

Rural Development Programme for England

The Implementation Plan for England's Northwest 2007 – 2013

DRAFT

Preface

*This Regional Implementation Plan is a **draft**, and may be subject to further changes. It is important to note that the draft Rural Development Programme for England may need to be amended following discussions with the European Commission. It will not be approved until the Commission are happy with the revisions. In these circumstances, there may be knock-on effects requiring amendment of the North West Regional Implementation Plan.*

Foreword

Our region is home to a rich and varied natural landscape stretching from the uplands of Cumbria and the Pennines to the lowland plains of Lancashire and Cheshire. Approximately four fifths is defined as rural with roughly one in six people living in rural areas

As part of Defra's commitment to Modernising Rural Delivery, they have devolved elements of the new Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) to the English Regions. Each Region has been tasked with producing a Regional Implementation Plan (RIP) which sets out the activities to be pursued. This is set within the wider framework of the national programming document for England.

Uniquely, in the Northwest we are using our sub regional partners to target Axis I, III & IV,. Each of our five sub regions has produced a Sub-Regional Implementation Plan that tailors the agreed regional approach to fit sub regional priorities.

Although responsibility for delivering Axis I, III and IV lies with the Northwest Development Agency and Axis II with Natural England and the Forestry Commission; partners have agreed that integration of all axes is key to a successful outcome for the programme as a whole.

The RDPE resources come at a time of great change within the farming industry and consequently changes for rural communities as a whole. These changes offer opportunities for a prosperous future that this programme is designed to help bring about.

Building on our past good track record, the success of this approach depends upon a good working partnership between not only the main delivery bodies, but also between other key partners at regional and sub regional level.

Only such collaboration will achieve sustainable outcomes from this programme for all rural interests and through them, for the wider region.

I would like to thank all of those who have contributed to this Plan and I am pleased to commend this programme to you.

Keith Barnes
Chair
North West Rural Board

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1. Introduction - Your voice, your future

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)

In June 2005, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) was approved to replace the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) as funds for rural development under the second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the period 2007 – 2013. The available measures for funding have been divided between three main headings (or axes). There will also be a fourth, cross cutting (or implementation) axis under which the LEADER approach to bottom up locally led projects will be used to implement measures of the other axes.

Axis I	Improving the competitiveness of the farming and forestry sectors
Axis II	Improving the environment and countryside
Axis III	Rural quality of life and diversification of the rural economy
Axis IV	The LEADER approach

To unlock this funding Defra are required to submit a Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) to the European Commission for approval. The national programme will define the scope of this Regional Implementation Plan. The Rural Development Regulation and its Implementing Regulation will define permissible activity.

The Government is committed to Environmental Stewardship. The consequence of this is that the socio-economic funding is likely to be near the minimum spends allowed by the EU. Therefore, the Government has agreed the balance of EU funding across the entire programme in England is ten per cent for Axis I; eighty per cent for Axis II and ten per cent for Axis III. For planning purposes Defra has indicated that the North West can assume Axis I and III funding of approximately £72 million for the life of the Programme and an estimated £300 million for Axis II subject to final budget allocations from the European Union including voluntary modulation.

The programme as a whole will be delivered on an integrated basis. However, the Northwest Regional Development Agency will be responsible for Axis I and III and IV. The Forestry Commission and Natural England are responsible for Axis II.

This document - a Regional Implementation Plan (RIP) - is one of eight being prepared across England by a range of partners including the RDAs, Forestry Commission and Natural England. The process has been facilitated by each region's Government Office. The RIPs will be presented to Defra by December 2006 as contribution to the national programme. The national programme will be submitted to the EU.

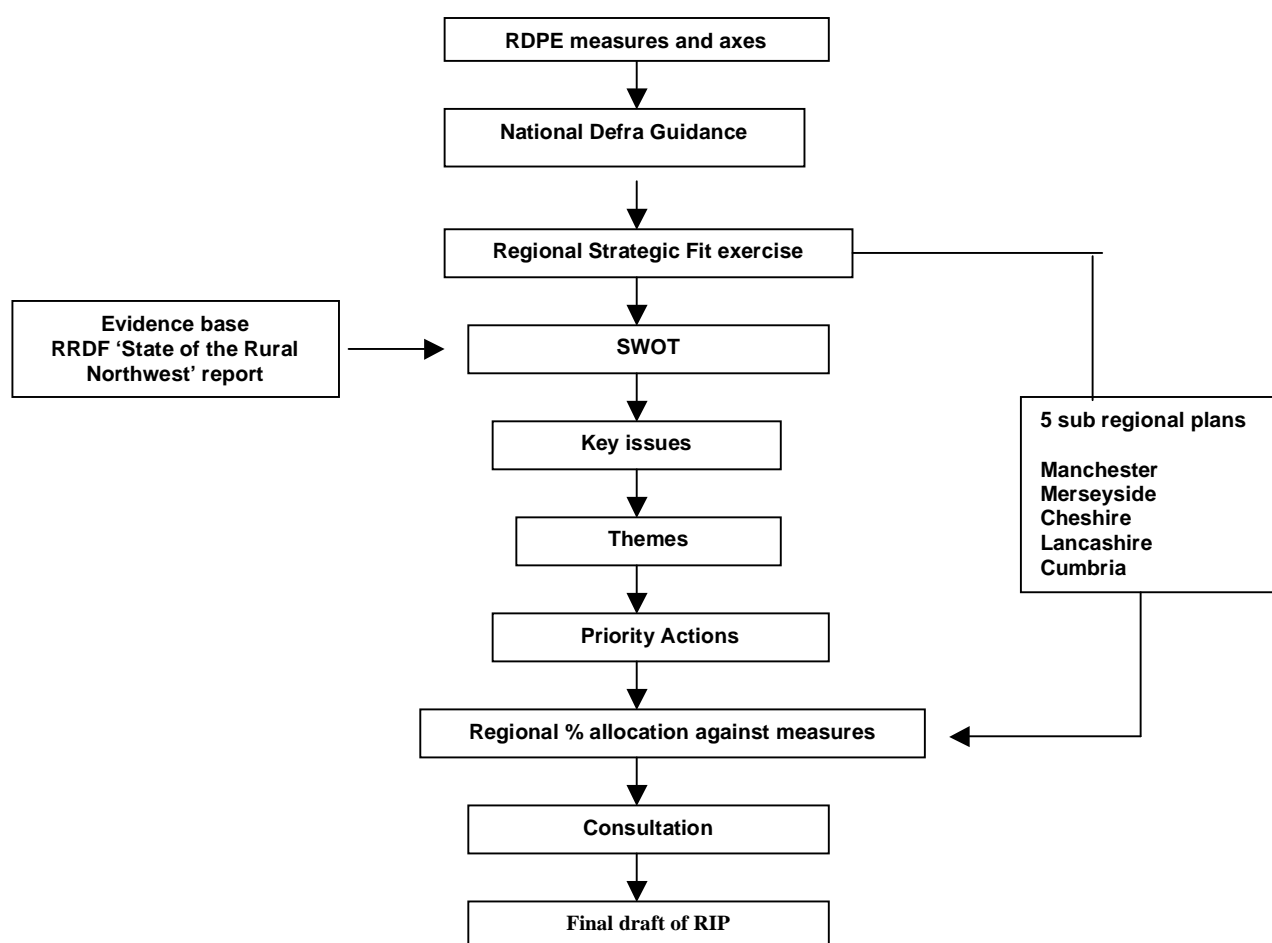
For England's Northwest, the Regional Development Agency has further devolved the preparation of sub-regional implementation plans to Cumbria, Lancashire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cheshire. These plans are being prepared by the existing sub-regional partnerships that have previously taken a lead for economic development programmes. The sub regional plans will deliver Axis I, III & IV of the Regional Implementation Plan in the sub-regions .

On the pages that follow, the details of activity for the region under the RDPE are set out and the proposed balance of funding for each theme is established. The activities outlined are guided first and foremost by the Regional Rural Delivery Framework (RRDF), but also by the delivery partners key documents; Regional Forestry Framework (RFF) entitled 'Agenda for Growth' the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) and Natural England's Strategic Direction.

Although the above outline of axes, plans, implementation schemes and priority areas at first glance may appear complex; for England's Northwest the reality is simple and engaging: over the next 6 years the region that has bounced back from past setbacks with such energy and dynamism, now has an opportunity to build on its strong partnerships and even stronger reputation for delivery.

The partners intend that the RDPE will build a sustainable future for the rural areas of the Northwest Region.

1.2 Illustration of the process the Delivery Partners have followed



2. The regional context for a sustainable rural future

England's Northwest is ready and willing to take on the opportunities and challenges set out within the RDPE and to add significant value to the European funding support that will drive change over the next six years.

Most importantly, the region is a proven force when it comes to delivery. The region's rural communities have forged powerful partnerships that have diversified the economy and perhaps most importantly have taken an holistic view of the opportunities for new businesses, skills development and environmental conservation and enhancement.

The North West has 6.7 million inhabitants and covers just over 10% of England. Some 80% of the region can be considered rural in character on which agricultural activities predominate. Within the sub regions dairy farming predominates in Cheshire, whilst beef and sheep farming in the uplands of Cumbria or Lancashire. Some 88 per cent of the population lives in urban areas, particularly across the major conurbations of Greater Manchester and Merseyside. However, Gt Manchester does contain some remoter communities around its fringes and within the South Pennines that are rural in character. Similarly, the Merseyside sub-region contains some of the highest quality land in the region that sustains an established horticultural industry and significant numbers of farm-based employees.

