

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

**THURSDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2013 AT 9.30 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM F, WOODHILL HOUSE**

Present

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

Officers in Attendance

Martin Brebner	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 4 September 2013 was noted and will be considered for approval at the LAG meeting on 10 December 2013.

3. STAFFING UPDATE

3.1 Belinda updated the PAC on the service review following Vicky's retirement.

- Martin Brebner has been appointed as Team Manager European Policies and Programmes.
- Alasdair Cunningham has been appointed as European Programmes Co-ordinator.
- David John McRobbie has been appointed to the second European Programmes Co-ordinator post.
- Anne MacLennan has been matched to the European Programmes Claims Officer post.
- June Jaffrey has been appointed to the second European Programmes Claims Officer post.

4. CHAIRPERSON/TEAM LEADER/CO-ORDINATOR UPDATE

4.1 Copies of the LEADER Evaluation completed by Blake Stevenson and

SRUC will be issued to the LAG along with the papers for the next meeting.

From an applicant point of view, the help and assistance offered by the LEADER team was highlighted as a positive point in the evaluation.

However, the bureaucracy associated with the burden of admin procedures and the issue of cash flow for applicants were also highlighted.

- 4.2 The file audit which had to be carried out by every LAG in Scotland following Audit Scotland findings was completed within the timescale. Every project file had to be reviewed and this onerous task took up most of Alasdair's time over the summer months. Approximately £200,000 has been identified as in-eligible expenditure and this amount will be paid from Scottish Government domestic funds.

Belinda thanked Alasdair, Anne and other members of Economic Development staff who assisted with the file review, for their hard work with this time consuming task.

- 4.3 Internal audit findings will be reported in more detail at the LAG meeting.

- 4.4 Belinda, Martin and Alasdair attended the LEADER National Conference in Cardiff on 6 and 7 November 2013. The main aim of the conference was to encourage trans-regional projects across the UK network. Some good examples of trans-regional projects in Cardiff were visited and copies of some of the case studies will be circulated for the LAG meeting.

- 4.5 The next quarterly meeting of the LEADER Strategic Board (LSB) will be held in Edinburgh on Thursday, 19 December 2013. Martin will attend on behalf of the LAG.

5. EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI)/LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (LDS) UPDATE

- 5.1 An e-mail has been received from Alistair Prior intimating that guidance about the next strategy could be circulated in draft form if required. It was considered essential to receive a copy of the guidance as soon as possible, even in draft, as the timescale is tight for the preparation of the Strategy document.

- 5.2 Following submission of the EOI, confirmation has been received from Scottish Government that Aberdeenshire can proceed on the basis of forming two LAGs.

First draft of the Strategy is due to be submitted in March 2015.

A consultant will be employed to write the Strategy document and an invitation to tender will be issued. PAC members were asked to let Martin know if they had anybody in mind who could be invited to submit a bid.

The successful bidder will also be involved in running the public consultation events in conjunction with Rural Development Partnerships.

- 5.3 Scottish Government is due to release a Draft Operational Programme for SRDP. This document will inform LAGs about what LEADER can and cannot fund in the next programme.

At this stage it looks unlikely that LAGs in Scotland will have access to any other funding streams other than LEADER and EFF.

- 5.4 Information about interim arrangements between programming periods is vague. However, it has been confirmed that admin costs will be covered during the transition period.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 6.1 190 – Wildlife SMarT - Gavin Clark, Scottish Natural Heritage declared an interest due to SNH providing match funding for this project.

7. PROJECTS 183 TO 194

- 7.1 Alasdair updated PAC members about projected project underspends.

- Baden Powell Centre looks likely to be spending beyond the deadline of September/October 2014 due to planning/building warrant consent issues.
- Balmedie Leisure Centre Café has broken ground and looks on track to spend within the deadline.
- Aboyne Wheelers – project has been de-committed due to issues with planning permission for the chosen site.
- Loons & Quines Loos Project – project has been de-committed due to the applicant being unable to accept the terms of the Aberdeenshire Council lease.
- Work has completed on the Fairweather Community Leisure Area. Several attempts to encourage the applicant to make a claim have been made. However, no claim has been forthcoming and the project timescale has now expired.
- Aberdeenshire Whitespace project is also at risk of decommitment.

