

LANCASHIRE RURAL PARTNERSHIP
COUNTYWIDE SERVICE STRUCTURE
FARM & RURAL BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES

A Research Study to Facilitate
A Co-ordinated Countywide Service Structure
For Rural Development Activity

Rural Innovation
February 2003

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The Lancashire Rural Partnership has been formed in order to define and deliver a countywide action plan as part of the Regional Rural Recovery Plan. This plan is defined as a 'watershed in terms of support for the rural areas of the county' and has developed its vision as being the development of 'a dynamic rural economy for Lancashire which is financially, socially and environmentally sustainable'

This aspiration has been developed in the Action Plan within Strategic Objectives SO3, SO4 & SO6 where priority projects are defined as being:

Strategic Objective	Priority Project
SO3 Assisting the restructuring of Agriculture	Co-ordination of advice and support for the farming industry Extending the range and availability of specialist support
SO4 Enhancing the competitiveness and capability of primary agriculture	Extending the range and availability of specialist support Providing specialist services to promote and support co-operative and collective approaches to countryside produce
SO6 The development and promotion of countryside produce	Establish specialist services to promote and support co-operative and collective approaches to countryside produce

These Strategic Objectives have been formed with reference to policy within the Rural White Paper that seeks a future for the farming industry where increased competitiveness and diversification are key drivers, coupled with the desire to ensure that change in business practice and type is linked to positive environmental change. The objectives are also linked to those within the East Lancashire Partnership Strategy for 2020 and the Lancashire West Partnership's 'Lancashire West Matters' Vision; this linkage is demonstrated within the Lancashire Rural Action Plan document.¹

Underpinning the Lancashire Rural Partnership vision is the desire to see a 'change in the planning, organisation and delivery of rural development, supported by innovation in design and delivery and a commitment to visible and tangible

¹ Paragraph 4.2, Partnership Linkage

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outcome for rural areas'. The Action Plan's objective is stated as being to 'simplify support for business and community development at the point of delivery, and to provide sufficient resources to facilitate the fundamental restructuring of the rural economy in Lancashire²'

As part of the process of change in the 'planning, organisation and delivery' the need has been identified for research into the current planning, organisation and delivery structures across the county, their effectiveness and 'fit' to the needs and demands of the client businesses and groups, and their ability to deliver the 'streamlined seamless service' defined in Paragraph 7.3 (page 31)³.

Rural Innovation has been commissioned to carry out this research, and to deliver a Study that, (subject to the time and budgetary constraints), can inform the process to define and implement a countywide structure for the effective planning, organisation and delivery of specialist business support services to support Strategic Objectives SO3, SO4 and SO6 of the Lancashire Rural Recovery Plan.

It is considered by the Client Group that the existing structure within East Lancashire (the area covered by Lancashire Rural Futures) has been developed in recent years and represents a viable platform for the delivery of Strategic Objectives within the Action Plan. The position in West Lancashire however is less well developed, and the Client Group requires a clearer understanding of the current structure and its capacity to offer the Service Menu Options defined within paragraph 7.3⁴

The scope and methodology of the Study has been agreed and set down between the parties, a copy of the document is included within the appendices, and is briefly summarised below:

Agreed Scope

The Study should (therefore) focus on West Lancashire (referring to East Lancashire where relevant) and seek to:

² Paragraph 5, Vision

³ Revised Lancashire Rural Recovery Action Plan, 08/10/2002

⁴ Strategic Objective 3; page 31

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- Understand the current delivery structure(s), range of services and take-up
- Assess (where possible) the need and likely demand for services
- Identify gaps in the provision or duplication of services, delivery and structure
- Make recommendations as to the preferred structure and delivery systems

The study should be presented in a concise and easily accessible written format suitable for dissemination across the Lancashire Rural Partnership and supported by a visual presentation.

This report forms part of the final output, and is supported by appendices and a power point presentation.

