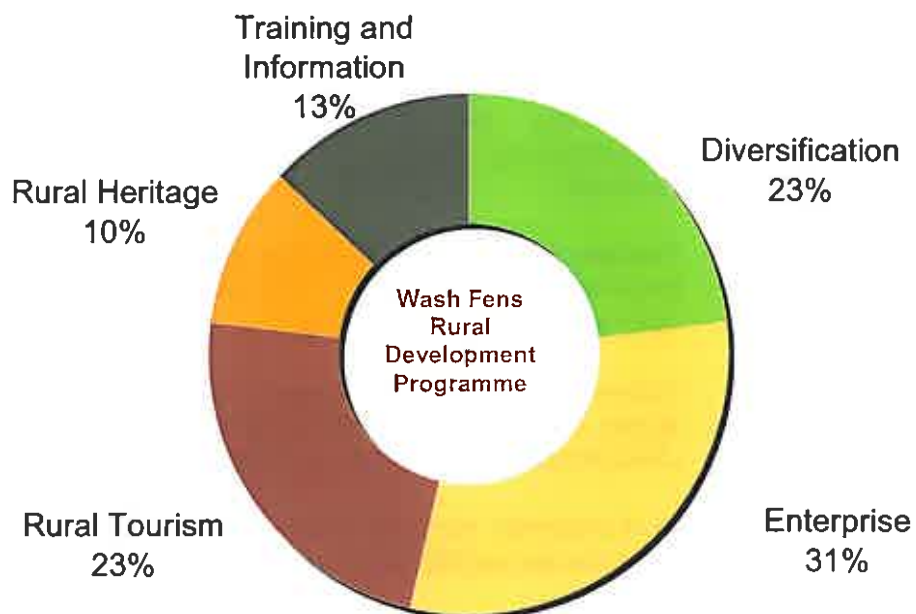
What funding is available?

The Wash Fens Rural Development Programme is divided up into five areas of activity known as 'measures'. Each measure is targeted at a specific objective of the RDPE programme.

The measures are:

- Diversification
- Enterprise
- Rural Tourism
- Rural Heritage
- Training and information

Local Action Group funding allocations are reviewed on an annual basis. The proportion of funding allocated to each measure is therefore subject to change. In our initial Local Development Strategy (LDS) we divided our funding up between the measures in approximately the following proportions:



There are **specific eligibility criteria for each measure**. The following pages set out the exact details:

1. Diversification

The agricultural nature of the Wash Fens is one of its unique characteristics and local farming businesses play a vital role in supporting the UK to maintain a high level of food self-sufficiency.

Following rises in commodity prices, farmers reported that although optimism in the sector had increased, their incomes had not. The purpose of this theme is therefore to help farm businesses to supplement and improve their incomes by developing new activities away from agriculture.

Who can apply?	<p>Members of a farm household* that is generating an income from agriculture at the time the application is made.</p> <p>*Includes husbands/wives, sons and daughters but excludes farm workers</p>
How much grant can be awarded?	<p>The minimum grant you can apply for is £3500. There is no fixed maximum amount (subject to state aid rules. See page 17). However all applications will be assessed on a case by case basis and applicants are advised to apply for the minimum amount of funding required to deliver their project</p> <p>There is no fixed rate of grant support. Grants of up to a maximum of 50% of total eligible project costs can be applied for. The remainder of the costs (also known as match funding) must be met by the applicant from other private sector sources e.g. own funds, borrowing, investors.</p>
What type of project may qualify for grant funding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing new business activities such as; retailing, manufacturing, service industries, arts, crafts and self made products • Tourism and leisure amenities such as; attractions, bed and breakfast accommodation, craft centres, tea rooms, museums, nature trails/parks, equestrian • Conversion of empty buildings for alternative use such as; office space, craft workshops, holiday accommodation, meeting rooms, childcare facilities, spa/health facilities, studios, etc • Environmental services such as; recycling and creating new products and additional income from local waste • Renewable energy including the storage/supply of wood fuel • Traditional trades required to maintain the rural landscape

