

LAG Officer
35 hours/week
Salary £25,694 (SCP29)



Introduction

Do you have experience of project management or development, together with the drive to help develop the local rural economy? Could you bring forward high quality applications to grant funding programmes expected to be worth over £2 million over the next 2 years?

BRCC is seeking a full-time LAG Officer to generate and support applications to its two LEADER grant programmes, on behalf of the Greensand Ridge and the Beds & Hunts Claylands Local Action Groups (LAGs). The successful candidate will have: considerable experience of working with sophisticated bureaucratic processes and associated software; excellent analytical and communication skills; good interpersonal skills; thoroughness; and an eye for detail. The role will involve independent travel across most of rural Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire.

LEADER is currently funded by the European Union (see p.2), so the future of the role beyond the first two years depends on the length and outcome of negotiations concerning the UK's exit.

Outline terms and conditions

1. *Period:* 2 years, with the potential to extend depending on the timetable for the UK's exit from the EU
2. *Working hours:* 1820 hours per annum (35 hours/week on average)
3. *Place of work:* BRCC's offices at Cardington, Bedford
4. *Salary:* £25,694 per annum
5. *Expenses:* Mileage is paid at 45p/mile for car users
6. *Holidays:* 231 hours holiday per annum, which includes all Bank / Public Holidays
7. *Line management:* the post reports to the Rural Development Manager

Recruitment Process

To apply, please send a full CV and supporting statement (showing how you meet the Person Specification) to Lisa King at lisak@bedsrcc.org.uk, or by post to BRCC, The Old School, Cardington, Bedford MK44 3SX. The Job Description and Person Specification for the role are below.

The application deadline is 9am on Monday 27th February 2017. Shortlisted candidates will be invited to an interview on Monday 6th March in Cardington.

For an informal chat about the post, please contact Lisa on 01234 832643.

The LEADER Programmes

Rural Development Programme (RDPE)

The Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) is part of the Common Agricultural Policy, jointly funded by the EU and the Government. Through the LEADER approach, Local Action Groups across England have around £138 million available to spend on the rural economy and on creating jobs in rural areas. Funding will be available to farmers, foresters, other local businesses and rural communities.

The new LEADER funding programmes started towards the end of 2015 and were due to run until the end of 2020. There was a considerable hiatus around the time of the EU referendum in 2016. However, the programmes opened again for business in the autumn of 2016, and HM Treasury has guaranteed funding for projects approved before the UK leaves the EU, currently expected to be during 2019.

Local Action Groups

A Local Action Group (LAG) is established to direct and oversee the distribution of RDPE funds through the LEADER approach, based on an agreed Local Development Strategy (LDS). BRCC acts as the accountable body for two Local Action Groups (see maps overleaf):

1. Beds & Hunts Claylands

The Beds & Hunts Claylands LAG was set up in 2014 to bid for LEADER funding for the first time. It falls mainly within the Bedford Borough and Huntingdonshire local authority areas, as well as small parts of Central Bedfordshire and South Cambridgeshire. The population is 145,767.

The area sits within the Beds & Cambs Claylands National Character Area, unified by the River Great Ouse as well as the predominantly clay soils, and surrounded by marked contrast on all sides. It is predominantly rural and sparsely populated, with settlements generally located along the river valleys and more recently along major road and rail corridors. Commercially farmed arable farms dominate the landscape with generally scattered and sparse woodland cover.

