

**MINUTE OF MEETING OF
RURAL ABERDEENSHIRE LEADER
LOCAL ACTION GROUP**

**WEDNESDAY, 19 JUNE 2013 AT 10.00 AM
BOYNDIE VISITOR CENTRE**

Present

Belinda Miller	LAG Chairperson
Shona Anderson	Visit Scotland
Moira Beverley	Aberdeenshire Council – Finance
Gavin Clark	Scottish Natural Heritage
Ian Cowe	Forestry Commission Scotland
Moira Gordon	SWRI
Reid Hutchison	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Economic Development
Scott Petrie	Scottish Land & Estates
Dawn Tuckwood	NHS Grampian

Officers in Attendance

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

Guests

Alistair Prior	Head of Rural Communities Team, Scottish Government
Jody Fleck	Senior Rural Communities Officer, Scottish Government

Apologies

Charlie Adam	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Jamie Bell	Scottish Enterprise
Jean Henretty	Aberdeenshire Rural Partnership Federation
Jennifer Kinnaird	Scottish Government Rural Payments Inspection Division
Bob Leonard	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Learning & Development
Alexander Macleod	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Planning
Keith Newton	Aberdeenshire Council - Community Planning
Lorna Paterson	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Charlie Adam	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Maureen Stephen	Aberdeenshire Councils for Voluntary Services
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Businesses

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

1.1 Belinda welcomed those present and, for the benefit of Alistair Prior and Jody Fleck, introductions were made round the table. Apologies were noted as above.

2. MINUTE OF LAST MEETING

2.1 The draft minute of the LAG meeting on 21 March 2013 was approved and will be uploaded on the LEADER website.

- 2.2 Gavin Clark, SNH, noted a couple of errors recorded in the draft PAC minute of 4 June 2013 with regard to the wording of the outcome on two of the project decisions:

Project 176 – K&M Climate Conversations

Decision recorded as “PAC unable to make recommendation to LAG until further information is provided”. The decision should read “Project funding of £5,512 recommended for refusal”.

Project 179 – Roads Community Café Extension

Decision recorded as “Project funding of £10,000 to be decided at the LAG meeting”. The decision should read “Project funding of £10,000 recommended for refusal”.

These amendments will be made to the draft PAC minute. The minute was noted and will be considered for approval at the PAC meeting on 20 August 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, David Hekelaar (Tarves Community Council) and Wilson Forbes (Mid Deeside Community Council) have been put forward. Keith Bennett, is a substitute for Mid Deeside Community Council. It was considered prudent to have both geographic areas represented to give a degree of spread.

It is hoped that the new representatives will be able to attend the September meeting. 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.

- 3.2 An e-mail was received from Scottish Government intimating that funding has been secured for administration costs to ensure a smooth transition between programmes. LAG considered it to be important to ensure that there is no loss of capacity during the transition period.

4. CHAIRPERSON'S UPDATE

- 4.1 The next LEADER Strategic Board (LSB) meeting will be held in August.
- 4.2 Belinda and Alasdair will accompany the Provost and Councillor Argyle on a familiarisation visit to two LEADER projects, PEP Interpretation Project at Pitcaple and the Junior Driving School at the Grampian Transport Museum in Alford on Wednesday 26 June.
- 4.3 A presentation on the work being undertaken by Blake Stevenson and SRUC consortium on the LEADER Evaluation will take place at the end of the LAG meeting.
- 4.4 The Expression of Interest to Scottish Government to form a new LAG partnership for the next LEADER Programme is currently being worked up and should be submitted next week.

Scottish Government is keen to see better linkages between urban and rural and is open minded about the 150,000 population threshold and about including larger towns.

The EOI is a relatively short summary and the next step, once SG give the go ahead, will be to work on the Local Development Strategy (LDS).

It is hoped that funding will be available through the new programme from late 2014 or early 2015.

In the interim period the LAG will have time to reflect and although there will be no requirement to make decisions about projects, the LAG will be involved in working towards the LDS.

