

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

**TUESDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2013 AT 9.30 AM  
COMMITTEE ROOM 1, WOODHILL HOUSE**

**Present**

Belinda Miller	LAG Chairperson
Keith Bennett	Mid Deeside Community Council
Moira Beverley	Aberdeenshire Council – Finance
Gina Ford	Scottish Enterprise
David Hekelaar	Tarves Community Council
Jean Henretty	Aberdeenshire Rural Partnership Federation
Reid Hutchison	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Economic Development
Scott Petrie	Scottish Land & Estates
Ian Wallace	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Planning
Chris White	Aberdeenshire Council – Area Manager

**Officers in Attendance**

Martin Brebner	Team Manager European Policies and Programmes
Alasdair Cunningham	European Programmes Co-ordinator
Anne MacLennan	European Programmes Claims Officer

**Apologies**

Charlie Adam	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Gavin Clark	Scottish Natural Heritage
Ian Cowe	Forestry Commission Scotland
Lorna Paterson	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Douglas Petrie	Scottish Government Rural Payments Inspection Division
Philip Smith	Visit Scotland
Maureen Stephen	Aberdeenshire Councils for Voluntary Services
Dawn Tuckwood	NHS Grampian
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Businesses

**1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES**

1.1 Belinda welcomed those present and introductions were made round the table.

**2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETINGS**

2.1 The draft minutes of both the LAG meeting held on 4 September 2013 and the PAC meeting held on 28 November 2013 were approved and will be uploaded on the LEADER website.

**3. CHAIRPERSON'S UPDATE**

3.1 Belinda Miller updated the LAG on the staff changes following Vicky's retirement and the subsequent internal review of LEADER and AEFF.

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

Resources have been an issue since Vicky's retirement and Belinda thanked the team for their hard work during this time.

- 3.2 Belinda, Martin and Alasdair attended the LEADER National Conference in Cardiff on 6 and 7 November 2013. The aim of the conference was to encourage LAGs to be proactive in running trans-regional projects. Some excellent cross boundary projects were visited during the 2 day event.

- 3.3 The next meeting of the LEADER Strategic Board (LSB) will take place in Edinburgh on 19 December 2013. Martin will attend on behalf of the LAG.

#### **4. CO-ORDINATOR UPDATE**

- 4.1 If all round 18 applications up for consideration at today's meeting are approved, this will result in a budget overspend of £139,000.
- 4.2 A total of £3.5million has been disbursed in grant payments to date. This equates to 76% of funds committed.
- 4.3 The team have a big task ahead to ensure that full spend is incurred by September 2014. Projects must be encouraged to spend within the timeframe and a letter has gone out to all active projects requesting an accurate project budget spend forecast.
- 4.4 Alasdair updated the LAG on the current situation with regard to active capital projects. Most are now completed or due to complete within the timescale.

However, the Baden Powell Centre is considered to be at risk. Following delays with planning permission and building warrant, the tender process was completed but the preferred contractor is not scheduled to start until February 2013. This has resulted in a project crisis meeting with the applicant being scheduled for Friday 13 December.

Full in-kind drawdown will have to be demonstrated before the final claim can be paid out. The group has the capacity and there is no doubting their ability to deliver, however, the timescale is proving to be a problem.

Some programme closure guidance has been received from Scottish Government and if the work is not completed on time, there is a real danger that the final claim will not be submitted on time.

LAG agreed that the applicant must be made fully aware of the risk and the potential for financial penalty.

Alasdair will update the LAG by e-mail following the crisis meeting.

## **5. AUDIT REPORTS**

5.1 Annual audit processes have been carried out over the past few months.

5.2 A Scottish Government Monitoring Visit took place in August and findings were that processes were generally robust with well organised records. However, some issues were highlighted and the LAG should be made aware about the following points in particular:

- The retention of incomplete projects past their retention period is a concern.
- LAG membership to be reviewed to ensure adequate representation by non-public sector bodies in decision making.

