Evaluation of Solway, Border and Eden LEADER Programme

Executive summary
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SBE LEADER at a glance

- 167 projects have been supported.
- The Programme has spent £7.12 million – with £5.9 million allocated directly to projects (the maximum funding allowed).
- £7.4 million of match funding has been secured, bringing the total amount directly invested in the SBE area to £14.5 million.
- 5,629 training days delivered to 7,617 training beneficiaries.
- The Programme has created 171 jobs and safeguarded 62 positions.
- 184 farm businesses and micro enterprises have been assisted with grant funding.
- 171 forest holders have been helped.
- The Programme’s administration costs have been 16%, considerably below the 20% allowed.
Introduction

About LEADER and the evaluation

LEADER stands for ‘Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l’Économie Rurale’ which translates as ‘links between the rural economy and development actions’. LEADER has been operating across Europe since 1991 and is widely recognised as an attempt to substitute top-down interventions by networking at the community level. Ultimately, LEADER is intended to improve the quality of life and prosperity of rural communities.

The Solway, Border & Eden (SBE) LEADER Programme was launched in the fourth programming period (2007–2013) to ‘support sustainable rural development in rural North Cumbria’. The Programme area extends from Cleator Moor up to Longtown and the Scottish Border and then across to Brampton and down the edge of the Pennines to Brough – and includes the Local Authority Districts of Allerdale, Carlisle, Copeland and Eden.

The Programme has distributed £5.9 million to projects benefiting the area. All LEADER funds were awarded by the Local Action Group (LAG). The LAG has two tiers: (1) the wider LAG: a group of individuals from private business, the public sector and voluntary and community organisations who represent the interests of the SBE area; and (2) the Executive: 12–14 representatives elected at the Annual General Meeting that consider grant applications and act as a Steering Group for the Programme. The LAG and project applicants have been supported by dedicated Programme staff and Cumbria County Council’s Regeneration Support Team (RST).

The SBE Programme – along with the neighbouring Cumbria Fells & Dales (CFD) LEADER Programme – is nationally significant:

- SBE received a total budget of £7.4 million from the EU and Defra, well in excess of the average budget given to other LEADER Partnerships (which is set at approximately £2.5–3.5 million).
- The SBE Programme has been able to fund activities to improve the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector (Axis 1 of the Rural Development Programme for England) as well as fund activities to improve the quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy (Axis 3 of the Rural Development Programme for England). Other LEADER Partnerships have had to focus on social/community measures (Axis 3 only) rather than also have this economic focus.

With the Programme reaching the end of its cycle, an Evaluation has been carried out by Rose Regeneration to:

- Examine what the SBE Programme set out to do – what were its aims, objectives and how would it operate?
- Identify what the Programme has delivered – what are its outputs, impacts and wider benefits?
- Produce a set of conclusions and recommendations – where next?

A parallel study was carried out for the CFD LEADER Programme. In addition to concentrating on the outcomes of the SBE Programme, a proportion of evaluation time was spent exploring the success and impact of Cumbria-wide initiatives.
Methodology

The process of collecting data

The Evaluation has followed a logical path through the evidence – from looking at how the Local Development Strategy (LDS) was produced to a consideration of what the Programme has achieved. This has included:

• A review of strategic documents and statistics (11 national and 71 regional and local papers) – to understand what the rationale for the Programme was and how this developed.
• The collection and analysis of Programme data (such as monitoring reports, delivery plans and files covering grant approvals, grant commitments and apportionment of outputs) – to understand what the Programme has achieved; its spend and project activity.
• Visiting the Programme office to carry out a systems audit and interview the LEADER team and staff at the Regeneration Support Team (RST) at Cumbria County Council – to practically understand how the Programme has been administered – including the identification of any refinements or improvements made to Programme systems.
• Spending time on-the-ground visiting LEADER funded projects and speaking with applicants, beneficiaries, businesses and community groups about their experiences of the Programme (some 50+ people) – to see first-hand the investments made by the Programme and hear about the impact it has had.
• Compiling detailed case studies of four funded projects – three taking place in Cleator Moor and one operating across North Allerdale (using a Social Return on Investment methodology) – to consider the broader outcomes of LEADER investment.
• Interviewing stakeholders from 11 organisations (e.g. ACTion with Communities in Cumbria: a Rural Community Council, Cumbria County Council, Defra, Lake District National Park Authority, National Centre for the Uplands and Natural England) – to triangulate the Evaluation findings and gain an external perspective of the Programme.

