

“To sustain the viability of rural communities by enabling local communities to deliver services and activities which enhance quality of life”

Poor access to services in the rural Fens, exacerbated by limited public transport provision, has been identified through both the consultation process for the LDS and numerous community consultations e.g. community led plans, as a key challenge to the sustainability of the communities within the Fens. Support for rural retailers is limited to mainstream services. The sustainability of village shops, often run as lifestyle businesses, is threatened by competition from the retail sector and ongoing Post Office closures, which often make shops hosting Post Office counters unviable forcing them to close. Significant Post Office closures began in the Fens in late 2008 with further closures likely within the programme period.

Measure 321 - Basic services

Through this measure the LAG wants to improve the living conditions and welfare of those living in rural areas and to increase the attractiveness of such areas through the provision of more and better basic services for the economy and the rural population. The LAG will use FARDP funds to invest in creation and enhancement of multiuse facilities and community hubs. These might include community buildings or community enterprises, e.g. community shops. They will provide services valued by the rural community that are self-financing or subsidised from other sources.

Measure 312 - Support for the creation and development of micro enterprises

The LAG wants to use this measure to support small scale social enterprises, charities and rural retail outlets that want to or already provide basic services for communities in the area. These businesses must also fit the definition of a micro enterprise ‘fewer than 10 employees and with a turnover or balance sheet of less than €2 million (£1.8 million)’. Grants will be available for start up or enhancement costs and could include revenue and capital expenditure. In all cases the LAG would need to see evidence that investment would create new jobs or in the least safeguard existing jobs from being lost.

Measure 331 - Training and information for economic actors

The LAG wants to use this measure to build the capacity of rural service providers through non qualification and non statutory training programmes that will enhance the quality and sustainability of the service they are providing.

Measure 421 - Implementing cooperation projects

Funding will be available within this measure for basic service providers who have already received funding through FARDP to link with similar operations within the EU to share knowledge and best practice. Support will generally be towards the facilitation of this joint working, so will cover travel and other associated costs. Examples of initiatives supported through this measure could be community run shops supported through FARDP that want to learn from similarly run ventures within the EU.