5.3 Aberdeenshire Council Internal Audit also concluded that adequate procedures are in place with file documentation being satisfactory. However, the need to ensure that more detailed documentation is maintained to support project application forms was highlighted along with the need for benefits and additionality of projects to be more clearly outlined.

The LAG should consider the following points in particular:

- Applications must quantify the economic benefits of the project.
- Consideration to be given as to whether or not the applicant group has the funds to proceed without LEADER funding.
- LAG representatives with an interest in a project being discussed must not be allowed to vote.
- LEADER application decisions must take account of concerns raised by Audit Scotland.

5.4 The following recommendations to address the issues identified were agreed.

- Clarification to be sought from SG regarding whether or not projects which have passed their grant retention period are still eligible for grant.
- Formal letters to be issued to all projects at risk of passing their grant retention period to remind them about the importance of submitting final claims on time.
- Quorum is formally confirmed at the LAG meeting and noted in the minutes.
- Economic benefit is to be made more obvious in the Project Assessment Report.
- LAG members with an interest in a particular project must leave the room during the project discussion. LAG would welcome clarification about the definition of an 'interest' in a project. It was agreed that looking to the future programme, the LAG may need to

see the full project application rather than the assessment report only.

## **6. REVIEW OF RURAL ABERDENSHIRE LEADER PROGRAMME**

- 6.1 The LAG commissioned a review and evaluation of the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme in March 2013. The review was carried out by Blake Stevenson in association with SRUC.

A copy of the full report was circulated to LAG members with the meeting papers.

The overall impact is positive although an imbalance between audit requirements and the bottom-up approach of LEADER was highlighted. LAG queried how this imbalance could be addressed.

Applicants raised concerns over the burden of the claims process despite the valuable help offered by the team. Payment in arrears was an issue for small community groups with cash flow issues.

There is strong evidence that LEADER has had positive benefits in Aberdeenshire. LAG agreed that the case studies presented in the evaluation document showcase what has been achieved by LEADER in Aberdeenshire.

In the new programme the LAG will be able to stimulate projects rather than waiting for projects to come forward. This was welcomed.

## **7. EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI), LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (LDS) & NEXT STEPS**

- 7.1 The Expression of Interest to form a Local Action Group for the 2014-20 programme was submitted to Scottish Government. Due to the population threshold, Aberdeenshire will be split into a North and South LAG with both groups covering rural and fisheries.

Guidance on how to develop the Strategy has now been received from Scottish Government.

External consultants will be appointed to develop a strategy for the North and South LAGs. Invitation to tender will be issued as soon as possible

Letters will be issued to various organisations across Aberdeenshire inviting representatives to be involved on the new LAGs. A launch meeting will be held in January to discuss how the new LAGs will operate.

North and South boundaries are now fixed and, with their local knowledge, Rural Partnerships will be invited to become involved with arranging community engagement events across the 6 areas.

The first draft of the Strategy will be submitted by the end of March.

The process will be fairly intense due to tight timescales.

## **8. CONFIRMATION OF QUORUM**

- 8.1 Five public sector organisations are represented at the meeting and four private or third sector. The balance is therefore incorrect. To address this imbalance, it was agreed that for today's meeting, Aberdeenshire Council would have one vote.

## **9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- 9.1 Aberdeenshire Council representatives and David Hekelaar declared an interest in project 194 - Replacement Mobile Classroom.

## **10. SCORING PROCESS**

- 10.1 LAG agreed that each project application would be considered on its own merit in the first instance. If the budget is then oversubscribed, a ranking process will be undertaken.

## **11. PROJECTS 183 TO 194**

### **11.1 183 – 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.

The applicant group will work in conjunction with Aberdeenshire Council in terms of maintenance following the installation of equipment. A formal partnership agreement will be put in place between both parties. LAG agreed that this partnership process has worked well in the past.

The funding application to the People's Millions Lottery Fund for 50% of the project costs was successful. All match funding is now confirmed and the project is ready to start if approved.