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CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH, CONSULTATION & INFORMANT SURVEY

Programme Context

The management and delivery of support services to rural and farm businesses has undergone a period of change, commensurate to that experienced within the rural economy over the last few years. Historically, public sector support to farm businesses was focused upon technical and husbandry advice, delivered via MAFF and ADAS (the Agricultural Advisory and Development Service). These agencies worked alongside agricultural colleges and universities, and incorporated 'business advice' within their overall activities. This model still remains in Northern Ireland, where the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) is integrally linked to, and delivers advice jointly with, the higher and further education sector through its association with the three land based institutes, Enniskillen, Greenmount and Loughry Colleges.⁵

Within England and Wales, the focus of public sector support has shifted from technical and husbandry advice, to business services designed to support the competitiveness of individual enterprises. This change was compounded with the privatisation of ADAS, and the inclusion of mainstream public farm and rural business support services within the DTI rather than DEFRA. DEFRA maintains responsibility (via the Rural Development Service) for the administration and monitoring of grant and funding programmes under the England Rural Development Programme, but the Small Business Service is responsible for the delivery of business support services to farm and rural business, just as it is across all sectors of industry.

There is therefore a key distinction, and subsequent separation, between funding and grant programmes under the ERDP such as the Rural Enterprise Scheme, Processing and Marketing Grant, and Countryside Stewardship Scheme; funding programmes derived from other programmes, such as the NWDA Rural Workspace Strategy, the Market Town Initiative / Vital Villages, and the programmes of farm business support; Farm Business Support Advice, Rural Planning Facilitation Service, ERDP Facilitation Scheme, DEFRA Planning Facilitation Scheme.

⁵ www.dardni.gov.uk / www.dardcolleges.ac.uk

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Mainstream Business Support Services

Across England & Wales, the Small Business Service is responsible for the management and delivery of 'mainstream' business support services. The lead programme is currently the Farm Business Advice Scheme (FBAS); this is intended to provide an analysis of the current position of a farm business resulting in the development of an Action Plan suggesting how best to take the business forward. Environmental appraisal and sign posting toward other relevant services and grants form part of the overall package.

The Small Business Service contracts with partner agencies to manage the delivery of the programme within each region and sub-region. Within Lancashire, the contract lies with the two Business Links (East Lancashire and North & West Lancashire); in practice it is administered as a single contract as East Lancashire sub-contract their responsibility to Business Link North & West Lancashire.

Business Link North & West Lancashire manages the delivery of FBAS centrally, and has set up a panel of Farm Business Advisors to deliver the service on farm. This mirrors the approach of Cheshire, but is more reliant upon sub-contracted FBAs than Cumbria where a team of dedicated FBAs are retained. Delivery partners include Myerscough RBC and ADAS; Lancashire Rural Futures (previously Bowland Initiative) were part of the original team but currently are not actively involved in either the management or delivery of FBAS.

In addition to FBAS, other mainstream schemes have been introduced (or piloted) across Lancashire and the wider region since the launch of FBAS in May 2000. These include:

- NWDA Planning Facilitation Service (up to 3 days to assess the suitability in planning terms of the businesses site / property for intensified or alternate use)
- DEFRA Planning Day (a single day of planning advice leading to a report on the site and options for re-use and / or diversification)
- ERDP Facilitation Day (a single day to support the preparation of a application to an ERDP funding programme)

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In each instance (save for the DEFRA Planning Day), the FBAS management and delivery structure (Business Link North & West Lancashire) has been used, supported by direct promotion and marketing by the programme sponsors.

Facilitation Services

Lancashire, distinct from the other sub-regions in the northwest, also has access to an additional level of 'facilitation service' in the east of the county. Facilitation in this context being the direct delivery of support, (via both consultancy and signposting), in terms of:

- Environmental audit, advise and scheme development
- Business development, feasibility and planning
- Funding and grant application, and
- Planning appraisal and application

This is the result of the pilot 'Bowland Initiative', a project (one of two within England & Wales) to test the integrated delivery of economic and environmental facilitation services to rural areas, principally based around farming communities within the Objective 5b area of East Lancashire. The scheme was welcomed locally, to such an extent that tangible support from Lancashire County Council, other key partners and European Objective 2 funding has created a legacy of the pilot, Lancashire Rural Futures, which now operates across the majority of the area to the East of the M6 motorway⁶.

