West Cheshire and Warrington LEADER Local Action Group

Local Development Strategy
2015-2020

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1. Introduction - West Cheshire and Warrington Local Action Group (LAG) is a bold new partnership focusing on delivering the LEADER approach to an area largely un-represented during previous programmes. Encompassing approximately 880 square kilometres and a rural population of over 110,000 the LAG area aligns with the administrative boundaries of the Cheshire and Warrington Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Cheshire East LAG respectively. The Accountable Body for both West Cheshire and Warrington and Cheshire East LAGs is Cheshire West and Chester Council. The group will work collaboratively across the sub-region capitalised upon synergies between LAGs. This will allow co-operation at sub-regional level to augment the work of the LEP by identifying and supporting opportunities to create and sustain rural jobs and growth.

1.1   Map of the area - The West Cheshire and Warrington LEADER area abuts the adjoining area proposed for the Cheshire East LAG. The LEADER area excludes the larger urban settlements of Warrington, Northwich, Chester, Ellesmere Port and the Wirral fringe. We recognise the influence of these settlements on the broader rural hinterland of the LEADER area. The LAG area has also included output areas adjacent to Warrington extending coverage of benefits that LEADER can bring into the locally cohesive landscape characteristics and rural areas of Dunham Massey.
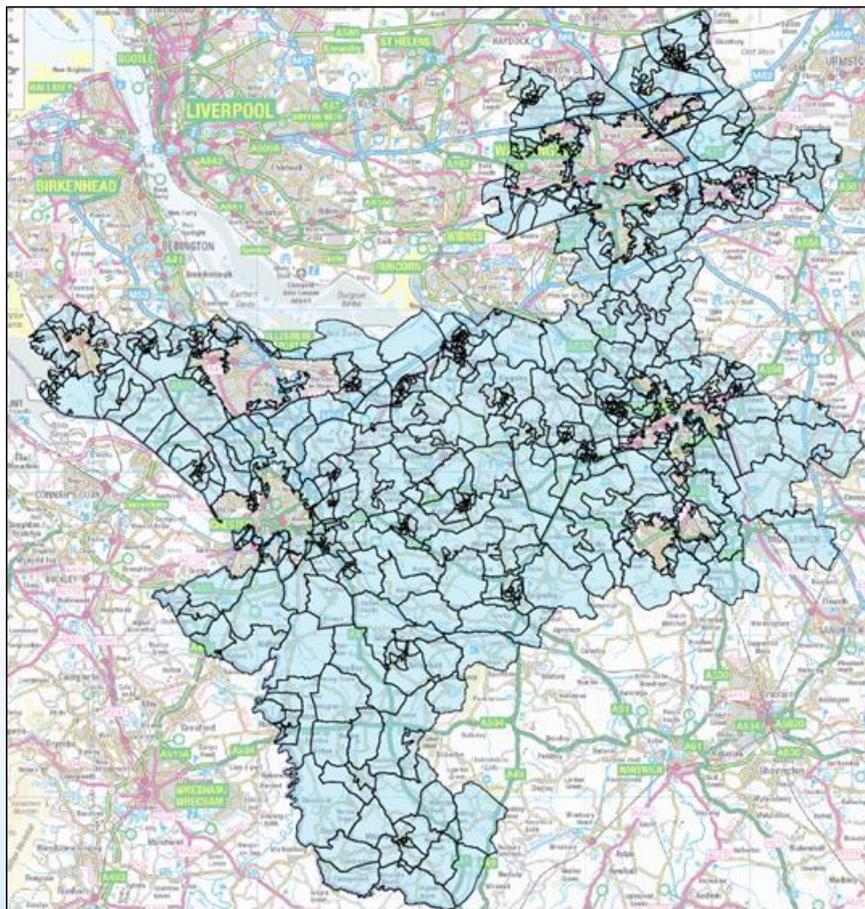
Figure 1 - West Cheshire and Warrington LAG Area

1.2   Rural population covered - The proposed LEADER area has a population of 111,465, with 86,301 residents in Cheshire West and 25,614 in Warrington. If the population were to exceed the 150,000 threshold due to Defra's classification process, the LAG boundaries will be reassessed taking into account the national position on derogation.

2.   West Cheshire and Warrington LAG: Characteristics - Over four-fifths of West Cheshire land is defined primarily by the rolling pastoral landscapes associated with dairy and livestock farming; as well as the distinctive Sandstone Ridge and Cheshire Plain. There is a

"traditional" rural economy based on land-based businesses such as farming, forestry, equestrian, outdoor-based recreation activities and visitor attractions. The proportion of people living in rural areas of West Cheshire is 26% and 17% in Warrington. The area is home to a number of rivers, ranging from the internationally significant Mersey to a series of locally important rivers and canals. The proposed LEADER landscape has a distinctive spatial and economic profile. Its settlement pattern is relatively densely populated with 15 service centres and the hinterlands of a number of major settlements. Notwithstanding these more urban "nodes" outside of the main roads connections across the geography are relatively poor.

The area's northern fringe is heavily dominated by densely populated areas of Merseyside and its western fringe shares a border with Wirral and North Wales. To the south of Cheshire is the significant ecological Meres and Mosses Nature Improvement Area which extends through into North Shropshire.

In order to depict the LAG area in greater detail and illustrate some of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the locality, the following approaches have been taken:

- **A Summary Economic Profile** – This looks at overarching local patterns and contextualises them on a national basis providing insights into where the area is performing strongly or poorly within a national context.
- **A Profile of Local LEP Priorities** – This looks to identify the current and planned economic activity to align activities in the LAG area.
- **A Locally Researched SWOT analysis** – This was drawn from a sub-regional programme of. The SWOT was further complemented by an e-survey to allow engagement with harder to reach groups.
- **A Prioritisation of Local Needs** – Combining the economic profile with local insights has allowed prioritisation on a local level of Defra's national policy areas.

Taken in concert this approach has enabled the formation of a bottom up prioritisation of local needs to inform LAG actions ensuring that their decisions are focused on sustainably resolving local issues.

2.1   West Cheshire and Warrington LAG: Summary Economic Profile - This economic profile has been compiled on a bespoke basis in partnership with Birkbeck College, University of London, modelling data sources at the output area to give a tight and authentic fit with the specific LEADER geography linked to this proposal.

2.1.1   Working Age Population and Home Workers Percentages
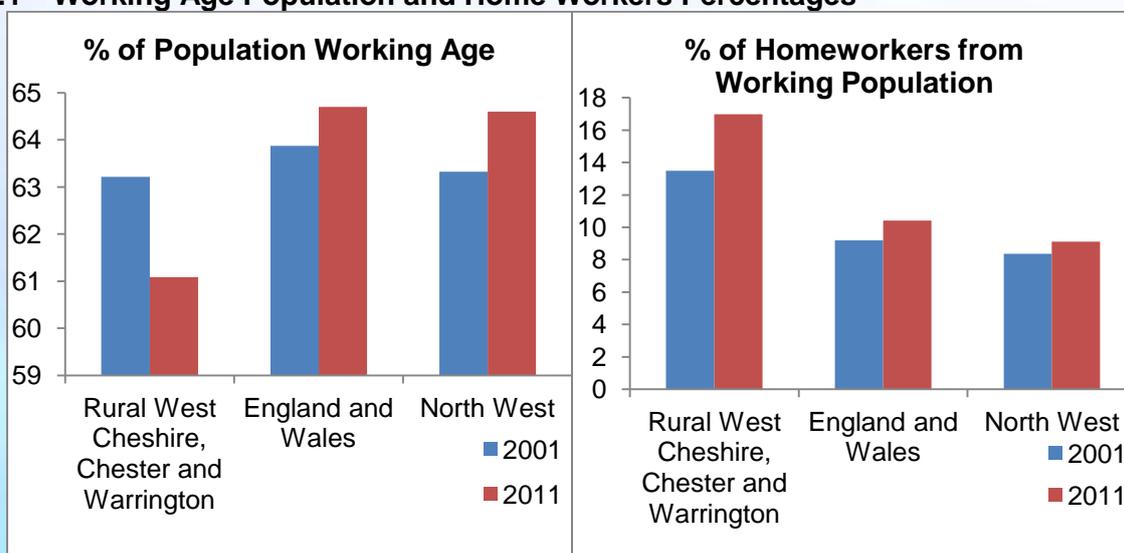
Despite the working age population (16-64) increasing in both the North West and England and Wales between 2001 and 2011, there have been falls of over 2% in the proposed LEADER area. The area exhibits considerably higher proportional homeworking than the North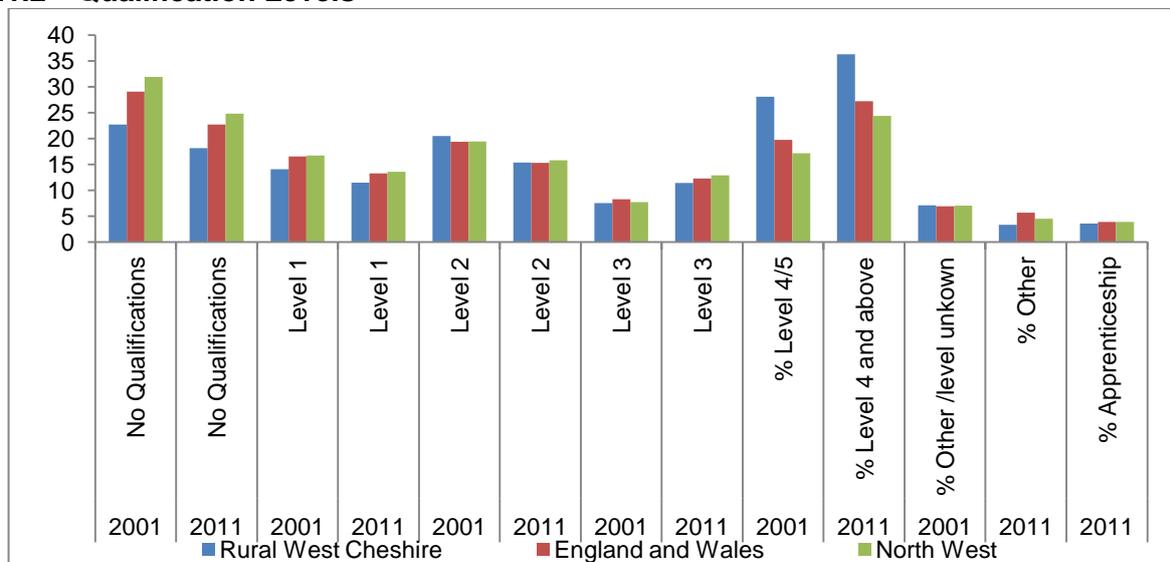 West and England and Wales. In 2011 there were 9,386 homeworkers according to the Census. Furthermore, it has witnessed an accelerated increase in this proportion over the last ten years.

2.1.2   Qualification Levels

There has been a reduction in the proportion of those with no qualifications, level 1 and level 2 qualifications as their highest level in the area of between 2001 and 2011. Conversely the area has seen increases in the proportions of those with their highest qualification at level 3 and level 4+ qualifications. Proportions of those with level 4+ qualifications are considerably higher than for England and Wales and the North West.

2.1.3   Businesses - The LEADER area had 11,630 businesses in 2013. The area has performed well in terms of business counts between 2011 and 2013. It outperformed the North West, keeping up with the growth in the number of business across England and Wales.