All of this information has been used to both evaluate the current Programme and make recommendations for the future.

The Evaluation has also taken account of deadweight (would a project have proceeded without LEADER funding and/or have altered significantly?) and displacement (has the SBE Programme allocated monies to projects which have had a negative impact on established facilities which undertake similar activities?).
The vision of the SBE LEADER Programme was:

To promote sustainable and integrated rural development of the Solway, Border and Eden area in a way that respects local distinctiveness and brings about significant improvements to the local economy and environment with the full engagement of local people.

To achieve this vision, the following process was undertaken to design the Programme:

**a) Policy documents**

The SBE Programme took into account several strategic documents at national, regional and sub-regional levels as well as thematic documents. To unlock LEADER funding at a national level, the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) was required to submit a Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) document to the European Commission for approval. In the Northwest, a Regional Implementation Plan was produced by the North West Development Agency (NWDA), Government Office for the North West, the Forestry Commission and Natural England to feed into this overarching document. This generated four themes:

1. Making farming and forestry more competitive and sustainable.
2. Conserving and enhancing the environment and countryside.
3. Enhancing opportunities and quality of life in rural areas.
4. Developing skills, knowledge transfer and capacity building.

**b) Learning from neighbouring areas – the LEADER+ Programme**

The SBE Programme was new to the area and initially received support from existing LEADER+ Programmes (operating between 2000 and 2006) covering CFD and the North Pennines. This dialogue with other LEADER partnerships was important in ensuring the SBE staff team and LAG accessed a wealth of information about good practice; fully understood community led development within the LEADER ethos; familiarised itself with European and National processes underpinning the Programme; and made best possible use of existing networks (seeking to improve not duplicate any standing arrangements).

**c) Developing a Local Development Strategy**

A Local Development Strategy (LDS) was produced as part of the tender for funds before the Programme could begin. As well as taking into account policy documents and learning from previous LEADER+ Programmes, the LDS was developed through:
Open consultation
A dialogue with interested parties, reflecting the area and its ‘Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats’ (SWOT). This highlighted a range of issues facing the SBE area:

- **Employment and skills**: high levels of employment in agriculture and forestry; a wide range of visitor attractions but untapped tourism potential; and a high percentage of small and micro-enterprises.
- **Deprivation**: significant areas where needs were in the upper quartile of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (particularly the West Cumbria/Solway Plain, areas around Longtown, Brampton and Alston Moor; Appleby and the North Pennines).
- **Land use**: high levels of lowland pastoral farming and low levels of woodland cover.

Community mapping
An exercise to find and work with community groupings covering the SBE area. This identified 14 community organisations and recognised the need to build community capacity in some areas where applications were less likely to come forward.

Steps a–c ensured the LDS was written to take account of inequality by targeting specific geographies (e.g. lagging districts such as Alston Moor), sectors (i.e. agriculture, woodland, tourism) and communities.

This baseline information was used to identify those eligible activities within the overarching RDPE document produced by Defra (known as Measures) where most benefit could be derived to address these issues.

d) LEADER Priorities

The SBE Programme has been nationally significant in being able to fund activities in Measures under Axis 1 and Axis 3 of the RDPE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Axis</th>
<th>Measure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors</td>
<td>111 Vocational training and information for agricultural, food and forestry sectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114 Use by farmers and foresters of advisory services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>115 Setting up of farm management, farm relief and farm advisory services</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>121 Farm modernisation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>122 Improving the economic value of forests</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>123 Adding value to agricultural and forestry products</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>124 Cooperation for the development of new products</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>125 Infrastructure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging the diversification of the rural economy</td>
<td>311 Diversification into non-agricultural activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>312 Support for the creation and development of micro-enterprises</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>313 Encouragement for tourism activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>321 Basic services</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>323 Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>331 Training and information for economic actors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>341 Skills acquisition for preparation/implementation of local development strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each Measure in the SBE Programme a ‘Priority Statement’ was prepared setting out the objectives, types of projects sought, level of funding available and outputs. These Statements were important in guiding potential applicants in the aims and Measures used in the Programme as well as practical issues (e.g. who could apply and how to apply).
Key findings
What the Programme has delivered and achieved

The Programme received a total budget of £7.4 million. It has expended £7.12 million of this allocation – with £5.9 million spent directly on projects (the maximum allowed) and £1.2 million spent on Management and Administration – project animation and development work – (considerably below the maximum allowed).