The Lancashire Rural Futures facilitation service is now active within its defined geographical area of activity, and focuses upon environmental and 'added-value' services. It is not involved in the delivery of the 'mainstream services' outlined above. Unlike some of the mainstream services⁷ (where there are entry requirements designed to allow only 'full-time' farming businesses access) the Facilitation Service is able to engage with rural SME businesses as well as farm businesses. The service has a permanent staff of rural business and environmental advisors, supplemented by specialists seconded from partner organisations including English Nature and the Lancashire Wildlife Trust. In addition to direct 'consultancy' it also facilitates the use of external specialists (architects,

⁶ www.lancashireruralfutures.co.uk

⁷ FBAS & DEFRA Planning Day

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archaeologists etc) and provides a contribution of 50% towards related costs from its own funding.

Lancashire Rural Futures is an independent agency; it is accountable to a Steering Group made up from range of partner organisations (and including representatives from the private sector). Lancashire County Council acts as accountable body and provides the accounting function whilst staff are employed by East Lancashire Business Link.

A summary of programmes and schemes is set out in the Programme Matrix included within the appendices.

Current Management and Delivery of Business Support Services

In order to assess and better understand current provision and performance, the Study Team has undertaken a number of interviews with both customers / recipients of the services, and those engaged or with a stake in delivery and management.

The customer interviews took the form of three group meetings, held in the north, centre and south of the county during January 2003. In each instance, these groups were formed with the help of the Nat West Agricultural Managers and Farm Business Clubs set up and run by Myerscough RBC. The Study Team would like to record our thanks to both parties for their support. In addition to testing customer experiences and perceptions of the current range of programmes, their accessibility and delivery, the group meetings also offered an opportunity to consider the ongoing needs of farm businesses, their likelihood to engage with subsequent programmes and the manner of that engagement.

The three groups provided access to 25 farm businesses, the majority of which had some, and often direct experience of either mainstream of facilitation services.

Output from Customer Consultations (Farmer Groups)

It is not the practice of Rural Innovation to report verbatim from group meetings, nor to include a detailed record of consultation within a report. Output is disseminated by the compilation of responses from each group, an analysis and reporting of the common themes and issues raised. These are set out below:

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Accessibility and Information

- There is no clear entry point to farm business support; too often different and confusing offers are being made by too many agencies and organisations
- A material number of respondents demonstrated a lack of understanding of the basic components of the mainstream schemes, their objectives and potential linkage to other programmes
- Business Link was recognised as an access point, but too often the experience of businesses trying to get rural help without 3^d party facilitation (delivery agent / consultant) was poor
- Alternate entry routes (rather than direct to Business Link) were often taken to mainstream programmes; Myerscough College was often cited.
- The respondents felt strongly that there is limited knowledge of the range of programmes and schemes available; little of the information available is integrated and this leads to confusion

Customer Experience of Farm Business Advice Service

- The FBAs are helpful but limited in their range of knowledge / skills and ability to come up with any meaningful solutions (acknowledged that this often beyond their control)
- The scheme / advisors are not interested in the core agricultural business, only in diversification / environmental issues (northeast Lancs)
- There appears to have been limited engagement with FBAS in the northeast of the county; Respondents commented that they were unconvinced about its value due to those offering to deliver it
- Respondents that had experience FBAS commented that they had found the process very bitty. Additional follow up would be useful. There was very limited linkage to additional schemes or programmes.
- The programme is billed as 3 days of consultancy; respondents commented that they had only seen the consultant for about 4 hours in all (including delivery of the Action Plan)
- Respondents who had engaged with FBAS exhibited very limited experience of the extra days and schemes (environmental / NWDA planning / ERDP facilitation) available

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- There appeared to be no follow up; where to go after FBAS? No linkage or leads to next steps