1. Diversification (continued)

What costs can grant support cover?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Capital investment (eq equipment, construction works, fixtures and fittings)• start-up revenue costs, product development, feasibility studies• Costs of establishing collaborative ventures• Technical support to help new enterprises to become established and to help existing enterprises to consolidate and expand <p>Please note : At the time of publication a government spending freeze is in force that prevents us from awarding grants to fund marketing and advertising activity. If your project includes this type of expenditure please contact us to check the latest position.</p>
What output targets are used to measure performance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The number of beneficiaries (persons) supported• The number of new jobs created (We want to create approximately 1 job for every £15,000 of grant we award)• The growth in profitability of businesses supported• The amount (£) of private sector monies used to match fund the grant from us

2. Enterprise

In England, micro-businesses (those with fewer than 10 staff) account for over 90% of firms in rural areas and play a key role in providing locally based employment.

Enterprise activity in the Wash Fens is behind the regional and national average, but with appropriate help, many micro businesses could be established or expanded to help move the area forward and broaden the quality and range of jobs available.

The purpose of this theme is to support innovative and enterprising projects that will improve economic prosperity and contribute to a more modern, thriving rural area where people choose to live, work and visit.

Who can apply?	<p>Businesses and social enterprises* with fewer than 10 staff and an annual turnover of less than €2 million or, persons wishing to set up a new micro-enterprise.</p> <p>*A social enterprise is a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for the benefit of the community.</p>
How much grant can be awarded?	<p>The minimum grant you can apply for is £3500. There is no fixed maximum amount (subject to state aid rules. See page 17). However all applications will be assessed on a case by case basis and applicants are advised to apply for the minimum amount of funding required to deliver their project.</p> <p>There is no fixed rate of grant support. Grants of up to a maximum of 50% of total eligible project costs can be applied for. The remainder of the costs (also known as match funding) must be met by the applicant from other private sector sources e.g. own funds, borrowing, investors.</p>
What type of project may qualify for grant funding?	<p>Eligible industries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retailing, manufacturing, or service industries including self-made products, recreation, equestrian and creative activities (e.g. crafts, sculpture) • Environmental services including the traditional rural trades required to maintain & enhance the landscape • Renewable energy including the storage/supply of wood fuel

2. Enterprise (continued)

<p>What type of project may qualify for grant funding?</p>	<p>Priorities for investment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth industries of the future that will lead to better paid higher skilled jobs e.g. low-carbon green technology, advanced manufacturing and communications/IT • Supporting businesses to diversify into new markets and products (including internet based global markets) • Supporting businesses to improve profitability by working more efficiently, enhancing productivity and reducing environmental impact e.g. investment in new and innovative technology, incorporating measures to adapt to climate change • Micro-enterprises that help to sustain remote rural areas (including home working) • Social enterprises that deliver and maintain services in rural areas or promote healthier communities • Services and facilities that enhance the area's image, rural identity or offer to tourists such as fine foods, arts, culture • Supporting those not fulfilling their potential to improve their economic prospects by developing entrepreneurial activities
<p>What costs can grant support cover?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital investment (eq equipment, construction works, fixtures and fittings) • start-up revenue costs, product development, feasibility studies • Costs of establishing collaborative ventures • Technical support to help new enterprises to become established and to help existing enterprises to consolidate and expand <p><i>Please note:</i> At the time of publication a government spending freeze is in force that prevents us from awarding grants to fund marketing and advertising activity. If your project includes this type of expenditure please contact us to check the latest position.</p>
<p>What output targets are used to measure performance?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of businesses/micro enterprises supported • The number of new jobs created (We want to create approximately 1 job for every £15,000 of grant we award) • The growth in profitability of businesses supported • The amount (£) of private sector monies used to match fund the grant from us

3. Rural Tourism

There is significant untapped potential for the Wash Fens to benefit from the economic impact that tourism brings and encourage healthier communities. The area possesses a number of 'attractors' that are capable of attracting high value visitors - countryside, coast, wildlife, waterways, unique heritage, food - but current activities are not yet developed sufficiently to realise that potential.

