

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

**TUESDAY, 4 JUNE 2013 AT 10.00 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM E2, WOODHILL HOUSE**

Present

Belinda Miller	LAG Chairperson
Jamie Bell	Scottish Enterprise
Gavin Clark	Scottish Natural Heritage
Scott Petrie	Scottish Land & Estates
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Businesses

Officers in Attendance

Vicky Thomson	Aberdeenshire Council
Alasdair Cunningham	Aberdeenshire Council
Anne MacLennan	Aberdeenshire Council

Apologies

Lorna Paterson	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Maureen Stephen	Aberdeenshire Councils for Voluntary Services

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

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

2. MINUTE OF LAST MEETING

2.1 The draft minute of the LAG meeting on 21 March 2013 was noted and will be considered for approval at the LAG meeting on 19 June 2013.

3. COMMUNICATION

3.1 There are currently three vacancies on the LAG – Aberdeenshire Community Councils, Aberdeenshire Rural Partnership Federation and a Youth Representative.

Jean Henretty, Chairperson of Marr Area Partnership, has been nominated to represent the Aberdeenshire Rural Partnership Federation.

The Area Managers have been helpful with regard to identifying representation from the Aberdeenshire Community Councils and two representatives (Tarves & Mid Deeside Community Councils) have been put forward with one substitute.

Although the September and December LAG meetings will focus more on the future programme and Local Development Strategy (LDS) rather than actual projects, PAC agreed that it would help with continuity and be beneficial for new members' understanding of LEADER if they were invited to join now.

A youth representative is still to be confirmed.

4. CHAIRPERSON'S UPDATE

4.1 The next LEADER Strategic Board (LSB) meeting will be held in August.

4.2 We still await a formal request from Scottish Government with regard to submitting an Expression of Interest for the 2014-2020 programme.

Once the Expression of Interest request is received, the Council has to agree to provide the resources for the new programme provided the LAG wants to proceed with the Council as Lead Partner.

4.3 A LEADER project visit has been arranged for the Provost, the Chair and Vice-Chair of Infrastructure Services Committee on 26 June 2013. The visit will showcase what LEADER has achieved in Aberdeenshire. Projects chosen are PEP Interpretation Centre at Pitcaple and the Junior Driving School at the Grampian Transport Museum in Alford.

4.4 The LEADER evaluation is now underway, being undertaken by Blake Stevenson and SRUC consortium.

5. EU RURAL & FISHERIES TEAM LEADER UPDATE INCLUDING THE CAPITAL PROJETS UPDATE (Item 7 on the Agenda)

5.1 A copy of the Team Leader's update was circulated and will be presented again at the LAG. Summary of the main points below:

- The current commitment figure changes on a daily basis as project underspends are identified.
- As at 3 June 2013, the projected balance if all Round 17 applications are approved will be -£37,251. Aberdeenshire Finance will not permit the LAG to commit an overspend. A further update to the current commitment and available balance for new projects will be provided at the LAG on 19 June.
- PAC will consider the eight Round 17 projects in full. It will not be necessary to rank projects at this stage.
- There is a payment of approximately £300,000 outstanding from Scottish Government from Claim Quarter 3 2012/13. Only admin expenses have been received to date.
- Project grant claims have been slower of late.
- Scottish Government reporting is ongoing. End year report and Eurostats report have been submitted.
- Following invitation to tender, a consortium comprising Blake Stevenson and SRUC was commissioned to undertake the LEADER evaluation. The consultants are about half way through the process and are currently meeting with chosen project case studies. Fourteen case studies were chosen by the consultants. This represents 10% of the programme. The case study reports will be used for promotional material. Telephone interviews will be held with LAG members and an electronic survey was issued to all approved

projects. Belinda and Vicky are due to meet with the consultants on 14 June to hear about initial findings. The consultant team will then report to the LAG at their meeting on 19 June. The evaluation report will be completed by the end of July.

- LAG welcomed the evaluation and considered the end result could be a worthwhile tool to help spread the positive LEADER good-news story to as wide an audience as possible. LAG considered it important to make sure that the end result is a smart, readable publication for LAG, SG, Council and other stakeholders. It will be important for MSPs to be able to spread the positive LEADER message by highlighting projects in their respective areas via their news page in local publications.
- Guidance has now been received from SG regarding procedures to carry out the file audit following issues raised by Audit Scotland. LEADER team aim to commence this task next week.
- Aberdeenshire Council Internal Audit will commence their annual audit shortly. Internal Audit was approached for assistance with the Audit Scotland file check. However, the department does not have sufficient resources to assist with this task.
- SG Rural Communities and SG Accreditation Team will undertake a three day audit of Aberdeenshire LEADER in August.