2.1.4   Location Quotients
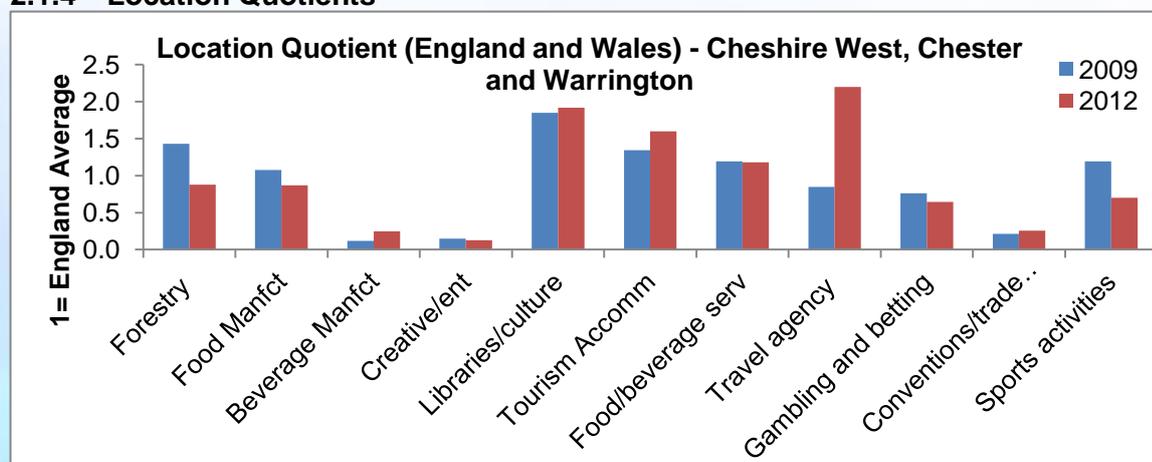
Cheshire West, Chester and Warrington has seen employee numbers in "sports activities" decrease in relative terms, along with "forestry and logging" and the "manufacture of food products". The proportion of the workforce employed in food production and forestry are lower than the national average - these are both key sectors in terms of LEADER investment. Both districts have witnessed substantial relative growth of employee proportions in the "travel

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agency, tour operator and other reservation service and relates activities". This is a key LEADER sector and an indicator of a strong tourism base to build on.

2.1.5   Job Density
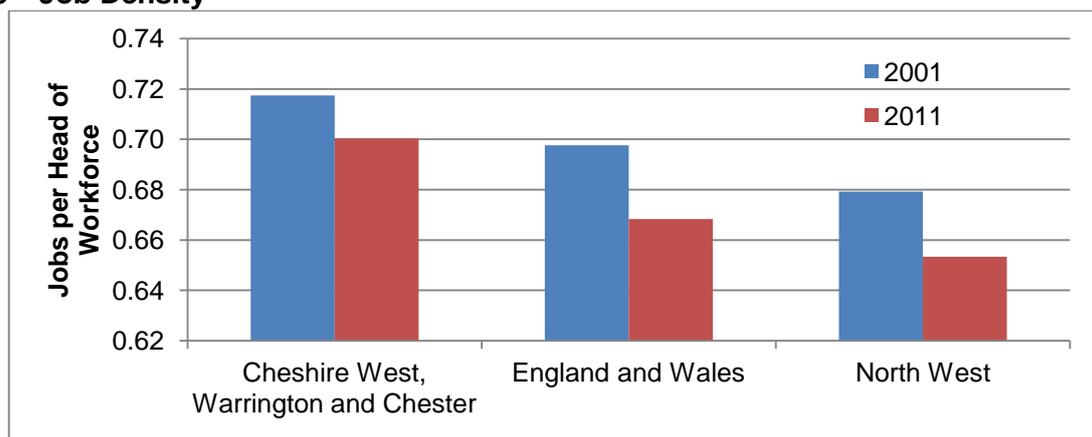
Overall, notwithstanding the proximity to major centres of employment in the north, the area has better economic self-containment than the North West and England averages in terms of job density (the ratio of jobs to workforce). Whilst the area has witnessed falls in job density between 2001 and 2011, they have not been as sharp as in the North West or across England and Wales and this suggests that there is already a coherent and well integrated economy in the area.

2.1.6   Wages at Place of Residence – The area outperforms both the North West and England and Wales in terms of full time workers' median wages. In 2013 (ASHE data) the median figure for full time wages was £526 per week, compared to an England and Wales average of £519.

2.1.7   Farming
This data is only available at county level from the Census of Agriculture. It reveals however very substantial falls in the number of farm employees across Cheshire, this was in line generally, but more severe than the wider trend across England and Wales. Our discussions with key informants from the farming and forestry sector substantiate that this was the case in the west as well as the east of the County.
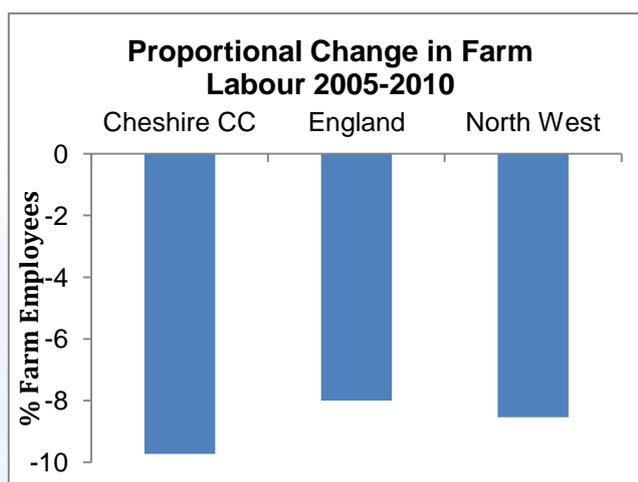
In terms of farm types the area is nationally and regionally significant in relation to dairy production and lowland grazing. It is regionally significant in terms of cereals.

Farm Numbers By Type (2010)

	Cereal	General Crops	Horticulture	Sp. Pigs	Sp. Poultry	Dairy	Grazing Livestock (LFA)	Grazing Livestock (lowland)	Mixed	Other
CHESHIRE CC	212	115	188	39	161	851	145	1033	252	2269
% North West Farm Total	0.31	0.22	0.23	0.21	0.23	0.28	0.05	0.29	0.27	0.25
% England Farm Total	0.009	0.013	0.020	0.016	0.025	0.066	0.013	0.029	0.022	0.030

2.1.8 Benefit Claimants
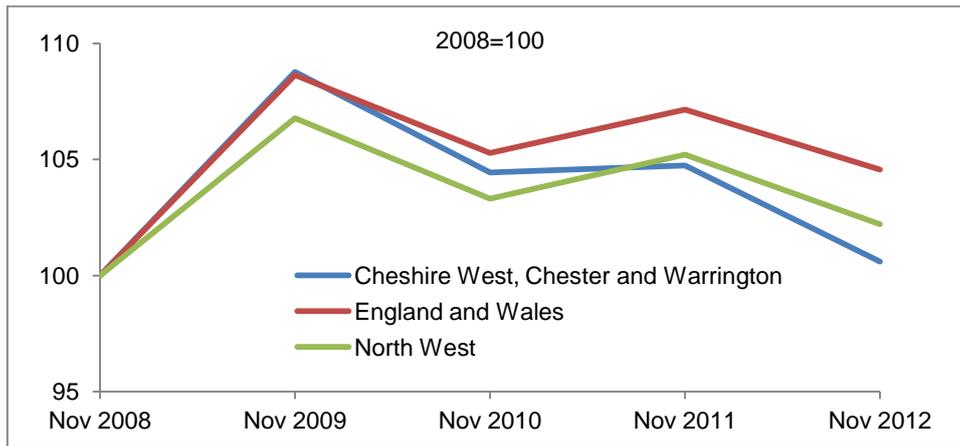
Benefit claimant numbers are approximately the same as in 2008, outperforming both the North West and England and Wales. Notwithstanding a smaller working population than the national average and a more significant proportion of elderly people, the area has relatively lower level of benefit claimants than the North West, England and Wales averages.

2.1.9   Access to Services - below, we show the access by public services / walking to GPs, Primary Schools and Food Stores.

LSOAs in Rural West Cheshire (inc. Warrington) – "median" values
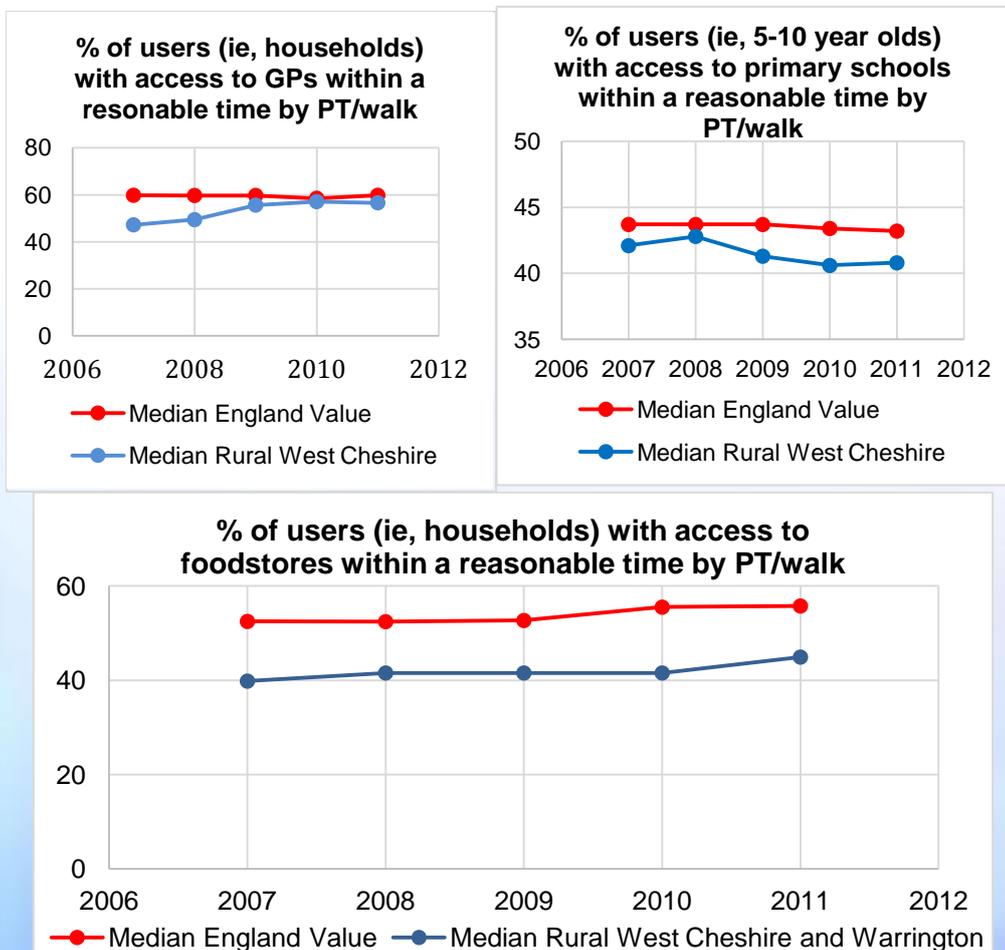
Rural West Cheshire saw some improvement in terms of access to GPs and food stores between 2007 and 2011, but was still below the English median regarding the latter in 2011. Access to primary schools worsened in rural West Cheshire between 2007 and 2011.

2.2 Evidence of alignment with LEP priorities and broader local economic activity - **This LDS has been developed in conjunction with the following key strategic documents, which in full or in part, to the rural economy of Cheshire and Warrington. These include:**
- Cheshire and Warrington LEP (2013) The Rural Economy within Cheshire and Warrington – The Evidence Report
- Cheshire and Warrington LEP (2014) ESIF 14-20 - European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy 2014-2020 (ESIF)
- Cheshire and Warrington Enterprise Partnership (2014) Cheshire and Warrington Matters - Strategic Economic Plan for Cheshire and Warrington (SEP)
- Cheshire West and Chester Council (2011) Rural Regeneration Strategy and Action Plan (CWCC RRSAP)
- Sector Report: Cheshire and Warrington
- Marketing Cheshire Destination Management Plan (DMP)
- Campaign for the Farmed Environment Local Liaison Group for Cheshire (2013) County Priorities for Cheshire
- Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (2013) Consultation on the implementation of CAP reform in England

This review also drew upon several online sources. A number of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and priorities for the sub-region are discussed. Several key themes emerge from these documents which are discussed below.