It is anticipated that the level of interest will be high at the start of the new programme. Projects coming forward will have to fit the strategy and the LDS must be robust in order to avoid raising community expectations.

Discussions will be held with Rural Partnerships who may have a larger role to play in the future programme.

The September and December meetings of the LAG will focus mainly on the strategy.

5. EU RURAL & FISHERIES TEAM LEADER UPDATE INCLUDING THE CAPITAL PROJETS UPDATE

- 5.1 The Team Leader's update is summarised below:
 - The projected balance if all Round 17 applications are approved today will be -£21,377.
 - Scottish Government has issued guidance on how to undertake the file audit following issues raised by Audit Scotland. Alasdair will lead on this major task which is to be completed by end August 2013. Future claims will be split on a project basis depending on whether

- items to be claimed are funded through EAFRD or National Funds.
- 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 slowed down recently
- The evaluation of the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme is progressing well. Thanks go to all LAG members who were involved in interviews.
- Aberdeenshire Council Internal Audit is about to commence the annual audit. Twelve project files have been identified for inspection.
- SG Rural Communities and SG Accreditation Team will undertake a three day audit of Aberdeenshire LEADER in August.

5.2 Capital Projects Update

- Logie Coldstone Hall – Project well underway and claims pending.
- Daviot Hall – Funds now identified. Project to commence asap.
- Newmachar Hall – Funds now identified. Project has now started.
- Action Kintore - Funds now identified. Project has now started.
- St Combs Hall – Project underway.
- Ritchie Hall – Finalised costs and budget now identified. Work due to start July/August for completion by December 2013.
- Baden Powell Centre – Awaiting building warrant approval – expected shortly. Project to commence thereafter.
- Two further projects are being closely monitored – namely Balmedie Leisure Centre and Gallows Hill Sports Pavilion, Newburgh. It is hoped these will progress as approved.

6. SRDP CONSULTATION

- 6.1 A draft consultation response to specific consultation questions contained in the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) consultation paper was circulated.

The LAG response will focus on the elements relevant to LEADER within the structural funds element and NESAG will make a response to the agricultural element.

Introduction

- This is the first of a two stage consultation process.
- 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.
- 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%.
- 5% of EAFRD spend must be delivered through the LEADER

approach.

Context

- EU funds will deliver against priorities agreed by 27 Member states.
- Six Rural Development priorities have been agreed:
 - fostering knowledge transfer and innovation
 - enhancing competitiveness
 - promoting food chain organisation and risk management
 - restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems
 - promoting resource efficiency and transition to low carbon economy
 - promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development (LEADER)
- SG proposes EU funds are to be targeted to three priority areas, namely:
 - Competitiveness, innovation and jobs
 - Low carbon resources efficiency and environment.
 - Local Development and social inclusion.

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.

Specific SRDP consultation questions relevant to LEADER were discussed in detail.

LAG members are asked to consider and make comment by Monday 24 June, before the LAG's response is submitted to Scottish Government.

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 7.1 Reid Hutchison – Project 175, New Pitsligo Bakery Social Firm Development. Reid is a Director of Fraserburgh Development Trust, the applicant for this project, and will leave the room during the discussion process.

8. PROJECTS 174 to 181

LAG will consider the merits of each application in the first instance. If all applications are approved, a ranking process will then take place in order to meet the balance of funds available.

8.1 174 – 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 is 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.

Gavin Clark confirmed that match funding from SNH has been approved subject to planning and signing of the lease.

LAG unanimously supported this innovative project. With the current publicity regarding difficulties facing the UK bee population, it was agreed that the educational elements of the proposal would raise awareness of the vital role of bees on our natural environment.

Summary of Responses	In favour	8
	Not in favour	0
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £14,807 APPROVED.

8.2 175 – New Pitsligo Bakery Social Firm Development

DOI - Reid Hutchison left the room at this point.