5.2 **Capital Projects Update (Agenda Item 7)**

Daviot Hall – The project budget has now been full confirmed following approval of the local wind turbine application. The Area Manager has sourced the final gap in match funding. The project will commence in July for completion by December 2013.

Nemachar Hall – Aberdeenshire Council has filled the funding gap. Meetings have been held with the applicant group and Council representatives. The project has now started and will complete by early 2014.

Action Kintore – Funding has finally been confirmed, again thanks to Aberdeenshire Council. Contractors are now on site. The project will complete by December 2013.

Ritchie Hall – Applicant has secured a bank loan. Alasdair Cunningham will be working closely with the applicant with regard to cash flow. Work due to start early August.

Two other projects are being closely monitored:

Balmedie Leisure Centre – Alasdair is due to visit the project this afternoon.
Gallows Hill Sports Pavilion – Work cannot start due to the applicant making a further application to Sport Scotland. This delay may put the LEADER part of the project at risk.

6. **SRDP CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 An update summary on the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) consultation was circulated.

- This is the first of a two stage consultation process.
- An Aberdeenshire LAG response will be formulated following the LAG meeting on 19 June.
- Although 7,500 businesses have been supported through Rural Priorities, Scottish Government is aware of the complex procedures and admin difficulties faced by applicants.
- The key for the new programme will be a fit-for-purpose IT system.
- The ad-hoc data recording system for LEADER has varied from LAG to LAG.
- Alasdair Cunningham will be attending a meeting in Edinburgh this week about proposals for a new IT system.
- LEADER has to align with the common strategic framework and duplication/overlap must be avoided.
- SG target is to launch the new SRDP in 2014.
- There will be a cut in budget across Europe of between 10-20%.
- Jamie Bell questioned the connection with other European funds – it is difficult to get a sense of how ‘rural’ fits.
- 5% of EAFRD spend must be delivered through the LEADER approach.

Regulation elements relevant to LEADER:

- Article 20 – farm diversification projects and non-agricultural rural micro and small businesses.
- Article 21 – renewable energy and broadband.
- Article 26 – Forestry for People, environmental enhancement of forests.
- Article 36 – co-operation.

Lessons Learned:

- Audit issues and clarity of guidance.
- LEADER being outwith the mainstream IT system.

There are new opportunities for LEADER.

- Consideration of small local development projects through LEADER.
- LEADER to support the concept of Business development.
- Must be clear demarcation on which system to approach to avoid duplication and confusion.
- The need for increased funds to cover these additional items.

Consultation questions relevant to LEADER were discussed.

A draft response will be worked up in advance of the LAG meeting.

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 8.1 Scott Petrie – Project 174, Crathes Castle is a member of Scottish Land and Estates. Noted but Scott can contribute to discussion and take part in the vote.

8.2 Belinda Miller – Project 177, Aberdeenshire Council is the applicant although it is not an Economic Development application. Noted but Belinda can contribute to discussion and take part in the vote.

9. **PROJECTS 174 to 181**

At this stage PAC are to consider the merits of each application for recommendation to the LAG. The process of ranking applications is not necessary at this point. A more accurate figure of funds available will be identified in advance of the LAG meeting.

9.1 **174 – New Apiary Building at Crathes Castle**

The project relates to the cost of constructing a new, fit for purpose apiary building in the grounds of Crathes Castle with space for workshop activities, group teaching and a storage area.

Aberdeen and District Beekeeper's Association has over 200 members and due to proposed housing development on the current site at SRUC in Aberdeen, the Association are relocating to the new site.

The Association has a long tradition of educating school groups and members of the public about beekeeping in a carefully controlled environment.

Confirmation of the lease from the National Trust for Scotland is pending although this has been granted in principle.

Planning application is in process but PAC expressed concern that the timescale of this might slow down the project.

Gavin Clark is optimistic that an application for match funding which has been submitted to SNH will be successful.