2.2.1 Economic Baseline - Many of the key documents note the relatively strong economic starting point for the Cheshire and Warrington sub-region. The ESIF Strategy highlights the substantial extent of private sector employment and the relatively high level of business start-ups. The SEP identifies the economic diversity of the area, including the wide employment offer and variety of business sectors, as a key strength. There are a number of positive key facts to take from the documents:
- "A higher proportion of output gained from manufacturing than Merseyside, Greater Manchester or Lancashire."[1]
- "In economic terms the whole LEP area (including Cheshire East) is more important to UK output than the City of Birmingham, Leeds, Edinburgh or Glasgow."[2]
- "When the level of highly skilled residents is compared with other strong performing LEP areas, Cheshire and Warrington outperforms the Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham and Liverpool and is most similar to the Greater Cambridgeshire LEP area."[3]

The Sector Report argues that this positive economic situation has been "undersold" in favour of a focus on lifestyle in the sub-region. The success of the economy in Cheshire and Warrington makes clear the need to "link the rural economy to the wider economy".[4]

2.2.2 Business Sectors - The Sector Report highlights engineering (civil; electrical; mechanical; chemical) as a key industry for the area, and recommends its promotion along with the energy sector and business and financial services. It also suggests seeking investment in the automotive, chemical and pharmaceutical sectors. The document makes

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[1] Sector Report: Cheshire and Warrington
[2] Marketing Cheshire Destination Management Plan 2013-2018
[3] Cheshire and Warrington Enterprise Partnership (2014) Cheshire and Warrington Matters - Strategic Economic Plan for Cheshire and Warrington
[4] Cheshire and Warrington LEP (2013) The Rural Economy within Cheshire and Warrington – The Evidence Report

clear the need for Cheshire and Warrington to ensure sufficient land continues to be allocated for the other key sector of manufacturing, in the face of shifts toward a more residential focus for land use planning. Rural areas of the sub-region share some of the business sector composition described above.[5] However, the Cheshire and Warrington LEP notes how the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector "has the second highest number of businesses by sector".[6] It outlines six key rural themes for growth: dairy farms; small businesses; the equine sector; the agri-tech sector; green infrastructure; renewable energy. **LEADER has the capacity to support all six LEP rural themes for growth. Its principal focus will be at the small and micro level distinguishing its activities from the other key funds to support the rural economy – the Farming and Forestry Productivity Scheme and the Growth Activities directed by the LEP itself and those organisations it commissions.**

Rural tourism has been identified as possessing the potential to support growth opportunities for the rural economy by the LEP.[7] The Cheshire and Warrington DMP highlights the potential the visitor economy offers to rural areas in particular: "…city break tourism has grown and propensity to choose rural tourism especially among young people has declined. According to Visit England Chester scores 96 on satisfaction whereas rural Cheshire scores 83 – similar to rural Lancashire and Somerset."[8] The DMP goes on to argue that Cheshire is associated with a lifestyle rather than a visitor destination, recommending new branding and messages to change this and attract more visitors to rural areas. These are important themes for LEADER as identified in the SWOT and e-survey.

2.2.3   Transport - Despite good links to Manchester and Liverpool, the SEP identifies missing transport infrastructure support as a key weakness/threat for Cheshire and Warrington. It argues that this is impeding development, with any new development potentially placing too much pressure on the network. Transport is thus identified as one of the SEP's six enabling programmes for growth and constitutes one of the strategy groups of the LEP. The ESIF allocates £6.7m of ERDF funding to transport investment both to improve pinch points and for projects with development-unlocking potential.

As with other themes, transport is of special interest for rural areas of Cheshire and Warrington, with the most comprehensive proposal Cheshire West and Chester Council's "Cheshire West Rural Metro".[9] Building upon Chester's previously successful park and ride system, this strategy looks to develop connections to "outreach locations…five miles away from the city centre" and rural locations further afield. The plan sets out nine park and ride sites, which may connect both with Chester and other areas of employment. The RRSAP also proposes the relocation of key services to areas already well served by local transport, such as schools, which would become "service hubs". The potential for a community interest company to take provision of community transport with innovative use of existing assets is also discussed in the plan. **Developments arising from this aspect of the rural economic development agenda will be key for LEADER, working at the community level with small scale initiatives.**

2.2.4   Agriculture – In absolute terms, as stated in the Cheshire and Warrington Rural Economy Evidence Report, agriculture makes up only a small proportion of economic activity in Cheshire and Warrington, contributing less than 1.2% of Cheshire West's GVA in 2007. Compared to other geographical areas however, the sector has a relatively significant presence in the region. In 2007, 8000 people worked in Cheshire & Warrington's agriculture sector. Numbers have continued to fall, with the latest Defra data showing just over 7,000 employed in agriculture in 2010. These statistics however, seriously underplay the role and

[5] Cheshire West and Chester City (2011) Rural Regeneration Strategy and Action Plan
[6] Cheshire and Warrington LEP (2013) The Rural Economy within Cheshire and Warrington – The Evidence Report
[7] ibid
[8] Marketing Cheshire Destination Management Plan 2013-2018
[9] Cheshire West and Chester Council (2011) Rural Regeneration Strategy and Action Plan

importance of farming to Cheshire and Warrington. Around three-quarters of land is in agricultural use, dominated by dairying and the production of grass for grazing, silage and hay, which underpins the green, pastoral landscape that characterises the region. Cheshire is largely a dairy farming county with the Agricultural Census 2009 finding 884 holdings with dairy cattle, and cattle businesses in general. Arable and mixed farm enterprises are found largely in the north of the county and parts of the Sandstone Ridge, growing cereals, potatoes, field vegetables and other horticultural crops. Equestrian businesses are found throughout the county and make a relatively significant contribution to overall land management including hay and haylage crops, grazing livery and training or leisure use.

Changes to agricultural policy, cheap food imports, climate change, increasing costs of land management, and security of environmental resources including materials, energy and water, will continue to challenge West Cheshire and Warrington's agricultural sector. As a result, in the last few years there has already been a move away from smaller dairy farm producers, leading to a reduction in overall producer numbers, with those remaining being much bigger. As a result of these economic pressures it will be necessary to consider the potential damage to animal welfare and the increased harm to the environment, particularly the quality of watercourses within the boroughs. In addition, apart from these local challenges, there is also a global challenge of a growing population and the likely doubling in food requirements without any increase in available land.

The Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE) Local Liaison Group for Cheshire seeks to promote work by farmers "to encourage wildlife, to benefit soil and water resources and support farmland birds…whilst ensuring efficient and profitable food production."[10] Its "Priorities for Cheshire" document sets out three key thematic priorities for the county. These include improved management of several priority habitats, such as hedgerows, grassland, ponds and deciduous woodland and an increased focus on several priority species, such as wading and farmland birds, hazel dormice, water voles, Great Crested newts and pollinators, also drawing attention to the need for invasive non-native species (INNS) control. The final thematic priority for the county is identified as river and groundwater catchments, for which the group recommend workshops, skills training and Best Practice promotion in the use and/or management of fertilisers, pesticides and soil. The priorities of the CFE for Cheshire form a key area of potential projects and support for the LDS and LEADER programme, although it is acknowledged that training is ineligible under LEADER.

2.2.5 Atlantic Gateway - The Atlantic Gateway project offers major opportunities for Cheshire. The project is described as a, "world trade, logistics, business and innovation corridor stretching from Deeside and Merseyside through the northern part of Cheshire and Warrington to Manchester"[11] The project, which involves £14 billion of investment, aims to deliver major projects (i.e. large infrastructure) in an effort to rebalance the British economy away from London.[12] For example, Cheshire and Warrington's RER highlights the Atlantic Gateway Board's aim for the delivery of green infrastructure through the development of a cross-LEP strategy. The programme sees the potential for 140,000 more jobs linked to Atlantic Gateway priority projects to be delivered by 2030.[13] Opportunities exist for rural businesses to align more closely with their urban counterparts to capitalise on this investment.

Areas of Alignment Outside of the LEADER Priorities
The following areas have been addressed by the Cheshire & Warrington LEP ESIF strategy using other funding sources:
- **Housing**

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[10] http://www.cfeonline.org.uk/about-us/
[11] Cheshire and Warrington Enterprise Partnership (2014) Cheshire and Warrington Matters - Strategic Economic Plan for Cheshire and Warrington
[12] www.atlanticgateway.co.uk
[13] ibid

- **Superfast Broadband**
- **Skills**

2.2.6   The LEADER Approach - In its recent review of CAP reform, DEFRA asked two questions concerning the LEADER approach. It found that the vast majority of respondents accepted the principle of LEADER, with only a minority reporting the opinion that it is a poor use of public money. Whilst critics reported the programme was expensive and bureaucratic, supporters argued for it to comprise social inclusion and quality of life, in addition to jobs and growth. The local implications of the opportunities to make LEADER work effectively have had a key role in shaping our thoughts. In addition to this strategic review and alignment we have been acutely conscious in shaping our approach of the need to align the work of the LEADER programme with the Farming and Forestry Productivity Scheme and the key themes arising from the Growth Hub work undertaken by the LEPs.

3.   West Cheshire and Warrington: Delivering Against Local Priorities

3.1   West Cheshire and Warrington LAG: SWOT Methodology - We have compiled this analysis using a wide range of data from all of the consultation meetings, focus groups and documentary sources, informed also by our data assessment in section 2 of the proposal.

3.2   Involvement of the community and consultation activity undertaken - A number of focus group and wider stakeholder consultations have been held to develop the LDS, these have been held at a number of locations to ensure full coverage across the LEADER geography. The development of this LDS has been organised jointly with the Cheshire East LDS and representatives for both areas were included in these Focus Groups:

Session	Date	Location
Arts and Tourism Focus Group	18th June	Arley Hall, Northwich
Rural Services Focus Group	18th June	Castle Park, Frodsham
SME Focus Group	19th June	Success Factory, Burwardsley
Farming and Forestry Focus Group	19th June	Reaseheath College, Nantwich
Cross Sector Focus Group	30th June	Middlewich Community Church, Middlewich
Open meeting	8th July	Town Hall, Macclesfield
Inter LAG playback & triangulation	9th July	Middlewich Community Church
Open Meeting	9th July	Castle Park, Frodsham
Follow up and triangulation	29th July	Nantwich Show

These facilitated sessions enabled cross-fertilisation of ideas and identification of broader thematic issues to drive the identification of value adding opportunities.

3.2.1 E-Survey - A wider process of engagement has been held with stakeholder and interested parties has been undertaken through the distribution of an e-survey, this has been distributed very widely through the contacts of the Regeneration Board and its wider constituents including to minority and difficult to reach groups. The LEADER e-survey generated 62 responses which were either specific to West Cheshire and Warrington or from pan-Cheshire organisations. As a means of segmenting the responses participants were asked which of the themes adopted by the Rural Regeneration Board they identified with. The overall cohort represents a good fit with the indicative national allocation of funding by Defra to the six LEADER themes, with the majority of responses from organisations/individuals engaged in farming, small business support and tourism.