Rural Planning Facilitation Service / DEFRA Planning Day Experience

- Respondents demonstrated limited knowledge or engagement
- The common view was that in principle the schemes sound useful, but help is also needed in preparing and submitting the application and dealing with the planning process
- Some respondents saw limited value in the DEFRA Planning Day; they felt that the reports produced were more than often generic, formulaic and unrealistic

Environmental Programmes

- Respondents in the west of the county had very limited engagement / take-up with environmental schemes; the common theme was that they were not worth the effort⁸
- Some respondents commented on an unwelcome focus on environmental issues from Bowland Initiative / LRF to the exclusion of core business issues
- No linkage with any other support / schemes had been experienced by respondents in the west of the county

Business Planning / Grant Applications

- In the west of the county, no support has been received or was perceived as available; there was no knowledge or experience of the ERDP Facilitation Day.
- Respondents in the west of the county reported that it was inequitable that they cannot have access to facilitation services available in the remainder of the county
- Respondents unanimously expressed interest in and a need for the facilitation services available in the east of the county. Many in the west were aware of the services, some had tried to access them but without success due to their location.
- None of the respondents had any ideas where to start looking for such a service outside of Lancashire Rural Futures

⁸ This may relate to the limited opportunity to deliver due to funding; the capacity of Environmental Agencies and the suitability of schemes to intensive lowland farming

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These points represent the views and comments put forward by respondents within the group meetings held. They do not incorporate any element of comment from consultants; that follows later in the report. They echo comments reported in the Farmers Guardian (7th February) from meetings of CLA members with Lord Haskins:

" When dealing with the Government our members are also concerned about duplication of activity, conflicting objectives of various agencies and how hard it is to find the right person with the right advice. Simplification of delivery of advice with one point of contact should be the aim."

"Government often says the right things and even has many of the right policies in place but it is not adequately delivering those policies..."

"Farmers felt that they receive no direction and funding schemes are far too complicated. The loudest call however, was for simplification with one point of contact."

Output from Key Informant Survey

The Key Informant Survey focused upon those parties with direct involvement in the management and delivery of mainstream and facilitation services across the county (but predominantly to the west of the motorway), together with those who have a 'stake' in the process. A full listing of those interviewed is included in the Appendices; this includes the core parties such as:

- Business Link North & West Lancashire
- East Lancashire Business Link
- Lancashire West Partnership
- Myerscough College and Rural Business Centre
- Lancashire Rural Futures
- English Nature
- Lancashire Wildlife Trust
- Food and Rural Affairs Team; Government Office North West

In each case, the interview focused on the parties' role in the process, their perceptions as to performance and their views as to the issues that an integrated countywide service should deal with and take into account. In order to inform the interview process and further support consideration of the issues, reference has also been made to practice in the wider region (particularly Cumbria) and schemes such as Farming Connect in Wales.

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Following completion of the interview process, the various outputs have been compiled and analysed in order to assess the common themes and issues raised. These are set out below; as before, these points represent comments and views expressed during the interview process, they do not include any comment from consultants:

- Delivery of FBAS across the county has been patchy and often inconsistent. Within the core Business Link North & West Lancashire area, it has been effective. Delivery in East Lancashire, particularly the LRF area is limited; Lancashire Rural Futures are not engaged in the delivery of FBAS or other mainstream programmes.
- Access to additional programmes; ERDP Facilitation & FBAS Environmental Day has been very limited across the whole county; there appears to be little linkage between delivery of initial FBAS and subsequent programmes and a failure in the delivery mechanisms
- Access for Environmental Agencies to farm businesses engaged with FBAS and other mainstream schemes has been limited; there is little effective integration between Environmental Agencies and Business Link North & West Lancashire
- Delivery of the DEFRA Planning Day has been led by private sector consultancies pro-actively 'selling' the day to existing and new clients
- Rural Planning Facilitation Service has been effectively applied within the core Business Link North & West Lancashire Area; there has been limited delivery in the remainder of the county
- Facilitation Services within the East of the county are subject to ongoing demand and are currently running at capacity; delivery is effective and strong linkage with environmental and other programmes is demonstrated. Delivery has predominantly been by direct 'consultancy' and case management, provided at no cost to the client business
- Due to gap in funding there is no access to 'facilitation' or 'free value adding consultancy' outside of the LRF area of operation
- There is a perception that 'political barriers' and 'competition between agencies' is a constraint to effective delivery
- There is concern over the sustainability, and also the long-term value to the customer, of 'no cost / free' delivery beyond the mainstream services