These investments have made a real difference; building community capacity and resilience and improving business productivity:

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In SBE, LEADER has not operated as a grants programme funding individual applicants, but operated holistically in making interventions in businesses and communities that are sustainable and strategic. Rather than taking Axes, Measures and the area in isolation, the Programme has actively sought to:

- **Link project activities within SBE across Measures** (e.g. tourism activities under Measure 313 have been considered alongside heritage projects funded under Measure 323); and **Axes** (with Cumbria Woodlands working across Measures 111 and 123 and helping people to access the Woodland Grants Scheme under Axis 2). This has assisted in building clusters of expertise and good practice.
- **Jointly develop and fund projects with the neighbouring CFD LEADER Programme** (e.g. supporting Lakes Free Range Egg Company and a supply chain of 46 family farms to be at the forefront of premium free range egg production in the UK through investing in facilities, products, technologies and training; and Rural Skills Cumbria, a project to make vocational training, knowledge transfer and information more accessible for rural communities – leading to 2,852 training beneficiaries gaining new/improved skills from 3,127 training days). This has assisted in providing a joined up Cumbrian approach to LEADER delivery.
- **Work strategically at project and Programme levels to ensure that LEADER complemented other economic and community initiatives.** CRISP 2 is an innovative partnership approach to funding provision that has enabled applicants to access money from three different funding streams (LEADER, Cumbria County Council and Cumbria Community Foundation) using just one application process based on the LEADER approach. This has assisted 26 community projects with funding.
• **Undertake transnational/co-operation projects** – a rural energy skills exchange (with a LEADER partnership in Germany), a producer exchange programme (food tourism activity across the EU), and a farmer network research study (included a project from the Netherlands).

These projects have improved competitiveness (through the promotion of local products in the SBE area and access to new business opportunities) and promoted innovation through new skills (such as renewable energy systems).

Taken as a collective, this approach to Programme design and delivery has promoted integrated and sustainable rural development in the SBE area in ways that join up neighbouring, national and European good practice.
Delivering economic benefits –
“to bring about significant improvements to the local economy”

The SBE LEADER Programme has exceeded its targets and championed the local economy; creating 171 jobs and safeguarding a further 62 jobs within the private, community and voluntary sectors:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Contracted with Defra</th>
<th>Actual Measured to 31 January 2014</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Axis 1 Jobs created</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axis 3 Jobs created</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs safeguarded</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total jobs created</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total jobs safeguarded</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of these jobs have been permanent and concentrated in land based sectors (particularly forestry, agriculture and food production), manufacturing, catering, tourism and hospitality. All of these jobs have been required to have a life expectancy of at least one year.

Many of the projects supported by SBE have sought to build upon and enrich sectors important to the local economy – from farm based initiatives providing strong provenance to food to building new markets for tourists (improving the ‘visitor offer’). Indeed, many of the projects have involved assisting recognised and distinctly Cumbrian business based in the local area – from Geltsdale Brewery to Claire’s Handmade and the farm shop at Orton Grange.

Many of the projects have been transformational. To address market failure, including the loss of revenue and jobs in the tourism sector between 2008 and 2010, LEADER has supported projects to unlock tourism potential beyond honey pot sites in the Lake District. Three projects funded under the umbrella of ‘Nurture Eden (Lakeland)’ have developed high quality green holiday offers/products in the Eden Valley. So far, these projects have delivered three jobs, 210 people have participated in various activities and events, 221 training days have been provided. Ten businesses have gone on to secure Green Tourism Business Scheme (GTBS) accreditation.

Cumbria Woodlands – ‘Skills for the Forest’ training programme.
The SBE area has a lower level of woodland cover compared to Cumbria as a whole (25,000 hectares of woodland in SBE compared to 65,000 hectares across the whole county). LEADER invested in Cumbria Woodlands to fund an Advisory Service and ‘Skills for the Forest’ training programme. This has provided 149 training courses for 992 participants – with training linked to capital grants to enable contractors to grow their businesses (e.g. purchasing wood drying equipment, chipping machines). The project has further supported 18 small businesses to develop management plans and/or apply for other grants (e.g. from the Forestry Commission) and created an informal business network/community of practice in the woodland sector involving owners, land agents, contractors and the general public. Crucially, the project has led 4,500 hectares of under-managed woodland brought back into active management.