3.2.1.1 Challenges - Respondents were asked to rate the biggest challenges facing the area. They were offered 4 choices: "Not a Challenge", "Slight Challenge", "Challenge" and "Major Challenge". To gauge trends responses were converted into a numerical value, with 1

representing "Not a Challenge" and 4 a "Major Challenge". In descending order respondents rated each area as follows:

Area	Score
Provision of public services is a problem	3.15
Businesses are still suffering from the economic downturn	3
Businesses are restricted by the infrastructure in the area	2.98
Town centre businesses are struggling	2.88
It's hard for businesses to find skilled employees	2.87
Businesses need better access to finance	2.66
Businesses compete more on price than quality	2.57
It's hard for businesses to find the right kind of advice	2.55

3.2.1.2 Opportunities - The same approach was taken to seeking views on opportunities for LEADER to improve things. In descending order respondents rated each option as follows:

Area	Score
Improved broadband (it has subsequently been announced that LEADER cannot support broadband)	3.09
Innovation in Farming and Forestry	2.98
Structured support and advice for businesses	2.91
Better promotion of the area	2.88
Adaptation of public buildings for enhanced community use	2.83
Improving access to markets for businesses	2.81
More productive farming and forestry	2.8
Local food productions	2.78

3.2.1.3 Broader Comments - Respondents were given the opportunity to provide free text views of the key issues in the context of LEADER – with its 6 priorities condensed into four themes as follows:

Farming and Forestry - Key themes involved: the enhancement of networking, farm succession activities: *"Need to invest in the "next generation" by making farming "cool" especially fruit and veg growing."* technical innovation: *"Help increase productivity, help deliver more applied research to benefit those on the ground, help access to finance, help develop new markets."* Support for business planning and diversification activities more generally.
Small Business Support - Key themes involved: indications of the importance of access to funding support; advice and networking: "*Focused professional advice and connection with others in similar business to share experience*" and a number of one off points including a very interesting observation around the crossover of this theme with the rural services agenda: "*Think about how community assets could be used more imaginatively to provide small business hubs, pop up start up and new business advice clinics*" a desire for enhanced broadband (even though LEADER cannot fund that theme) was highly prevalent in the responses to this area.
Tourism, Arts and Culture - Key themes involved: more joined up marketing campaigns and approaches, more focused interpretation of key tourism assets, investing in individual tourism businesses: "*Add a extra income streams and employment opportunities by helping to fund tourism accommodation and facilities*" and making the most of the natural assets in the area from a tourism perspective: "*Promote and protect natural environment and biodiversity, that would create jobs and make Cheshire more desirable."* Access to improved broadband was again raised as a theme in this area.
Rural Services - The challenges facing young people in the area was raised as an important theme in terms of rural services: "*Give opportunity to young people struggling for jobs a chance to prove themselves*" improving access to transport and addressing the impact of reduced public services were also referenced by a number of respondents: "*Making sure any reduction of services from Principle Authorities can be taken up by Local Councils with the*

necessary funding made available" Finally broadband was cited very heavily as the greatest area of potential investment and development to improve the rural services agenda.

3.3   West Cheshire and Warrington LAG: SWOT Analysis of Locality - The following SWOT analysis, based on the national LEADER priorities, is drawn from the, consultations, workshops and questionnaires and has led to the identification of a series of local priorities that focus on offering value added to the existing infrastructure and activity of the LAG area. Indeed, the development of value added to the existing economy of the area was stressed in a number of the focus groups conducted in the preparation of this strategy. These broadly reflect the National Development Framework priority areas but interestingly for us, many of the indicative proposals span a number of priorities simultaneously - serving culture and heritage, tourism and micro businesses simultaneously, for example.

We have grouped our analysis by the six categories of the LEADER National Development Framework as a means of allowing resultant projects arising from this analysis, to be targeted at areas of priority investment. Against each priority a programme of activity is also set out. We have held a number of detailed discussions with individuals and organisations about project themes and ideas and whilst we have not encouraged them to assume their concepts will be funded we have found the provision of information from them particularly useful in scoping out the local priorities below.

3.3.1   Increasing Farm Productivity in West Cheshire and Warrington

Strengths
- The area has some economically active estates which already provide workspace and other activities for example the Bolesworth estate.
- There is a successful agricultural, woodland and equine base to the area, with a mixed pattern of agriculture – the equine factor this in part accounts for the significant amount of land not given over to traditional agriculture uses (categorized by the agricultural census as "other") which comprises over 2000 hectares.
- Productive farming, landscape value, forestry and biodiversity are well integrated and there is a good understanding of 'multifunctional' management – which involves recognition of environmental as well as production imperatives around land use. Reaseheath College in Cheshire East has been heavily involved in this context in the development of low carbon approaches to increasing agricultural production.
- The "Cheshire" brand has considerable potential in terms of linking farming to tourism.
- Reaseheath College is a national centre of excellence in the land based sectors.
- The area has a strong dairy sector with almost 7% of all dairy activity in England and Wales

Weaknesses
- There is limited scope for new entrants and limited scope for this to change. There will be more restrictive entry opportunities due to the pending sale of county farms in Cheshire West.
- Land prices are particularly high in Cheshire.
- There are agricultural labour shortages chiefly because of high property prices.
- Bovine VD and TB are challenges.
- There is a disconnect between residents/consumers and farming as a sector.
- There are relatively small numbers of employees in food processing as a key activity upstream from agriculture.

Opportunities
- There are good opportunities to enhance local food branding and on farm processing as demonstrated in the previous programme at Tiresford Dairy Farm through diversification into higher GVA yoghurt production

- There is potential for the diversification of crops and the introduction of novel and innovative agricultural practices, to boost GVA.
- Key support for the development of low carbon approaches to increasing agricultural productivity supported by LEP and Reaseheath College.
- Scope for more rural live-work schemes building on the current strong supply of rural office space in the area.
- Scope to enhance networking amongst farmers and support those seeking to develop a career in the area through farm placements and work experience
- With a high proportion of under managed woodland access to forest land could be improved to support farm diversification and productivity
- Increased production and usage of renewable energy is a real opportunity for the area

Threats
- There is a perceived disconnect between LAG area residents and those who farm the land. Many residents no longer understand how agriculture works and it is commonly therefore seen as aesthetic rather than productive.
- There are persistent pressures to develop housing on agricultural land.
- In the longer term, climate change will impact negatively on agriculture.
- A number of key farming skills are in short supply in the area
- The sustainability of farming is threatened as succession planning is poor compounding the difficulties for new entrants to get into the sector
- General trends leading to increased scale and reduced employment in farming
- Unmanaged expansion of large scale farms could be detrimental to the environment
- New agricultural approaches putting the traditional landscape "offer" of the area at risk
- Flood risk and its implications

Local Priority objective - *S*upport improvements to farming and forestry business resilience and competitiveness: on farm energy generation and improved efficiency; resource conservation and reuse; improved efficiency of processes leading to reduced overheads, increased soil conservation and improved productivity; business mitigation and adaptation to climate change.

Rationale- Emerging from the significant pressures detailed in the 'Agriculture' section is the rationale for LEADER funding to support 'Increasing Farm Productivity'. The LAG recognises the importance of increasing farm productivity but also acknowledges that significant funds are required to address these issues. The LEP ESIF strategy details Primary Dairy Production and Agri-Tech/Food as rural priorities, principally using ERDF and the Growth Fund to support technological development and innovation. Networking and cooperation support from LEADER will assist these technological advances that will maximise the opportunity to increase farm productivity. £155,800 (10%) of budget has been allocated to this priority.

Examples of Activity
- Projects to develop low carbon approaches to improved agricultural efficiency – this is a particular theme being developed by Reaseheath College
- Projects to enhance local supply chains and build integration around food production and processing – working with key initiatives such as Foodlink Cheshire
- Projects to address the challenges around farm succession planning
- Projects to link farming to tourism, particularly through food production and equine activities. – two exciting opportunities linked enhancing cooperation in the equine sector have been worked up in the context of this theme by the Cheshire Equine clinic
- Projects to develop adaptation to climate change

3.3.2 Micro and Small Enterprises and Farm Diversification in West Cheshire and Warrington

Strengths
- The area has a high proportion of homeworkers and a good supply of rural workspace.
- There is a highly capitalized business base in the area and a well-developed entrepreneurial spirit. This is reflected in higher levels of wages, high job density, a large stock of businesses and higher levels of qualifications than the national average
- The area has an attractive work environment with access to large enabling 10 million people access to the area within an hours drive.

Weaknesses
- There is relatively limited broadband and mobile phone coverage.
- It is hard to source employees for lower paid jobs, where travel costs suppress supply.
- There is a net out-flow of young people due to high property prices and consequently a lack of employment opportunities
- Participants in the micro-enterprise focus group highlighted a lack of coordinated business support

Opportunities
- Increased homeworking would reduce commuting. This would benefit from hot-desking facilities (for example through the adaptation of community buildings) and fast broadband, there is already a strong stock of homeworkers to build on.
- There is scope to build local business networks to encourage inter-trading and collegiate growth of businesses.
- There is scope to do more around local food, farm shops and on-line marketing of premium produce, building on projects such as the exciting Cheshire Fresh initiative.
- There is great scope for the market towns to work closely together in a number of respects, to develop a consortium identity.
- Craft and artisan networks offer scope for the development of niche brands linking tourism and key areas of business.
- There is low unemployment but there is quite a lot of low paid work (particularly in tourism) and under employment.
- The area is proximate to very large markets for local goods and visitors in Merseyside and Manchester, these provide a significant outlet for the areas local food, tourism and arts and culture offers.
- Participants at the micro-business focus group indicated that there is already a strong supply of rural workspace and niche and value adding approaches could supplement the nature of the current offer.
- There is scope to develop community engagement with key aspects of the natural environment for example through the establishment of community energy companies.
- Experience from the previous LEADER programme suggests there is scope to promote exporting amongst rural businesses.
- There is scope to improve transport to support access to rural employment.
- There is the opportunity for SME's to tie into work being undertaken at Thornton Science park to support 'young and developing enterprises'[14].

Threats
- It is important that the LEADER projects are well integrated with what is already taking place in the LAG area.
- The LAG area is perceived to be a net exporter of highly qualified young people.
- The area has relatively high prices for business premises.

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[14] http://www.chester.ac.uk/thornton-science-park

- There is a small labour pool and small local markets exacerbated by out-migration of young people.
- There is limited access to specialist skills and support to enable businesses to grow.
- Perceptions that planning makes it very difficult to develop a business the area.
- No straightforward solution to the provision of broadband to more isolated businesses.
- A significant stock of small family businesses with vulnerabilities over succession.
- The growth of fewer, larger farms could increase demand for the support from smaller operators and restrict opportunities for diversification
- The relative economic fragility of small family businesses especially in diary farming

Local Priorities - *S*upport rural business development and the establishment of new rural enterprises to secure strong rural economic growth, particularly those developing innovative approaches or techniques and those critically dependent upon the local environment for success. There is real scope to work with Reaseheath College as a local centre of excellence in this context.

Rationale - In West Cheshire and Warrington there is an exceptional and diverse SME base. In Cheshire West and Chester, 42% of all self-employed live in the rural area, and in Warrington 24% of all self-employed live in the rural area. Statistics released by Defra in August 2013 show that almost a quarter of farmers nationally had carried out diversified activity in 2010, with about half of those involved in agriculture contracting/haulage and a third running some type of tourism activity. The proportion was lower in the NW (at 19%) than in all other regions. There is a high incidence of independent and family business in the area with a strong entrepreneurial spirit. The development of innovations in homeworking with appropriate networks to buttress this, will both 'spread' economic activity and provide more resilient communities. There is scope for innovation in the development of food and heritage products under the Cheshire brand. The area has almost 10,000 home workers and a dynamic stock of over 11,000 businesses with wages and qualifications above the national average.

Due to the continuing economic and environmental pressures it is therefore imperative that support for micro and SMEs farm diversification is made available to ensure sustainable jobs and growth can be realised in the future. £623,200 (40%) of budget has been allocated to this priority.

Examples of programmes / activities
- There is scope for farmers to exploit opportunities to add value to their businesses through, for example, food processing, marketing, rural tourism and renewable energy ventures.
- Potential to strengthen support for increasing exports by better co-ordination and proliferation of best practice, knowledge transfer and identification of foreign markets.
- Projects that demonstrate the potential for green infrastructure to support economic growth.
- Projects that encourage local production and local trade – in the context of agriculture and horticulture for example the Cheshire Fresh initiative provides real opportunities in this context, through the development of a commercial food hub for the area.
- Projects to develop real and virtual hubs for small and micro businesses will be important. There are already examples of excellence in the area such as the Bolesworth estate and the Success Factory at Burwardsley.
- The development of new food branding under the Cheshire niche – there are a number of initiatives already underway in this context which can be built on such as CPRE's Cheshire Local Food Website

3.3.3 Rural tourism in West Cheshire and Warrington

Strengths
- Tourism is already well established. Based on environment, built form, arts and culture, it is a significant employer, the location quotients for libraries and museums, visitor accommodation and trade shows and conventions are all considerably above the national average.
- There is a well-developed 'events' portfolio in the LAG area (field sports, horses, equine, game fishing, wildlife tourism)
- 'Cheshire" is a quality if somewhat "gentle" tourist brand and has strong associations with stately homes, gardens, weddings and waterways.
- The LAG area is less seasonal than many tourist destinations.

Weaknesses
- There is a lack of high grade hotels in the area with conference facilities.
- A number of key tourism assets are little known and little visited.
- In certain places and at certain times there can be visitor congestion.