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- Concern has been expressed at the difficulty in accessing clear and timely data and records of programme delivery, actions & outputs. This impacts on the ability of programme managers to assess and monitor performance (both of individual FBAs / delivery agents and programme managers), to target specific sectors and to prioritise delivery.

Current Position - Gap Analysis and Comment

There appears to be a dislocation of services and programmes across the county. There is limited integration of FBAS and other mainstream programmes, no evidence of integration between mainstream programmes and facilitation services and in the west, no planned or managed progression between programmes and agencies. This is manifested by:

- Limited engagement and interaction between Lancashire Rural Futures & Business Link North & West Lancs (they can even appear to be in competition)
- Limited engagement and interaction between Business Link North & West Lancashire and East Lancashire Business Link in respect of delivery of mainstream farm business support services
- Failure to integrate and make accessible records; thus preventing measurement and monitoring of performance, prioritisation and targeting of business sectors / clusters

Consequential Impact

The consequences of the current position on the ground and for customers include:

- Lack of a single point of entry across the county
- Confusion as to who offers what; and how to link different programmes together
- Limited knowledge and understanding of the range of programmes and services available
- Lack of a consistently applied and effective 'welcome' and on-going case management
- A perception of 'competing providers'
- Constrained access to FBAS and other mainstream programmes in parts of the county

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- No access to value adding 'free' consultancy, facilitation and case management outside East Lancashire
- Lack of targeting or prioritisation (of business type / locations) within mainstream programmes; limited assessment of the performance of both programmes and advisors and lack of shared knowledge regarding actions needed and outputs achieved
- Limited follow up, link to capacity and skills building and so an extension of the dependency culture
- Lack of respect and trust in the quality of advice available from the customer base

The current situation represents at best a missed opportunity to maximise access to capital grants, integrate programmes and agencies and so add value. At worst it is a failure to effectively deliver existing programmes in a consistent manner across the county to the detriment of recipients and potential recipients.

Countywide Service Structure

Context and Programme Authority

The research, consultation and analysis has informed the Study Team as to the background to the system, the status of management and delivery in Lancashire and offered the opportunity to compare this with other areas and programmes. Lancashire is unique within the region in that it has to consider both the mainstream services **and** the additional facilitation service offered by Lancashire Rural Futures (funded to at least until March 2005), and incorporate both elements into a countywide and integrated service.

The objectives of the Action Plan toward such integration are clear; it is mentioned as early as the Introduction to the Action Plan that the purpose of the Lancashire Rural Partnership is to bring a much greater level of coherence and co-ordination to the ways in which support for business in rural areas is planned, managed and delivered. An aspiration then defined in the within the vision section as being to 'simply support for business and community development at the point of delivery'.

The specific intent to implement this vision is set down within Strategic Objective 3: Assisting in the Restructuring of Agriculture, which includes as its priority

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project the 'co-ordination of advice and support for the farming industry'. The intentions of this project are set down in detail within SO3⁹ and refer to the intent to include the mainstream services within the proposed service structure.

The Action Plan also sets out the linkage between its Strategic Objectives and regional and national objectives and policy. It is not the brief of this paper to assess or test those linkages; instead it is assumed that issues such as the objectives of engagement with businesses, how this links with regional and other sub-regional themes, strategies and action plans, the needs that the service should address etc. have all been adequately dealt with in the production of the Action Plan. We have therefore focused upon the issues that in our view need to be considered and incorporated in any countywide structure, before going on to make proposals as to a possible model.