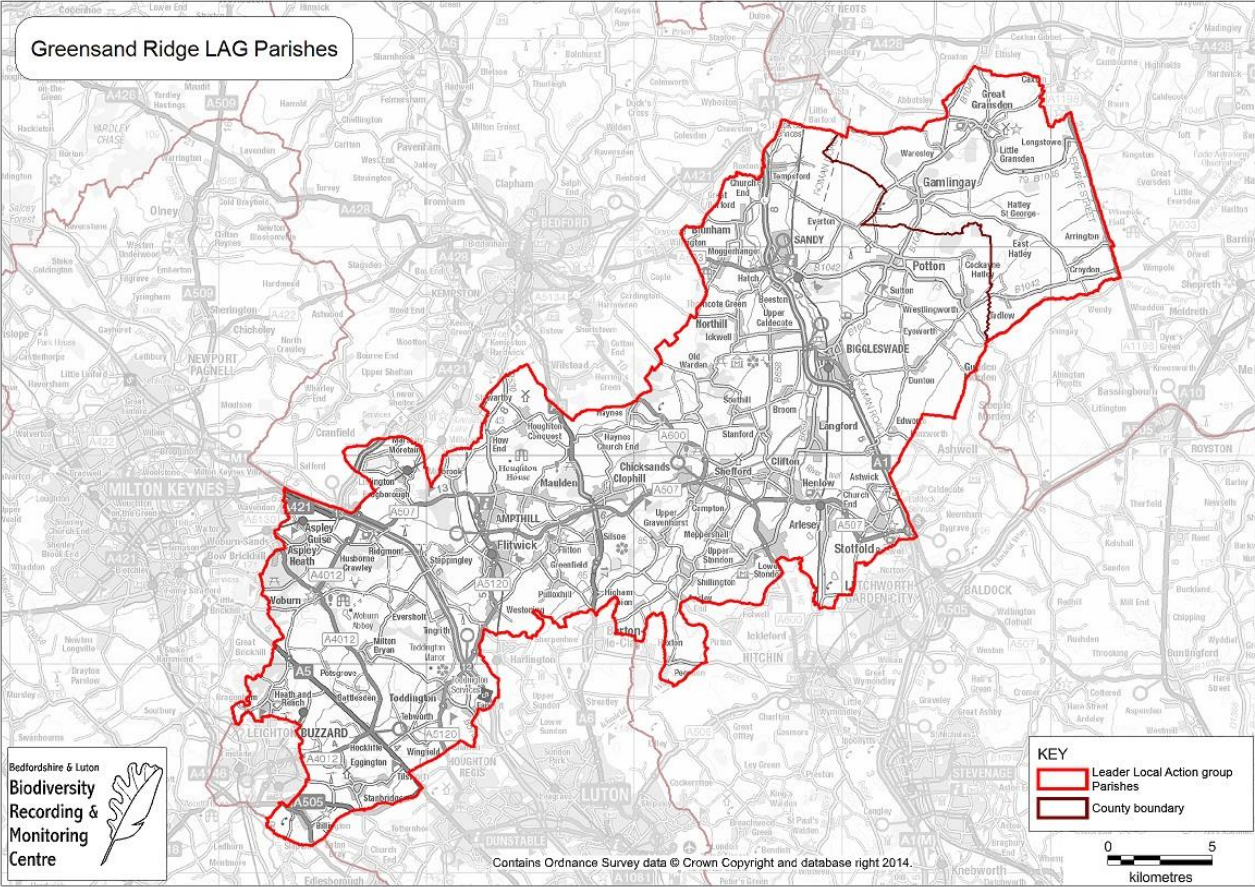