In other projects, modest investment from LEADER has led to big increases in the profitability of struggling upland livestock businesses. The Blue Grey Group, for example, received a LEADER grant to raise awareness of the commercial viability and local provenance of Blue Grey cattle among farmers and the public. This farmer collaboration project has increased prices (with farmers now receiving £137.18 more per head at the auction mart), provided 667 people with training in the production and keeping of Blue Greys and represents an important start to securing the future of the breed.

It is clear that without LEADER support, many of these businesses would not have been able to establish or grow. These investments provide an important legacy for the Programme – with some businesses subsequently joining the Cumbria Business Growth Hub (part of the Government’s Rural Growth Network Pilot Programme), obtaining accreditation (e.g. Green Tourism Business certification) and/or winning national awards.

Delivering social/community benefits – “with the full engagement of local people”

The Programme has sought to invest in projects that build community capacity and resilience – tackling significant areas of deprivation in the SBE area and supporting service centres as hubs for innovative service delivery. This includes providing a grant to a Credit Union to increase the number of ‘collection points’ where people can deposit money, apply for loans and seek financial advice; through to supporting Age UK’s Village Agents Programme (with the Lottery):
**Village agents**

The ‘Active for Life project’ aimed to reduce social isolation; assisting older people to feel more independent by enabling them to become more involved in community activities and volunteering.

The project received £27,237 from the LEADER Programme with additional funding from the Lottery. This was used to employ four local village agents (known as ‘Active for Life Assistants’), one project coordinator and cover their associated support costs.

Each agent worked in a parish in North Allerdale; providing older people with easy access to a wide range of information to help them make informed choices about their present and future needs (e.g. putting them in contact with organisations that provide services they need). The Village Agents also helped to set up or facilitate community activities such as a men’s group in Thursby, IT sessions in Silloth library, seated Non-Impact Aerobics classes; a poetry group and walking groups. Being based in the communities they serve enabled Village Agents to build closer relationships with older people in their locality than if they were based in a distant office.

It is clear that this investment in community infrastructure and facilities provides lasting results – mitigating the loss of services and encouraging community participation in the delivery of local services.

**Responding to ‘crisis events’**

In November 2009, unprecedented rainfall led Cockermouth and surrounding areas to flood, affecting some 900 properties and 1,400 people. LEADER funding was used to provide a ‘Flood Debris Recovery Scheme’. 34 farmers received grants ranging from £750 to £6,800 to help them hire specialist equipment and/or contractors to remove debris from their land and repair structures damaged by flooding.

**The “added value” of LEADER investment**

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a framework for measuring and accounting for value that moves away from financial transactions to take account of less tangible social, economic and environmental factors. As a framework and a process, SROI provides a useful tool for looking at the broader outcomes of LEADER funded projects. Through consideration of the costs of setting up a project and the key outcomes it has delivered, an indicator for each outcome can be identified and then used to ascribe a value for that outcome. Deadweight, displacement and leakage have been factored into the calculations to give a real time (2014) understanding of the value achieved.
The former mining town of Cleator Moor is located between Whitehaven and the western fringes of the Lake District. Although it has suffered decline over many decades, the town now has an energetic programme of self-help and regeneration. SBE LEADER has supported this activity within the settlement, specifically through three projects that have collectively sought to create workspace, to further develop youth provision and tackle digital exclusion: (1) St Kevin’s Hall – the creation of workspace offering up to 2,000 sq ft of newly modernized and restored office, meeting and training accommodation; (2) Phoenix Youth Project – the redevelopment of an existing youth and community centre so that it is ‘fit for purpose’; and (3) Access Copeland – an Information Technology ‘drop in’ centre.

Undertaking SROI analysis for all three projects demonstrates that for every £1.00 invested, there is a return of £4.62 for the local community.

Beyond monetarising the value of LEADER investment, support from the Programme has also enabled:

- The creation of workspace that complements the existing portfolio of office accommodation.
- The restoration of a listed building and refurbishment of an underused leisure facility – both are strategically located in the centre of Cleator Moor and offer venues for the delivery of new services to the local community (e.g. space for training, meeting space for young people and local groups).
- Tailored support provided for hard to reach groups to improve their digital skills, instill confidence and assist them to get back into work.

