

**MINUTE OF MEETING OF
RURAL ABERDEENSHIRE LEADER
PROJECT ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE**

**TUESDAY, 24 MAY 2011 AT 10.00 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM D, WOODHILL HOUSE**

Present

Belinda Miller	LAG Chairperson
Ewen Cameron	Scottish Natural Heritage
Scott Petrie	Scottish Rural Property and Business Association
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Businesses

Officers in Attendance

Vicky Thomson	Aberdeenshire Council
Jamie Wilkinson	Aberdeenshire Council
Anne MacLennan	Aberdeenshire Council

Apologies

Jamie Bell	Scottish Enterprise
Lorna Paterson	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Maureen Stephen	Aberdeenshire Councils for Voluntary Services

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

Belinda Miller welcomed those present and apologies were noted as above.

2. MINUTE OF LAST MEETING

2.1 The draft LAG minute of 14 March 2011 was noted and will be considered for approval by the LAG at the meeting on 7 June 2011.

3. COMMUNICATION

Eurostats Report to be completed and returned to Scottish Government by 2 June 2011.

4. CHAIRPERSON'S UPDATE

EFF Axis 4

Notification of Interest is to be submitted by 26 May 2011. A Strategy document will be drawn up before the end of August.

Development work will require to be separate to LEADER activities as funding for one European Fund cannot be used to develop another European Fund. Derek McDonald, Rural and Maritime Industries Development Officer, and Martin Brebner, European Services Executive, have been drafted in to assist.

It is proposed that an EFF Project Officer be appointed to work alongside the LEADER Team. It will be proposed to SG that a percentage of Vicky and Anne's time be allocated to EFF as there must be clear demarcation between EFF and Rural claims.

Once the outcome of the bid is known, it will be important to hold a series of EFF community seminars and roadshows highlighting the fund to coastal communities.

It was originally considered that the FLAG would comprise of LAG members plus one or two fishing representatives. However, the balance must be more equal, i.e. more fishing representation. The complement of the FLAG may include 14 to 15 organisations with ample evidence of representation from fishing sector.

An e-mail has already been circulated to the LAG to establish interest in joining the FLAG. Scottish Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage, Visit Scotland, Federation of Small Businesses, Community Council and Rural Partnerships have all expressed interest, however, EFF was not seen as a correct fit for land based organisations such as Scottish Rural Property and Business Association, Forestry Commission Scotland and National Farmers' Union Scotland.

Fishing representatives are currently being sourced.

5. LEADER CO-ORDINATOR UPDATE

5.1 Financial Update

Table 1 was circulated. If Round 12 projects are approved by the LAG, the cumulative total will be £3.8 m of LEADER funding committed towards total project costs of £14.8 m. As project underspends have yet to be factored in, the figures are subject to change and are being kept under review.

5.2 Project Update

There are currently 113 active projects and six applications were received for Round 12.

5.3 Scottish Government Claims

Rural Aberdeenshire LAG is in the top quartile as regards to spend across Scotland. Spend is slower in some first time LAGs and SG is keen to encourage mentoring of these LAGs.

Aberdeenshire LEADER budget is becoming exceedingly competitive and it is anticipated the budget will be fully committed by September/December 2011.

SG has suggested that LAGs over commit their budget by up to 30%. PAC considered it a risk to over commit to that extent and will take a balanced view dependent on outcome of budget review balanced with project underspend.

The Udney Community Wind Turbine project has been instructed to repay all grants if they want to apply for Feed in Tariff (FIT). The applicants have increased their bank loan considerably and this will mean a delay in net revenue coming back to the Community Trust Fund from the generation of electricity.

As a result of the two Udney projects being de-committed, approximately £100,000 will be recycled back into the LEADER fund.

5.4 **Scottish Government Reports**

The increased level of reporting to SG continues.

The first audit of Aberdeenshire LEADER in 2011 is scheduled for 20 July with a visit by SG Rural Communities Empowerment Team.

A copy of the End Year Review for period 01/04/10 to 31/03/11 which was submitted to SG in May will be circulated to the LAG.

5.5 **Rural Aberdeenshire Broadband Initiative**

BET Technology – implementation has taken longer than anticipated, however BT has now enabled the exchanges. Fifteen participants must be signed up before BT will proceed.

Federation of Small Businesses may be able to help with highlighting to businesses in these areas. Vicky will forward further information to Andy Willox regarding two areas that may benefit from additional participants.