PAC suggested that a letter be issued to all live projects to make them aware of the timescale for claiming from LEADER.

Alasdair confirmed that, as per his calculations, the balance of funds available to commit on project applications received in Round 18 is £125,724.

At this stage PAC will consider the merits of each application for recommendation to the LAG. It is proposed that a process of scoring applications will take place at the LAG meeting.

- 7.2 Three project applications submitted in Round 18 are considered to be ineligible.

7.3 **186 – Provision of new Multi-Use All Weather Sports Pitch**

The project relates to the resurfacing of an existing all weather pitch in Hatton.

The application does not meet the requirements of Regulation 12 of the 2008 Regulations. The facility does not provide new or extended infrastructure for health and recreational purposes as it is only providing a like for like replacement on the existing footprint of the site.

PAC agreed that the replacement of the surface is unlikely to attract new groups to make use of the facility.

PROJECT RECOMMENDED AS INELIGIBLE.

7.4 **192 – Cowhythe Store Security**

The project is to replace the doors at a steading building just outside Portsoy which is used for the storage and restoration of boats. The replacement doors will make the property water-tight and will increase security.

LEADER guidance advises that 'projects comprising improvements to general security and safety of towns and villages such as closed circuit television (CCTV) are also ineligible'. It would be difficult to prove any benefits of the project as it would be essential to prove a negative, i.e. that nothing was stolen.

PAC agreed that an upgrade such as this to replace doors would fit more comfortably in another remit. Where is the innovation in security?

PROJECT RECOMMENDED AS INELIGIBLE.

7.5 **194 – Replacement Mobile Classroom**

The project is to purchase a mobile classroom to replace the oldest, most vulnerable of three mobile classrooms currently in use.

This application was received late on 4 November 2013 and was not previously known to the LEADER team. The applicant had been working to the wrong application deadline.

PAC considered this project to be based around statutory requirements. It was agreed that the application be considered ineligible due to statutory activity and late submission of the application.

PROJECT RECOMMENDED AS INELIGIBLE.

7.6 **183 – The Cutty Park**

The project is to create a state of the art play park in Inverbervie. There has been a significant growth in the number of new build family housing in the area and this has highlighted the lack of well-equipped play facilities for the increasing number of youngsters in the community. There is wide community support for the proposals.

This applicant group will work in conjunction with Aberdeenshire Council and a partnership agreement will be drawn up between both parties.

PAC agreed that the provision of a play park would strongly benefit the wider Inverbervie community.

An application has been submitted to the Big Lottery Fund (People's Millions) for 50% of the funding. Outcome is expected today. PAC agreed that if the funding application to Big Lottery is unsuccessful, then the timescale for LEADER spend will not allow this project to proceed.

PAC raised the question about who will be responsible for the on-going maintenance of the facility. There is a maintenance agreement with the Council but PAC would welcome further information about what is covered by this in advance of the LAG meeting. This will then form a condition of grant.

PAC was happy to recommend the project on the assumption that the Big Lottery funding is confirmed.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £24,000 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL PROVIDED THAT THE MATCH FUNDING PROFILE IS CONFIRMED PRIOR TO THE LAG MEETING.

7.7 184 – Huntly Digital Hub

The project is to develop, test and install a high speed internet connection for all residents at a Social Housing complex based in Huntly.

Project activities include:

- a feasibility study to look at the provision of digital infrastructure, hardware, software and skills requirements,
- obtain quotes,
- develop a support programme and
- deliver training.

The applicant, Blackwood Foundation, is a social housing company based in Elgin.

PAC agreed that digital exclusion in terms of internet access is a problem across rural Aberdeenshire. However, project costs were considered to be expensive for 14 homes and the figure of £15,000 for training and development was thought to be unrealistic.

PAC suggested that the application would be better split into two phases, with the first piece of work being the feasibility study and the second phase progressing to the development of outcomes of the study.