2.1 Sub-regional partnerships

The North West Development Agency increasingly delivers through an empowered network of sub-regional partnerships such as Cumbria Vision or Manchester Enterprises. The partnerships include a range of

agencies and organisations involved in rural regeneration, economic development, business support and specialists within the landbased sector.

These partnerships have been pivotal in helping to deliver key programmes through the Regional Economic Strategy (RES). In the more rural sub-regions of Lancashire, Cumbria and Cheshire, the partnerships first came into being to deliver the Rural Action Plans that were created as a consequence of Foot and Mouth Disease, as a result their ability to deliver strong and robust programmes is therefore proven. The five sub-regional partnerships are working with their local partners to produce sub-regional Implementation Plans. These sub-regional plans are based on regional priorities identified as a result of a mapping exercise of relevant strategies (see Annexe VII). Together, their key role is to identify action at a very local level. The sub-regional plans are the foundation for delivery of Axis I, III and IV and could have the potential to assist targeting Axis II.

2.2 The strategic drivers for change

The structure of this plan and its action themes outlined in the next few pages, have been informed by a regional consultation exercise and by analysis of the key regional strategies that will inform the plan, namely the Regional Rural Delivery Framework (RRDF), the Regional Forestry Framework, the Regional Economic Strategy and Natural England's Strategic Direction. Delivery partners intend that this programme will complement and work with other relevant strategies in the region, eg RSS, SSFF and Environment Agency.

The Regional Delivery Plan for the Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food (SSFF) will continue to ensure that farm businesses become more market orientated, environmentally sustainable and reconnect with their consumers. The strategy will embrace a wide spectrum of activity, ensuring that farm businesses are environmentally sustainable and economically viable. Key deliverers of this change will be agri-environmental payments focused on the delivery of public goods and the Single Farm Payment Scheme.

The priority actions outlined in the RRDF are of particular importance and map against the thematic action areas outlined in this implementation plan, which were laid out by Defra as being priorities within the RDPE. As a set of regional priorities that have been established, agreed and acted upon by regional partners, it is vital that they are reflected in this plan for the RDPE. The RRDF has six priorities:

- **Maximising the economic potential of the region's rural areas**
- **Supporting sustainable farming and food**
- ***Ensuring access to affordable rural housing****
- **Ensuring fair access to services for rural communities**
- **Empowering rural communities and addressing rural social exclusion**
- **Enhancing the value of our rural environmental inheritance**

** There are no measures in the RDPE Programme to address affordable housing.*

2.3 Thematic action areas

In its guidance to the regions on how to develop their Regional Implementation Plans, Defra established three desired themes for action:

- **Making farming and forestry more competitive and sustainable;**
- **Enhancing the environment and countryside; and**
- **Enhancing opportunities in rural areas**

This thematic direction indicates that a joined-up approach to programme delivery should be pursued. As the regional experience of rural diversification has shown, rural development programmes are at their most effective when they adopt an holistic and sustainable approach. For example, where environmental enhancement is used to boost a tourism business or where an agricultural business diversifies into an area that also has a positive environmental outcome (e.g. biomass). In addition to the above themes, the North West partners drafting this implementation plan have added a fourth cross-cutting theme of:

- **Skills, knowledge transfer and capacity building**

With these four themes established and agreed and with the desire for joined-up delivery of the RIP identified, a strong framework has been created for the Northwest's response to the RDPE that when the programme starts, a balanced programme can be delivered.

3. Issues and Opportunities

In preparing this RIP an analysis was conducted of the region's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) in line with guidance from Defra and the approach deployed across other English regions. The full analysis, which utilises primary evidence from the PION Report – the State of the Rural North West 2004 - can be found in Annex IV to this document. Some of the significant issues arising from the SWOT that are relevant to this programme are explored in more detail below. These substantiate the proposed actions and measures that are to be found in sections 4 and 5 of this plan.

3.1 Key issue: Competitiveness and Growth

The rural North West still faces significant long-term economic challenges and some fundamental problems that remain difficult to shift.

There are a number of underperforming areas (per capita), a lack of enterprise diversity and a widespread recognition that there is limited available workspace of an appropriate nature for modern enterprise. Baseline data collected for the RRDF makes it clear that, although rural areas account for 40% of the region's businesses and 25% of its workforce, its contribution to GVA is only around 23% of the regional total. This suggests an abundance of poorly performing enterprises in rural areas. This must be addressed if we are to create the conditions for sustainable growth.

Outside of agriculture and forestry, economic activity and commerce type in rural areas is similar to the rest of the region. Rural areas do however, have a higher proportion of SMEs, tend to have more lower paid workers with a higher proportion of seasonal employment, and significantly more multiple employment. There is a need for on-going investment, increased innovation, growth of a higher level skills base and an enduring level of entrepreneurship. A key difference in the rural economy is that its business based appears more robust. Business start-up rates may be lower in rural areas but survival rates are higher. Prosperity in rural areas is can appear 'polarised'. Agriculture's weak economic performance is in stark contrast to the growth in business services and the stabilising force of public sector employment which provides 20-25% of all jobs in rural areas. This also impacts at the level of individuals within rural communities where the relative prosperity of an area masks deprivation and counters the argument that all parts of a community automatically benefit from the success of investment elsewhere

3.2 Key issue: Climate change and energy

All aspects of life; economic, social and environmental face a significant threat from climate change. By the 2080s, it is predicted that the average annual daily temperature could increase by up to 4 degrees centigrade and seasonal rainfall patterns will change. Winter precipitation could increase by up to 30 per cent and summer rainfall decrease by up to 60 per cent. Actions that strengthen the resilience of the rural environment in the face of impending climate change impacts should be encouraged and landscape scale adaptation strategies pursued.

Rural economic activity should move towards making a significant contribution to achieving a low-carbon and well adapted region, as a business opportunity. Better land management, increased energy efficiency and new diversified enterprises focused around bio-fuels and bio-energy crops could contribute to reducing the region's carbon emissions.

Clear priorities for action include using waste streams or by-products to generate energy, short rotation coppicing and utilising under-managed woodlands as a source of wood fuel to address the Forestry Commission's national target of 1m tonnes of biomass from woodland management.

However, rural communities in the Northwest, particularly those in off-gas areas, lack any capacity to realise locally focused biomass initiatives. Such initiatives would deliver on priority actions across all four RIP themes and all rural areas in the North West should address this need for capacity within rural communities.

3.3 Key issue: Resource protection

The region's natural environmental resources - its natural capital - has an estimated value to the Northwest's economy of around £2.5 billion, much of it through rural businesses that are directly reliant on the environment, such as fishing, forestry or outdoor pursuits. An estimated 48,000 tourism jobs alone are judged to be reliant on a high quality environment. Protecting our natural environmental resources is of

primary importance in protecting environment-dependant jobs and is important to creating new business opportunities for the future.

One resource that comes under consistent pressure in rural areas is the region's network of waters and waterways. The majority of water pollution incidents are not from heavy industry but from agriculture. The contribution of diffuse pollution – run-off - to a reduced water quality across the region is of particular concern. The run-off is often made-up of nutrient rich soils that are drawn from arable and rough grazing areas that are at an increasing risk of soil erosion. This erosion of soil can damage waterways and water resources such as Cumbria's lakes, but it also leads to a release of carbon locked in the soil and a drop in biodiversity. A key challenge for rural areas is a true adoption of sustainable farming and land use that reduces water pollution, increases efficiency in water use, combats soil erosion and protects the region's locked up carbon 'sinks'.

3.4 Key issue: Sustainable agriculture

The Northwest's agricultural sector is used to adapting and changing to shifting circumstances, from BSE and Foot and Mouth Disease to an increasingly globalised and cost-cutting market for agricultural products.

In the coming years, circumstances will continue to shift. Most pivotally through the change in focus under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) from supporting agricultural output to supporting sustainable land management, environmental stewardship and the development of farm businesses focus on their customers. A sustainable and prosperous farming sector will be in a better position to deliver many of the desired environmental and animal health and welfare outcomes than one which is struggling to survive.

To deliver this, farmers' will need to adopt a new culture of cooperation and collaboration that will be capable of delivering economies of scale. The challenge for the region, particularly in upland areas, is to maintain an economically viable farming and food sector which is focused on its markets and seeks to maximise the environmental gain from this shift. At the same time it is important to recognise the role of the agricultural community in safeguarding the region's upland heritage where diversity and options for change are limited. Opportunities also exist to develop locality food brands, offering farmers the chance to add value to commodity production. Potential may also exist to link economic and environmental assets through food branding, especially in areas of high landscape character.

Organic farming within the region is recognised as having an important role in delivering a Sustainable Farming and Food sector. The region has responded to the challenges facing the organic sector and has established the North West Organics Centre to reverse the reduction in land managed organically and bring the region more in line with national trends and market opportunities. Pressing issues such as declining returns to producers, a lack of producer co-operation, a lack of processing facilities and problems over quality and continuity of supply remain important for the region to address.

3.5 Key issue: Forestry and woodlands

Woodland and forestry in Northwest England face several challenges. Although we have 700 square miles of Community Forest, we have relatively low woodland cover at 6.8% of land cover (96,171 hectares). Nearly half of the resource is under-managed,. The Regional Forestry Framework (2005) identifies the priorities for this cross cutting sector and the issues this programme can address are summarised below.