Opportunities
- Waterways, equine and cycle paths all offer potential to strengthen the current offer.
- The wedding venue market is a powerful attractor and is growing in significance.
- There are opportunities around high quality camping "glamping" and other key innovations.
- There is scope to develop "spill over" tourism from enhanced networking around the Manchester/Liverpool City Break offer and in the context of Chester and North Wales.
- There is perceived to be a large pool of volunteer labour in the LAG area, particularly offering potential for use in the heritage tourism sector.
- Greater networking amongst smaller businesses could be developed at a very local level in the LAG area to cement the coherence of tourism.
- There is potential to support smaller and under utilised attractions to help build market share and diversify the tourist offer
- The strong estates structure in the LAG area could be exploited more fully for tourism.
- Support for the creation or improvement of conference facilities to improve the business tourism offer could be further developed.
- Capture rural benefits from the increased filming opportunities occurring within the burgeoning Manchester media cluster and surrounding districts.

Threats
- There can be visitor over-use at key sites. A balance must be struck between conservation and development.
- Cheshire is not classed as a primary location and loses out on structural funding for tourism development as a consequence.
- The area has limited visitor accommodation for wet weather challenges.
- Attractions and visitor infrastructure more generally could work better together, for example there is insufficient visitor information linking tourism with accommodation.

Local Priorities - Support implementation of the local Destination Management Plans, improving delivery of services and development of new sustainable tourism business activity, and in doing so, securing improvements to the environment.

Rationale - There is a strong tourism sector in the LAG area capable of significant growth based on developing innovative products and services around the Cheshire brand, which integrates the built environment into the 'natural' landscape. There is a well-developed 'events' portfolio in the LAG area capable of further exploitation and potential for the development of new cycleways and walking routes, which will contribute to sustainable

tourism. There is considerable potential in terms of waterways and equine agendas in the area. £311,600 (20%) of budget has been allocated to this priority.

Examples of programmes / activities

- A system of information points for visitors. Interpretation is a key to tourist success. The canals and bridleways which form an iconic part of the offer of the area provide significant scope for this project theme,
- Development of a 'one stop shop' for straightforward information about staying in the LAG area. – There is considerable scope to address the two initiatives above in the context of Marketing Cheshire
- The development of tourism Apps – there are very powerful examples of the operation of initiatives in this context for example in Settle in North Yorkshire
- A project to develop private and community gardens for subsequent access by the public. This might include small-scale vegetable and fruit growing – such initiatives could build on the current experience of the Grozone initiative led by Groundwork Cheshire in Northwich
- Improvements in the Public Right of Way offer: signposting and the development of 'themed' routes –building on the waterways and equine offer in the area
- Projects which further support the development of key tourism themes including: the weddings market, further development of the tourism potential of rural estates and the development of new areas of activity around "glamping" and other small scale tourism development including small touring caravan sites.
- Visit Cheshire have identified an opportunity around the development of themed family visits to key attractions in Cheshire.

3.3.4   Rural Services in West Cheshire and Warrington

Strengths

- The area has a strong (and educated) social capital base.
- There are active town and parish councils and trusts in the area of innovative service provision. The area has a particularly strong footprint in terms of Neighbourhood Planning. DCLG information indicates that Cheshire West and Cheshire is in the top 5 counties in England in terms of the number of approved and progressing neighbourhood plans.
- The area has strong market towns and smaller service centres
- The area is externally deemed to be a quality place to live and work
- There are low levels of anti-social behaviour

Weaknesses

- Housing supply is limited and expensive. This leads to a local needs shortage and encourages commuters and second homeowners. This is considered to be a core issue.
- Transport systems do not cover the area well although this also represents an opportunity for action.
- There are very unequal opportunities in the LAG area in relation to pay, opportunity, transport and housing.
- Fuel poverty is prevalent in areas which are "off-grid"
- There are significant pockets of rural social isolation, exacerbated by transport issues.

Opportunities

- Transport needs to be more holistically brokered to combine business, domestic and leisure travel 'joined up' transport could link key towns and would provide visitor routing to improve the visitor experience.
- The growth of the community health agenda allows more to be done about health locally, especially in rural areas.

- The social care agenda has potential– it provides opportunities for employment. There must be scope to build on this as a sector, particularly in view of the relatively older demography in the area.
- An increasing understanding of social enterprises offers new opportunities for the formation of new organisations.
- The strong tradition of people engaging in developing local thinking around small communities in terms of neighbourhood planning in Cheshire West demonstrates significant social capital and the opportunity to use LEADER funding to build on it.
- There is an opportunity to support innovative methods of reducing social isolation, including leveraging technology, community cohesion and flexible transport initiatives
- Linkages can be built between green energy, forestry and the reduction of fuel poverty
- The area is well represented in terms of churches and other community buildings

Threats
- There are pockets of rural deprivation which are commonly hidden
- The 'weekender' culture can take the social and cultural heart out of some villages.
- There is a high cost of living in the LAG area.
- There is service market failure in terms of schools, shops and health facilities in a number of key settlements in the area.
- Increasing numbers of the elderly will put demands on the area in terms of the rural premium cost of service provision.
- Fuel poverty and rural isolation both make some rural places very difficult for vulnerable people to live in and can affect the viability of larger community assets.
- Social isolation is a growing threat to resilient communities compounded by unsustainable transport models

Local Priorities - Develop community support actions to strengthen community resilience leading to active and inclusive communities that are able to help provide local services.

Rationale - There is a strong social capital base in the LAG area with active parish and town councils and other 'citizen' groups. There is a particularly strong agenda around Neighbourhood Planning and the engagement of communities in Cheshire West. There is potential to further develop innovations in community transport and health facilities as well as social care, with an eye to an ageing population in the area. The development of social enterprises in the area is strong and existing businesses have a strong sense of social responsibility. Whilst it could be inferred that the relatively robust nature of the population means that there are limited challenges in terms of the rural services agenda, the area does have poorer access to services in terms of GPs, schools and food stores. Further to this the area has particular challenges around transport, fuel poverty and rural isolation.

Community resilience is the only theme in which Cheshire and Warrington falls outside of the most resilient LEP areas, and there is a clear commitment to work with partner agencies to support communities to address those issues that will drive rural areas of West Cheshire and Warrington forward. £218,120 (14%) of budget has been allocated to this priority.

Examples of programmes / activities
- The development of Churches for wider community innovation offers real potential and would enhance community cohesion – there is scope to work with the Chester Diocese and other key groups including Methodist circuits in this connection.
- The enhancement of village halls as community hubs along with the vesting of public assets in communities through asset transfer – there is already a tradition of asset transfer in the area for example in the context of Neston Town Hall and this can be built on

- More spaces with public access in the service centres in the area would be valuable (work space, play space, trees) and provide a low cost approach to the development of the physical infrastructure
- A project based around local needs housing would address a core issue of the area – local rsls such as Muir Housing Group and Plus Dane Group could be engaged
- Projects for young people (and to an extent other local people) will be important – through initiatives such as the Cheshire West Wheels to Work scheme
- Projects that develop the welfare of older people would create employment and reduce social isolation simultaneously.
- Projects to address the challenges arising from the poor local transport issues.
- Projects based on community companies addressing issues such as opportunities around local energy generation.

A number of these initiatives could be taken forward through the creation of village/town companies, operating as social enterprises to address the increasing challenges of providing discretionary public services which underpin the quality of life of key vulnerable sectors of the community – these could build on the successful village agent scheme run in the area by Cheshire Community Action.

3.3.5 Cultural and heritage activity in West Cheshire and Warrington

Strengths
- The area has a series of key identities linked to the Romans, equine, waterways, key landscape features such as the sandstone ridge and its market towns.
- There is already good quality cultural and heritage activity linked to initiatives such as the rural arts touring scheme
- There is a good provision of stately homes and gardens

Weaknesses
- There is a lack of joining up in terms of promotion and support for cultural and heritage activity across the Cheshire and Warrington LEADER area.
- Access to venues can be prohibitive due to transport or entrance fees

Opportunities
- Support for the development of museums is a key theme.
- There is scope for a stronger identity for the LAG area around food, agriculture and landscape assets such as waterways (in terms for example of the internationally famous Cheshire Ring system) and key geological features such as the Cheshire Plain, Sandstone Ridge and Meres and Mosses NIA.
- There are many historical and cultural associations with scope for interpretation; this is a particularly strong area of activity in the area's market towns and larger villages.
- There is scope to build on the work of the rural arts touring scheme

Threats
- There is significant pressure on certain key tourism assets.
- A limited pool of heritage skills to maintain a nationally distinctive built environment.
- Increasingly limited public funding to support arts and culture based activities.

Local Priorities - Support for conservation and enhancement of West Cheshire and Warrington's high nature value sites together with support for events linked to cultural activity.

Rationale - West Cheshire and Warrington landscapes, countryside, heritage and natural assets all underpin its unique offering to people and companies that want to invest in Cheshire and Warrington. Support Local Nature Partnership plans which contribute to economic growth.

There is a strong craft tradition and skills base in the area and an industrial heritage of significant tourist value. Historical places and people have strong stories to tell. £124,640 (8%) of budget has been allocated to this priority.

Examples of programmes / activities
- Craft industries should be developed, to build on local distinctiveness. – there are real opportunities linked to the work of Mersey Forest and the heritage open days campaigns run by Visit Cheshire
- Projects to develop arts and crafts projects (and incubator space) to sell through tourism outlets linked to rural estates and other visitor attractions – there are a significant number of estates, for example, where this is.
- Projects to build local engagement and new small company spin offs linked to the work of the Cheshire rural touring arts scheme.

3.3.6 Increasing Forestry Productivity in West Cheshire and Warrington

Strengths
- 42% of woodland in active management (2,200+ hectares) with mix of small business
- The Mersey Forest is an acknowledged centre of forestry excellence in the area.
- Increasing timber prices and forest land values proximate to large wood markets.

Weaknesses
- Less than 50% of woodlands are in active management
- Limited knowledge of forestry operations in the area and underdeveloped supply chain
- Limited skills capacity and technical knowledge in woodlands and forestry operations

Opportunities
- Significant forestry potential, than 50% of woodland in the area is actively managed.
- There is scope to build on the very strong potential and achievements of the Mersey Forest in terms of the development of tourism and woodland management opportunities around business and job creation.
- Increase in innovative small scale harvesting techniques for lowland broadleaf areas
- There is scope for woodland creation in a number of marginal areas. With significant increases over recent years in the value of wood-fuel there are increasing incentives for farms and estates to generate benefit from their unmanaged woodland and in some cases to plant more woodland
- There is scope for the development of the venison sector in Cheshire West.
- There is scope to develop new employment opportunities around woodland management and to develop small woodfuel businesses – this could also have a very useful impact in providing resources to ameliorate fuel poverty.
- The opportunity to address the diffusion of pollution and flooding amelioration.
- Capitalising on tourism opportunities based on woodland recreation

Threats
- Sustainability of management practices and pest and diseases
- Not joining up approaches to broader land use sectors missing business growth

Local Priorities - *S*upport the return of neglected woodlands into productive management and the stimulation and development of forestry and woodland product markets.

Rationale - There is a significant extent of deciduous and ancient woodland in the LAG area, which offers considerable potential for development as fewer than 50% of the woodland in the area is actively managed. Fuel processing offers significant potential. The Mersey Forest is a key local asset and organisation in this area, which has established a number of key projects which could be built on. £124,640 (8%) of budget has been allocated to this priority.

Examples of programmes / activities

- Development of the venison market in the woodland environment – there are already examples of know how to build on in this context for example in the venison market established at Tatton Park in Cheshire East and in the context of a number of small niche venison processors including the Smokehouse over the border near Wilmslow
- The development of projects that add value to timber – the work of Mersey Forest's timber network provides real scope to build on and is a trailblazer in this context
- The development of projects to improve timber management
- The development of projects for the production of timber as a fuel – the high levels of fuel poverty in the area make this a particularly important initiative.
- The development of projects that link forestry to tourism – there is real scope to build on the powerful offer in this context in relation to Delamere Forest as an exemplar.
- Projects to develop woodland management skills development. – The Mersey Forest has a particularly strong tradition of activity in this area.