PAC would be willing to recommend an application for a feasibility study but could not consider the other items until the outcome of the study was known.

Although proposals will benefit a relatively small number of residents, PAC felt that the project would not benefit the wider community unless the project was to include a wi-fi hub/café which was open to all.

Roddy Matheson, Industry Sector Manager with Aberdeenshire Council, advised that this project is likely to be overtaken by the proposed roll out of fibre optic broadband across Aberdeenshire in the near future and as a result, the project could be deemed redundant within a couple of months of completion.

Approved LEADER projects have to be operational for five years from date of final claim and therefore, PAC agreed that LEADER would be unable to approve a project which looks likely to be overtaken by and financed by another source of public funds.

PAC considered the application to be undermined by this additional information provided by Roddy Matheson. PAC would welcome more detail from Roddy in advance of the LAG meeting with regard to the timescale of the roll out and the proposed areas to be included.

PAC was supportive of the feasibility element of the application but, unless it is confirmed that the Huntly area will not be part of the fibre optic roll out programme, PAC cannot recommend approval of this project.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £15,000 RECOMMENDED FOR REFUSAL.

7.8 **185 – Energy Efficient Lighting System for GTM**

The project is to install an energy efficient system of roof lighting and a series of flexible lighting to highlight exhibits at the Grampian Transport Museum (GTM) in Alford. The museum building has recently been re-roofed and re-cladded and all the original lighting has been lost. The new lighting will make use of recent advances in low energy technology.

GTM is a very important resource in the Alford area and PAC agreed that the innovative proposals will have a positive impact in terms of bills and energy consumption for the facility. The proposed low carbon targets are welcomed but PAC would like to see a breakdown of anticipated carbon and cash savings.

PAC agreed that outputs recorded in the application form were unrealistic and relate more to the Museum than to the lighting project. Alasdair will check the figures provided and ask the applicant to re-consider the project outcomes.

GTM is providing pound for pound match funding in the form of their own contribution. However, PAC would like Alasdair to ask the applicant if any other sources of funding have been explored.

GTM is committed to being an eco-friendly facility and PAC was keen to use the museum as case study for other businesses.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £7,305 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

7.9 **187 – Fettercairn Community Allotment**

The project is to create a community allotment facility in Fettercairn to be up and running in time for the next growing season. Funding requested will go towards capital expenditure such as kerbing for the growing plots, lawnmower etc. Proposals also include a series of open days and a summer fete to engage members of the community and encourage young and old to grow their own fruit and vegetables.

PAC considered proposals to be informative and educational with an element of enterprise involved in selling the produce and the promotion of healthy eating.

PAC agreed that the sum of £1,580 represents very good value for money. It may be that the group are happy with a small, easy project and although the PAC does not want to overburden the applicant by taking on more than they can handle, it was suggested that Alasdair to go back to the applicant group to ensure that all items required to give the project the best start and chance of success have been included in the project costs.

It was also suggested that the applicant consider making an application for Area Top-Up funding in the event of the Community Council contribution being unsuccessful.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £1,580 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

7.10 **188 – Logie Coldstone Hall – ‘A Stage for the Future’**

This application follows on from an earlier LEADER project to renovate Logie Coldstone Hall which is just about to complete. During the renovation works the stage was found to be rotten and had to be removed.

This application relates to the purchase of a flexible, portable stage which will increase the versatility of what the main hall can be used for.

Logie Coldstone Hall is a very well used facility and the refurbished Hall, with the addition of the new portable stage, will encourage local user groups to stay closer to home for entertainment.

The funding package is already in place.

LEADER is all about adding value and PAC welcomed this application as a good example of a phased approach.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £4,625 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

7.11 **189 – Rocks, Rails, Rogues and Refuge**

The project aims to restore a 19th century prison carriage, which would then be installed at Maud Station as a visitor attraction.

Alasdair highlighted that VAT may not have been included in some of the costs and questioned whether or not the timescale for securing match funding was realistic and achievable during the remainder of the present

LEADER programme. PAC shared concerns over the funding package and also questioned the LEADER value added.