Only 61% of woodland Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's) are in favourable/recovering condition and our valuable Ancient Woodlands, which cover 1% of land, are in need of protection and active management to restore and conserve their biodiversity value. In helping to meet Regional and National BAP targets we need to focus on key woodland habitat types and species.

Although an intrinsic part of the regional landscape, many woodland habitats are seriously fragmented and in need of restoration and reconnection. The North West has 7 million people and some of poorest health records in England. This gives rise to opportunities for increased access to and community engagement in woodlands. Woodlands have a key role in economic, social and environmental regeneration. For example, in the restoration of derelict, underused and neglected land (DUNL) and over a third of the 26,385 hectares are in rural areas.

The forestry and woodland industry sector underpins the sustainable management of our woodland. It has significant skill, capacity, leadership and networking challenges and there is a need to build on and improve its environmental and sustainability credentials to ensure they can deliver the required benefits. We need to foster growth in the sector through innovation, the development of new markets, eg woodfuel

biomass and process improvement. There is a particular opportunity to add value to current forestry or farming operations through diversification, particularly for micro-businesses.

3.6 Key issue: Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage

The landscapes of the NW region includes densely-populated cities and extensive urban fringe areas though 80% is farmland including large expanses of sparsely-populated upland areas and scenic countryside. The region has a remarkable range of habitats – from major estuaries such as Morecambe Bay, to the lakes and uplands of the Lake District and North Pennines. Approximately 29% of the region is subject to statutory landscape designation, comprising the Lake District, Yorkshire Dales and Peak District National Parks and Arnsdale Silverdale, Forest of Bowland, Solway and North Pennines Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In addition, the UK Government is a co-signatory of the European Landscape Convention which gives specific duties towards the conservation and enhancement of all landscapes. The region also has responsibilities resulting from a wealth of European and international ecological designations.

These rich landscape and biodiversity assets provide an essential resource for public enjoyment and recreation, and underpin much of the tourism activity in the region. Of major significance are the region's upland areas, much being subject to statutory landscape and ecological designation. Ensuring continued support for these public goods in light of the impact of further CAP reform constitutes a major challenge for the region. 30% of England's common land is in the NW, many being large upland sites with high ecological status. The challenge is achieving coherent management of this asset through intervention, capable of addressing the inherent complexity of land management interests.

2070 km² of the region is designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The challenge is to improve the sustainable management of this rich resource. Currently 18% is in poor condition due to unsustainable management – particularly upland, river, lake, limestone pavement/grassland and woodland habitats.

The North West's contribution to the England Biodiversity Strategy, through 5 Local Biodiversity Action Plans, will improve the quality and extent of many important habitats. Fragmentation and isolation of existing habitats which reduces habitat robustness, connectivity and expansion potential is also a significant issue, Particularly in more developed and populated lowland areas and for large-scale upland habitats, including upland woodland/scrub.

In the North West there is a significant historic/archaeological asset base and designated historic environment assets. In addition there are many thousands of buildings, sites and features within a historic landscape context which are not legally protected but which provide a sense of place for the people who live in and visit the countryside and make the landscape of the North West so varied and attractive and which attract thousands of visitors every year.

Changes to the NW region's traditional rural landscapes are happening fast, through urban pressures, the partly unpredictable effects of climate change, the need for renewable energy production, and through economic changes affecting agriculture, not least the changes to agricultural support payments. This change offers challenges but also opportunities for increased environmentally focused management.

3.7 Key issue: Skills, knowledge transfer and capacity building

One reason why skills, knowledge transfer and capacity building is presented as a cross-cutting theme in this RIP is due to the broad and extensive range of challenges and opportunities the issue presents for rural areas, not least because so many areas have relatively high levels of low productivity or low pay. For the agricultural and forestry community, there is a need for farmers and land managers to broaden their skills base to include: sustainable approaches to land management to ensure that they gain maximum direct (economic) benefit from the changing focus in the CAP; a greater level of understanding of information and communication technologies (ICT); and a wider and more up-to-date set of techniques around business management and marketing.

There is a more general need to build and develop Leadership within the rural communities, to increase levels of vocational training and deliver an increase in levels of knowledge transfer or research, from core areas such as animal welfare, renewable energy, resource efficiency and better business practice.

4. Delivering Rural Development across England's Northwest

The delivery of this Regional Implementation Plan will be led by three key regional agencies: the Northwest Regional Development Agency (Axis I and III and LEADER); Natural England and the Forestry Commission (Axis II). The four themes detailed earlier will guide the activities within the RIP and have been used to help ensure that key regional priorities, such as those contained in the RRDF, are included. Below the themes are related in more detail, including information regarding targeting of resources and delivery.

4.1 Theme One

Making agriculture and forestry more competitive & sustainable

Summary evidence base

Agriculture and forestry together account for 3% of regional GVA. However, sub-regionally and within a singularly rural context, this figure can be doubled. Approximately 40,000 are employed directly in farming and 25,000 through woodland and forestry companies. Overall in the rural economy, there are considerable issues around low profit and lack of economic diversity that is compounded by remoteness and a lack of workspace. Agriculture and forestry are particularly associated with these issues. Although rural areas enjoy lower levels of unemployment, earning levels are lower and multiple employment is prevalent in remote areas.

Strategic 'fit' with other regional strategies See annex VI

This thematic area supports a number of important regional strategies as detailed below:

Regional Rural Delivery Framework

- Support the provision of business and environmental advice to the farming and food sectors
- Support for on farm diversification and innovation
- Encourage greater collaborative activity both vertically and horizontally within the farming and food industry
- Promote sustainable business growth in rural areas by focusing intervention on opportunities for higher value production, higher-value employment; in-migrating businesses and entrepreneurship; and by focusing business support on closing the productivity gap with non-rural businesses

Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food

- SSFF will use RDPE as a key delivery vehicle to achieve its outcomes. SSFF has been embedded within headline Priority 2 of the RRDF to ensure mainstream delivery of the strategy.

Regional Forestry Framework

- Provide support that meets the specific requirements of the woodland and forestry sector
- Provide advice that meets the specific requirements of woodland and forestry sector

Natural England Strategic outcomes & objectives

- Influence markets and supply chains
- Environmentally sustainable farming, fishery and forestry

Regional Economic Strategy priority actions

- Implement plans to ensure ongoing growth in the rural economy
- Review Business Support Needs (in the rural economy)
- Supporting companies to use and harness the benefits of ICT

Priority actions

- Encourage and support collaborative activity amongst farm and forestry businesses
- Develop an economically viable farming food and forestry industry that is profitable reconnected and responsive to its markets
- The modernisation and diversification of key employment sectors in rural areas
- Develop new markets for and add value to rural products including opportunities arising out of climate change such as woodfuel biomass
- Increase efficiency of use of resources, such as energy and water
- Implement Sustainable Food and Farming Strategy
- Vocational training and development of skills to improve competitiveness
- Provision of advice to land managers to maximise sustainability of land holding
- Adding value to primary produce

Delivery and targeting

The priority actions identified above will be delivered under Axis I of the RDPE (see Table I) by the Northwest Regional Development Agency in partnership with local and sub-regional partnerships; particularly in respect of adopting a LEADER approach. Networking forums and dissemination workshops have been identified as appropriate methods of delivery particularly at the point of need. Some measures will be available across the region while others, for example, will be focussed on districts that are identified by Defra as lagging behind in productivity or in sparse rural districts

4.2 Theme Two

Conserving and enhancing the environment and countryside

Summary evidence base

The region boasts a broad and diverse range of environmental, historic, landscape and recreational assets which require intervention for varied reasons in order to sustain and deliver the defined public goods. The region's natural environment delivers more than £2.5 billion into the region's economy through primary industries such as forestry or agriculture to secondary industries such as environment-dependent tourism and recreation. Under this theme there are priorities for biodiversity, landscape, historic environment, resource protection, woodland, access and climate change. For further detail on evidence please refer to the RRDF and its supporting evidence report.

Strategic 'fit' with other regional strategies See annex VI

This thematic area supports a number of important regional strategies as detailed below:

Regional Rural Delivery Framework

- Enhancing the quality of, and promotion of, our rural environmental inheritance
- Promoting a prosperous, sustainable farming and food sector

Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food

- SSFF will use RDPE as a key delivery vehicle to achieve its outcomes. SSFF has been embedded within headline Priority 2 of the RRDF to ensure mainstream delivery of the strategy.

Regional Forestry Framework

- Linkage and expansion of existing areas of woodland
- Targeted woodland creation and management
- Joint agenda for agriculture and forestry supporting landscape, biodiversity and forestry businesses
- Woodland as a viable tool for regeneration of derelict land
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- Address needs of different recreation users and promote accessible woodlands

Natural England Strategic outcomes and objectives

- A healthy natural environment
- Enjoyment of the natural environment
- Sustainable use of the natural environment
- A secure environmental future

Regional Economic Strategy priority actions

- Promote sustainable farming and food production and its role in the management of rural environmental assets
- Implement the Regional Forestry Framework

Priority actions

- Protecting, enhancing and reversing any decline in the 'environmental capital' associated with woodland: biodiversity, soils, water, landscapes and cultural heritage
- Conserve and enhance wildlife and biodiversity by; Reversing the long term decline in woodland and farmland birds, Improving the status of habitats and species as identified in the England Biodiversity Strategy, maintaining and restoring nationally and internationally important wildlife sites to safeguard their value and meeting the PSA target for SSSI's
- Maintain and enhance landscape quality and character
- Protect and enhance the historic environment and cultural heritage
- Promote public access and understanding of the countryside
- Protect natural resources including conservation of soils, flood alleviation, improving water quality, tackling water pollution, and mitigating direct emissions of green house gases from agriculture.
- Promote and encourage sustainable forest management including a priority on restoration of Ancient Woodland
- Creation of woodland where it will make up shortfalls in the provision of environmental services and benefits, and increase resilience and facilitate adaptation to climate change
- Regeneration of derelict land through woodland creation
- Provision of environmental services and quality of life benefits from environmental assets, particularly: recreational access and health benefits
- Tackle climate change through protection of carbon sinks and enhanced production of renewable energy and materials which will contribute to overall reduction in emissions.
- Enable our habitats and species to adapt through buffering and extension.