Issues that Should be Addressed by a Countywide Service for Lancashire

In the view of the Study Team, the following issues are fundamental to the creation and operation of a countywide service structure:

- The provision of a single and obvious point of access supported by **all**
- The implementation of intelligent assessment of customer requirements, matching to programme / scheme and case management
- Centralised records / database to support administration, performance monitoring, targeting and prioritisation; accessible to all partners
- Maximum integration and environmental cross compliance between capital and revenue programmes and business development
- Case management and customer support for business from initial contact, through business / needs assessment, implementing actions (i.e. FBAS, planning & grant applications), building skills and capacity and on toward ultimate self-reliance
- Material and effective integration between and amongst the mainstream agencies & programmes (Business Links / LSC) and the 'informal and value adding' agencies and programmes (LRF / Myerscough RBC)
- Movement of customer businesses from dependency to self reliance (the objective of the overall service should be to pass businesses out of the process,

⁹ Paragraph 7.3, page 31

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into a position where they are self reliant, and can interact with cross sectoral Business Link services as appropriate)

Any countywide service structure will need to ensure greater integration between the various programmes and grant schemes. There should be no barriers to access based upon location, and the pro-active use of programmes to meet needs. Improved access to grant funding should be supported by an integrated approach to business and environmental issues, thus promoting cross-compliance. Duplication or substitution should be resisted. The service should have clear objectives, and a mission of building capacity towards self-reliance.

Value for money should be paramount; and the proposals robustly tested. Best use of existing structure and resource will be important, but should not be used as an excuse to perpetuate inefficient practice. Programme management and provenance will clearly need to be respected.

In order to contribute to the design of a structure and service that will address these issues, the Study Team has prepared an indicative model as a work in progress. This is illustrated in the 'Integrated & Co-ordinated Business Support Services' model inserted below.

Indicative Model

This seeks to demonstrate the key elements of a countywide model; for clarity these are as follows:

Strategic

- Incorporation of operational management and countywide delivery of **all** programmes and schemes within a single organisation / partnership; in this case the Lancashire Rural Partnership provides the obvious 'host'
- Integration of the operational management and delivery of all programmes (both mainstream and added value) into a single countywide entity; this requires devolution of **operational** management and delivery from programme managers to this body; programme managers will need to retain their responsibilities to programme owners
- Separation of overall programme management of mainstream services from operational management and delivery