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 operate as a Social Enterprise. The bakery will relocate to a new site on the edge of New Pitsligo and will 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 raised numerous questions and detailed feedback was received from the applicant including:

- A transition consultancy specification was provided.
- A clear timeline for the consultant, with specific key milestones was outlined.
- Clearer information was provided with regard to what is expected for the modest amount of grant requested. The consultant, who will be an external expert, will help refine the business plan, help with design of the new premises and help with product development and, from discussions with bakery consultants, a day rate in the region of £200-£400 is considered to be appropriate.

LAG agreed that the additional information provided gave a much clearer understanding of the project compared to what was presented at the PAC meeting.

LAG considered the bakery to be a key employer in an area with high unemployment figures. Over 28 people are employed, with 20 of those being local to New Pitsligo. The new premises will have the capacity to employ and train more people.

LAG welcomed the proposals which will offer excellent opportunities for the local community. There will be a viable management structure following the transition process with Fraserburgh Development Trust being involved in the transition process and the day-to-day running of the business.

Summary of Responses	In favour	7
	Not in favour	0
	DOI	1

PROJECT FUNDING OF £4,800 APPROVED.

This project has since been withdrawn by the applicant due to difficulties in securing match funding.

8.3 **176 – K&M Climate Conversations**

This application was withdrawn following the PAC meeting due to the applicant experiencing difficulties in securing match funding.

8.4 **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).

The applicant provided a clear timetable for proposals following questions raised by the PAC.

Rangers will be provided with promotional materials and the project officer will work closely with rangers to facilitate events.

The applicant is in discussion with primary and secondary schools across Aberdeenshire. LAG expressed concerns regarding the fact that it will be impossible for the project officer to work with schools during June and July. However, following discussion, it was agreed that proposals are not targeted solely at schools. The timing will allow the project officer to attend summer events such as agricultural shows, with work then being carried out in schools from mid August till November.

Although the atlas is the ultimate outcome of the project, the project officer will encourage interest from volunteers, ensuring sustainability once a pool of volunteers is built up.

LAG agreed that NESBReC has a proven track record.

Summary of Responses	In favour	5
	Not in favour	3
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £3,000 APPROVED.

8.5 **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.

New Deer Community Association is a pro-active group. The business plan demonstrates that the facility will be operated as a sustainable enterprise. Extensive community consultation was carried out and there is evidence of high demand for the facility by numerous user groups. It is hoped to start up a series of junior leagues. Proposals encompass people with disabilities.

Use of the all weather pitch will be the most up-to-date 3G sports surface, or possibly even 4G.

The facility will be free for school use up to 7pm. Thereafter there will be a charge for other user groups. It is hoped to eventually have an online booking system.

LAG was supportive of proposals and it was agreed that the all weather surface will add considerable value to the phase 1 project.

Summary of Responses	In favour	8
	Not in favour	0
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £20,000 APPROVED.

8.6 **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 repositioning of the boundary 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.

LAG considered the costs to be high for what is proposed. A net increase of three parking spaces was not considered to represent good value for money. Concern was also expressed regarding confirmed match funding from the Buchan Area Committee which was reduced from £10,000 to £3,000, immediately creating a shortfall of £7,000.

LAG was concerned about displacement with another recently funded LEADER facility, St Combs Hall which could access the same set of user groups.

LAG also agreed that proposals would have more merit if Phase 1 and 2 were considered together with the back up of a business plan demonstrating demand and viability.

LAG recommended that the application be rejected for LEADER funding in its current form. This decision is due to:

- Proposals not being particularly innovative
- Proposals not representing good value for money
- Displacement issues with another local venue

Should they wish to do so, the applicant group will not be prevented from re-applying for LEADER funding at a future date if the development of the new extension is to go ahead.

Summary of Responses	In favour	0
	Not in favour	8
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £10,000 UNSUCCESSFUL.

8.7 **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. The vision is for this space is to 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.

A business plan will be prepared and 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, the drawings and submit the planning permission. However, LAG expressed concerns that this work must be actively tendered.

PAC had requested further detail regarding clarity on the timeline of events and the steps of development of proposals. The applicant confirmed that the consultant will work on the feasibility, produce the business plan and look for possible funding avenues from July to September 2013. On the basis of these findings, the drawings, planning permission and building warrants will be worked on from October to December 2013.