Delivery and targeting

The activities above will be delivered through Axis II of the RDPE primarily by Natural England and the Forestry Commission through the Environmental Stewardship (ES) and English Woodland Grant Schemes (EWGS). There is an intention to engage with local and sub-regional partnerships in respect of the LEADER approach and the priority actions outlined above will be supported through measures in Axis I & III. For a balance of measures see table 1. Targeting for ES occurs via a consultative process resulting in Targeting Statements based on Joint Character Areas. Natural England will undertake a comprehensive review of these statements in 2007 and will actively engage with sub regional interests as part of this process. Elements of EWGS are spatially targeted through the Public Benefit Recording System. Targeting will be reviewed regularly, especially in the context of potential for flexibility through a LEADER-style approach. See Annex 1 for scheme priorities. Hill Farm Allowance, in its current form, will continue to operate until 2008 and will then be subject to change.

4.3 Theme Three

Enhancing opportunity & quality of life in rural areas

Summary evidence base

Rural areas have a higher concentration of lower turnover businesses and a higher concentration of very small businesses, presenting challenges for business support and investment. Economic growth through indigenous new enterprises in Cumbria is higher than average in England and self employment is higher in rural areas; this should be exploited. Micro businesses form a significant part of the rural economy.

Strategic 'fit' with other regional strategies See annex VI

This thematic area supports a number of important regional strategies as detailed below:

Regional Rural Delivery Framework

- Strengthen the central role of key service centres by placing them at the heart of socio-economic growth and regeneration activity in lagging rural areas.
- Ensuring fair access to services for rural communities
- Empowering rural communities and addressing rural social exclusion

Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food

- SSFF will use RDPE as a key delivery vehicle to achieve its outcomes. SSFF has been embedded within headline Priority 2 of the RRDF to ensure mainstream delivery of the strategy.

Regional Forestry Framework

- Developing and supporting woodland businesses
- Woodland owners to develop a multi-purpose approach and engage with tourism & leisure bodies to promote accessible woodland

Natural England Strategic outcomes & objectives

- Improve places for people to enjoy the natural environment

Regional Economic Strategy priority actions

- Diversify economic base and support sectors with growth potential focusing on lagging areas
- Investing in quality public realm, greenspace and environmentally quality focused on Key Service Centres

Priority actions

- Build on entrepreneurial culture to improve sustainable, higher value business formation
- Greater socio-economic functionality of multi-use centres
- Initiatives that improve the quality of rural tourism
- Initiatives that enhance the capacity of rural communities to work together including the use of sustainable renewable technologies
- Implementing evidenced good practice in rural service provision in other parts of the region following on from the Lancashire Rural Pathfinder
- Stimulate demand and capacity to increase recreational/access opportunities
- Small scale regeneration of derelict, underused and neglected land and buildings in rural areas
- Enhance long-term viability and earning capacity of existing micro-enterprises
- Address low wage economy in the North West
- Develop rural Leadership in the region

Delivery and targeting

Delivered by the NWDA and its partners under Axis III of the RDPE, for a balance of measures see table 1. The priority actions will be delivered where possible through sub-regional partners, using the LEADER approach where appropriate. The targeting of this theme requires further development but will include special attention for the Defra defined economically lagging districts, sparse rural districts, micro-businesses and projects based around the natural economy. Support will be targeted at those businesses that have the potential to improve GVA, sustainable tourism enterprises and high value job creation. Consideration will also be given to projects that provide access to services where this will assist in undertaking an environmentally-based activity and activity creating employment that improves the condition/accessibility/interpretation of natural and cultural features.

4.4 Theme Four

Developing skills, knowledge transfer and capacity building

Summary evidence base

Employers are less likely to train staff in rural Northwest than elsewhere in the UK and there is evidence pointing to lower levels of entrepreneurial skills and poorer management skills. There is also some evidence that people in the region's rural areas do not acquire skills because employers do not demand them. The NW Woodlands Skills Issues Paper published in 2004 identifies issues such as lack of access to training, lack of skills, inaccessibility of funding, lack of support and a lack of continuity of income as important. A number of rural towns suffer from a negative 'travel to work exchange', with highly skilled workers travelling from rural areas to major conurbations to work.

Strategic 'fit' with other regional strategies See annex VI

This thematic area supports a number of important regional strategies as detailed below:

Regional Rural Delivery Framework

- A flexible and skilful rural workforce that is able to adapt to and exploit new growth opportunities within local economies
- Work with training network providers to increase the availability and diversity of Vocational Training, specific to the farming and food sectors.
- Effective advocacy of the needs of rural communities enabling access to necessary personal skills development
- Inclusion of community representatives in programme management (e.g. LEADER model)
- Support skills training to assist business expansion and diversification, focusing on IT and digital technology skills; business improvement techniques and up-skilling in existing workforces

Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food

- SSFF will use RDPE as a key delivery vehicle to achieve its outcomes. SSFF has been embedded within headline Priority 2 of the RRDF to ensure mainstream delivery of the strategy.

Regional Forestry Framework

- The woodland and forestry sector needs specialist training provision to meet specific needs

Natural England Strategic outcomes & objectives

- Improve quality of environmental land management through development and adoption of sustainable practices

Regional Economic Strategy priority actions

- Develop a skilled workforce in rural areas to enable businesses to diversify and expand
- Develop world class management/leadership and environmental management skills

Priority actions

- Improved skill access and employment within the Farming, Food and Forestry sectors
- Work with training network providers to increase the availability and diversity of vocational training
- Initiatives that tackle the root causes of low performance in the rural economy
 - Knowledge transfer and innovation
 - Leadership development
 - Community capacity building

Delivery and targeting

This cross-cutting theme will be delivered by a range of partners across all Axes of the RDPE. For a full breakdown of measures see Table 1. Programmes given priority under this theme may include ICT, sparse rural areas/upland (as defined by Defra), training in conservation management, new technical skills, sustainable land management practices, Leadership, networking and communication skills, knowledge transfer, and landscape scale activities. All training/skills, including business support proposals must not duplicate any existing or potential mainstream or ESF provision, therefore will focus on non-accredited skills, sector specialist and NVQ level III

4.5 Themes, Axes and Measures

Code (Fiche)	Article	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Axis IV
Axis 1						
111	Articles 20 (a)(1) and 21	X		X	X	X
114	Articles 20(s)(iii) and 24	X				X
115	Articles 20(a)(iv) and 25	X				X
121	Articles 20(b)(i) and 26	X				
122	Articles 20(b)(iii) and 27	X		X		X
123	Articles 20(b)(iii) and 28	X				X
124	Articles 20(b)(iv) and 29	X			X	X
125	Articles 20(b)(v) and 30	X				
Axis II						
212	Articles 36(a)(ii) and 37		X			
214	Articles 36 (a)(iv) and 39		X			
216	Articles 36(a)(vi) and 41		X			
221	Articles 36(b)(i) and 43		X			
223	Articles 36 (b)(iii) and 45		X			
225	Articles 36(b)(v) and 47		X			
227	Articles 36(b)(vi) and 49		X			
Axis III						
311	Articles 52(a)(i) and 53	X		X	X	X
312	Articles 52(a)(iii) and 54	X		X	X	X
313	Articles 52(a)(iii) and 55	X		X		X
321	Articles 52(b)(i) and 56			X		X
323	Article 57			X		X
331	Article 58			X	X	X
341	Article 59			X	X	X

Over the life of the programme it is an aspiration that linkages are developed for Theme 2 measures.

4.6 Targeting delivery

An overarching priority throughout the programme is value for money and the need to ensure that funds dispensed through the RPDE, lever the greatest possible levels of social, environmental and/or economic gain.

The targeting for Axis I and III will be both thematic and spatial, with one initial tier of targeting being directed at the Defra defined economically lagging districts and, at a deeper level, specific pockets of deprivation and need. Where there are no lagging districts, the Public Benefit Recording System approach will assist the identification of need and opportunity.

The Public Benefit Recording System (PBRS), approach has proven potential to help direct and prioritise funding using geographical information systems, where they can unlock the greatest level of social, environmental and economic gain. The core ethos behind PBRS takes in two principle criteria:

- The economic, social and environmental quality and cross functionality of a site, woodland or other area are considered as the predominant driver, and
- Such quality and cross functionality can only be delivered via holistic (economic, social and environmental) Entrepreneurship and Leadership.

Importantly for the RDPE the PBRS can help to enhance integration of activity between differing policy areas or funding regimes and it provides a evidence base to show value for money and additionality. The

FC is using PBRS to target elements of its English Woodland Grant Scheme as are several of the sub regions for their socio-economic allocations.

Targeting for Environmental Stewardship Schemes takes the form of targeting statements, based on a consultative landscape scale approach using "Joint Character Areas". These statements will be subject to strategic revision in 2007 and Natural England will actively engage with regional and sub regional stakeholders as part of this process.

