

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

**MONDAY, 31 MARCH 2014 AT 11.00 AM
COMMITTEE ROOM 2, WOODHILL HOUSE**

Present

Belinda Miller	LAG Chairperson
Keith Bennett	Mid Deeside Community Council
Moira Beverley	Aberdeenshire Council – Finance
Gavin Clark	Scottish Natural Heritage
Gina Ford	Scottish Enterprise
David Hekelaar	Tarves Community Council
Jean Henretty	Aberdeenshire Rural Partnership Federation
Douglas Petrie	Scottish Government Rural Payments Inspection Division
Scott Petrie	Scottish Land & Estates
Dawn Tuckwood	NHS Grampian
Ian Wallace	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Planning
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Businesses

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
Ian Cowe	Forestry Commission Scotland
Reid Hutchison	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Economic Development
Lorna Paterson	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Philip Smith	Visit Scotland
Maureen Stephen	Aberdeenshire Councils for Voluntary Services
Chris White	Aberdeenshire Council – Area Manager

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

- 1.1 Belinda welcomed those present and, for the benefit of Douglas Petrie, introductions were made round the table.
- 1.2 Apologies were noted as above.

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

- 2.1 The draft minute of the LAG meeting held on 10 December 2013 was approved and will be uploaded on the LEADER website.

3. CHAIRPERSON'S UPDATE

- 3.1 Work is progressing on the strategy documents for the new programme, with SRUC developing the South Aberdeenshire strategy and EKOS

developing the North Aberdeenshire strategy.

With regards to the new programme, Scottish Government is still open to input from LAGs. There are no fixed plans and nothing has been finalised as yet. The proposal for two LAGs is being re-examined.

Confirmation has been received that funding is in place to keep the team in place until the start of the new programme.

- 3.2 Martin attended the last LEADER Strategic Board Meeting which was held in Edinburgh on 19 December 2013.

The main agenda item was programme closure. Scottish Government aim to have as much grant funding as possible paid by the end of March.

The team is endeavouring to get as many projects as possible finished to meet this timescale.

Martin reported on a number of community engagement events which have taken place around Aberdeenshire. Consultants from SRUC and EKOS were present at these events and the findings and views of delegates will be incorporated in the draft Strategy documents.

Funding has also been confirmed for the preparatory work involved with these events.

4. CO-ORDINATOR UPDATE

- 4.1 Alasdair reported that claims have been slow in coming forward. A number are late and are not meeting quarterly submission deadlines.

If this is the case, the LAG questioned whether those projects which have completed but have not claimed ever really needed the funding. It was agreed that a more formal warning system for projects falling into this category will be essential for the new programme.

Moving forward, budgets will be tighter and, if projects do not meet the claims procedures, LAG would expect the grant to be returned to allow other projects to make use of the funds.

There are various reasons for this but resource issues have meant that the team has spent the majority of time on the volume of claims which are being submitted timeously. Claim workshops which were held following funding rounds, were well attended. It will be important to continue with these workshops in the new programme.

4.2 Scottish Government Reporting

The End of Year Report has been completed and is due for submission by 31 March.

5. UPDATE FROM LEADER CONFERENCE, 20 MARCH 2014

5.1 The National LEADER Conference took place in Glasgow on 20 March 2014. On behalf of the North and South LAGs, Alasdair Cunningham, David John McRobbie, Scott Petrie, Dawn Tuckwood and John Loder attended.

There were presentations from Scottish Government and from representatives from overseas LAGs, looking at best practice abroad.

5.2 Delegates were then split into workshops to discuss the next programme. Main points discussed were:

- More opportunities for umbrella projects next time.
- Funding available for community animators to go out and develop projects.
- Roles and responsibilities of LAG members/Chairpersons/Scottish Government/Brussels.
- How to involve more young people either in development, out on the ground, or at LAG level.
- Emphasis on community development – how do we build capacity?
- The proposal to allow businesses to seek funding from LEADER .
- Co-operation between LAGs plus transnational projects will be key in the new programme.
- LEADER budget will be top sliced for transnational projects.