**Over-achievement of many Programme Outputs**

The table opposite illustrates (for each Measure used in the Programme) the Targets set at the outset and the Actuals that have been achieved.

Where outputs have not been fully achieved, this can be accounted for by: (a) the projects that came forward fitted the priorities and actions of another Measure, (b) a smaller number of larger projects have been funded under some Measures, and (c) a larger number of shorter training courses of less than 8 hours/1 day’s duration were delivered under Measure 111 which led to more trainees benefitting. Measure 122 was
particularly difficult to contract and deliver due to tight eligibility criteria, demand and need for the type of projects that LEADER was able to fund.

What have been the ‘key ingredients’ that have led to successful delivery?

The following drivers have emerged from the Evaluation:

- **Programme Design traversing to Programme Delivery** – LEADER staff have worked hard to identify, build and maintain relationships with key partners and stakeholders. Before the Programme began business and community groupings covering the SBE area were identified. Over the course of the Programme staff ensured that LEADER priorities and activities were disseminated to and accessed by hard to reach groups (e.g. foresters, farmers) and communities. During and beyond the LEADER Programme staff have worked strategically at a project level to ensure LEADER complemented other economic development and regeneration programmes.

- **Being innovative and managing risk** – LEADER staff, the LAG, Executive and RST have worked together to manage project animation and delivery; from providing intensive initial support for project enquiries
and a rigorous approach to business planning integral with the full application process; through to
detailed briefings and support for successful applicants in how to submit claims. While there has been a
clear separation of duties between animation and delivery; supporting applicants through the whole process
has undoubtedly assisted in the smooth running of the Programme and its decision making process.

- **Being there for the long term (and considering project outcomes and sustainability beyond the
  LEADER Programme cycle)** – taking account of different scales of project and wanting to engage people
  and groups at the most local level possible over the duration of the Programme period (2007–2013). This
  included ‘calls for projects’, commissioning sector wide initiatives led by umbrella organisations and
  supporting individual applicants to work up a project idea. This commitment has helped to create a climate
  where projects are delivering economic, social and environmental outcomes which can be sustained.

As the Programme comes to a close, these findings illuminate a substantial range of excellent
outputs and outcomes achieved by SBE LEADER which should be celebrated.
Conclusions and recommendations

Where next?

a) What has the Programme achieved?

Projects supported under LEADER have not only met the aims and objectives of the LDS but also delivered against (i) the strategic and policy context in which the Programme was framed (e.g. the priorities in the Sub Regional Implementation Plan), and (ii) the bottom up elaboration and implementation called for in the LEADER principles.

The Programme has:

- Procured research and feasibility to better inform the LAG, Executive and/or support applicants – some projects have used LEADER funding to develop a business plan for a new dairy farm enterprise, investigate the use of small scale renewable energy and heating systems on farms, and the feasibility of using an anaerobic digester to generate biogas and produce energy from farm slurry.

- Been transformational in what it has achieved, with clusters of expertise around: (1) Woodland management: bringing 4,500 hectares of woodland into new management, providing 149 training courses for 992 participants, supporting 18 small businesses and building a network of expertise involving woodland owners, land agents, advisors, contractors and members of the public. (2) Farming – the Blue Grey project involved 667 people participating in training and worked with 6 butchers to demonstrate the commercial viability of the Blue Grey and its strong cultural heritage in upland Cumbria. (3) Social/community capacity building and resilience (e.g. building community capacity, assets and local distinctiveness) through projects such as Village Agents support for credit unions.

- Been committed to being locally led and bottom up – some of the grants awarded may have been large with the project considered ‘big ticket’ (e.g. the Perfect Egg project received £200,000 from SBE to invest in the future of free range egg production in Cumbria) but a bottom up approach has been taken in their design, delivery and impact – in the example of the perfect egg project, 23 local jobs have been created and a further 28 safeguarded; and 13 other local farm businesses have introduced new products and technologies. Many of the grants awarded have been on a smaller scale (less than £50,000) yet vital in supporting the growth aspirations of micro-enterprises (e.g. funding the development of self-made products, traditional trades and marketing/branding activities).