4.7 Targets for the Programme

There are a number of Defra Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets that will be used to monitor programmes under the RDPE, namely:

- **Reduce gap in productivity between the least well performing rural areas (the Defra defined economically lagging districts) and the English median**
- **Improved accessibility of services for rural people**
- **More customer focussed, competitive and sustainable farming & food sectors**
- **At least 95% (by area) of the region's SSSI's are in favourable condition by 2010**
- **To reverse the decline in farmland and woodland bird populations by 2020**

The Regional Economic Strategy (RES) will also guide the RDPE, in particular the eight, ambitious short term targets it sets for the region to achieve by 2009. RDPE will make a contribution to these regional targets. These are:

- **Achieve economic growth above the England average**
- **Create 150,000 net new jobs, 80,000 in 'knowledge occupations**
- **Raise the company formation rate to 21,000 per year**
- **Reduce the number of people with no qualifications by 80,000**
- **Increase the number of people in the workforce with graduate qualifications by 120,000**
- **Increase the number of people in the workforce by 83,000**
- **Reduce the number of areas which are categorised in the worst 5 per cent nationally in terms of deprivation**
- **Reduce CO2 emissions per unit of output**

Both Environmental Stewardship and the English Woodland Grant Scheme have their own targets, which will be revised under the new programme and are yet to be agreed. Priorities for the 2 schemes in the region are given in Annex 1.

4.8 Reviewing Targets

As the RDPE is a seven year programme there will be a need to adjust and further develop targeting in response to recognised and agreed shifts in priorities. The opportunity to re-visit the priorities and targeting of Axis I & III sits comfortably with the timescales for refreshing other regional strategies and particularly the Region's Economic Strategy.

During the course of this programme Natural England is committed to engaging with local, sub regional and regional stakeholders in the review of its statements and targets. The ES targeting statements will be reviewed throughout the programme to ensure they continue to meet current challenges and priorities. For forestry, as well as new national priorities, the RFF 3 year action plan cycle will inform the reviewing of targets for the FC and EWGS.

4.9 The use of a LEADER Approach

The LEADER approach will be integral to delivery of much of the RDPE programme in the Northwest and form the basis of a delivery platform across substantial parts of the region.

Sub-Regional Partners have been invited to identify and develop areas, partnerships and proposals that are consistent with the regional priorities identified and are working together to develop the LEADER approach. The sub regional partnerships are currently developing their LEADER ideas. It is expected that up to 20% of Axis I and 40% of Axis III will be spent under LEADER. The goal will be to demonstrate a true community-led approach to rural regeneration across all Axes.

An open and transparent selection process is required. In the North West this will be through a two phase process. The first stage will be an Expression of Interest submitted to a regional selection panel. The Panel will assess all the Expressions of Interest. Following this partnerships will be invited to develop local strategies. These will be reviewed by the Regional Panel against criteria to be published.

The Forestry Commission and Natural England will engage with the new LEADER Groups as the approach offers sustainable, holistic and integrated public benefit delivery. They will seek to engage in the development of LEADER in the region and in spite of the constraints in the delivery of Axis 2 funding, will seek to align elements of their grant funding in agreed priority areas developed with the LAG's.

Local Partnerships will need to consider the following:

European and National Guidance

The European Rural Development Regulation that provides the detail of the requirements can be found on Defra's website http://www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/rdp07_13/default.htm

What type of partnership can be a Local Action Group (LAG)?

According to the Council Regulation "they must consist of either a group already qualified for the LEADER II or LEADER+ initiatives, or according to the LEADER approach, or be a new group representing partners from the various locally based socio-economic sectors in the territory concerned."

When partnerships consider what the role of a LAG might be, it will be important to look concurrently at the following three elements - how LAGs should be constructed, what LAGs should deliver and where. It is delivered. Only by looking at these three together is it possible to start having an idea what structures might be fit for purpose.

Construction – key points

- Must be sufficiently local – in population terms this means 5-150,000
- Must be public-private partnership
- Non-public sector representatives must make up at least 50% at decision making level
- Must be multi-sectoral – in other words they cannot have a single focus such as tourism or access to services but must instead have a fully integrated approach to rural development

LAG delivery

- Must be capable of drawing up and subsequently implementing their own local development strategy
- Their strategy must be multi-sectoral
- Their strategy must be bottom-up (meaning community involvement in developing the strategy as well as individual projects)
- They will choose projects to be financed under the strategy
- They will use their budget to: implement their strategy; implement co-operation projects; run the local action group (including capacity building)

Key here are the bottom-up nature of the approach and the autonomy that the partnerships need to be given. The approach is about identifying issues as well as implementing a strategy to solve them.

The areas to be covered by LAGs

- The areas should be well-identified sub-regional rural territories
- Should be coherent
- they should be within the population limits of 5,000 and 150,000 inhabitants other than in exceptional circumstances
- offer sufficient critical mass in terms of human, financial and economic resources to support a viable development strategy

LAG areas must therefore have a sufficient local identity. Given the population criteria most LAGs are unlikely to cover more than one or two districts. The requirement to be coherent and well-identified would, for example, rule out a dispersed grouping of market towns unless there was an overarching LAG that covered the whole area.

Regional Selection Criteria

To promote delivery of priorities at a more local level Regional Partners have developed the following priorities

- An ability to comply with LEADER principles and regulations
- Focus on tackling rural disadvantage
- Targeting on specific geographical areas
- Track record on delivery or work with experienced delivery agency
- Potential to lever in additional sources of funding
- Ability to tailor interventions to local need based on experience
- Demonstrate commitment to integration across the Axes

Regional Selection Panel

This will consist of a representative of the NWDA, GONW representing Defra, Natural England, Forestry Commission, Regional Assembly, Regional Skills Council, Environment Agency Chaired by Chair of Rural Affairs Forum, or their nominated representative

5. Unlocking value and sustainability

Successful implementation of the Regional implementation Plan will depend on the 3 key delivery partners and a range of stakeholders being committed to working in partnership. The plan also needs to be flexible enough to respond to new challenges.

Natural England will be responsible for the delivery of Environmental Stewardship Schemes (in addition to the existing work connected to the legacy agri-environment schemes). The Forestry Commission will be responsible for delivering the English Woodland Grant Scheme and the Farm Woods Payment Scheme as well as commitments under the preceding Woodland Grant Scheme and also the Farm Woods Premium Scheme once transferred. A large proportion of the funding allocation from Axis II is already assigned to existing commitments, initially giving limited flexibility. Axis II funding will also be used to support the successor to the Hill Farm Allowance Scheme. The important role that Axis II has in helping to secure the economic viability of land-based businesses and communities must be seen as a key part of unlocking value and sustainability.

NWDA is managing the legacy commitments for the 'Project Based Schemes' of the ERDP as well as delivering the new programme for Axes I, III and IV from 2007. NWDA are developing delivery of these axes at sub regional level. These sub regional partnerships already have good working relationships with Natural England and Forestry Commission, ensuring an integrated approach to delivery.

5.1 Other regional funding sources

In delivering the RDPE, regional partners are committed to ensuring that projects are funded by the most appropriate funding streams. Additionality and the avoidance of double funding will be key, with particular attention given to the range of other available funding sources and how the limited resources from the RDPE might be used to achieve beneficial impact.

Wherever feasible, the maximum use of mainstream funding opportunities will be achieved. RDPE monies will not replicate what can be provided via centrally funded providers. Nor will it be a way of backfilling services where efficiency measures have deemed them non essential. Projects which approach the RDPE programme for funding, where mainstream public sector spending could potentially support the projects, will have to demonstrate that mainstream funding is either not available or inappropriate for their project. For example, some skills training can be provided through schools and colleges via the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for post 16 year olds and so as a result, it is not sensible for the RDPE to fund provision.

Principles Underpinning Delivery of RDPE funded Business Support

Since the announcement in the 2006 Budget, government is collectively working within the national policy of Business Support Simplification. This policy drive has the vision of creating easy to access Government support for business which is:

Targeted – where it will have greatest impact;

Efficient – delivered to get best value for money;

Fit for purpose – meets national, regional and local challenges in a changing global economy.

Business Link is now the primary access point for publicly funded business support, and will act as the gateway by providing Information, Diagnosis and Brokerage only.

All business support funded by RDPE, whether designed and delivered at the regional, sub-regional or local level must be consistent with the regionally coordinated framework and informed by:

- Regionally agreed priorities and actions
- The Government's Business Support Simplification Policy

Sub-regionally, the delivery partners for the RDPE will need to ensure that the principles outlined in this section are adhered to in order to deliver integrated programmes and to avoid overlap or confusion in the minds of potential beneficiaries.

See Annex II for more detail on other funding sources.

5.2 Value for money

It is recognised this funding is not the whole solution to the region's challenges. The limited funds available through RDPE mean that appropriate prioritising and targeting needs to take place and levels of support should be proportional to the public benefit.

The sub-regional partners are delivery bodies for other funds available in the NW, their knowledge of other regional funding sources will ensure that the most appropriate funding source is utilised ensuring value for money and avoiding duplication.

In light of the baseline issues illustrated in the SWOT analysis, rural economic intervention will focus on halting and where possible, reversing decline; tackling the barriers to productivity; bringing new opportunities to rural areas; and supporting the activities that are strengthening the rural economy.