5.3 The clear message for LAGs is “if it’s not in the Strategy then it cannot be funded”.

5.4 LAG agreed that, although the proposal to include businesses is a big change from the current programme, if there is a community element to the proposal and there are no displacement issues, then business applications could be considered.

LAG welcome the potential for small businesses to be involved so it will be important for SRUC and EKOS to have this clearly defined in the Strategy documents.

5.5 Housing, transportation and childminding were also considered by the LAG to be important issues for inclusion in the strategy.

LAG discussed the difficulties for commuters living in rural areas to become involved in their community. Discussion took place on how commuters can be encouraged to take up a more active role in community life.

5.6 With regard to the youth element, LAG agreed that it will be important to involve young people in making rural decisions.

Discussion took place on how best to cultivate and support youth

representatives to be part of the process. In the past, transport to and from meetings has proved to be a problem for a youth representative.

The possibility of creating a community animator for young people was discussed.

It was agreed that social media could be utilised to attract youth interest. Youth Forums or Pupil Councils could also be approached.

It was agreed to consider youth representation as a whole for inclusion in the Strategy.

6. REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 6.1 The revised Terms of Reference document was circulated.
- 6.2 The main amendments relate to staff changes.
- 6.3 The statement, "Each member organisation has one vote" has been added to clarify voting procedures.
- 6.4 LAG pointed out that the sentence which states that "PAC has delegated authority to approve projects up to £5,000" is no longer relevant. The PAC make recommendations but no longer make decisions on small grant applications. This will be amended to read "PAC makes recommendations to the LAG".
- 6.5 With regard to LAG membership, the document states that some organisations have two representatives. This is to be removed because all organisations are allowed to have a substitute.
- 6.6 Under the heading of Management and Finance, it states that the final 50% of the 7% advance is to be paid in 2013. This has happened so this statement should be removed.
- 6.7 LAG approved all the above changes.
- 6.8 Martin will make the additional amendments and a final version of the document, along with a version showing track changes, will be re-circulated.

7. EXPIRED/UNCLAIMED PROJECTS

- 7.1 Following the last LAG meeting, a letter was issued to all projects which had not submitted a claim or progress report within the required reporting period.

LAG was reminded that Belinda Miller and Alasdair Cunningham have delegated authority to approve project extensions.

The timeline for final grant payment to be made to projects is end September 2014. This will allow for final drawdown of funds from Scottish

Government to be made by end December 2014.

8. AT RISK PROJECTS – IMPLICATIONS FOR LAG/LEAD PARTNER

8.1 126 - Fairweather Community Leisure Centre Last progress report received was February 2012.

This project was a partnership agreement with Aberdeenshire Council. The park is completed and carries the LEADER logo.

No financial claim has been made and the two year project period expired in June/July 2013.

Moira Beverly will speak to Aberdeenshire Council colleagues within Landscape Services.

LAG agreed that this project is now outwith the claim period and may not now be valid to make a claim.

8.2 138 - Gallows Hill Community Pavilion Project has started and the applicants have made their first financial claim.

The delay in claiming was a result of a VAT issue. The applicant understood that the build would be VAT exempt but this was not the case. This resulted in project costs increasing by 20%. Some items had to be removed.

The finalised ground lease was also outstanding.

The project is due to finish by June 2014. There is still £51,000 of grant to be paid out.

It is hoped that the project will complete by September. A project extension is required and Alasdair will action this.

The draft lease is due to be finalised within two weeks.

Cash flow is also an issue for the applicant group.

8.3 142 - Sandhaven & Pitullie Community Hall Development Phase This is a feasibility study for the development of a hall in Sandhaven & Pitullie. The applicant is North East Scotland Preservation Trust (NESPT).

Difficulties have been encountered with engaging a consultant to carry out the work. The two year project period will expire in June 2014.

If no consultant has been hired as yet, this project is at serious risk of not meeting the grant conditions.

Alasdair will arrange to meet with Paul Higson from NESPT to establish

the current status of the project.