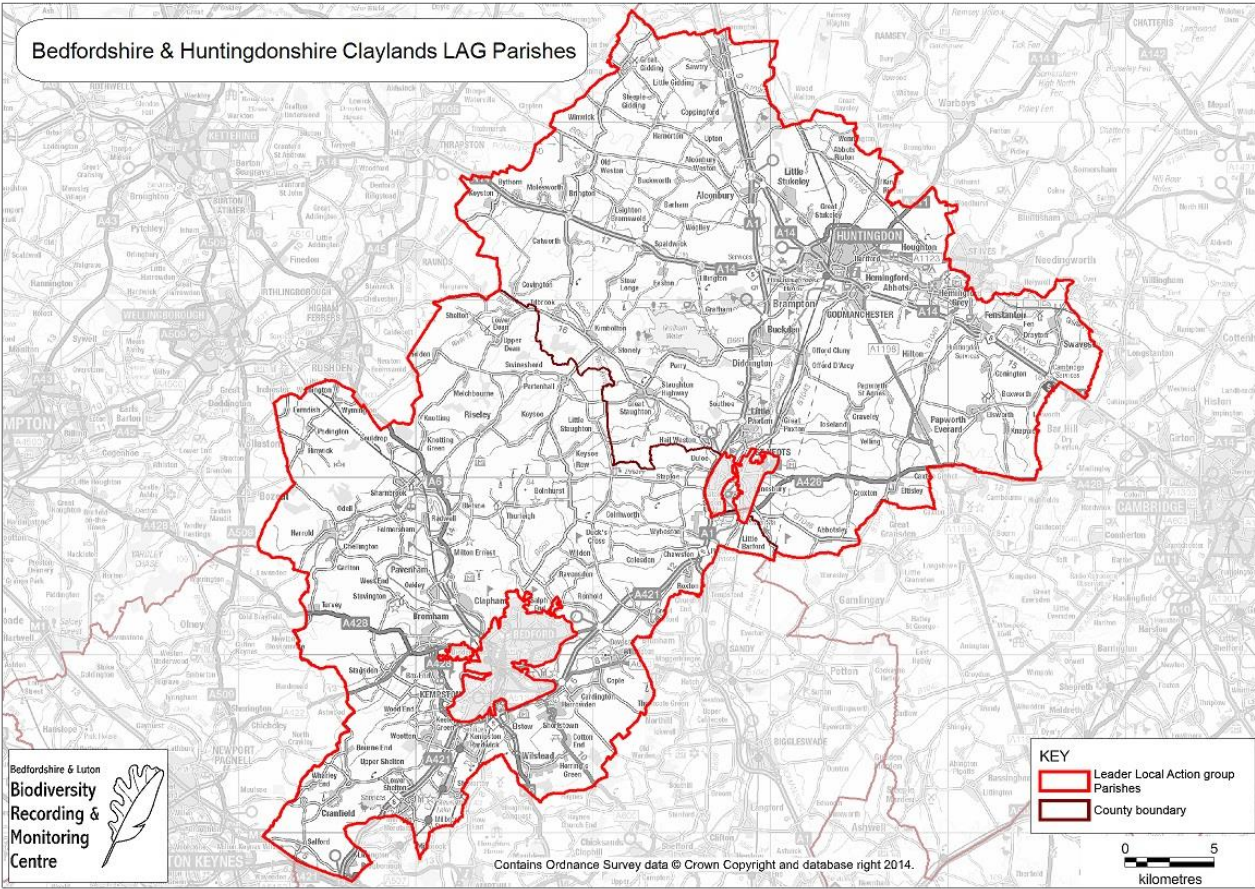
2. Greensand Ridge