The Wireless System in Kinmuck has been trialled. The project manager is now investigating various ways to bounce out the signal.

SG has commissioned a Broadband study to help identify the best method to deliver broadband funding. Mott McDonald has been appointed as consultants. Vicky had a telephone consultation with Robin Bosworth, Mott McDonald, who will be making contact with the Rural Aberdeenshire Broadband Initiative project participants.

5.6 **LEADER Promotion**

Vicky attended a ceremony at the Udney Community Wind Turbine where local primary schools were involved in burying a Time Capsule.

The LEADER Conference will be held on 31 August in Inverness. SCVO is to be involved in organising the conference. More information will be available shortly.

SG will part-fund the production of a Scotland-wide LEADER promotional guide to showcase what the 20 LAGs have achieved. Each LAG will be allocated 2 pages to promote a selection of their successful projects.

The Holyrood Magazine was highlighted as a well read publication for a possible article to advertise Aberdeenshire LEADER.

The possibility of hosting an event at Holyrood is also to be investigated.

This would involve an MSP hosting an event within the Parliament building.

It was suggested that LEADER 'good news' stories could be highlighted by Local MPs in their weekly column in the various local papers.

It was also suggested that Fergus Ewing MSP, Minister for Energy, Enterprise and Tourism, be invited to visit some of the LAGs key projects. PAC considered that the best PR comes from the projects themselves.

It is proposed that an Aberdeenshire LAG Report will be produced later this year which will provide statistical information and compilation of Aberdeenshire LEADER case studies.

Belinda thanked the LEADER team for all their work.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

6.1 Ewen Cameron, SNH part funder of project 127.

6.2 Belinda Miller, Aberdeenshire Council, Economic Development part funder of project 129.

7. PROJECTS 126 to 131

7.1 126 – Fairweather Community Leisure Area

The project is to purchase and install a range of play equipment for a children's play area in Mintlaw.

A field on the north side of Mintlaw was bequeathed to the community and the new equipment will be located on the site of the redundant tennis courts. There is a nearby pavilion with toilet facilities. The Trustees are working in partnership with Aberdeenshire Council Landscape Services who will oversee the purchase, installation and maintenance of equipment as well as maintenance of the landscape areas.

Other playparks funded by LEADER have been very successful. The proposal aligns closely with the Council's Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

With 1,000 new homes proposed for the area, there is wide community support for the project as there are no play facilities currently available.

PAC was in favour of the project and suggested that the applicant may also wish to consider the installation of adult exercise equipment on the site.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £23,814 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

7.2 127 – Mid Deeside Communities Access Network Project 2011-2013

This application is re-submitted from Round 11 and relates to path creation and expansion of the popular Health Walks in three communities in mid-Deeside, namely Tarland, Lumphanan and Torphins.

Path costs are based on Bill of Quantities and pathworks will go out to

tender once landowner consents have been received.

The preferred bidder for the Health Walks Project Manager has been selected. Health Walks provide benefit for all participants and the Project Manager will be working closely with local GP practices. Volunteers will also be trained to take account of risk assessment etc.

Core costs have been removed from the application although 10% for professional fees is included to cover cost of COAT Officer drawing up the detailed specification for pathworks. PAC considered these as eligible costs.

PAC considered the applicant to be experienced pathworks consultants. PAC felt the project as a single application to Aberdeenshire would be appropriate.

The project is linked to core path planning and local community consultation. Aftercare and maintenance will be the responsibility of COAT and will not revert to landowners. If quotes come in over budget, COAT would require to fund the shortfall.

PAC support the proposals, recommending that the Local Community Planning Officer be involved and that the applicant provide evidence of engagement with NHS locally.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £52,500 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

7.3 128 – Development of Boyndie Visitor Centre

Boyndie Visitor Centre is a popular visitor attraction in the North East and is located on the site of a former school building.

The project relates to re-aligning the internal layout of the existing visitor centre and the capital works will reshape the internal workings of the building. An industrial polytunnel will be erected and the newly created retail, training and workshop areas will be equipped. The car-park will be extended to allow better access for buses. This, along with the increase in café space will lead to increased income. Disability access already exists and this is not included in the capital works.

Two members of staff will be employed to manage the retail and training activities. The centre currently works closely with Aberdeenshire Council Social Work to offer placements for trainees with disabilities or learning difficulties. These posts will be self sustaining after one year due to income generated from training courses. LEADER funding will cover salaries and on-costs but would not cover any redundancy costs, if these were required.