LAG considered the new play park to be a well designed facility which will add economic value.

LAG agreed that there are no displacement issues as families will travel some distance for good play park facilities.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £24,000 APPROVED.

<b>Summary of Responses</b>	<b>In favour</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>Not in favour</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>DOI</b>	<b>0</b>

## 11.2 **184 – Huntly Digital Hub**

The project is to develop, test and install a high speed internet connection for 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; obtaining quotes; developing a support programme and delivering training.

Although the LAG agreed that digital exclusion in terms of internet access is a problem across Aberdeenshire, it was considered that the project will not serve the wider community with only 20 private individuals in 14 households likely to benefit.

Roddy Matheson, Industry Sector Manager with Aberdeenshire Council, confirmed that Huntly will be included in proposed roll out of fibre optic broadband across Aberdeenshire.

LAG agreed that the only gain from the proposal would be the possibility of faster internet access for a limited amount of beneficiaries and, due to the likelihood of proposals being superseded by the forthcoming digital roll out, the project could be deemed redundant within a couple of months of completion. It is a condition of LEADER funding that the capital investment must remain in place and operational for 5 years from the date of the final claim.

Although supportive of the concept, due to the above reasons, LAG was unable to approve the project.

**PROJECT FUNDING OF £15,000 REJECTED.**

<b>Summary of Responses</b>	<b>In favour</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Not in favour</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>DOI</b>	<b>0</b>

## 11.3 **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.

Following their meeting, PAC requested a more detailed breakdown of likely carbon and cash savings. The applicant confirmed that considerable savings of between £4,000-£6,000 per annum are anticipated in terms of energy use.

Following a suggestion by the PAC, GTM is more than willing to act as a case study role model in terms of providing support to other facilities and businesses.

GTM is providing direct match funding from their own funds. PAC queried whether any other sources of funding had been explored and it was confirmed that Museums Gallery Scotland had been approached. However, due to having secured an earlier grant for work on the roof, another funding application could not be submitted.

LAG welcomed the innovative approach and the applicant's commitment to being an eco-friendly facility. LAG agreed that proposals will improve the visitor experience at this valuable resource.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £7,305 APPROVED.

<b>Summary of Responses</b>	<b>In favour</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>Not in favour</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>DOI</b>	<b>0</b>

**11.4 186 – Provision of new Multi-Use All Weather Sports Pitch**

The project relates to the resurfacing of an existing all weather pitch in Hatton. The replacement surface will be high performance 3G.

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.

LEADER cannot support replacement or upgrades to existing facilities. It must be demonstrated that funding will go towards new or extended infrastructure that will help contribute to the economic development of the area.

LAG expressed concerns that the proposed upgrade would not attract a significant amount of new user groups.

Due to there being no demonstration of added value, the LAG was unable to approve the project.

PROJECT INELIGIBLE FOR LEADER FUNDING.

<b>Summary of Responses</b>	<b>In favour</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Not in favour</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>DOI</b>	<b>0</b>

**11.5 187 – Fettercairn Community Allotment**

The project is to create a community allotment facility in Fettercairn which will 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 all age groups to grow their own fruit and vegetables.

Following a suggestion by the PAC, the group has increased the amount

of grant requested to allow for additional capital items to be included.

The group has been successful in securing an additional £1,500 from the Area Top-Up Fund. The commitment from subscriptions will be confirmed as people sign up to use the allotment.

LAG would welcome confirmation that a plot or plots have been allocated for community group and school use.

LAG discussed the issue of the group being allowed to sell the produce grown on the allotment. This may depend on how the group is constituted. Although it was suggested that legislation to allow allotments to sell produce is currently under review by Scottish Government, LAG agreed that the applicant should be made aware about the potential grey area surrounding the sale of produce.

LAG agreed that the proposals are more than just the provision of an allotment and welcomed the long term educational elements of the project.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £7,080 APPROVED.

