



MERSEY LEADER PRIORITIES

The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has outlined six priorities for the LEADER programme. A proportion of each LEADER area's funding has been allocated to each theme, to ensure a fair spread of funding across all types of organisations in the rural area. All projects that apply for LEADER funds must support one of the following:

1) Increasing Farm Productivity

LEADER investment will be focused on supporting farmers and farm businesses through the promotion of innovative business practices and new technologies in order to improve farm business resilience and develop diversification opportunities, with the aim of bringing growth to the sector.

Areas for development include projects to develop low carbon approaches to improve agricultural efficiency, enhance local supply chains and build integration around food production and processing as well as challenges around farm succession planning. Eligible projects could also help develop adaptation to climate change and link farming to tourism, particularly through food production and equine activities.

2) Micro/Small Enterprises & Farm Diversification

Funds are available for farmers to exploit the potential of their land and add value to their businesses through expansion into non-farming activities such as processing, marketing, rural tourism and renewable energy ventures. Business start-ups are also encouraged to apply for grants to assist with the construction of premises, factories and workshops.

3) Rural Tourism

Building businesses while developing high quality visitor products will be a crucial part of growing the economy in this sector. There is currently a need to support the linking of activities, businesses, attractions and sites to offer an easy-to-access quality visitor experience that appeals to all markets as well as extending the tourism season. Funds are also available to develop small-scale infrastructure for transport and accommodation.

4) Rural Services

Assistance aims to be provided to rural communities to alleviate the difficulties they face in terms of inadequate infrastructure and access to services. Projects will implement and deliver a range of essential services that are responsive to identified local needs and are valuable for residents, the wider community and make a contribution to the local rural economy. These can include the enhancement of village halls as community hubs along with

the vesting of public assets in communities through asset transfer, welfare programmes for older people that can create employment and reduce social isolation simultaneously and projects based on community companies addressing issues such as opportunities around local energy generation.

5) Culture & Heritage

This priority area encompasses everything from ecclesiastical heritage to maritime and fishing traditions, all within a high quality natural environment.

There is an essential relationship between the area's natural resources and businesses. In order to continue to reap the benefits of this natural capital (i.e. the landscape with all its assets and services), encouragement is needed to reinvest in the landscape on which a substantial quantity of the areas success depends.

Often the success of a cultural or natural heritage project is as a result of the high quality landscape within which it sits. By reinvesting in this landscape, its quality will be retained and businesses and society can continue to benefit from it. Closer links between cultural and heritage activity and the tourism sector will be encouraged further to expand the range of visitor experiences available.

6) Increasing Forestry Productivity

It has been highlighted that some landowners and land managers have a lack of knowledge and understanding around the potential opportunities that their woodland may offer. Small woodland sites and farms are often under-managed yet there are many areas for development. These include the implementation of the venison market in the woodland environment; the development of projects that add value to timber and improve timber management such as the production of timber as a fuel. Projects that can assist linking forestry to tourism will also be eligible for funding.