This theme has two main aims:

- To encourage more day visitors and overnight stays by improving tourism infrastructure and promoting activities that maximise the unique mix of opportunities that the area has to offer, and
- To make rural tourism businesses more sustainable through collaboration, resource efficiency and effective use of ICT

<p>Who can apply?</p>	<p>Existing tourism enterprises located in, and tourism related organisations operating in, rural areas, and persons wishing to set up new rural tourism enterprises.</p>
<p>How much grant can be awarded?</p>	<p>The minimum grant you can apply for is £3500. There is no fixed maximum amount (subject to state aid rules. See page 17). However all applications will be assessed on a case by case basis and applicants are advised to apply for the minimum amount of funding required to deliver their project.</p> <p>There is no fixed rate of grant support. Grants of up to 100% of eligible project costs can be awarded, depending upon the extent of commercial return and an assessment of the wider economic, social and environmental benefits.</p> <p>For commercial enterprises a rate of 50% or less will be awarded. The remainder of the costs (also known as match funding) must be met by the applicant from other sources e.g. own funds, borrowing, investors.</p>
<p>What type of project may qualify for grant funding?</p>	<p>Rural tourism is fundamentally linked to the local environment, landscape and heritage offer. Grant support will be targeted primarily towards the development and marketing of activities relating to rural tourism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small-scale infrastructure such as information centres and the signposting and interpretation of tourist sites

3. Rural Tourism (continued)

<p>What type of project may qualify for grant funding?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recreational infrastructure (e.g. walking, cycling, riding routes) that improve access to historic sites and natural areas, in particular the Wash Estuary and the route of the Fens Waterways Link • Provision of new small-scale accommodation and upgrading of existing provision that will meet National Quality Assurance Scheme standards and enhances the rural tourism offer • The development and/or marketing of rural tourism services, in particular those that are linked to the Wash Estuary and Fens Waterways Link e.g. cycle hire, fishing, boat trips, services for boat owners • Supporting the development of new niche markets such as 'green tourism' e.g. from improved environmental performance • Forging better links between tourism businesses and their local environment and cultural assets and promoting quality local food culture and rural crafts • Increased and more effective use of ICT such as, internet promotion and booking services • Assisting tourism providers to develop clusters and business initiatives to meet visitor needs and market their products and services • Networking and collaboration within the tourism industry including benchmarking of business performance
<p>What costs can grant support cover?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small-scale capital investments • Feasibility studies and start-up revenue costs • Cost of establishing collaborative initiatives • Technical support to help new businesses become established and to help existing businesses to improve the quality of their services, consolidate and expand <p>Please note: At the time of publication a government spending freeze is in force that prevents us from awarding grants to fund marketing and advertising activity. If your project includes this type of expenditure please contact us to check the latest position.</p>
<p>What output targets are used to measure performance?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of tourism actions supported • The number of new jobs created (We want to create approximately 1 job for every £15,000 of grant we award) • The growth in profitability of businesses supported • The increase in overnight stays or day visitors • The amount (£) of private sector monies used to match fund the grant from us

4. Rural Heritage

The Wash Fens is characterised by its' distinctive manmade landscape and cultural heritage linked to its farming history and the drainage of the fens. It has a rich archaeological and built heritage which includes windmills, churches, monuments and listed buildings. Preserving and maintaining such buildings helps to maintain the attractiveness of the area as a place to visit and live.

The Wash Fens also has an enviable cluster of natural habitats and wildlife. The Wash Estuary is recognised as a Wetland of International Importance and is exceptionally rich in plants, birds and invertebrate. However, future development must balance the conservation needs of the wildlife with the benefits for people that want to enjoy the area.

The purpose of this theme is to conserve and enhance rural heritage, including the traditional farmed landscape, as a basis for economic growth, particularly in relation to recreation and tourism.