- Significantly, the Programme has delivered rural aspirations by jointly funding and supporting projects with CFD. This approach is unique in Cumbria and not replicated elsewhere in England.

b) The overall findings of the Evaluation

- Examine in depth the level of success of the SBE LEADER Programme has had in meeting its aims and objectives and produce a clear set of conclusions – the Evaluation has established how the LDS was positioned within the parameters of the NWDA and regional documents and guidance. The Programme was given a remit for economic and social/community activities – operating across Axis 1 and Axis 3 – as well as considering linkages to Axis 2 at the individual project level. Targets for spend
and activity have been exceeded and are nationally significant – in terms of the budget allocated (the maximum funding allowed for projects was awarded) and sectoral transformation.

- **Demonstrate its impact on all stakeholders** – stakeholders recognise how SBE is nationally significant and distinctive in the scale and range of activities it has undertaken. On the one hand, stakeholders believe the outputs delivered by the programmes have increased the sustainability of their areas, with a small number of big scale projects identified (e.g. Cumbria Woodlands, Lakes Free Range Eggs). On the other hand, some stakeholders believe that fewer large scale projects would have made a greater economic difference in the area. Some initiatives including CRISP 2 and Village Agents have increased partnership working among stakeholders. Project applicants did not perceive LEADER funding to be displacing existing or similar activities. Where projects had similarities in terms of sector, this provided opportunities for networking and informal support. Applicants rated highly the support they had received from LAG/Executive and made recommendations on how the administrative processes could be improved in any future programme.

- **Identify its contribution to wider social and economic outcomes and agendas** – the Programme has taken risks, promoted innovation and contributed to agglomeration effects in terms of woodland management and tourism infrastructure. Economically, the Programme has delivered 171 jobs and safeguarded a further 62 positions. Socially the Programme has increased community capacity and enhanced village facilities and services.

Taken as a collective, these achievements and overall findings demonstrate LEADER in its truest form – supporting community-driven and wide benefitting projects to meet local needs. These findings also illustrate how the Programme has delivered sustainable economic growth by supporting distinctly Cumbrian local businesses and communities to grow and thrive.

c) Where next?

A number of the recommendations below are Pan Cumbrian and relevant for SBE and CFD – for both Programmes have jointly funded projects, share institutional support through RST and their geographies physically connect.

**Reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of the current LEADER Programme**

- A consideration of where LEADER activity has taken place and not happened and the reasons accounting for this. Can these findings be used to inform project identification and selection in any future Programme (and the use of commissioning and project calls)?
- The identification of gaps in the current evidence base about the rural development needs and aspirations of communities in the SBE area and effective ways of addressing these.
- How future LEADER investment fits and aligns with the challenges facing the public and voluntary sectors (i.e. will this affect the ability of community groups and businesses to find match funding?) as well as the activities of other infrastructure bodies (e.g. Rural and Farming Network, Local Nature Partnership, National Centre for the Uplands, Health & Wellbeing Boards, Clinical Commissioning Groups and Local Enterprise Partnership)?
The review could take account of the following areas:

**What more can be done to animate and develop projects?**
- Building upon existing social/community LEADER funded initiatives (e.g. Village Agents) and the concentration of LEADER investment in settlements (e.g. Cleator Moor), establish ‘community-to-community’ learning: a list of peers that have followed the LEADER approach to deliver real and sustainable change through their own project and that could assist other communities.
- Refresh the evidence base and mapping exercise undertaken at the beginning of the Programme to identify community groupings covering the SBE area – this may include a ‘capacity audit’ to distinguish those groupings able to support a future LEADER Programme.
- Holding ‘surgeries’ or ‘drop in sessions’ for potential applicants to come and speak with LEADER staff about their project idea. This is particularly important in areas of deprivation and/or where support from other community organisations has declined.

**How can any future Programme build upon existing projects?**
- Use Transition to undertake thematic networking with grant recipients in sectors. For example, to build upon farming achievements in the existing Programme bring farmers together to identify gaps and address these in commissioning and project calls in any future programme (e.g. genetics, breeding, benchmarking). The existing Programme has sought to develop tourism beyond the honey pot sites in the Lake District, building upon world class assets (e.g. Hadrian’s Wall). Yet many of the businesses supported under the Nurture Eden project – and those not involved in the project – remain under-capitalised and small, lifestyle businesses. To assist them in continuing their transferral to tourist enterprises and to attract international visitors, LEADER could think through how to deepen the visitor offer by attracting external investment into these businesses (e.g. creating the right climate of support for investment).
- Use Transition to liaise with other partners and delivery bodies in these sectors (e.g. farming – National Centre for the Uplands, Sector Skills Council) to distill national and international knowledge and good practice. This could include discussions with other bodies that have a rural community focus but operate at a national level (e.g. Plunkett Foundation, Carnegie UK Trust, Action with Communities in Rural England).