PAC agreed that proposals represent a large investment for the applicant group who are making a big commitment towards creating a new facility of modern day standards. The location of the apiary will be crucial and adequate signage will be essential to direct passing trade such as school groups and general visitors to Crathes Castle to this unique facility.

PAC suggested the possibility of selling the end product, for example 'Crathes Honey'. However, sustaining and raising awareness of the species are the main aims of the application, not the retail of the by-product.

PAC considered the educational and outreach elements of the project to be innovative, especially with the current difficulties facing the vital role of the bee population on our natural environment.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £14,807 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

9.2 **175 – New Pitsligo Bakery Social Firm Development**

The project is to employ a transition consultant over a six month period to provide advice on best procedures to enable a long-established commercial

bakery business in New Pitsligo to transfer to a Social Enterprise to be run by Fraserburgh Development Trust (FDT). The owner of the bakery business is due to retire and is keen for the bakery business to provide continued employment in the area.

Phase 1 funding was secured from the Big Lottery to undertake a feasibility study and FDT is about to embark on working up a stage 2 application to the Big Lottery for the new building.

Professional fees were stripped out of the application, leaving a clear stand-alone LEADER element which will contribute towards the next phase.

The project fits Measure 341 – Local Development Strategy work, and also aligns with the LEADER priority for employment creation and training.

Duties of the transition consultant will include overseeing the transition of business from commercial to social enterprise in terms of the impacts on the present workforce and production, contributing to the design proposals for the new bakery and training facility, upgrading the business plan, assessing current products and developing training programmes for the transition.

PAC agreed that the proposal for a social enterprise will help to instil community pride.

It will be essential to advertise the brief for the consultant and the applicant must be aware that this process must be open to all. PAC agreed that such a diverse brief will require a very competent person.

PAC considered the costs to represent good value for money with a modest LEADER grant making a valuable contribution to the much larger £4.2 million build project. However, it was agreed that there is a lot expected of the transition consultant for £9,000 and PAC would welcome justification of what can actually be delivered for the money as well as additional detail about how this figure has been quantified.

Although generally supportive of the concept, PAC would welcome more information about the timespan of the application to the Big Lottery and further clarification on the consultant's working hours.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £4,800 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PROVIDED FOR THE LAG MEETING.

9.3 176 – K&M Climate Conversations

The project is to employ an Initiatives Officer to engage with communities in Kincardine & Mearns with regard to a proposed course of action for short and long term combat of climate change.

The officer will facilitate a series of 4-5 workshops over a 3-4 month period with interested local stakeholders within the community.

Proposals are not competing with flooding issues in Kincardine & Mearns but may complement these.

A revised application is still to be submitted by the Planning Officer who has completed the form on behalf of the applicant.

PAC raised the question as to who is actually going to be the applicant and also who the end beneficiaries will be. PAC would welcome further information regarding the aspirations of the community. It was agreed that although the concept could be good, there is insufficient detail to back up the proposal.

Issues identified include:

- Geographical footprint is too large and diverse.
- No transport costs built into the project costs.
- No cohesion – the project will cover disparate communities with very different issues.
- Only 4 or 5 workshops proposed.
- No consultant's brief provided.

The LEADER Project Officer will meet with the applicant prior to the LAG meeting to try to bottom out some of the above issues.

PAC agreed that although STARDG is a very effective consultancy, the applicant must go out to tender.

PAC questioned the impetus and drive of the application. The proposal is not bottom up. With such a broad subject matter, there is no indication of what will be delivered in terms of outputs.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £5,512 RECOMMENDED FOR REFUSAL.

This application was subsequently withdrawn by the applicant as match funding could not be confirmed.

9.4 **177 – Community Mammal Recording**

The project will employ a project officer on a six month contract to encourage and support local communities to record wildlife in their area. Recorded information will be used to build up an Aberdeenshire atlas of mammal species.

The project officer will educate the community by giving talks and presentations to local community groups. Training days on mammal recording will be held for schools and local interest groups.

Aberdeenshire Council is the applicant on behalf of North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC).

PAC considered the Aberdeenshire mammal atlas to be a valuable comparison tool which will show tangible results at the end of the project with the key output being the atlas. Mapping the volume of mammals over a six month period will represent a snapshot in time and PAC hoped that once volunteers become interested and trained, the process could be

ongoing.