The Greensand Ridge LAG existed during the last round of LEADER funding in 2007-13, when it invested nearly £2m in the local area (see www.greensand.org.uk for more information). The area falls mainly within the Central Bedfordshire unitary authority area, although there are also small parts of Milton Keynes to the west, and Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire to the south. The population is 140,684.

The LAG area is based around the Greensand Ridge National Character Area (no.90). Much of the Ridge was regarded as 'marginal land' in medieval times due to its predominantly sandy soils, and was parcelled out following the dissolution of the monasteries to private estates, which have largely controlled development ever since. As a result, there is now a string of parks and manor houses across the Ridge that collectively form a considerable tourism draw.

Local Action Group areas

(NB these are for illustrative purposes only as some changes were made to final boundaries prior to the submission of the bids.)



Funding priorities

Although the priorities for the two LAG areas have been developed separately, there are certain common priorities reflecting the government's policy objectives for the RDP and LEADER:

- Increasing farm productivity
- Micro and small enterprises and farm diversification
- Rural tourism
- Culture and heritage activity
- Provision of rural services
- Increasing forestry productivity

Delivery team

Following a staffing restructure, the delivery team for the LEADER programmes will operate across the two LAGs, and will consist of:

Rural Development Manager (Lisa King):

- Day to day responsibility for Programme Management
- Oversee delivery of LDS and operations
- Principal point of contact with Rural Payments Agency
- Appraise projects
- Reports to BRCC Chief Executive

LAG Officer (to be appointed):

- Promote the programme and bring in new projects
- Support applicants in navigating the application process efficiently
- Ensure that Outline and Full applications meet detailed programme requirements prior to assessment and appraisal
- Reports to Rural Development Manager

LAG Support Officer (to be appointed):

- Administer the Local Action Groups and associated communications
- Assist the LAG Officer as necessary in dealing with applications
- Check application documentation at key stages as part of Quality Control procedures
- Handle and process claims for approved projects
- Reports to Rural Development Manager

LEADER funding is complex and must be managed and administered according to the Rural Payments Agency's National Operational Manual. Training on the use of this Manual will be provided to the post holder. The ability and willingness to comply absolutely with detailed processes, and make sense of these for applicants, are essential for all team members.

Job Description

Job Purpose

The LAG Officer is responsible for bringing forward successful applications to the LEADER Programmes for the Greensand Ridge and the Beds & Hunts Claylands, by promoting the programme to applicants; supporting applicants and navigating the complex LEADER process on their behalf; and complying with the detailed requirements of the programme as set out in the National Operational Manual.

The post holder reports to the Rural Development Manager.

Job responsibilities

Programme applications

- Promote the Programmes directly to potential applicants in order to generate Expressions of Interest
- Provide intensive support to applicants in order to ensure a high quality of applications, with a particular focus on the technical and administrative requirements of the application process (involving the use of a complex web-based data management system as well as Microsoft Excel and Word and associated electronic and paper filing systems)
- Advise applicants on business planning and business case preparation, and signpost to more intensive support as required
- Champion projects and present them to the relevant LAGs and/or their funding subcommittees
- Carry out appraisals of projects brought forward by other staff, as required
- Adhere completely to the strict requirements of the National Operational Manual for LEADER, including maintaining separation of duties, reporting any conflicts of interest, and making entries as required on the online database (DORA) provided by the Rural Payments Agency

General

- Report monthly (or as required) to line-manager
- Deputise for the Rural Development Manager as required
- Actively pursue self-development, identifying training and Continuing Professional Development needs and potential solutions
- Adhere to BRCC's policies and procedures at all times
- Undertake other duties as may reasonably be requested

Person Specification

	Essential attributes	Desirable attributes
Educational Qualifications	Qualified to Level 5 (Intermediate Higher Education or equivalent) or similar demonstrable level of ability	Qualified in relevant discipline(s), e.g. business management, project management
Experience	<p>Considerable experience of working with sophisticated bureaucratic processes and associated software</p> <p>Project management and development</p> <p>Working with, or within, small businesses or enterprises</p>	Delivering or applying to EU funding programmes (or similar)
Skills & knowledge	<p>Very high level of IT literacy (including sophisticated use of Microsoft Office products or equivalent as a minimum)</p> <p>Excellent analytical skills, thoroughness and an eye for detail</p> <p>Excellent written and verbal communication skills</p> <p>High level of numeracy</p> <p>Customer service skills</p>	<p>Knowledge of one or more of the following sectors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rural tourism / leisure - Agri-food - Rural enterprise <p>Knowledge of grant programme management/ administration</p>
Personal qualities	<p>Ability to work under own initiative</p> <p>Ability to work as part of a highly focused team and a willingness to 'muck in' to get the job done</p> <p>Organised, methodical and logical approach</p> <p>Ability to manage multiple priorities effectively</p> <p>Ability to drive up the energy and enthusiasm of others</p>	
Other	<p>Full driving licence</p> <p>Prepared to work occasional weekends / evenings</p>	<p>Own vehicle</p> <p>First Aid at Work certificate and/or Fire Safety training</p>