Although LAG acknowledged that proposals to revitalise the Kirk Stables building are worthwhile, concern was expressed that the project as applied for can not be realistically undertaken as proposed in the application. LAG considered the project to be a 2 stage approach but the applicant is trying to do both in one application.

LAG agreed that a full feasibility of the options available for the property should be undertaken resulting in a business and marketing plan being prepared that will demonstrate demand and economic viability. LAG considered it to be essential that these two elements are addressed well before any activity is undertaken with regard to preparing drawings for

planning permission and building warrant.

LAG recommended that the application in its current form be rejected for LEADER funding. It was considered more appropriate for the applicant to identify alternative sources of match funding towards the feasibility and business plan elements of the project. LAG suggested that the applicant contact the Formartine Partnership with regard to possible funding and the Formartine Area Manager to identify the possibility of Area Top Up funding for the project.

Summary of Responses	In favour	0
	Not in favour	8
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £9,532 UNSUCCESSFUL.

8.8 **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 near the centre of Aboyne. Three quotes have been provided which meet LEADER tendering arrangements. All consents are in place.

Planning permission and building warrant are already in place and quotes have been obtained. The lowest quote equates to £96 per square metre which is less than Scottish Government standard costs.

All match funding is confirmed and the applicant group is making a significant contribution of 20% of project costs.

There are numerous letters of support in the file. There is a large amount of volunteer input involved in the Games. Other local user groups have expressed an interest in using the storage facilities.

LAG considered that this important annual event may be at risk if there are no storage facilities for the considerable amount of equipment needed to stage the traditional event which is to be a key element of Homecoming 2014. The storage building will make a positive contribution to the ongoing sustainability and delivery of Aboyne Games.

LAG agreed that the Games are a key economic driver in the area. The event generates a ripple effect of economic activity and has a positive impact on accommodation and catering facilities in the area.

Summary of Responses	In favour	8
	Not in favour	0
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £17,600 APPROVED.

8.9 With two applications being unsuccessful for LEADER funding, this resulted in a shortfall of £1,800 which was accepted by Aberdeenshire Council Finance. This small shortfall will be quickly cleared as current projects complete, some of which will have a project underspend.

9. AOCB

There was no other business.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that, due to there being no balance of funding available for future application rounds, the PAC meeting scheduled for 20 August 2013 will be cancelled.

The LAG meeting scheduled for 4 September 2013 will go ahead as planned and will be held in Committee Room 5, Woodhill House at 10 am.

11. BLAKE STEVENSON: INITIAL FINDINGS PRESENTATION TO LAG

11.1 Ellie Brodie and Charlotte Mitchell from Blake Stevenson and Sarah Skerratt SRUC, were welcomed to the meeting.

Initial findings from fieldwork carried out on the Evaluation of the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme were presented to the LAG. No analysis of the findings has been undertaken as yet.

Of 142 projects funded by Aberdeenshire LEADER, an on-line survey was sent out to 118 project managers. Of these 118, 61 responses were received.

Fourteen detailed project case studies have been undertaken. To help to explain the sampling process, the 14 case studies were chosen from the following criteria:

- Geographical spread
- Type of project/theme
- Range of value of LEADER grant

The consultants spoke to 48 people during the detailed case study consultation period.

Differences have been identified between the e-survey and case study outcomes.

The evaluation has looked back at processes to establish what is working well and identify areas where LEADER has made an impact, as well as identifying areas where less impact has been seen.

12. LAG AND FLAG WORKSHOP FOR THE FUTURE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2014-2020 (Facilitated by Blake Stevenson)

- 12.1 FLAG members joined LEADER LAG members to look back at the positive impact of the current programme and to discuss members' thoughts for the next programming period. Discussion centred around the preparation of a joint Rural and Maritime Local Development Strategy and the submission of an Expression of Interest for 2014-2020 to Scottish Government.

FLAG/LAG members were then split into discussion workshops. Consultants from Blake Stevenson chaired the two groups.