<b>Summary of Responses</b>	<b>In favour</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>Not in favour</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>DOI</b>	<b>0</b>

#### 11.6 **188 – Logie Coldstone Hall – ‘A Stage for the Future’**

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

This phase two application relates to the purchase of a flexible, portable stage which will increase the versatility of the hall.

All match funding is already in place so, if approved, the project can proceed immediately.

LAG welcomed the phased approach and agreed that the portable stage will make the hall more multi-purpose and will attract a number of new user groups. For example, now that the stage can be removed, the local bowling club will be able to make use of the increased floor space in the hall.

LAG agreed that the economic viability of the hall will be increased.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £4,625 APPROVED.

<b>Summary of Responses</b>	<b>In favour</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>Not in favour</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>DOI</b>	<b>0</b>



11.7 **189 – Rocks, Rails, Rogues and Refuge**

The project aims to restore a 19<sup>th</sup> century prison wagon which was found in a shed at Peterhead prison. Once restored, the carriage will be re-sited at Maud Station as a visitor attraction.

A funding application to Heritage Lottery for £28k has been submitted but outcome is not known as yet. A benefactor within the applicant group has come forward to act as guarantor.

Concerns were expressed about deterioration once the restoration is complete. LAG agreed that the carriage will deteriorate quickly without adequate shelter and protection from the elements.

Other concerns raised included additionality and the sustainability of the project. Whilst not wanting to lose this important piece of North East history and recognising the importance of conserving the carriage as part of the local heritage, LAG questioned whether the carriage could be a viable tourist attraction.

LAG welcomed the innovative idea and concept but questioned the ability of the group to deliver a project of this scale within the timescale for the current LEADER programme. It was suggested that the applicant re-apply to the next programme which would give the group a chance to build a more robust business case to demonstrate long term viability. LAG also suggested that the group forge links with the Grampian Transport Museum where there is proven success in making similar types of projects work.

Although the LAG considered the application to have the potential to be a good project, questions were raised about the proposed return on the investment and whether or not the project represents good value for money. The LAG was unable to approve the application due to the scale of the cost and the timescale of the project.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £33,000 REJECTED.

<b>Summary of Responses</b>	<b>In favour</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Not in favour</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>DOI</b>	<b>0</b>

11.8 **190 – Wildlife SMarT**

The project aims to help promote sustainable marine wildlife tourism. The overall project is complex, with many different strands including: support and training for commercial tour boat operators, better co-ordination of marine wildlife tourism, enhanced opportunities for visitors, integrated interpretation and promotion, opportunities for development and potential diversification from fishing, new educational resources etc.

The application covers project activities over a two year period with the proposed project completion date being December 2015. This would not be eligible under LEADER as the full project would need to be completed

in 2014. It is not possible to 'front load' the LEADER element of the proposal.

LAG considered the funding package to render the application ineligible due to being part of a larger project covering the whole of the North East of Scotland.

LAG suggested that that this project would fit better with the Aberdeenshire European Fisheries Fund which could fund activity into 2015. However, the applicant will have to re-apply to AEF as it is not possible to automatically transfer this current application.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £30,000 REJECTED.

<b>Summary of Responses</b>	<b>In favour</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Not in favour</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>DOI</b>	<b>0</b>

11.9 **191 – North Sea Ring**

The project is to employ a Co-ordinator to facilitate co-operation and forge links between the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival and other similar overseas organisations in Europe and beyond.

This type of activity would usually be considered as a transnational project, however LAG agreed this was not feasible in the remaining timescale of the present LEADER programme.

Without the ability to be classed as a truly transnational project, the LAG could not identify significant added value to this application and concerns were expressed that funding would be supplementing an existing role.

LEADER funds cannot be used to sustain an existing core post for which funding from other organisations had recently ended. Although the application was clearly for a different project, the LAG had concerns about additionality and felt that the application had too many similarities, allowing the continuation of a post which had been funded by Aberdeenshire Council in the past.

The LAG suggested that, with its strong links to maritime sectors and due to the current timescale constraints faced by LEADER, this application would be better suited to AEF. This would allow the applicant more time to forge the required transnational contracts with other EU member states.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £18,000 REJECTED.