4.   Local Action Group Partnership - A strong, knowledgeable and representative LAG is key to delivering the benefits of LEADER funding in priority areas. In order to build an effective LAG it must be a balanced, organic grouping of interested and engaged local stakeholders. The LAG should also strongly reflect the priorities of the LDS with both responding to developments in the LAG geography accordingly.

4.1   Membership – The West Cheshire and Warrington LAG will be comprised of members from the public, private and voluntary/community sector (VCS), core decisions will be made by the LAG executive with outline membership drawn from the Rural Regeneration Board and augmented with a number of other key interested parties who have been identified through the development of this LDS. The CWaC Rural Regeneration Board has a mature and well established track record in terms of rural economic development. The board has agreed to become the shadow LAG for the area with the addition of key partners to ensure full coverage of the LEADER priorities and geographical area. The shadow LAG Executive Board has the following current membership and has deployed its expertise in shaping this proposal:

Area	Who	Organisation	Status	Thematic Area
LEP Representative	Meredydd David	Reaseheath College	Private	Farm Productivity, M&SME Support & farm diversification
Voluntary/3rd Sector **(CHAIR)**	Reverend Canon David Felix	All Saints Vicarage, Daresbury	Public/ Private	Support for cultural and heritage activity, Rural Services
Farming business	Stuart Roberts	SFR Farming	Private	Farm Productivity, MSE Support & farm diversification
Private	Joanne Butterill	NatWest	Private	MSE Support & farm diversification
Forestry	Penny Oliver	Forestry Commission	Public	Forestry
Forestry	Paul Nolan	Mersey Forest	Public	Forestry
Rural Estates	Matthew Morris	Bolesworth Estate	Private	Farm Productivity, M&SME Support & farm diversification Forestry productivity
Heritage/Natural Environment	Andrew Hull	John Moores University	Private	Support for cultural and heritage activity
Tourism	Katrina Michel	Marketing Cheshire	Public	Rural Tourism
M&SMEs	Heather Hayes	Blue Orchid	Private	M&SME Support & farm diversification
Councillors	Eleanor Johnson Louise Gittins	CW&C	Public	Rural Services, Cultural & heritage, Tourism, etc
Education	Annette McDonald	Reaseheath College	Private	Farm Productivity MSE Support & farm diversification
Rural Services	Chris Brown-Bolton	Development Enabling	Private	Provision of Rural Services

		Ltd.		Cultural &Heritage
Regeneration	Lizzie Aldridge	Warrington BC	Public	All areas

Wider recruitment of LAG membership, once the programme is approved will be by open invitation and a wide range of representation and skills will be sought. Applicants should have an interest in local economic development in its social, cultural and environmental context and have a thorough knowledge of (and passion for) the LAG area.

4.2   Structure and decision making process

4.2.1   Management, scope and decision making structure of the West Cheshire and Warrington LAG - Accountable Body experience gained by Cheshire West and Chester Council management of two successful LEADER programmes has influenced the LAG delivery approach. The structure has been designed to attract quality applications to meet the aims of the LAG Strategy as well as ensure full accountability of public funds. The LAG will establish two sub-groups, the Executive Board will be the decision making body and the Standards Sub-committee will exist to adjudicate in case of any disputes arising, monitoring of the Equal Opportunities Policy and other specialist requirements arising.
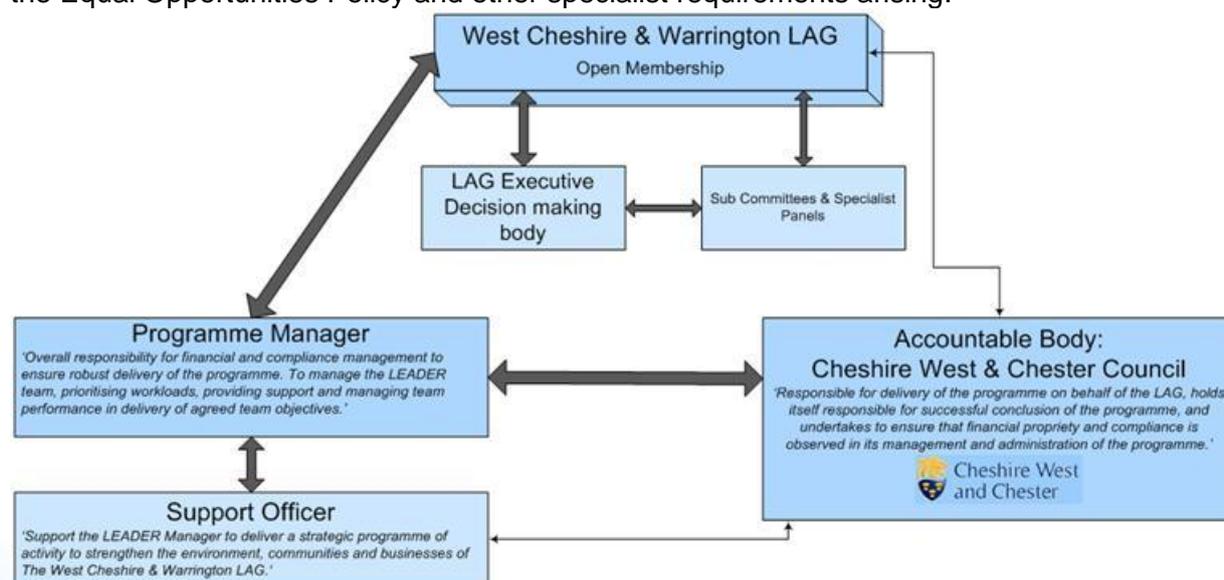

Figure 2 - LEADER Delivery Structure

4.2.2   Local Action Group - The West Cheshire and Warrington LAG will have an open membership but will ensure there is a range of competencies and skills within the Partnership to identify target groups and potential beneficiaries, and to facilitate quality applications through networks developed. The Partnership will be comprised of members from the public, private and civil society organizations and core membership will be drawn from the Cheshire West and Chester Rural Regeneration Board along with other key interested parties who have been identified through the development of this LDS. The Rural Regeneration Board has a well-established track record in terms of rural economic development and is therefore a robust foundation on which to build this partnership. The main LAG offers a forum to the area. It will be a dynamic body and will adapt to local needs. Therefore a continuing integration and inclusion of new sector representatives will take place over time ensuring a gender balance and a fair representation of the specific target groups addressed by the LDS.

Encouragement to apply for membership will be active through forums, networks and meetings as well as through existing Rural Regeneration Board members. The shadow LAG has appointed a Chair who will conduct the meetings of the Local Action Group, as will the Executive Board. The Chair will act as an important point of contact with the Accountable Body and will represent the LAG on the LEP Rural Strategy Board. The LAG will hold an annual review process for the appointment of Chair of the LAG, and Chair of Executive Board,

at the Annual General Meeting. Mindful of the sustainability agenda, it is intended that the LAG will meet twice a year.

4.2.3   Strategic Management Group (the LAG Executive Board) - The LAG Executive Board is the responsible partnership for the Local Development Strategy and has responsibility for the overall management and strategic direction of the Local Development Strategy (LDS). It will monitor the progress of the programme locally. The value of the LAG Executive Board comes from its role in bringing local people together to stimulate ideas and co-produce projects, taking the initiative and demonstrating leadership and clear transparent governance in the implementation of the programme. The Executive Board, made up of a subset of the LAG membership, meets the regulations as a decision making body. The LAG and Executive Board will be bound by the operational requirements set out in the Partnership Agreement which will be drawn up by the Accountable Body upon approval of application. The Partnership Agreement will detail written procedures and will include how the LAG and Executive Board will deal with the risk of conflicts of interest arising.

The main functions of the LAG Executive Board (on behalf of the wider LAG) are: to ensure the LDS is implemented; ensure that the LDS achieves its outcomes; liaising with partners; developing and overseeing strategic projects and ensuring financial probity. to complete a thorough assessment and appraisal of applications, approve applications, provide feedback to successful and unsuccessful applicants, and monitor project progress against expenditure and outcomes and mentor projects to ensure successful delivery. It will also help monitor overall programme progress and support the development and implementation of the evaluation and monitoring framework within the programme. The LAG Executive Board members will be able to demonstrate the following competences:

- To contribute to strategic development and decision-making.
- To hold management to account for its performance in meeting agreed goals of the LDS and objectives through purposeful challenge and scrutiny; and to monitor the reporting of performance.
- To ensure that financial information is accurate and that financial controls and systems of risk management are robust and defensible.
- To live up to the highest ethical standards and comply fully with the National Operations Manual.
- To be proactive by assisting in developing, monitoring and mentoring projects

4.3   Local Action Group staff, numbers and job descriptions - The LEADER Programme Team is the salaried staff (paid for within LAG administrative funds) responsible for all aspects of the implementation of the LEADER programme and will comprise a Programme Manager and Administrator.
4.3.1   Summary of LAG paid posts and responsibilities - The Programme will comprise two staff, with job descriptions as follows:
4.3.1.1 Programme Manager – who will:
- have overall responsibility for financial and compliance management to ensure robust delivery;
- develop and strengthen relationships with national, LEP and EU actors, including liaising with the RDPE Network;
- create a strong partnership of private, public and voluntary sector players by creating communication channels and opportunities for networking;
- establish an effective communication strategy with rural interests, local communities creating knowledge exchange opportunities and working with local and national press, handle publicity and set up awards ceremony, websites and workshops and exhibitions;
- devise, implement and oversee an effective, inclusive and transparent programme responsive to the needs of the area and meeting the LDS aims and objectives;

- devise implement and oversee a robust programme of monitoring and evaluation that meets Defra and EU Audit requirement;
- engage with programme funding applicants;
- influence rural development through policy meetings, conferences, workshops, and links with wider programmes and funds.
- ensure compliance with state aid rules

4.3.1.2 Support Officer – who will:
- be responsible for providing comprehensive support to programme beneficiaries.
- assist in development and maintenance of key information and quality systems;
- provide advice and guidance to projects;
- administer and record project claims, monitoring physical and financial records and project files;
- collate statistical information;
- liaise with Internal Audit to ensure that claims are fully eligible and compliant;
- process all financial information relating to grant funding programme, as well as collating information for board meetings and presentations;
- ensure claims and reports are completed within the timetable;
- implement and manage a programme of monitoring and evaluation;
- engage with applicants to process claims and ensure effective collation of evidence and recording of important financial and impact information at each stage of the programme

4.4   Equal Opportunities Statement - The Equality and Diversity statement is Cheshire West and Chester Council's formal commitment to delivering fairness and removing the barriers that limit what people can do and can be. It is a promise that the Council will work hard to respond to local challenges, to tackle prejudice and improve the life chances and opportunities of those who face discrimination and disadvantage. The Council, recognising its responsibilities as an employer and provider of major services within the community, will ensure that its services, including the ones carried out in partnership with or on behalf of the Council, are available equally to all, regardless of race, colour, nationality, ethnic origins, gender, gender reassignment, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion or belief, social or economic status or political beliefs, making sure that no one is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which cannot be justified. As the driving force behind the design, implementation and refinement of the strategy the LAG shall represent target groups across the current direction and thematic areas of the LDS consisting of members of public, private and civil society. No single interest group shall have more than 49% of voting rights within the LAG.

4.5   Training requirements - The proposal is committed to ensuring that its workforce is representative of the community it serves and that it not only discharges its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 but that it is also regarded as a best practice employer. The Equality and Diversity (E & D) Policy outlines that job applicants are made aware of the expectations and priorities of our approach to Equality and Diversity prior to interview. This reinforces the commitment to equality and diversity at all levels reflected across the policies of the organisation.

Staff employed by the Accountable Body will be expected to demonstrate appropriate competencies, skills and resources to generate and manage development processes on a local level as well as have administrative management of local projects and experience in financial management. Animation and project facilitation will require staff with specific communication and organisational skills. An annual appraisal of staff will review skills against relevant criteria and appropriate training identified. Targets of achievement will be agreed and monitored during appraisal process.