The future direction of The Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food (SSFF) will continue to ensure that farm businesses become more market orientated, environmentally sustainable and reconnected with their consumers. The strategy will embrace a wide spectrum of activity, with environmental payments in particular being focused on the delivery of public goods. The aim will be to ensure that farm businesses are environmentally sustainable and economically viable. Central to delivering SSFF will be the Single Payment Scheme (SPS), with farmers having to meet a range of standards for continued receipt of SPS. Complementary to these will be the agri- environmental payments that will be delivered as part of Environmental Stewardship, of which the higher level payments will be competitive and the Forest Environment Payments through EWGS.

In addition to the environmental elements of RDPE, Axis 1 and 3 activity should also aim to help farm businesses adjust to the changing economic environment by helping to embed a culture of delivering value for money and increasing the overall efficiency and sustainability of their business.

Investment in skills, enterprise and innovation is identified through the SWOT and sits as a priority theme for the NW. RDPE support will be directed towards low pay, low productivity, economically lagging areas and upland communities.

The North West Regional Implementation Plan has been subject to a sustainability appraisal.

5.3 Demarcation with other EU Funding

It is an EU requirement that a clear demarcation is established between the European structural funds; European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) the European Social Fund (ESF), the European Fisheries Fund (EFF) and the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). In the region, the operation plan for the ERDF and the RIP have been produced in parallel. However, provisional discussions have suggested the following options and points that are important for all partners to note. Broad demarcation rules are:

- ERDF will apply equally to rural areas as well as to urban areas.
- There will be no support for agricultural activity from ERDF or ESF
- Axes I and II deliver support primarily directed at farmers and forestry activities, including delivery of SFFS priorities

On business support ERDF will be directed towards growth businesses, whilst RDPE funding from Axis III will be directed towards micro and start up businesses. This will also apply to skills provision and re-skilling programmes.

To ensure arrangements work coherently across structural funds, rural development funds and fisheries funds, the Northwest Development Agency are undertaking the role of alignment. This alignment will help achieve a greater focus for all instruments in contributing to shared regional goals, in particular those set out in the Regional Economic Strategy and in the Regional Rural Delivery Framework.

The Managing Authority for the England programme will have responsibility for ensuring that the required complementarity is achieved. At a regional level the Rural Practitioners Steering Group, as part of its overall strategic management for the programme, will arrange for annual progress reports to the Managing Authority. To ensure clarity and avoid duplication we will look for reciprocal arrangements with ERDF Programme management Committee.

More detail on demarcation between activities is provided at annex V

5.4 The balance of regional measures

Table I below indicates the proposed level of funding to be allocated through the RIP across each Axis Area.

The sub regional allocations are provisional at this stage

The prioritisation was undertaken by mapping regional priorities from all the relevant strategies, informed by the experience of the delivery partners. See the table in Annex VI for the full analysis.

In the early stages of delivery of the new Programme, provision will need to be made for the financial commitments resulting from Agreements entered into under the previous (2000-2006) England Rural Development Programme. This will inevitably have an impact on the region's ability, initially, to support significant levels of new activity in line with this Regional Implementation Plan. It is clear that much of the work carried forward from the previous programme will be consistent with the priorities identified for the new programme period, but where priorities have changed, allowance will be made to honour existing contractual commitments.

Table II shows indicative allocations between the five sub-regions. The allocation has been agreed between the sub-regional partners and is based on the formula agreed by Defra and the RDAs nationally to allocate RDPE funding across England.

Table III

Table III indicates potential activity that will be delivered through LEADER

TABLE I

Use of Measures in North West by percentage (%)					
Code (Fiche)	Article	Measure	%	VM %	Leader % ^[1]
Axis I					
111	Articles 20 (a)(1) and 21	Vocational training and information actions	35	35	x
114	Articles 20(a)(iii) and 24	Use of advisory services	5	5	x
115	Articles 20(a)(iv) and 25	Setting up of management, relief & advisory services	5	5	x
121	Articles 20(b)(i) and 26	Modernisation of agricultural holdings	5	5	x
122	Articles 20(b)(iii) and 27	Improving the economic value of forests	5	5	x
123	Articles 20(b)(iii) and 28	Adding value to agricultural and forestry products	20	20	x
124	Articles 20(b)(iv) and 29	Co-operation for the development of new products	20	20	x
125	Articles 20(b)(v) and 30	infrastructure related to the development & adaptation of agriculture & forestry	5	5	x
		TOTAL	100	100	20
Axis II					
212	Articles 36(a)(ii) and 37	Payments to farmers in areas with handicaps, other than mountain areas	16		
214	Articles 36 (a)(iv) and 39	Ag - Agri-environment Payments	70		
216	Articles 36(a)(vi) and 41	Non productive investment	1.5		
221	Articles 36(b)(i) and 43	First afforestation of agricultural land	5.1		
223	Articles 36 (b)(iii) and 45	First afforestation of non-agricultural land	0.6		
225	Articles 36(b)(v) and 47	Forest-environment payments	5.1		
227	Articles 36(b)(vi) and 49	For - Support for non-productive investments	1.8		
		TOTAL	100		
Axis III					
311	Articles 52(a)(i) and 53	Diversification into non-agricultural activities	25	32	x
312	Articles 52(a)(iii) and 54	Support creation & development of micro-enterprises	20	32	x
313	Articles 52(a)(iii) and 55	Encouragement of tourism	15	10	x
321	Articles 52(b)(i) and 56	Basic services	17	5	x
323	Articles 57	Conservation and upgrading of rural heritage	3	1	x
331	Article 58	Training and information	5	5	x
341	Article 59	Skills acquisition, animation & implementation of local development strategies	15	15	x
		TOTAL	100	100	40

1[1] X indicates measures which may be delivered by LEADER Groups

Table II

NW sub-regional % allocation of axes I and III funds – does not include any voluntary modulation funds			
	Axis 1	Axis III	Total
Cumbria	44.84	44.88	44.86
Lancashire	29.03	21.19	25.11
Gt Manchester	6.25	9.27	7.76
Cheshire & Warrington	17.98	14.56	16.27
Gt Merseyside	1.84	10.2	6.00
Total	99.94	100.05	100.00

Calculation of allocation of funding to sub-regions is based on Defra methodology to allocate national funds to Regional Development Agencies.

Table III

Axis IV - LEADER			
Percentage breakdown of the LEADER budget			
41	Articles 61 to 65	Implementing local development strategies	
411		- competitiveness	30
412		- environment/land management	
413		- quality of life/diversification	53
421	Articles 61 – 65, 59 & 68	Implementing cooperation projects	2
431	Articles 61 to 65, 59 & 68	Running the local action group, acquiring skills & animating the territory as referred in article 59	15
		TOTAL	100

6 Measuring success and communicating change

The above sections of the RIP detail how the RDPE will be delivered across the region, what the region's priorities will be in delivering RDPE programmes and what the expected split will be within each of the Axes when it comes to funding allocation. In this concluding section of the RIP the indicators for the programme are established, an outline plan for communicating the RIP is set out and a commitment to equality and diversity is detailed.

6.1 Indicators, monitoring and evaluation

Indicators, monitoring and evaluation is being developed in with DEFRA.

6.2 Regional Communication

The North West Regional Implementation Plan will be published on GONW, Northwest Regional Development Agency, Natural England and Forestry Commission websites.

A web-based consultation exercise on the North West RIP was undertaken in November 2006. All members of the Regional Rural Affairs Forum and previous consultees were invited to comment. The document was updated to reflect these views where possible.

Sub regional partnerships have undertaken their own consultations on individual Sub regional RIP's via events or the web.

Delivery partners will continue to engage with stakeholders to update on programme progress.

6.3. Governance Arrangements

The NW RIP has been produced under the auspices of the Rural Practitioners Steering Group (RPSG). The RPSG has delegated the drafting of the RIP to a drafting group consisting of NWDA, Natural England, FC and GONW. All of the principal delivery partners have contributed to the drafting of this Plan and all are committed to the pursuit of the themes and priorities that have been identified and to the integrated delivery of RDPE in the Northwest.

The RPSG members on behalf of all regional partners have signed off this version of the RIP via group e-mail during week commencing 26 March. The format of Regional Rural governance are being reviewed at the time of the final draft of this document. Provisional governance arrangements are:

RDPE Delivery/Steering Group – reporting to Rural Strategy Group (formerly Rural Board)

Comprises:

North West Development Agency)
Forestry Commission)
Natural England) Delivery Bodies
Government Office North West – Observer on behalf of DEFRA

Chaired by NWRAF Chair

Responsibilities

- Oversee programme delivery in the region
- Review performance and RIP
- Monitor cross axis integration
- Monitor LEADER LAG activity
- Report on performance, programme management issues to Regional Rural Strategic Group, North West Rural Affairs Forum, National Programme Monitoring Committee
- Capture best practice
- Communications – agree consistency on respective websites etc

Functional Relationships

- Primary accountability to North West Rural Strategic Group
- Additional reporting responsibilities to NWRAF, National Programme Monitoring Committee
- Further reporting to leads of RSG task and finish groups

Other detail

- Group to meet quarterly
- Quarterly report submitted to RSG
- Annual report produced and promoted via NWRAF event, submitted to national PMC
- NWRAF website primary communication point

6.4 Ensuring Equality and Diversity

In delivering the programme, steps will be taken to ensure equality and diversity is addressed. The situation will be monitored regularly.

In addition to the Equal Opportunity Policies operated by the Lead partners they will ensure that the systems and procedures of partners ensure everyone is treated equally and that none is discriminated on the grounds of disability, gender, ethnic origins, age, etc.