**How can the Programme be more flexible next time?**
- Have a delegated fund for small projects. This fund could be part of the LEADER Programme envelope (i.e., similar to the proposals for streamlining the process for smaller grants set out in the current Programme but not approved by NWDA) or having a delegated fund delivered through an intermediary organisation (e.g. building upon the approach taken to allocate funding under 2 Measures to Cumbria Woodlands to run an advisory service and training programme).
- Have dedicated thematic sub groups, comprising members of the LAG which would assist the Executive in shaping the Programme and ensuring its delivery. Each sub group would focus on a theme or issue rather than have a spatial focus (e.g. conformity with the LDS, awareness raising and publicity, financial profile and monitoring spend).
- CRISP 2 was an innovative partnership approach to funding provision that has enabled applicants to access money from three different funding streams. Horizon scanning to identify other funders who could assist projects with cash flow or match funding is important. On the one hand, once an applicant had received an offer letter, LEADER programme staff could refer them on to these organisations. Any cash flow support would operate outside the envelope of (and be entirely separate from) LEADER.
administrative processes. On the other hand, LEADER staff could undertake a ‘funding gateway check’ to assist applicants in identifying other match funding sources.

- From the horizon scanning above, establish protocols with other organisations to ensure maximum resource and greater impact are achieved in any future Programme. For applicants this could include a “No Wrong Door” approach requiring all partners to put businesses/communities in contact with the correct funder/support organisation so they are not turned from one partner to another to have their queries attended to and can get the best out of their project. This approach should also aim to reduce ‘red tape’, focusing on what a given project can achieve rather than stifling an applicant with administration.

Linkages to other Economic Infrastructure and Activities
LEADER can provide a seabed of intensive support that aligns to other economic strategies and programmes. It is clear from the operation of the current Programme that there are opportunities to engage with activities at a sectoral/thematic level (e.g. tourism, food and drink, business services, agriculture and forestry) as well as a settlement/geography level and according to size/scale (e.g. with LEADER supporting micro and small enterprises and signposting medium and large enterprises to other regeneration programmes). For SBE, this could lead to the identification of ‘areas of opportunity’ and ‘areas of need’ to best target LEADER and attract other funding streams.

Agriculture and the Land Based Sector
In the next programming period (2014–2020) there will be more focus on innovation and support for agriculture and land based activities. For SBE, these changes build upon the current Programme’s use of LEADER to support the agriculture sector (Axis 1) and expertise of Executive and LAG members already representing these sectors. Building upon existing relationships with the agricultural community (e.g. NFU, Cumbria Farmer Network) will be important going forward.

Sharing learning and good practice
Aspects of the LEADER Programmes in SBE and CFD have provided good practice that could be shared nationally and trans-nationally. Whilst this has taken place in the current Programme (e.g. through contact with Programme staff in other areas, the RDPE Network), the next Programme could provide an opportunity to build upon this informal approach. Similar opportunities could be provided to support LAG members in their development and (where relevant) more projects funded under what is currently Measure 421. At the same time, there are opportunities for SBE to consider good practice from elsewhere, including in proximate geographies (e.g. Dumfries and Galloway) and trans-nationally on thematic issues (e.g. Day of the Region celebration which includes LEADER partnerships from Scotland, Ireland, Netherlands and Germany).

What is distinctive about SBE’s geography and communities?
The SBE LEADER area covers physical/natural boundaries rather than administrative boundaries. While stakeholders and project applicants have described the benefits of this approach (e.g. independence of the LEADER area as it is not tied to a given political authority; and how it leads to a stronger community of interest/networks/shared challenges that can be tapped into); it is worth considering what is the distinctive about the SBE geography and the communities within it in shaping a future bid for LEADER funding.
Solway, Border and Eden Programme was delivered by:
Current and previous members of the Programme Team.

In Partnership with the Local Action Group of businesses, authorities and communities.
Previous Chairs – Peter Kempsey, Pauline Herbert. Current Chair – Brian Armstrong.

With the support of Cumbria County Council’s Regeneration Support Team
and the backing of the Defra RDPE Delivery Team.