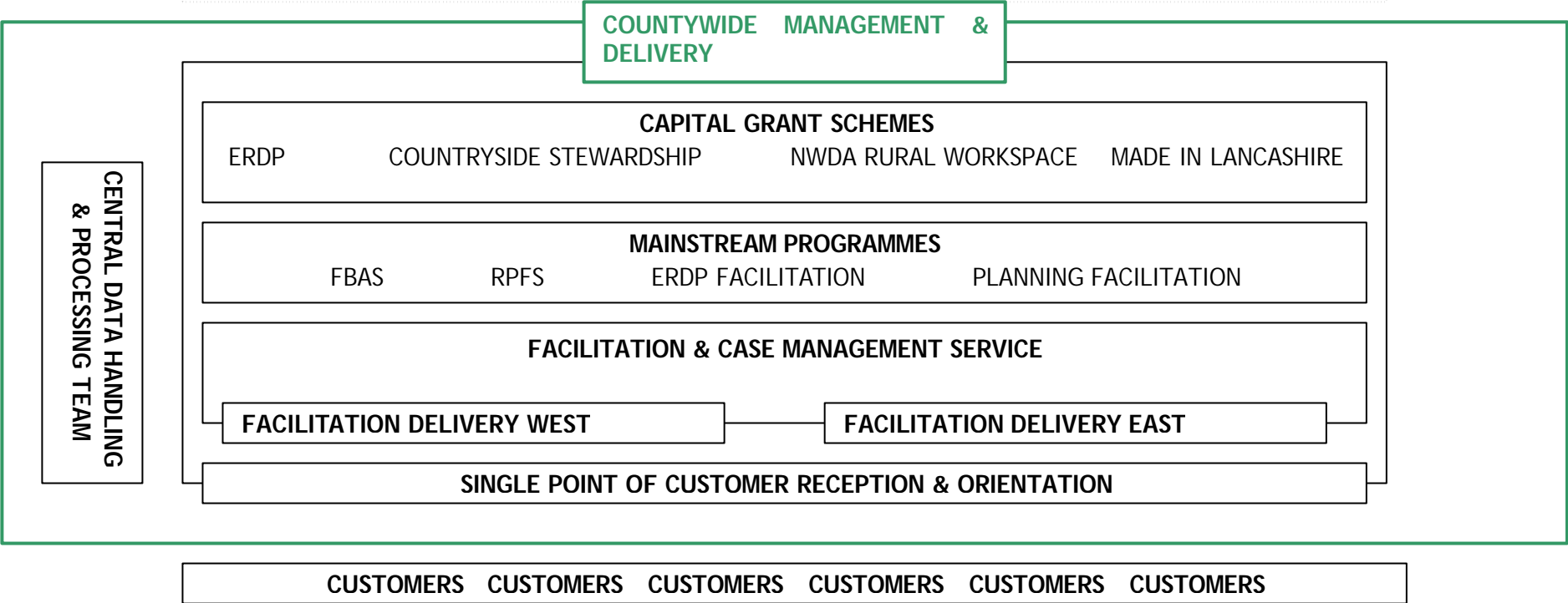
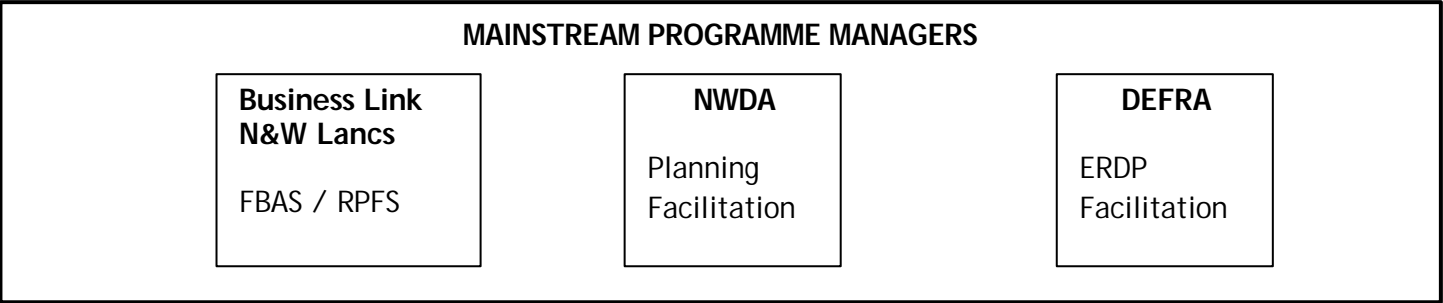
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- A single and central service to handle operational data and hold / update client and action records for all programmes. This data service should act on behalf of the Lancashire Rural Partnership and ensure that data is freely available to all programme partners as well as for strategic analysis, performance management and monitoring at partnership level

Operational

- Access for customers (both for mainstream and value added services) via a single 'reception', supported by **all** partners; this reception point would open a client record, undertake initial assessment and immediately appoint a case manager from within the facilitation & case management service (an indicative case management process is illustrated on the flow chart included in the appendices)
- Case management will remain within the facilitation & case management service. Access to mainstream services will be determined and drawn down by the case manager within the facilitation & case management service
- Data handling and case records updated by case manager but held and managed by the central data handling and processing team
- Definition by each case manager of an action plan with each client, including objectives, key stages and an exit strategy
- Reporting and delivery responsibilities from the facilitation and case management service to each programme manager and accountable body (i.e. to Business Link North & West Lancashire for operational management and delivery of FBAS)

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CENTRAL DATA HANDLING & PROCESSING TEAM

Confirming & Implementing the Model

It is not within the brief of this paper to make recommendations as to the precise form of model, nor the application of that model on the ground. However it is the view of the Study Team that in defining both the right model for Lancashire, and the means of applying that model, key issues need to be considered that will influence the type, style and make up of the service. It is important that both the concept and the operational model are developed in the context of these issues. Whilst this is unlikely to be an exhaustive list, it is the view of the Study Team that these issues will include:

- How the service is to be funded? Is the funding time limited? What is the exit strategy? How long is it sustainable to support rural / farm businesses?
- How can best value be achieved? Should a service be based upon facilitation, direct consultancy or a measured combination of both? Should non-mainstream services be free or is a contribution from client business necessary? How can duplication of investment and avoidance of waste be best managed?
- How can the service best achieve accessibility to customers? Does best practice exist that can add value?
- Where might the core services be based/ How can current skills be retained and incorporated within the key areas?

These issues should be addressed as part of the final design of the correct model, and in order to inform the operational context of the new system.

Opportunity for Lancashire

It is clear from the work undertaken to deliver this study that there is both a need and an appetite for a countywide service structure for farm business support. Lancashire is fortunate to have access to value adding facilitation services over and beyond the mainstream services although it seems inequitable that access to these services should be restricted by location. It is important however, that any countywide model adopts practice that makes best use of mainstream services, in addition to application of 'added value' services. The delivery of the ERDP Facilitation Day in Cumbria, and the success of the integrated model for mainstream services across the county is a good example of what can be achieved before access to value added services.

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Access to the Lancashire Rural Futures programme potentially offers much advantage to farm and rural businesses across Lancashire, it is important however that the programme is delivered in as sustainable way as possible, and that the funds available within it are put to best use, wherever possible to complement mainstream services, and to add value.

In addition to facilitation, the environmental resources available across the county must be fully engaged in the new structure. Key Informants from specialist environment organisations all commented on the lack of integration within areas of the county, and their difficulties in gaining access to businesses alongside mainstream programmes. This must be addressed if the objectives of the Rural Recovery Action Plan are to be met. Full and formal integration between business and environmental programmes will ensure that farm and rural businesses are in the best position to access capital grants and deliver economic growth within the context of enhanced environmental sustainability.

The current position is less than perfect; there are gaps in provision and a failure to integrate by informal association. There is however a demonstrable need for service integration, clear will amongst the majority of stakeholders and partners to tackle the situation, and some exciting assets that can contribute to an effective structure; these include:

- The case management and 'freedom of action' of Lancashire Rural Futures
- A core of existing and proven specialist advisors
- The proven worth of value adding / facilitation activity
- The mainstream services and management / admin resource of the FBAS
- The position of Myerscough RBC within the culture of the rural economy
- The new Rural Technology Incubator building at Myerscough College
- Best practice in accessibility and promotion from neighbouring sub-regions
- Lancashire Rural Partnership as pan county and inclusive umbrella body
- The potential for LRP partners to contribute existing and skilled staff to the reception and database service
- The enthusiasm and commitment of those already engaged in the process

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Next Steps

This report was commissioned in order to inform members of the Lancashire Rural Partnership Programme Management Committee in their deliberations relating to a countywide service structure. It is the hope of the Study Team that it will serve that purpose.

In our view, the case for a countywide service structure is clear; what is now necessary is to define the model that will best serve the client businesses, and do so in a way that meets the Rural Recovery Action Plan objectives. Once a model that is acceptable to the Partnership is determined, careful consideration will need to be given to how it is best applied in order that it effectively deals with the issues raised during consultation and this paper.

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Appendix One

Schedule of Consultees

Customers & Client Businesses: 3 group meetings in north, central and southwest Lancashire engaged with 27 client businesses and Nat West Agricultural Managers

GONW Food & Rural Affairs Team
Rural Development Service
Lancashire County Council
Business Link North & West Lancashire
Business Link East Lancashire
Lancashire West Partnership
Lancashire Rural Futures
Myerscough College
English Nature
RSPB
Lancashire Wildlife Trust
Farm Business Advisors

**LANCASHIRE RURAL PARTNERHSIP
COUNTYWIDE SERVICE STRUCTURE
FARM BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES**

Appendix Two

CASE MANAGEMENT FLOWCHART