A skills audit and training needs assessment of LAG members will be carried out if the programme is successful. This will be aimed at ensuring there is the correct spread of skills and experience within the LAG to guide the programme to deliver growth and jobs. Through developing a relevant skill set, the long-term sustainability of the LAG and its work will maximise potential opportunities.

4.6   Targets, results and outputs - Whilst West Cheshire and Warrington has not previously benefitted from LEADER at the current proposed landscape scale, analysis of the outputs achieved in other LEADER areas (we have been supported by Rose Regeneration who undertook the National Review of LEADER 2007-13 for Defra) has enabled us to identify the following output areas and targets based on the scale of our programme. We have followed a process, which involves considering the key literature, consultation and economic research outlined above to derive these targets. The baseline, which we have set for the development of these targets, will also be used to inform the development of our approach to the evaluation of the programme based on the indicators within the key measure fiches set out in the Common Monitoring and Evaluation System.

Outputs	Target
Projects supported	41
Jobs created	67
Jobs safeguarded	8

Further breakdowns of these figures against priority areas can be seen in annexe 2.

4.7   Mobilisation / Action Plan - As the current West Cheshire and Warrington area has not benefited previously from LEADER we are conscious of the need to have a mobilisation plan to enable us to hit the ground running once funding is approved. We have set out a high level schedule of the approach we currently have in train and which we will follow once we have agreement to proceed.

Activity	Approach	Timescales
Develop a portfolio of potential projects to achieve good spend in year one of the programme	We have been working with the key infrastructure organisations on the Shadow LAG to prime their networks for the development of projects. We have also received a good number of unsolicited project ideas which provides a good basis on which to encourage formal applications for projects once LEADER begins. Programme launch.	First LAG meeting December 2014 – First project round January 2015, first projects approved February 2015
Establish staffing arrangements to underpin the implementation of the programme	We have already agreed the requisite operational arrangements to ensure we cover the accountable body requirements of the programme. We have developed job descriptions for the programme roles required to make LEADER work and are primed to advertise to fill these as soon as funding is agreed. Any shortfall in recruiting staff will be underpinned by the three local authorities engaged in the development of these proposals	LEADER roles advertised November 2014 – Interviews and Job offers December 2014, key staff in place January/February 2015 (if required C West staff (Rural Regen Board Secretariat) will progress things in the interim.
Put robust governance arrangements in place for the oversight and	We have a Shadow LAG in place, it has met three times in the development of the LDS. We have a clear plan to establish a full LAG through recruitment and development activities in November and December 2014.	Formal recruitment and development of LAG November 2014. LAG in place and inaugural meeting December 2014.

management of the programme	The proposed structural and constitutional issues linked to the operation of the LAG are set out in the LDS	
Establish effective and compliant project management, bidding, approval, monitoring and evaluation systems	We have worked very closely with Rose Regeneration in the development of this LDS. We have drawn on their expertise from the national review of LEADER alongside the new approaches set out in the National Delivery Framework to develop our approaches to these issues. We have set them out in some detail in the LDS. We have significant experience of running other relevant rural grant schemes and a well-honed capacity to work in this context. We have also established strong networking links with other LEADER areas as a means of sharing experience and expertise including for example Mersey LEADER.	LEADER operating manual issues November 2014. Key arrangements translated into local LAG delivery manual, enshrining principles set out in LDS and refined to take account of national Manual by December 2014 to be approved by inaugural LAG meeting.

4.8   Sustainability appraisal - The *sustainability appraisal* comprises an assessment of the social, economic, environmental and cultural effects of individual projects, and summatively, the strategy as a whole, from the outset of the preparation process to allow decisions to be made that accord with sustainable development. From many definitions, the practical manifestation of sustainable development will be taken as being development that does not impair (and may enhance) social, economic, environmental and cultural capitals such that they remain available for future use. In practice this invariably means any project proposals developed through the LEADER programme should demonstrate a thoughtfulness about how these four capitals interrelate and what the consequences of the use of one has on the others. This suggests a holistic approach to project development where the relationships *between* these capitals are considered.

The seven LEADER principles (area-based local development, bottom-up implementation, local partnerships and action groups, integrated multi-sectoral actions, innovation, co-operation and networking) sum to a sustainable development approach founded in neo-endogenous development and these all have been used as benchmarks in this application. In terms of projects and activities, many are *small scale and local* (indeed this was a generic theme in all of the focus groups) embracing such things as community gardens, individual workspaces and community agriculture – increasingly recognised as positively developing all four capitals simultaneously.

Local renewable energy proposals (in relation to timber, for example) and those specifically disposed towards the young and the old indicate, respectively, an awareness of energy consumption and the more vulnerable in society as part of the sustainable development agenda. Understanding community dynamics in a number of projects, too, will allow more sustainable approaches to be developed. Other proposals seek to *integrate* a number of sectors and capitals, particularly in relation to tourism, combining the 'natural' environment, heritage and culture and social 'living spaces' with economies based around the West Cheshire and Warrington locality. There is also a strong orientation towards the use of IT for learning, delivery and infrastructure, which is environmentally relatively benign. The importance of the relationship *between* capitals in the application is manifest in both the SWOT analysis and the programme of activity, both of which portray a strong orientation towards networking, co-operation partnership development and integration, at the local level.

4.9   Proposed co-operation activity
The joint relationship between this area and Cheshire East in terms of Accountable Body arrangements provides a very powerful opportunity to mirror the achievements of two

Cumbrian LEADER areas under the previous programme in jointly sponsoring a number of county-wide projects. Previous good relations through LEADER funding to support the Meres and Mosses NIA can also be enhanced to deliver benefits across a wider geographic footprint. More broadly within England there are opportunities to work on tourism and food based themes with the Mersey and North Shropshire LEADER programmes. There are excellent opportunities on a trans-national basis to consider joint work in terms of tourism and arts and culture with North Wales. More broadly across Europe regions with dairy farming, estate based land activities and high proportions of home workers are all natural partners for knowledge transfer and cooperation. A key early task of the LAG will be to identify opportunities for cooperation and register these early with Defra to maximise the potential for the area.

5. Management and Administration

5.1   Accountable Body - Cheshire West and Chester Council (CW&C) will fulfil the role of the Accountable Body for the Cheshire East and West Cheshire and Warrington LAGs. CW&C is fully competent in and regulated by national statute in terms of the financial and legal competence to perform this role as a statutory public body. It has developed a full understanding of the regulatory control requirements for LEADER project development and implementation through experience and successful delivery of both the LEADER Plus programme 2002-2007 and Northern Marches Leader programme 2008-2013. Previous programmes have been successfully audited by both internal and external auditors throughout the life of the programme and upon completion. CW&C has also been responsible for the management of other programmes and projects funded by EU including ERDF, ESF and Regional Growth Fund Programmes. The Accountable Body will carry out responsibilities in accordance with the National Operational Manual, when released, and these roles and responsibilities will be set out in the Partnership Agreement.

5.2   Project development and assessment procedures

5.2.1   Project Development - Clear guidance and criteria on the scope of the funding will be developed by the LAG in line with the objectives of the LDS and disseminated to the general public and target groups through leaflets, relevant networks (including digitally) and press. These criteria will cover the regulations of the funding, and any requirements specific to the West Cheshire and Warrington Programme, for example, in relation to sustainability. The timetable for application rounds will be decided by the LAG and applicants invited accordingly to submit expression of interest. Technical support will be available from Programme Manager and Support Officer. Project Development Workshops will be offered to potential applicants

5.2.2   Project assessment procedures - All project selection procedures will be non-discriminatory, open and transparent throughout an appraisal and approval phase.

5.2.3   Project Appraisal - An outline assessment procedure is displayed in the chart below. Full responsibilities for each entity displayed will be written within Partnership Agreement. As a core principle, the separation of duties is ensured throughout the process, with independent scoring and appraisal being fed into the Executive Board. Declarations of interest are required at the beginning of each Executive Board meeting and are recorded with the notes of the meeting and in a separate book available for inspection.

5.2.4   Project Approval - The Executive Board has the responsibility of approving projects on behalf of the LAG with the role set out in full in the Partnership Agreement. Reports of decisions are sent to the LAG during a 6 monthly update of commitment, spend and progress against LDS objectives. Declarations of Interest will be recorded as above
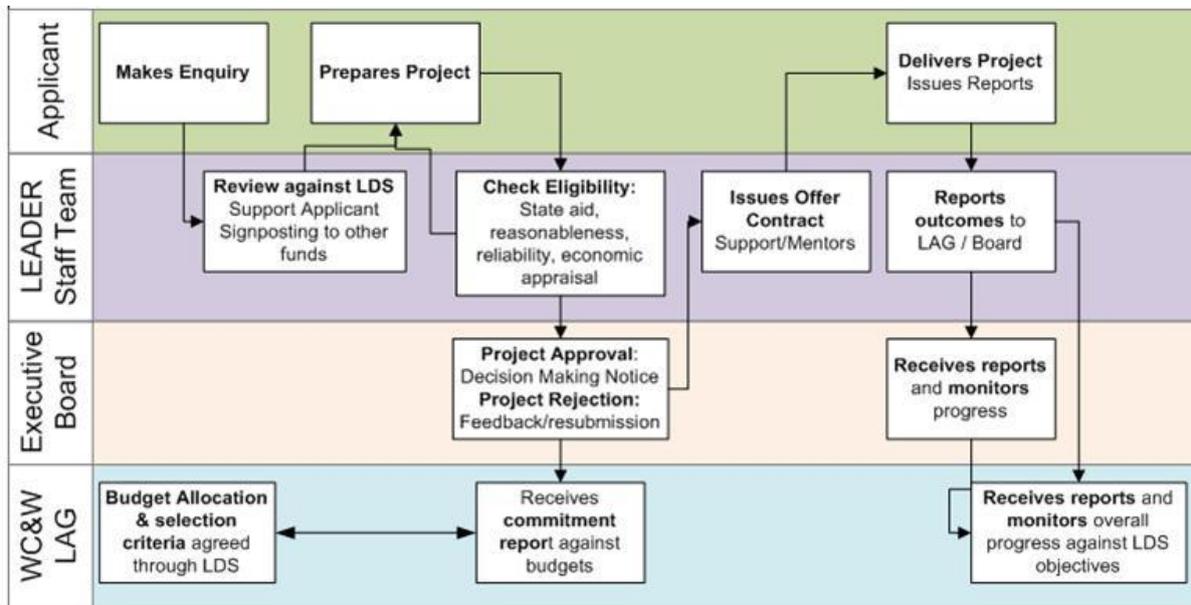
Figure 3 - Outline Project Development and Assessment Process

5.2.5   Project Contracting - The Accountable Body will contract with organisations on behalf of the LAG. The Programme Manager together with the Supporting Officer will raise and issue Offer Contracts to successful applicants.