Who can apply?	Businesses, social enterprises, charities and other groups (i.e. voluntary/community) that have a formal constitution.
How much grant can be awarded?	<p>The minimum grant you can apply for is £3500. There is no fixed maximum amount (subject to state aid rules. See page 17). However all applications will be assessed on a case by case basis and applicants are advised to apply for the minimum amount of funding required to deliver their project.</p> <p>There is no fixed rate of grant support. Grants of up to 100% of eligible project costs can be awarded, depending upon the extent of commercial return and an assessment of the wider economic, social and environmental benefits. For commercial enterprises a rate of 50% or less will be awarded</p> <p>Where the grant support rate is less than 100%, the remainder of the costs (also known as match funding) must be met by the applicant from other sources e.g. own funds, borrowing, investors, and other grants.</p>
What type of project may qualify for grant funding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small scale grants to assist with the enhancement of the unique buildings and character of the Wash Fens area, including repair, physical interpretation and sympathetic adaptation of historic buildings and earthwork archaeological sites • The maintenance, restoration and upgrading of the natural heritage e.g. restoring wildlife habitats • Environmental awareness activities linked to natural heritage • The maintenance, restoration and upgrading of the cultural heritage

4. Rural Heritage (continued)

<p>What costs can grant support cover?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Capital investments• Research studies and audits• Interpretation and materials <p>Please note: At the time of publication a government spending freeze is in force that prevents us from awarding grants to fund marketing and advertising activity. If your project includes this type of expenditure please contact us to check the latest position.</p>
<p>What output targets are used to measure performance?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The number of rural heritage actions supported• The number of rural population benefiting from improved services• The amount (£) of private sector monies used to match fund the grant from us• The growth in profitability of businesses supported

5. Training and Information

By encouraging more diverse, highly skilled and possibly technology based employment within the Wash Fens there will be an equal need to make appropriate training opportunities available to provide the skilled, flexible workforce that these businesses will demand.

Furthermore, micro businesses often face problems releasing employees for training purposes both in terms of time and funding.

The purpose of this theme is to provide bespoke training and information activities in support of rural micro-enterprises, non-agricultural farm diversification businesses, rural tourism businesses and the conservation and upgrading rural heritage.

Who can apply?	Micro enterprises (including social enterprises), tourism businesses, charities and other groups (i.e. voluntary/community) that have a formal constitution and farm diversification enterprises.
How much grant can be awarded?	<p>The minimum grant you can apply for is £3500. There is no fixed maximum amount (subject to state aid rules. See page 17). However all applications will be assessed on a case by case basis and applicants are advised to apply for the minimum amount of funding required to deliver their project.</p> <p>The maximum rate of grant support is 70% of total eligible costs. The remainder of the costs (also known as match funding) must be met by the applicant from other private sources e.g. own funds, borrowing, investors, money raised within the local community or from donations. It cannot be public funding.</p> <p>'In kind' contributions may also be considered as match funding in certain circumstances e.g. training for community volunteers.</p>
What type of project may qualify for grant funding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training in ICT Skills • Training, coaching and mentoring in business skills • Training in traditional rural skills • Training related to diversification away from agriculture* <p>*Funding for diversification activity is limited to members of a farm business generating an income from agriculture at the time of application</p> <p>Training will only be provided where a gap in provision exists.</p> <p>Courses of instruction and training which form part of regular educational programmes or systems at secondary or higher level are ineligible.</p>

5. Training and Information (continued)

What costs can grant support cover?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Costs of trainers/facilitators & mentors• Training needs assessments• Training venues and refreshments• Course materials and examination fees• Course evaluation costs• Project management costs for training organisers• Small scale infrastructure/capital costs <p>Please note: At the time of publication a government spending freeze is in force that prevents us from awarding grants to fund marketing and advertising activity. If your project includes this type of expenditure please contact us to check the latest position.</p>
What output targets are used to measure performance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The number of people taking part in training and information activities• The number of days of training received• The number of participants successfully completing training or information activities• The growth in profitability of businesses supported

SECTION 4 – KEY INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS

Location

The Wash Fens area is located in South East Lincolnshire. It encompasses the entire **local authority districts of Boston Borough and South Holland**. Only projects located in these areas are eligible to apply for funding. A map of the area can be found at the end of this document or you can check if your project is located in the eligible area by using the 'postcode checker' at www.washfens-rdpe.co.uk

How do 'State Aid rules' affect an applicant's eligibility?