<b>Summary of Responses</b>	<b>In favour</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Not in favour</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>DOI</b>	<b>0</b>

11.10 **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.

Unfortunately the LAG was unable to consider the application due to the security element of the application. LEADER guidance states that: 'projects comprising improvements to general security and safety of towns and villages such as closed circuit television (CCTV) are also ineligible'.

PROJECT INELIGIBLE FOR LEADER FUNDING.

<b>Summary of Responses</b>	<b>In favour</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Not in favour</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>DOI</b>	<b>0</b>

#### 11.11 193 – Greenness Community Hall Replacement

The project is to build a new community hall in the village of Greenness, between Turriff and Fyvie. The current building is a portacabin which was previously used as the canteen for the primary school which burned down in 1994. The new hall will be built on the footprint of the portacabin.

Community consultation has been carried out and there is considerable local support for a new facility. Three key anchor user groups are using the portacabin in its current poor condition. It is hoped that the new facility will attract new user groups and the applicant group has aspirations to hold larger events such as weddings.

Questions raised by the PAC have been addressed in the business plan, which has been updated with the help of a consultant.

LAG agreed that rurality was not an issue and although Greenness has a small population, the viability of the facility was not considered to be an issue due to the proximity to Fyvie and Cumminstown.

The application is for the build element only. The proposed hall is a small space with very little storage area and LAG agreed that there may be other costs that the applicant has not considered such as landscaping and access. LAG suggested that the applicant speak to the local firemaster with regard to regulations about fire engine access.

Only one quote has been obtained for the build element and it was agreed that the applicant must be made aware of the need for a proper tendering process to be carried out.

Planning permission has been secured for the new build which will be in kit form. However, no building warrant has been issued and LAG expressed concerns that the build will not fit with the LEADER timescale.

Match funding is in place in the form of an insurance policy held by Aberdeenshire Council. This insurance money has been set aside for approximately 20 years and LAG expressed concern that the insurance

money had not been used by now.

Concerns were raised about the possibility of the building being sold on as a domestic dwelling if the new hall was not successful. LEADER rules state that the facility must be used for its original purpose for five years from completion date and the LAG considered this to be a risk.

Although broadly supportive of proposals, the LAG was unable to approve the project due to the proposed timescale for delivery of the build and the application presented not being sufficiently developed.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £60,000 REJECTED.

<b>Summary of Responses</b>	<b>In favour</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Not in favour</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>DOI</b>	<b>0</b>

#### 11.12 **194 – Replacement Mobile Classroom**

DOI – Aberdeenshire Council representatives and David Hekelaar left the room.

The project is to purchase a mobile classroom to replace the oldest 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 was working to the wrong application deadline. LAG agreed that it would be unfair to other applicants to consider a late application.

Audit Scotland have raised issues in the past regarding the statutory nature of applications with an educational element.

LAG also considered that a like-for-like replacement of the mobile classroom to be ineligible for LEADER funding.

LAG agreed that the application was ineligible for the following reasons:

- education based statutory activity
- the proposal being a direct replacement of an existing item
- the late submission of the application.

PROJECT INELIGIBLE FOR LEADER FUNDING.

<b>Summary of Responses</b>	<b>In favour</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>Not in favour</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>DOI</b>	<b>2</b>

**11.13** Due to the fact that the total amount of project funding approved for Round 18 totalled £43,010, there was no requirement for the LAG to undertake ranking procedures.

**12. 2014 TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS**

- 12.1 As there will be no further projects to be considered in this programme period, it was agreed that there would be no need for any further PAC meetings to be scheduled.

Future LAG meetings to oversee the current programme will be shorter.

**13. AOCB**

- 13.1 There was no other business.

**14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 14.1 No PAC meeting as there will be no projects to be considered.

- 14.2 LAG meeting: Monday, 31 March 2014 at 10.00 am in  
Committee Room 2, Woodhill House