5.3   Claims and Payments - The procedure will be finalised once guidance in the National Operational Manual has been published and made available in order to meet requirements of the funding programme. However the approach in outline will consist of the following:
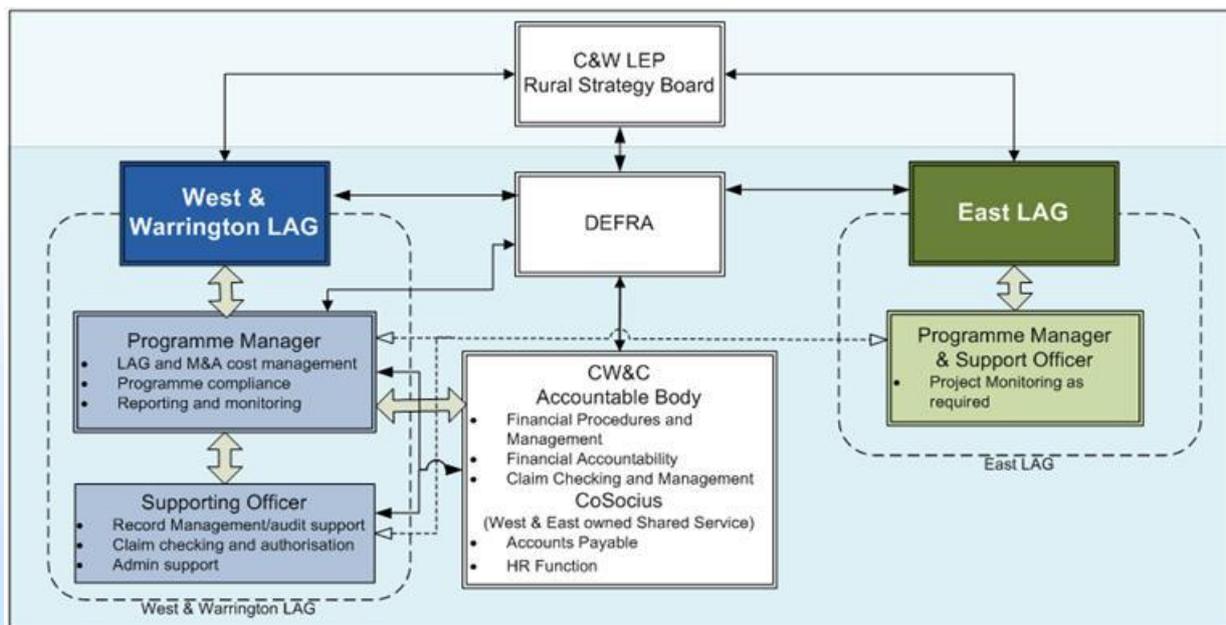

Figure 4 - Outline Claims and Payments Approach

5.3.1   Procedures - Programme compliance and systems management – the Programme Manager is responsible for advising the LAG that proposed projects and activities are compliant with the EU rules and regulations of the Programme. However as an additional safeguard there is a strong range of expertise on the LAG, which would be able to pick up any significant deviations of activity in relation to programme rules. Effective systems have already been established under previous LEADER programmes. These have been reviewed and modified in preparation for the new Programme. The Programme Manager has overall responsibility for reviewing and amending these procedures as required throughout the life of

the programme. Financial procedures follow CW&C's rules and regulations. The Supporting Officer is responsible for maintaining project financial records and inventories and for ensuring that audit requirements in relation to evidence retention is met.

5.3.2   Risk Management - The LAG will adopt a formal process to identify, manage and mitigate risks as they arise through the establishment, maintenance and regular review of a Risk Log. A Risk Management Log has been devised as part of application process. This will then be used on an ongoing basis to manage risks throughout the programme life. Review of the risk management log will be a standing agenda item for LAG meetings and staff will report any issues to the meeting which can then advise on appropriate remedial action to resolve problems.

5.3.3   Audit Provision - Cheshire West and Chester Council's internal audit section will complete annual inspections. Inspections will check that the correct procedures are being carried out by all parties involved in the programme, including an examination of a representative sample of projects themselves. These checks will include the processes pertaining to the appraisal and approval or refusal of projects, and the management of conflicts of interest within the Accountable Body and the Local Action Group.

5.3.4   State Aid - There is expertise within the LAG to identify when state aid rules need to be applied and the appropriate methodology to use for reporting and recording levels of aid. However, guidance will be taken from Defra as and when published.

5.4   Monitoring and evaluation - The LAG Executive Board has a duty to monitor, evaluate and review the results and progress of the Plan on a regular basis as stated within the Partnership Agreement.

5.4.1   Project Monitoring - Cheshire West and Chester as the Accountable Body will be responsible for ensuring programme management includes project monitoring. It is intended that cost efficiencies in this area together with a separation of duties can be maximised by working closely with Cheshire East LAG staff. Monitoring will be undertaken to identify possible weaknesses or risks in the operation of projects and to ensure corrective measures are taken to effectively manage and deficiencies. Successful applicants will receive a contract with budget and details of outputs and results against which the project will be monitored. The detailed requirements against which projects will be monitored will be taken from the National Operational Manual when made available.

5.4.2   Evaluation - The LAG considers that evaluation is an important tool for the development of the partnership and their role in the area. As it is a continuing process the systems set up to record activity and financial progress will enable accurate information to be fed into both mid-term and final evaluation. The LAG will carry out a mid-term evaluation of progress at the end of 2017. This will cover the relevance of the Strategy, promotion and take up, financial and physical progress, the effectiveness of the LAG Team and its processes and also the overarching LAG Partnership. Project applicants will be encouraged to evaluate and report on their performance, identifying strengths and weaknesses, upon completion of activity. It is intended that use of the new common monitoring and evaluation system (CMES) will assist with the performance review and the monitoring and evaluation tools to be used. Also guidance and advice will be sought from the RDPE network in support of programme and regulatory requirements.

5.5   Communications and publicity - The purpose of the Communications Plan is to communicate and publicise the LAG and the LDS aims and achievements effectively, to stimulate the market and encourage eligible applications. It will also give partner organisations programme awareness. Successful applicants will be required to acknowledge LEADER funding in all publicity and all materials produced, and use the programme branding guidelines; participate in press and PR events; provide information to the LAG for use in

publicity materials, including the West Cheshire and Warrington LAG website, and participate in applicant workshops and 'showcase' events. The communications plan will:

- help achieve overall programme objectives;
- help applicants understand the services they should expect and what is required of them;
- enable effective engagement with stakeholders and other funders;
- demonstrate the success of programme funded work to communities and stakeholders in the LAG and beyond;
- ensure the public, communities and other funders understand what the programme is about;
- provide appropriate information to Defra to support national communications and PR activity.

5.5.1 Target Groups - The following groups will be targeted:

- the general public
- beneficiaries
- potential LAG members
- local and regional authorities (i.e. Cheshire & Warrington LEP)
- professional organisations
- economic and social partners
- NGOs, particularly;
- bodies promoting equality between men and women
- environmental organisations
- LEADER Local Action Groups within the UK and EU
- Commission representations in the Member States through the Cheshire Brussels Office

The general strategy is to identify all those people who could bring about the objectives of the plan and all those impacted upon by the changes, which will take place, and identify the most effective means of communicating with them.

5.5.2 Communication Plan - The Communications Plan will consist of an appropriate mix of methods, deploying different types of media as appropriate. Where possible, cost savings will be sought by working closely with Cheshire East to ensure a joined up approach. Methods will include:

- *Branding* to identify the EU focus, the LEADER programme and the Defra sponsorship (all via logos) on all information, materials and publicity related to actions funded by the LDS.
- *Events* will include a press/media launch. In addition, project officers will attend local events, such as community and business group meetings, to ensure that there is wide understanding of the LEADER programme. These events will include an annual conference for all stakeholders, showcasing successful projects and facilitate networking and disseminate good practice.
- *Networks* for cascading information will be developed with intermediaries to communicate key messages, opportunities and results to the rural communities,
- The programme *website* will be a central resource for information, downloads and case studies on the LEADER programme. The website will include details of funded projects, a status update on the Programme; and information on the Executive Board and Panel membership together with opportunities for joining; Contact details for key staff.

5.5.3 Social Media and On-line Campaigns - A stakeholder survey will be conducted annually to gather insights and perceptions on the performance of the programme and areas for improvement and development.
Press releases will be used to disseminate good practice and the achievements of funded projects, and keep the general public up to date with LEADER activity.
Media training will be provided for Executive Board / Panel members, as well as for funded projects where necessary, who are keen to act as spokespeople for the programme with the local media in a co-ordinated manner.

6.   Financial Plan - The bid is seeking to secure £1.9million for the West Cheshire and Warrington LAG from 2015 – 2020 maximising the opportunities in the wider area including Dunham Massey. With an estimated intervention rate of approx. 50% the total expenditure is expected to approach nearly £4m. Allocation of total funding between priorities has been set by the LAG with reference to the EU funding budgets shown within the Cheshire and Warrington ESIF strategy. Reference has been made to the allocations shown within the Growth Fund and FFPS in particular, and where there are duplications of potential activity then budgets have been adjusted accordingly to maximise impact in all sectors within the rural areas of West Cheshire and Warrington. Particular note has been made of the expectation that 70% of budget will be allocated to directly supporting the rural economy. It is understood that the final amount allocated to West Cheshire and Warrington would then result in delivery proportionate to that allocation.

The LAG believes that it is requesting the amount necessary for successful implementation of the proposed programme of work. The 18% restriction of total grant funding for Management & Administration means that resourcing the programme will be challenging despite trying to maximise economies of scale with Cheshire East. The LAG and Accountable Body are very mindful of the need to ensure there are sufficient financial resources in place to implement the strategy in a controlled way and Cheshire West and Chester has therefore agreed to contribute up to £15,000 in kind public match through management and administrative support if needed. This is in addition to cash match in the form of office space, associated overheads expenditure, mobile, broadband, postage and printing costs amounting to approximately £20,000, which will be incurred, but not reflected in M&A budgets, due to the difficulty in obtaining eligible supporting evidence.

West Cheshire and Warrington LAG would like to consider the use of delegated schemes once Defra have approved the process. There are two organisations which the LAG feel could contribute significantly to maximising impact in rural areas of West Cheshire and Warrington and create sustainable growth and jobs, for example, Reaseheath College and Mersey Forest. Both organisations are a conduit for other European Funding and will be key to delivering rural priorities stated within the Cheshire & Warrington ESIF strategy. The strategy has ambitious plans to support the growth of our rural areas and states that EAFRD investment is intended to supplement ERDF and ESF. Within the LEADER priorities of 'Increasing Farm Productivity' and 'Increasing Forest Productivity' the LAG believes that more impactful opportunities could be exploited by supplementing the Growth Fund and ERDF rural proposals.

6.1   Expenditure for each year, by measure - Our proposed allocations of funding by Defra priority are as per the Overall Funding Profile attached in annexe 1.

7. Approvals;

7.1 LAG approval;
Name; Rev Can David Felix   **Position;** Chair, West Cheshire and Warrington LAG
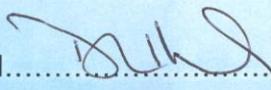
Signed...   Date...29ᵗʰ AUGUST 2014...

7.2   Accountable Body Approval;
Name; Charlie Seward   **Position;** Strategic Director, Cheshire West and Chester Council
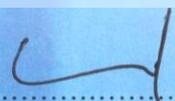
Signed...   Date...4ᵗʰ SEPTEMBER 2014

8. Annexes

Annex 1 - Overall funding profile

LEADER 2014-2020
Local Development Strategy Application
Financial Profile

Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

1. Applicant Details

Local Action Group:	West Cheshire and Warrington LAG
Accountable Body:	Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council

2. Financial Profile

	Expenditure Forecast (£)								
	Financial Year							**Total programme**	**% Allocation (excluding M&A)**
Policy Priority	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021		
Support for increasing farm productivity	0	15000	29000	29000	29000	30430	23370	155800	10%
Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification	0	62000	116500	117000	117000	117000	93700	623200	40%
Support for rural tourism	0	31000	58000	58000	58000	59000	47600	311600	20%
Provision of rural services	0	22000	40000	40000	40000	40000	36120	218120	14%
Support for cultural and heritage activity	0	12000	23000	23140	23500	24000	19000	124640	8%
Support for increasing forestry productivity	0	12500	23000	23000	23000	23000	20140	124640	8%
Running costs and animation *	10000	58000	58000	58000	55000	53000	50000	342000	
Grand Total		10000	212500	347500	348140	345500	346430	289930	1900000

* Footnote: Running costs and animation include staff salaries; marketing & promotion; travel and LAG capacity building

Annexe 2 – Output Targets

LEADER Policy Priority	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	£50,000	Total RDPE expenditure Number of projects supported Jobs created (FTE)	£155,800 3 3
Support for micro and small enterprises and farm diversification	£11,931	£35,000	Total RDPE expenditure Number of projects supported Jobs created (FTE)	£623,200 17 52
Support for rural tourism	£32,477	£35,000	Total RDPE expenditure Number of projects supported Jobs created (FTE)	£311,600 9 10
Support for culture and heritage activity	£55,991	£35,000	Total RDPE expenditure Number of projects supported Jobs safeguarded (FTE)	£124,640 4 2
Provision of rural services	£33,272	£35,000	Total RDPE expenditure Number of projects supported Jobs safeguarded (FTE)	£218,120 6 6
Support for increasing forestry productivity	£77,045	£62,000	Total RDPE expenditure Number of projects supported Jobs created (FTE)	£124,640 2 2