Many areas of RDPE are covered by detailed State Aid rules that ensure state (public) funding does not distort competition or provide unfair advantage. This effectively means that individual businesses are limited to the amount of public funding they can receive.

Some of the measures are only allowed to be delivered if 'de minimis' rules are adhered to. RDPE projects which are subject to de minimis rules can be awarded up to a maximum threshold of €200,000 providing no other public support has been received during that time (around £173,000 at current exchange rates). The exchange rate calculation is made based on the information provided at www.cobody.gov.uk

Previous grant support awarded to businesses, groups or individuals may therefore prevent or limit the amount of RDPE grant funding that can be offered.

If you are concerned that the State Aid rules may affect an application to RDPE, please contact us to clarify your position or refer to the DEFRA website for RDPE State Aid guidance information:

www.defra.gov.uk/documents/rural/rdpe/stateaidguid.pdf

Ineligible costs

We cannot fund costs for:

- Fees incurred during the preparation of the grant application
- Costs connected with leasing contracts, interest refinancing, overheads and insurance, reclaimable value added tax
- Costs associated with obtaining required consents and licences or statutory costs, e.g. fees for planning permission or building requirements
- Simple replacement investments, for example, repairs to machinery
- Costs already incurred in advance of a grant offer

Please note: At the time of publication a government spending freeze is in force that prevents us from awarding grants to fund marketing and advertising activity. If your project includes this type of expenditure please contact us to check the latest position.

Planning

An offer of grant funding cannot be made until all necessary planning permission and buildings regulations consent have been obtained. It is therefore advisable to commence discussions with your local planning authority before submitting an Expression of Interest Form to ascertain how long this process is likely to take.

Tenancies

Written permission must be gained from the landlord where a project's activities are performed wholly or partially on tenanted property. In most instances it will be a requirement for the applicant to have a tenancy agreement for such property for at least 7 years from the date of the grant offer letter.

Procurement

To ensure that value for money is achieved you will be required to obtain three written quotations for each item of proposed expenditure on your project. These could be obtained direct from the supplier, via the internet or from catalogues, etc.

Quality standards

We expect all projects to encompass or work towards the best possible standards relating to environmental management and energy usage, project management, financial management, people management, production methods, buildings and facilities.

Tourism accommodation will be required to meet the standards of the National Quality Assurance Scheme.

New build projects will be required to meet BREEAM (BRE Environmental Assessment Method) standards wherever reasonable and practical. BREEAM is the leading and most widely used environmental assessment method for buildings. It sets the standard for best practice in sustainable design and environmental performance (www.breeam.org).

Conditions of funding

If we approve your application for funding, a Funding Officer will be allocated to your project and we will meet with you to outline the terms and conditions of our offer. An explanation of what we expect in return for supporting the project will also be given. The formal grant offer will then be signed by both parties. It is only at this stage that the project may commence.

Recipients will be required to keep to the terms and conditions of the grant offer for 5 years from the date that the final grant payment is made.

Payment of funding

Payment is made in arrears. You must therefore ensure that you have sufficient funds to be able to 'bank roll' your project. A payment schedule will be agreed with you in advance and if necessary, the grant can be claimed over several instalments. You will be asked to submit a claim for payment with evidence of your expenditure in the form of original invoices and original bank statements.

In order to receive grant payments, all successful applicants will be required to register with the **Rural Payments Agency**. This is the body responsible on behalf of the government for distributing rural funding from Europe.