PAC considered the proposals to provide the opportunity to encourage increased tourist footfall from Moray and other areas to continue on to other attractions along the Banffshire coast, thus linking well with other businesses in the area.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £69,660 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

7.4 **129 – Aboyne Centre Enhancement Scheme**

The project aims to assist local businesses in Aboyne to refurbish and enhance the frontages of the business premises. The initiative aims to improve appearance and ambiance of the town centre and therefore stimulate economic activity through increased footfall and visitor numbers to the town.

An Architect's firm was employed to undertake a study on how to enhance the shop fronts and improve visual impact in the town. This full appraisal was funded by Scottish Enterprise. SE can contribute towards marketing costs but is unable to contribute towards the refurbishment costs. Mid Deeside Ltd will be contracted by SE to manage the project.

All 20 businesses who have expressed an interest will need planning permission and some will require listed building consent. The businesses will require to pay for refurbishment and claim in arrears. LEADER will pay grant to Mid Deeside Ltd as beneficiary, who will disburse funds pro-rata back to the businesses who will require to sign a contract to this effect.

PAC considered the proposals to be very worthwhile with good economic focus, meeting priorities for town centre enhancement plus promotion of the mid-Deeside market town. However, management of the project would require further consideration. PAC would like a definitive list from MDL of the businesses that will take part in the initiative.

PAC felt that marketing will be critical to the success of the project and adequate signage will be essential due to the spread out nature of shops in Aboyne.

PAC would like further detail for the LAG on proposed timescale and examples in the form of photographs or drawings of how shop front improvements can make a difference

**PROJECT FUNDING OF £87,038 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL
SUBJECT TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.**

7.5 **130 – Renovation of Hay Memorial Hall – Phase 2**

The historic Hay Memorial Hall in Cornhill was built in the late 19th century and is in urgent need of revitalisation. The Community Trust successfully obtained £50,000 from the People's Millions and these funds have been used to install secondary glazing and a new air source heating system.

The LEADER project is for Phase 2 of the renovations which include new flooring, re-pointing the exterior walls and repairs to external railings. The floor is currently unstable and is unsafe for user groups. Re-pointing will make significant improvements to heat retention and repairing the railings will improve safety and the external appearance of the Hall. Historic Scotland consent has been received.

Existing local user groups are keen to return to the Hall when the floor is repaired and the improvements will encourage new user groups to use the

modernised facility.

PAC was supportive of the proposals to return the category B listed building to its place as the hub of the small community.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £28,000 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

7.6 **131 – Sandhaven & Pitullie Community Hall Feasibility Study**

Sandhaven & Pitullie Community Hall, which was gifted to the community in 1932, is in urgent need of revitalisation. The small, focussed, voluntary committee has been in discussion for over 2 years regarding the development. However the group has experienced a big challenge in identifying best course of action combined with the range of funding that will be required for the capital project once development proposals have been identified.

The committee has set up a partnership agreement with North East Scotland Preservation Trust to undertake a full feasibility study to prioritise what needs to be done to bring the Hall up to modern day standards.

The Hall is a well used facility in this small community. An energy audit has already been undertaken and potential for biomass has been identified.

PAC felt the group has taken a big step forward in joining forces with NESPT and the study will identify options, costings and potential sources of funding for the capital works. PAC considered a feasibility study to be a sensible way forward for the group.

Once the study is completed, the group will be positioned quite favourably in terms of EFF which may be a possible contributor towards the capital works.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £5,000 APPROVED BY PAC.

8. **AOCB**

Ewen Cameron advised the PAC that Paul Timms' replacement will be Gavin Clark. Gavin will take up post within a couple of months. Ewen will attend the next LAG Meeting.

Ewen informed the PAC that all SNH funds are now disbursed from a central fund with fixed application deadlines. Ewen assesses projects from this area and makes recommendations, but there is no local budget and outcome is determined by a single central panel.

The lead in time is longer for applications and there needs to be more forward planning, therefore it may be worth considering applying for the next 2 years of SNH contribution to LAG administration expenses in the one application.

Ewen would appreciate being informed at the early applicant enquiry stage of any potential projects which may be suitable for SNH funding.

Ewen will keep Vicky informed about application deadlines.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

LAG meeting – Tuesday, 7 June 2011, Committee Room 1, Woodhill House, 10.00 am.

PAC meeting – Tuesday, 30 August 2011, Conference Room C, Woodhill House, 10.00 am.