In order to address and overcome any possible inequality, measures and procedures will be established and integrated into the programmes everyday work. These measures will cover all aspects of the programme. Projects will be required to inform how they will overcome any inequality on Access to Services, recruitment of beneficiaries and delivery.

Annex I

Proposed Priority action areas through delivery of Environmental Stewardship and English Woodland Grant Schemes in the North West.

Natural Resource Protection

- Target natural resource protection towards high priority catchments and SSSIs in the NW region.
- Work with Catchment Sensitive Farming Programme to improve water quality in 5 priority river catchments in the region (Bassenthwaite Lake, Eden, Waver, Wampool and Wyre river catchments)
- Work through the Farm Advice Unit with ADAS on the Environment Sensitive Farming programme, and with FWAG and other delivery agents to promote pesticide, nutrient, farm manure, waste and soil management practices that protect soil and minimise pollution of air and water
- Work with The Environment Agency towards the objectives of the Ribble Basin WFD Pilot
- In partnership with the Environment Agency, promote good fertiliser management in NVZ areas, awareness of new Farm Waste Regulations, and adoption of new opportunities for agricultural waste recycling in the NW region.
- Target upland moorland sites with measures to reduce soil and the resulting moorland habitat loss by grip blocking and extensified management
- Work through the Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food to deliver environmental support and advice that will result in reduced diffuse pollution from agriculture

Heritage

- Target areas of international significance to ensure that they are under optimum management including the Hadrian's Wall WHS and other designations
- Target Scheduled Monuments and other significant Historical Environment sites at risk especially SAMS and SMs
- Utilise the Historic Landscape Characterisation research to maintain and enhance historic landscape character where appropriate
- Target priority traditional farm buildings and retain them in appropriate use
- Utilise the historic environment as a driver to encourage people to access and enjoy the countryside

Habitats and Species

- Support the long-term improvement in farmland and woodland bird populations in the NW through improved land management for birds. The priorities are:
 - upland and lowland wet grassland habitat restoration, to improve the species status of breeding snipe, curlew, redshank, lapwing and yellow wagtail
 - Provide year round habitat requirements for lowland farmland birds especially for corn bunting, tree sparrow, grey partridge and lapwing
 - Management of moorland fringe for black grouse, twite and ring Ousel
- Support the creation and improved management of key habitats in the NW, including:
 - Lowland raised mires
 - Blanket bog
 - Standing open water
 - Fens
 - Lowland and upland hay meadows
 - Rivers and streams
 - Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
- Create at least an additional 3,100 ha of habitat to ensure the long-term viability of existing semi-natural habitat resources in the NW by 2015. (This is a minimum and the review of national BAP targets by end 2006 will lead to an increase in the NW target)
- Support species recovery in the NW through delivery of the priority actions in the 5 Local Biodiversity Action Plans in the NW. Enable delivery of the 5 Local Biodiversity Action Plans in the Region
- Implement the North West visions for water and wetland habitats networks
- Support landscape scale habitat restoration that develop robust habitat networks and increase connectivity between fragmented, rare and isolated wildlife habitats. Improving habitat networks in degraded lowland landscapes and upland moorland are the priority, to permit the migration and dispersal of species and improve the long term viability of their populations

SSSI's

- Meet the PSA target for SSSIs so that at least 95% (by area) of the region's SSSIs are in favourable condition by 2010, using Environmental Stewardship as the main tool. This will require at least a 13% (27,000 ha) improvement by the end of 2010
- Support the management of SSSIs already meeting the target to maintain and improve their condition and ensure the target is maintained
- Target habitats to address the key management challenges on the region's SSSIs are:

Moorland/blanket bogs, Upland heath, Upland acid grassland, Standing waters (lakes and wetlands), Limestone pavement and grassland and Semi-natural woodland

Landscape

- Target resources at landscape scale actions in support of statutory National Park and AONB management plan delivery
- Target resources at landscape scale actions to achieve landscape enhancement via area-based initiatives in the urban fringe e.g. through support of Community Forest Delivery Plans and other areas e.g. Solway Basin
- Character areas identified as declining in quality 1998-2006 by Countryside Quality Counts project
- Conservation, enhancement and expansion of broadleaf woodland in appropriate situations e.g. upland valleys and margins
- Conservation and enhancement of characteristic field boundary patterns and components e.g. stone walls, hedgerows, hedgerow trees, ancient and veteran trees and other important elements of enclosed farmed landscapes e.g. infield trees and other actions that compliment sub-regional landscape assessment/strategies

Access

- Creation and management of access in urban fringe and providing links between urban and rural areas
- Support delivery of Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs) and other locally identified access priorities e.g. Community Forest Delivery Plans, regional parks and other area-based initiatives)
- Creation of access that links or complements National Trails in the North West – Pennine Way, Pennine Bridleway, Hadrian's Wall and other strategic sub-regional routes
- Integration of isolated CROW access land with wider access infrastructure
- Increase public awareness (particularly in disadvantaged and ethnic communities) of the regions' access and recreational resource and rights and responsibilities
- Provision and promotion of new access to archaeological, ecological, cultural assets
 - Provision and promotion of new educational access

Woodland

The Regional Forestry Framework 'The Agenda for growth' (2005) has 26 priorities and the current action plan (2006-2009) 'Making it happen' has 47 priority actions. The schemes have a number of woodland priorities¹:

- Manage and/or restore woodland non-statutory sites
- Management and restoration of woodland UK BAP priority habitats and species to further Biodiversity targets
- Management and restoration of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW) and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS)
- Expanding and linking existing woodland fragments to enhance functional woodland ecosystems
- Use of woodland creation for buffering sensitive sites from diffuse pollution and increase resilience and adaptation to climate change
- Sustainable woodland management
- Native woodland creation
- Woodland SSSI's, especially those in unfavourable condition
- Creation of access/community woodland close to people and/or with a demonstrable need, including socio-economic lagging and regeneration areas
- Red Squirrels – in specified reserves or buffer zones
- Protection of Cultural Heritage
- Landscape improvement
- Provision of access opportunities
- Brownfield Land restoration/reclamation

Annex II

Regional funding streams

¹ Biomass is not a specific priority under the schemes although it is linked to our priorities for woodland management and restoration. Biomass production was formally delivered via the Energy Crops Scheme, which will have a successor scheme.

Programme Name	Lead	Description	Timeframe
Regional Economic Strategy - Single Pot	NWDA	Economic Development/regeneration	To be reviewed in line with RES
Rural Renaissance	NWDA	Economic development /regeneration	To 2008
Structural Funds	NWDA/ GONW	ERDF (see 6.3 on demarcation)	To 2014
Rural Social & Community Programme	GONW	supporting some aspects of rural community development and tackling social exclusion	To 2008
Heritage Lottery Fund	Heritage Lottery Fund	active in supporting environmental regeneration projects	To 2007
Various	English Heritage	Historic Buildings, Monuments and Designed Landscapes ; Regional Capacity Building ;Area Schemes; Repair Grants for Places of Worship (joint scheme with HLF); cathedrals;	
Big Lottery Fund	Big Lottery Fund	Community Buildings Reaching Communities:	To June 2008 No date set
SITA "Enriching Nature Programme"	SITA Environment Trust/NW Biodiversity Forum	Provide funding for community and environmental improvement projects	Various judging rounds ongoing
Business Resource Efficiency and Waste (BREW) fund	NWDA	Used to address areas of environmental concern in water, waste and energy;	To 2008
Various	Environment Agency's	Funds on water resources, flood prevention and associated measures;	
Various	Learning and Skills Council	Post 16 year old training provision through schools and colleges	To 2007

NB: This table does not include sub-regional programmes and funds. Some programmes are managed sub-regionally

Glossary of Terms and Links

With a number of layers of policy and strategy outlined in this document, it helps to have a ready reckoner to hand to assist in detailing which action plan, delivery partner or funding programme is being discussed at any one time; this table is an informal guide to the acronyms and terms used in this document.

Acronym	What it represents
EAFRD	This is the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, part of the European Union's Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). In England it will go by the name of the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) from 2007.
MRD	Modernising Rural Delivery, a programme set out in Defra's 2004 Rural Strategy. This strategy set out major new plans for the delivery of rural policy at a regional level, including the creation of a new agency, Natural England, formed from parts of English Nature, the Countryside Agency and the Rural Development Service.
RDAs	Regional Development Agencies, the sustainable economic development bodies created by Government in 1999. The RDAs have responsibility for Axis I, II and IV under the new RDPE. In the NW the RDA is the Northwest Development Agency To find out more visit www.nwda.co.uk
FC	The Forestry Commission is the Government Department responsible for Forestry in Great Britain. It implements agreed forestry policy on behalf of Ministers. The FC is responsible for protecting, expanding and promoting the sustainable management of woods and forests and increasing their value to society and the environment. To find out more visit www.forestry.gov.uk
RDPE	The Rural Development Programme for England 2007-13
NE	Natural England, established in October 2006 and formed out of English Nature, the Countryside Agency and the Rural Development Service. Responsible with the Forestry Commission for the delivery of Axis II of the RDPE at the regional level. For more information http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/about/default.htm
ELS	The Entry Level agri-environment Scheme currently running and which in future will be delivered through the RDPE.
HLS	The Higher Level agri-environment Scheme currently running and which in future will be delivered through the RDPE.
OLS	The Organic Level agri-environment Scheme currently running and which in future will be delivered through the RDPE.
EWGS	The English Woodland Grant scheme delivered by the Forestry Commission which in future will be delivered through the RDPE.
RES (1)	The Regional Economic Strategy first launched by the Northwest Regional development Agency (NWDA) in 2003 and extensively updated in March 2006.
RES (2)	The Rural Enterprise Scheme which along with the Processing and Marketing Grants, Vocational Training Scheme and the Energy Crops (SRC) Producer Groups Scheme Schemes will be replaced by a new socio-economic programme under the RDPE.
LEADER	The LEADER approach is pan-European approach to rural development programmes where opportunities and priorities are identified from the 'bottom-up' by local partnerships or LAGs - local action groups. It is an EU requirement that a minimum of 5 per cent of the RDPE be delivered through the LEADER approach.
LAGS	Local Action Groups