8.4 152 - Aberdeen Angus 2012 Ruby Anniversary Tour

The project event took place and the resulting publication bore the LEADER logo.

Project costs have never been claimed despite several promises of a claim being submitted.

A letter was issued in January but there was no response from the applicant.

This project is an audit risk.

LAG agreed that the project should now be de-committed. Alasdair will write to inform the applicant of the LAG decision.

8.5 150 - Children's Community Voice

First claim has now been submitted but this has not been checked as yet.

This project was approved in June 2012 so is still within the two year period.

This claim will be checked and valid items will be paid. The applicant will then submit the final claim.

8.6 155 - Ritchie Hall 2013

This project does provide regular updates and financial claims have been paid.

Part of the match funding was a bank loan for £80,000. However, the applicant group has used their own funding and the loan, which was set up as an overdraft facility, has never been drawn down.

The work will be completed but there are concerns about the group's ability to pay.

Final claim should be forthcoming.

8.7 166 – Balmedie Leisure Centre Café & Provision of New Entrance

Work is progressing very well. Cash flow may be an issue for the applicant to pay the final bill.

This project is a small risk.

8.8 173 – Aberdeenshire Whitespace Trial

This project has been de-committed. A formal de-commitment letter is still to be issued.

8.9 **178 - Fit For All (Phase 2)**

This project is for the provision of a multi-surface playing field at New Deer.

This is phase two of a two phased approach. Aberdeenshire Council Area funding was approved for both phases of the project. Phase one was over budget due to a VAT issue and the Area funding for phase two was used for phase one. This resulted in a funding gap for phase two and the full match funding profile is no longer in place.

A funding application has been submitted to Sport Scotland and the outcome of this should be known by the end of April.

A stipulation for Round 17 applications was that all match had to be confirmed prior to approval. This is no longer the case.

LAG agreed to wait for the outcome of the Sport Scotland application.

Build period is estimated at eight weeks. If contractors are not on site by July then the project is at risk.

Alasdair will keep in regular contact with the applicant.

8.10 **183 – The Cutty Park**

This is a playpark in Inverbervie.

The lease agreement between the applicant and Aberdeenshire Council for the land is not yet in place.

The Council will procure the playpark items on behalf of the applicant group.

The project has an eight week build timescale. LAG was concerned about slippage.

Alasdair will monitor the situation with the lease and keep in regular contact with the applicant. The project was only approved in December 2013 so there is no expiry issue.

8.11 **165 - Baden Powell Centre New Build**

Funding of £160,000 was approved for this project which was due to start by the end of 2013. Ground was broken in January 2014 and there is a projected eight to nine month build period. In theory, the applicant can still meet the September deadline.

The first financial claim is imminent.

The project is well within the two year project period. The initial project timeline approved is different from the Scottish Government timescale. Following the two year rule, the applicant has up to the end of December 2014 to submit final claim.

In order to pay the applicant by end September, the completion certificate will have to be issued by end August.

Scottish Government is happy with the projected timescale as it stands, but LAG has concerns about what will happen if this slips. Scottish Government timelines have since changed and, as the original agreement was for an end December 2014 completion, it may be possible to negotiate an extension with Scottish Government for the benefit of the applicant.

It was suggested that an Aberdeenshire Council architect meets with the contractor to establish whether this schedule of work is realistic. If the project does not complete by the September deadline, the grant will have to be re-claimed from the applicant otherwise the Council will be liable. The LAG urgently need assurances that the money can be claimed on time.

Alasdair will monitor this project closely and will hold regular meetings with the applicant.

9. PROGRAMME CLOSURE

- 9.1 An outline of reports to be sent to Scottish Government regarding programme closure was circulated.

10. AOCB

- 11.1 Gina Ford reported that Newmachar Hall, a LEADER funded project is now open to the public and is a fantastic facility.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 11.1 No PAC meeting as there are no projects for consideration.
- 11.2 LAG meeting: Thursday, 5 June 2014 at 1.30 pm in Committee Room 3, Woodhill House