

## South East Local Enterprise Partnership - EAFRD Programme

### Rural Tourism Call – Background Information

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#### National Context

Defra has identified investment in tourism as a key priority. It plays an important role in the English economy as a whole and a vital one in many rural communities. England's visitor economy is worth £106 billion taking into account both direct and indirect contributions such as capital investment by tourism related businesses.

The turnover of rural tourism businesses in this country is around £25 billion and accounts for 13% of rural employment and 10% of rural businesses. Tourism supports 2.6 million jobs.

Tourism in England is currently operating below capacity in some areas and has real growth potential. To thrive and secure a stronger global position, the tourism industry must remain competitive in terms of cost and ease of access, and offer visitors great experiences in great destinations.

This Rural Tourism Call is available to fund a variety of investments in rural tourism to promote growth in the sector. This includes the development of tourism businesses, support for visitor attractions and tourism infrastructure and creating sustainable jobs to reduce reliance on seasonal work and provide stable levels of employment.

#### Local Context

**This call invites applications that optimise support for investments in the creation and development of non-agricultural activities (measure 6.4) and support for investments in visitor attractions, tourist information, recreational infrastructure and small scale infrastructure (measure 7.5).**

The development of sustainable rural tourism is highlighted as a major priority in the SELEP Rural Strategy and is included in RE3 – 'Support the development of sustainable rural tourism'. Suggested activity includes:

- Raising awareness of the cultural and heritage offer across SELEP.
- Profiling the art, history and cultural attractions across SELEP to provide an enhanced visitor experience to support an increased footfall and enhanced economic returns.

The promotion of tourism across the SE LEP area currently takes the following forms:

'Visit Essex' and 'Visit Kent' act as the Destination Management Organisations for each county. In the 'Economic Impact of the Essex Visitor Economy 2015 report' it states that the value of the visitor economy is £3.0 billion which supports 59,000 jobs. Core objectives include increasing the volume and value of visits to Essex, to encourage overnight stays and repeat visits, driving economic benefits to rural networks and increasing awareness of the rural offer in the County.

In Kent it is worth more than £3.4 billion and supports 67,000 jobs. In the '2013-2017 Visit Kent Business Plan' it states that the overall strategic aim is to help Visit Britain and Visit England work towards their national targets (3%

and 5% year on year respectively). This will be achieved by rigorous research to enable them to anticipate and meet trends and needs.

Core objectives include a rolling programme of tourism campaigns, unlocking talent and improving skills within the workforce, improving and developing the product and developing partnerships to create a mutually supportive community of tourism businesses.

Key to the successful operation of any visitor economy is the availability of a well-trained workforce. Excellent customer service and customer care are crucial.

In East Sussex the promotion of tourism is carried out by the District and Borough Councils. A survey completed out in 2011 by Tourism South East established that overnight stays in East Sussex were worth £376 million with a further £444 million earned from day trips. Total income from tourism was £820 million. The 'East Sussex Cultural Strategy 2013 – 2023' states that a priority aim is:

'To develop and promote well packaged cultural tourism offers which attract people to East Sussex, raise its profile and attract more visitors and businesses to the County'.

The vision is to produce a well packaged, clearly signposted, regularly refreshed cultural tourism offer. This means visitors will go to East Sussex because they are confident they will have distinctive and exceptional cultural encounters and stay there longer because of the choice on offer.

The strategic outcome will be a thriving and high value visitor economy, with great places to visit and enjoy, and a distinctive county renowned for its natural assets, unique heritage, culture, market and coastal towns (East Sussex Economic Development Strategy).

**Theme - this call seeks applications that support growth in the tourism sector in SELEPs rural areas through the promotion of tourism at a strategic level, and support for investments in the creation and development of new and improved products and services.**

The aim is to encourage investments that strengthen and promote the SELEP area as a destination to attract more overnight and day visitors, extend the tourism season and encourage visitors to stay for longer in rural areas.