RIP	Regional Implementation Plans are being prepared in eight regions across England by a range of partners including the RDAs, Forestry Commission and the Natural England. The process has been steered and facilitated by each region's Government Office. The RIPs will be presented to Defra by December 2006.
SRPs	Sub-regional partnerships are delivering a series of five sub-regional implementation plans for Cumbria, Lancashire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cheshire.
RRDF	The Regional Rural Delivery Framework
RFF	The Regional Forestry Framework entitled 'Agenda for Growth' was launched in 2005. It is one of the key strategies helping to inform this implementation plan.
SFFS	Sustainable Food & Farming Strategy

Key Links

Regional Economic Strategy;
<http://www.nwda.co.uk>

North West Rural Delivery Framework and 'State of the Rural North West Region report
<http://www.gos.gov.uk/gonw/docs/276882/400859>

Regional Forestry Framework www.iwood.org.uk

Natural England's Strategic Direction <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/about/default.htm>

Sub-Regional Contacts:

Cumbria – Geoff Brown, Fells & Dales LEADER – geoffbrown@fellsanddales.org.uk

Lancashire – Janet Baron, Lancashire Economic Partnership – janetb@lancashire-ep.org.uk

Cheshire – Fil Prevc, Cheshire County Council – fillip.prevc@cheshire.gov.k

Merseyside - Jonathan Jackson, ICEP – jonathan.jackson@knwsley.gov.uk

Manchester – Christine Westcott, Manchester Enterprises – Christine.westcott@manchester-enterprises.co.uk

Annex IV:

Output of the regional SWOT analysis

• Strengths

- Rural areas host 40 per cent of the region's businesses; with lower registration/deregistration rates, but higher survival rates and self-employment increases with sparsity
- Generally the highest performing rural areas are in the vicinity of the major conurbations
- Competitive property rentals
- Internationally recognised tourism destination
- Largest Community Forest area of any region at nearly 13 per cent and well established sub-regional Woodland initiatives
- High Labour market participation
- Timber and forestry related industries contribute £435 million to the regions economy and support almost 70,000 jobs, with 37% of these in rural areas
- Significant historic/archaeological asset base, designated historic environment assets including; 25,699 Listed Buildings, 1,336 Scheduled Monuments, 136 registered Parks and Gardens and Battlefields, 836 Conservation Areas
- Two World Heritage Sites at Liverpool and Hadrian's Wall with two more under consideration for Manchester and the Lake District
- Internationally and nationally important wildlife resource especially in uplands and on coast
- 429 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) covering 204,000 ha, 10 European Special Protection Areas (SPAs) covering 155,000 ha and 37 European Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) covering 255,000 ha; Over 1,000km of coastline; including sections of Heritage Coast
- Highest level of good SSSI management in England
- High quality landscapes 29 per cent of the North West designated as National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB);
- 18 per cent of region is Open Access land and 30 per cent Registered Common Land
- Major recreational asset base including Over 24,500km of public rights of way and 3 National Trails: the Pennine Way, Hadrian's Wall Path and Pennine Bridleway
- Environmental tourism makes major contribution to region's economy (£770 million in GVA)
- Strong tradition of collaborative working with many partnerships in place
- Strong well established sub-regional delivery capacity
- Catchment Sensitive Farming Programme operating in 4 water catchments and WFD pilot on Ribble Catchment

• Weaknesses

- Full-time employment drops as sparsity increases 30 per cent lower in sparse areas than urban
- Despite having 40 per cent of business rural areas contribute only 23 per cent of regional GVA (£21bn) each year mostly by services (63 per cent) and industry (34 per cent) . The farming sector contributes less than 3 per cent of GVA, despite 20 per cent of all rural business being farm businesses. Marginal economic viability of traditional farming systems, especially in the uplands
- Low skills within existing workforce inhibiting diversification and expansion
- Low turnover firms trading below VAT registration levels resulting in poor contribution to rural economy overall
- Lack of full-time employment opportunities and of alternative employment options in uplands
- Low value jobs maintaining low GVA, lack of rural workspace and lack of co-operative working between producers
- Lack of processing facilities for organic producers (8 per cent of England's organic processors based in NW) and the achievement of quality and continuity of supply
- Significant areas of rural economic underperformance (with Defra Public Service Agreement 4 rural top tier indicator districts in Copeland, Allerdale, Eden and West Lancashire and second tier indicator districts in Carlisle, Crewe & Nantwich, Lancaster, Pendle, South Lakeland and Ribble Valley)
- Access to services is variable across the rural North West and is particularly problematic in sparse areas, particularly for health services, post offices, job centres, and business support
- Overall, 10 per cent of rural households do not own a car, increasing to 25 per cent in sparse towns and 30 per cent in sparse dispersed areas, lack of public transport
- House prices in rural areas are 50 per cent higher than in urban areas, presenting affordability problems
- Reduction in young people entering agriculture and forestry
- Significant proportion of the region at moderate to high erosion risk, primarily due to agricultural practices
- Diffuse pollution and rising nutrient levels as a result of agricultural practice. The region has 17 per cent of country's most polluted rivers
- General poor quality of upland and lowland wet grassland habitats
- Habitat (including woodland) fragmentation and isolation reducing opportunities for species to transfer locations
- Large areas of sensitive landscapes including uplands, low-lying coastal areas, post industrial farmed landscapes and urban edge farm land
- 18 per cent of SSSI's in unfavourable condition especially some habitats 61 per cent of woodland SSSI are in unfavourable condition
- Declining area of land organically managed
- Occurrence of unfavourable/inappropriate land management practices e.g. overgrazing, drainage, burning
- Most derelict land of any English region at 7.5 per cent from the Derelict, Underused and Neglected Land 2002 (DUNL) - of the 3893 sites covering 26,385 hectares over a third of the area is in rural areas
- One of least wooded regions at 6.8 per cent and approx 45000 ha of under-managed woodland and ASNW covering 1%
- Large area of common land - 30 per cent of England's common land presents significant issues

• Opportunities

- Build on and stimulate an entrepreneurial culture to improve business formation
- Encourage LEADERship and capacity building within farming and rural communities
- A base of poor performing business that could be supported to improve turnover and growth and strengthen their business
- Enhance the long term viability and earning capacity of existing micro-enterprises
- Development of key service centres as central part of the rural economy
- Diversification of agricultural sector as a consequence of CAP reform
- Ability of rural areas to be flexible to support more options for new generations of business and society
- Integration of commuter base into social capital
- Countering the flow of out-migration
- Implementing good practice in rural service provision from the Rural Pathfinder
- Provide easy access to skills, eg training networks, to encourage micro businesses to diversify and expand
- Further development of Sub-regional partnership arrangements for programme delivery
- Implementation of the Sustainable Strategy for Farming and Food (SSFF) in the NW reconnecting farmers and the food supply chain and encouraging collaborative working
- Encouragement of innovative initiatives which will add value to agricultural and woodland products and/or create new markets
- Emphasis on high value food products and regional quality products
- Increase the area of land entering organic conversion
- Optimising use of Environmental Stewardship Schemes
- Support active/protective management of Ancient Woodlands to restore and conserve their biodiversity value
- Potential for more benefits from woodlands such as biomass, wood-fuel, health, tourism and recreation
- Adding value to Woodland creation/restoration
- Emphasis for woodland and non food crops to provide a source for renewable energy
- Increasing market demand for added value products eg linked to environmental/organic produce
- Stimulate demand and capacity to increase recreational/access opportunities and increase Natural Tourism
- Regeneration of derelict land
- Reducing green house gas emissions and adapt to inevitable climate change
- Build on improving water quality through influencing management of agricultural land in water catchments (92 per cent rivers found to be in fair or good condition)
- Influencing land managers to mitigate flooding through inception of rainfall and rates of water release
- Landscape scale approach to land management
- Implementation of AONB and NP statutory plans
- Linkage to Regional Spatial Strategy
- Maximising the effects of CAP reform in NW uplands could provide a wide range of public benefits – including biodiversity, wildlife, cultural and historic landscapes/features, carbon sequestration, water resources, access and enjoyment opportunities

Threats

- Declining GVA performance of agriculture sector
- A focus of activity away from sparse areas
- Narrow economic base of sparse areas
- Limited availability of local work force and businesses operating in areas remote from growth
- Severe Decline in business and financial services support
- Polarisation of less sparse and sparse areas
- Continued out-migration of key age-bands
- Out-migration caused by low wages and high housing costs
- Decrease of service accessibility in sparse areas
- Potentially competing demands on the environment
- Poor management of SSSI's leading to decline in quality
- Impact of climate change due to green house gasses already emitted
- Landscape quality and character changes through urban pressure
- Continuation of unfavourable land management practices
- Ageing profile of farmers/loss of traditional management skills
- Significant proportion of the region's soils area at moderate to very high erosion risk