PAC agreed that marketing and the involvement of schools will be critical for the success of this idea. PAC also suggested that the applicant make contact with the Aberdeenshire Council 'Be Part of the Picture' Placemaking project.

PAC were supportive of the proposals but would welcome some further information about marketing and approximate timescale for the atlas to be produced.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £3,000 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

9.5 **178 – Fit for All (Phase 2)**

The project is to create a 30m x 40m all weather sports surface. This is Phase 2 of a larger project to develop a sports hub in New Deer. Phase 1, which is currently underway and is funded by Sport Scotland, is the construction of a new sports pavilion. The all weather sports surface will complete the suite of services and will provide an all year round sports facility. Currently, due to the wet ground conditions, the pitches cannot be used from late September.

Full planning was granted in 2009 for the whole complex and all statutory consents are approved.

Extensive community consultation was carried out and there is evidence of high demand for the facility by numerous user groups. Proposals encompass people with disabilities.

New Deer Community Association is a pro-active group. A very good business plan shows that the facility will be operated as a sustainable enterprise.

Use of the all weather surface will be free to schools up to 7pm then will be charged for other user groups. There will be a managed booking system which will eventually be online. The applicant group is hoping to start up a series of junior leagues.

PAC considered proposals to represent good value for the rural area and the facility will become a hub for the wider community. It was considered that the all weather surface will add value to the phase 1 project.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £20,000 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

9.6 **179 – ROADS Community Café Extension**

The ROADS Community Café building was funded by Lottery four years ago and is a well used facility. There is now a need to expand the facility to enable an increased amount of users to make use of the facility. The project will be split into two parts.

The LEADER project is Phase 1 and relates to modification of the car park and retaining wall to cope with the increased demand for parking space

once the extension to the facility has been completed.

Phase 2 will then build the new extension. This is not part of the LEADER application.

Planning permission has been granted for the proposed works.

PAC considered the costs to be high for creating a retaining wall and an additional net three car parking spaces.

PAC suggested the project might have been better if Phase 1 and Phase 2 were considered as one complete project application for an extension to a facility with the back up of a business plan demonstrating demand and viability.

PAC queried possible displacement issues with another LEADER funded facility, St Combs Hall.

PAC considered proposals to be expensive for what is being delivered. A retaining wall and additional three car parking spaces for a selective use building does not represent good value for money. Displacement was also a concern.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £10,000 RECOMMENDED FOR REFUSAL.

9.7 **180 – Kirk Stables Feasibility and Development**

The project is to commission a feasibility study/business plan to convert the Methlick Kirk Stables building into useable space. This space will be in two parts, half being a village 'room' and the other half of the building being for holiday lets. The holiday let will be a self catering facility which will be open to all and suitable for disabled users.

The study will work closely with the community to establish demand for the facility and will also identify funding for the capital works.

An architect has been identified who is making a part in-kind contribution to do the feasibility/development plan, drawings and submit the planning permission. However, PAC agreed that the architect work must go through a tender process.

PAC welcomed the feasibility study to consider demand and viability for the proposals. It was also recommended that the study looks at marketing.

It was agreed that a timetable of activities should be requested in advance of the FLAG meeting.

PAC considered proposals to be a novel approach for a community to consider a holiday let to generate funding for the community.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £9,532 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

9.8 **181 – Aboyne Games Storage Shed**

The project is to construct a new storage shed for equipment used at the Aboyne Highland Games. The current storage facilities will no longer exist as the land is being developed.

A forty year renewable lease is in the process of being drawn up for the new site in the centre of Aboyne. Three quotes have been provided which meet LEADER tendering arrangements. All consents are in place.

Aboyne Highland Games' own resources over and above what is being utilised in the LEADER project have been earmarked for additional improvement works, e.g. portable toilets and new grandstand seating.

There are numerous letters of support in the file. Other local user groups have expressed an interest in using the storage facilities.

PAC agreed the Aboyne Highland Games are a key economic driver in the Deeside area. This important annual event may be at risk if there is nowhere to store the considerable amount of equipment needed to stage the traditional event. The storage building will make a positive contribution to the ongoing sustainability and delivery of Aboyne Games.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £17,600 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

10. **AOCB**

There was no other business.

11. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

LAG meeting – Wednesday, 19 June 2013, 10.00 am at Boyndie Visitor Centre

PAC meeting – Tuesday, 20 August 2013, 10.00 am, Conference Room F, Woodhill House.