While recognising the importance of conserving the carriage as part of the North East's heritage, PAC members were unclear as to whether or not this was a LEADER project or whether it should be funded by other sources.

Other concerns raised included the sustainability of the project, in terms of the likely degradation of the restored carriage without adequate shelter, the need for visitors to travel by car to the location and the ability of the facility to attract visitors in its proposed location.

Overall, the PAC view was that this was potentially a good project, but there were too many unanswered questions for them to make an unequivocal recommendation to the LAG.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £33,000 TO BE DECIDED AT THE LAG WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REQUESTED IN ADVANCE THE MEETING.

7.12 **190 – Wildlife SMarT**

Gavin Clark declared an interest in this project as Scottish Natural Heritage is a match funder.

The project aims to help promote best practice in sustainable marine wildlife tourism. The overall project is complex, with many different strands. Alasdair explained that while the original project had aimed to cover a larger part of Scotland's coastline, this particular project only related to the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER eligible area.

The proposed timescale for the project is to complete in December 2015, with the applicant wishing to 'front load' the LEADER component of the project. This would not be eligible under LEADER as the full project would need to be completed in 2014 and grant would only be paid at the project intervention rate based on actual costs incurred during the LEADER-eligible period.

PAC also felt that this project would fit better with the Aberdeenshire European Fisheries Fund which could fund activity into 2015.

PAC was unable to approve due to the timescale being ineligible. It was recommended that the applicant be advised to revise the application and submit to AEFF.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £30,000 RECOMMENDED FOR REFUSAL.

7.13 **191 – North Sea Ring**

The project aims to facilitate co-operation between the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival group and other similar organisations in Norway. This type of activity would usually be considered as a transnational project, however this was not feasible in the remaining timescale of the present programme or with non-EU Norwegian partners.

PAC questioned additionality in terms of previous awards from the LAG to the group to support the Portsoy Boat Festival and the possibility of LEADER funds being used to sustain an existing core post within the group for which funding from other organisations had recently ended.

The costs for travel and marketing were questioned, as were the outputs in terms of the number of jobs created. It was interpreted from the application that some of these costs and outputs would actually relate to partners from outwith the eligible LEADER area and therefore could not be counted.

PAC also felt that the project was a better fit with the AEF programme than LEADER.

PAC was unable to approve and it was recommended that the applicant be advised to revise the application and submit to AEF.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £18,000 RECOMMENDED FOR REFUSAL.

7.14 **193 – Greenness Community Hall Replacement**

The project relates to the provision of a replacement community hall in the settlement of Greenness, between Turriff and Fyvie.

The present facility is a portacabin which was previously used as the kitchen for the former primary school which burned down in 1994. Planning permission has been secured for a new building, which will take the form of a house but without internal walls.

PAC questioned the risk that if the project was not viable, it would be sold on as a domestic property. However, LEADER rules require the facility to be used for its original purpose for five years from completion date.

Questions over the ownership of the land on which the facility would be constructed were raised. This will be clarified with the applicant in advance of the LAG meeting.

Match funding is to be made available from an insurance policy held by Aberdeenshire Council, along with a contribution from the applicant. The applicant contribution was highlighted as being less than the minimum 5% required. This will need addressed should the project be approved.

PAC questioned the likelihood of the project being delivered within the proposed timescale due to the fact that the match funding has been available for almost 20 years without being spent. The viability of the facility was also questioned given the small population of Greenness and its proximity to larger settlements.

A feasibility study has not yet been carried out and was instead proposed as one of the project activities. This was deemed to be a separate project to the build and a precursor to the capital project being approved.

PAC agreed that, due to the lack of supporting study and proposed timescale for delivery, the project as presented was not sufficiently

developed and realistic to be recommended for approval.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £60,000 RECOMMENDED FOR REFUSAL.

8. AOCB

There was no other business.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

11.1 LAG Meeting – Tuesday, 10 December 2013 at 9.30 am,
Committee Room 1, Woodhill House

11.2 No PAC meetings are scheduled for 2014 due to the fact that there will be no further projects for consideration in the current LEADER programme.