Publicity

All projects funded through the Rural Development Programme for England are required to acknowledge the grant support they have received in any press releases, publications or websites relating to the funded project. Recipients are also required to display a plaque at the project site. We will supply you with the information and logos needed to comply with these requirements.

Monitoring

Project monitoring will take place during the project and might continue after completion of the funding period. This may be performed by Lincolnshire County Council or Defra. The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) may also perform audits on the project and in some limited instances; European Commission (EC) auditing may also be requested.

Sale of assets

You must inform us if you plan to sell, transfer, wind-up or mothball any element of the project during the 5-year term. Repayment of all or part of the grant may be required in these circumstances.

Freedom of information

Because the grant will involve expenditure of public money, there is public interest in how the money is spent. An annual list of all awards made under the programme will be published on a government website. Confidentiality may also be disclosed in response to requests made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Details about your Expression of Interest and Application will be shared with members of the Wash Fens Local Action Group and other partner organisations who may from time to time act in the role of Expert Advisors to the Local Action Group. All partners will be required to treat this information as 'commercially in confidence' until such time as any offer of grant may be made.

SECTION 5 – HOW TO APPLY

The application process

Applications for funding are assessed through a two stage process:

1. Expression of Interest Form
2. Full Application Form and Business Plan

Expression of Interest form

Once you have read these guidance notes you should complete an Expression of Interest Form. This is available from the Local Action Group Manager.

We will check this for eligibility and also make an assessment of how your project will help us to achieve our objectives. This will enable us to reach an initial view as to whether your project may be suitable to apply for funding.

A decision will usually be made within 15 working days of receipt of a signed paper copy.

If your Expression of Interest is successful, you will be invited to go on to the next stage and submit an application for funding. If you are not invited to apply, you will receive a full explanation in writing.

Full Application and Business Plan

The Full Application Form and Business Plan are used to gather more comprehensive information about your project such as evidence of demand and market research. The amount of detail required will be proportionate to the size of grant being applied for and the complexity of the project.

You will be asked to submit supporting documentation to verify the information you have given e.g. copies of your most recent accounts, quotations for project costs (minimum of three), lease/tenancy agreements, planning permission/consents.

In assessing the viability of a project, security of match funding is assessed. If applicable, you will therefore be asked to supply a "letter of confirmation" from your financier or bank statements to show that the necessary funds are in place.

Decision making process

All applications will be subject to a thorough appraisal to ensure that the project can be successful and sustainable and provides value for money. This will be carried out

by an Independent Appraisal Officer appointed by Lincolnshire County Council, the accountable body for the Wash Fens Rural Development Programme. The appraiser will make a recommendation for approval or rejection of the project.

The application may also be viewed by Defra staff in the East Midlands Regional Office who oversee the delivery of the RDPE LEADER Approach in this region.

The final decision about whether a project is approved or rejected will be made by the Wash Fens Approval Panel, a sub-group of the Wash Fens Local Action Group.

All Local Action Group members have to declare whether they have an interest in any project and if so, are unable to participate in any discussion or decision about that project.

Please note that there will be competition for funding. Not all projects that are invited to submit a Full Application will necessarily be awarded a grant. We will provide reasons for decisions in all cases.

The programme operates within a fixed budget. If demand exceeds the funds available, then priority will be given to projects that can demonstrate the most benefit to the local rural economy.

When can I apply?

You can submit an Expression of Interest Form at any time while the programme is still running. All projects must be completed and grant funding spent by 31 December 2013.

In most circumstances the entire application process, from Expression of Interest to approval of the full application and contracting, will take around three months.

Full applications must be with us by set deadlines in order to be considered by the Local Action Group Approval Panel meetings. Applicants whose Expressions of Interests are deemed successful will automatically be sent a list of the submission deadlines.

An up to date list of submission deadlines is also available on our website; www.washfens-rdpe.co.uk or can be obtained from the LAG Manager.

Annex 1

