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Banffshire groups to benefit from Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme

More than £315,000 has been provided to nine Aberdeenshire projects ranging from tourism initiatives for the north coast, community hall developments and building restoration works.

The projects all received funding as part of Rural Aberdeenshire's LEADER programme, which has approved 54 projects in its first year, with a total of £1.6 million awarded towards total project costs of £6.5 million

Since the successful launch of LEADER in June 2008, Rural Aberdeenshire Local Action Group (LAG) has considered a variety of projects reflecting its key aims to revitalise communities and encouraging a progressive rural economy.

Projects that received funding from Round Five of LEADER funding are:

- Scottish Enterprise development project in Banff area - £90,000
- The Portsoy Players - £9,623
- Drumlithie Village Hall - £27,838
- Scottish Preservation Trust project - £4,205
- The Royal Northern Countryside Initiative - £4,528
- Maud Village Trust - £50,571
- Mearns Community Radio - £3,959
- Archaeological survey of Pitsligo Castle Gardens - £2,850
- Café and interpretive centre, Strichen Community Park - £121,466

LAG chairman, James Knowles, said: "We are delighted that LEADER is contributing £90,000 to support a key strategic project led by Scottish Enterprise which will develop opportunities for businesses within the tourism sector in the Banff area through delivery of a three-year action plan.

"Furthermore, residents of Portsoy and district will be encouraged to get involved with development of local amateur dramatic group Portsoy Players who will bring forward seasonal productions, backed up with participatory workshops.

"Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER is an excellent example of what partnership working can deliver. One of the positive outcomes of the partnership

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approach is the wide range of matched funding that is being levered in towards LEADER projects from the public and private sector.

“With many projects now underway, and some completed, it is evident the programme is working very well in Aberdeenshire.”

Neil Fraser, Project Manager with Scottish Enterprise, said: “Scottish Enterprise is delighted that LEADER funding has been secured as part of the ongoing development of the Banffshire Coast Tourism offering.

“The project has been scoped following the development of a three-year strategy by local tourism businesses and funds will increase the capacity of the Banffshire Coast Tourism Partnership, building on the strong relationship that already exists between Scottish Enterprise and the rural tourism sector on the Banffshire Coast.

“It is expected that in addition to a dedicated project management resource the funding will contribute towards the development of additional quality products, services and accommodation adding to the growth of the tourism economy in the area.”

Lorna Summers, chairman of the Portsoy Players, was delighted to learn that the group would receive £9,623.

She said: “We are delighted with the LEADER Local Action Group’s support for this project. It will make a difference in many ways, attracting local talent from all generations and developing new ways of working together.

“Over the next two years we will build on the numbers of people who attend local theatre productions. The project will ensure that they spread the word, return to watch, and even participate in acting or one of the other many backstage crafts.

“This is much more than amateur dramatics – it involves people from all walks of life, all ages and abilities in a fun way, adding significantly to the quality of community life.”

Other projects supported by LEADER in the fifth round of applications include the Drumlithie Village Hall which received £27,838 and the North East Scotland Preservation Trust’s work to regenerate derelict buildings in Portsoy which received £4,205.

Alastair Macphie, honorary chairman of Drumlithie Village Hall Committee, said: “This is the news that Drumlithie Hall and the many user groups have

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been waiting for. The Hall is an integral part of the village and we have been keen to ensure our village community life continues to thrive. Receiving the funding from LEADER will ensure the hall is fit for the future.”

Paul Higson, project manager for the North East Scotland Preservation Trust, said: “The North East Scotland Preservation Trust owns some derelict, B Listed buildings in a spectacular setting in Portsoy which are on the Buildings at Risk Register. It is vital that the Trust finds a viable means of saving the buildings and restoring them.

“To achieve this, an options appraisal needs to be carried out by independent, specialist professionals. Thanks to the LEADER grant funding the Trust can now proceed to commission the appraisal.

“Once a viable new use for the buildings emerges, the Trust will embark on what is likely to be its biggest project ever.”

The Royal Northern Countryside Initiative (RNCI) also received £4,528 to help provide activities and projects to schools and groups in Aberdeenshire.

Initiative chairman, Martin Birse, said: “There is over-whelming demand from schools for the events that are organised by the RNCI.

“Coupled with the many willing hosts, activity providers and volunteer stewards, the catalyst for making events like this happen is securing financial assistance. Therefore, we are delighted that the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme funding has granted us the means by which to realise this.”

Maud Village Trust received £50,571 to create a community recreational area in the centre of Maud.

Pat Buckman of Maud Village Trust, said: “It was great news to receive the award from the LEADER fund. It will enable us to complete the development of the Old Mart Site which we set out to do in 2002.

“We can now transform what looks like an uncared for piece of land at present into an environmentally friendly area to include an attractive garden and play area for the benefit of the villagers and visitors to Maud.”

Mearns Community Radio also received funding which has secured its future beyond the winter months.

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Ian Hunter of Mearns Community Radio, said: "The award of £3,959 from LEADER means Mearns FM, the new community radio station in the Mearns area can finally secure its transmission network.

"Failure to secure the funding before this winter may have been devastating for the project as the signals for Laurencekirk and Inverbervie rely on the temporary aerial on the Garvock Hill which may not withstand extreme weather.

"This would have halted the young people initiatives being progressed with Mearns Academy, the Mearns Youth Forum and the Inverbervie Primary school. There are also other projects being planned for that area including one at Benholm Mill and they too would have come to a halt".

LEADER has been promoted across Aberdeenshire at a series of rural funding and community events. Previous recipients of funding have made a positive contribution to promote the programme through presentations made at LEADER seminars.

More applications have been received and the closing date for Round Six applications is Tuesday, November 3.

Details of all approved projects to date and information on the application process can be found on the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER website:
www.aberdeenshireleader.org

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Notes for Editors

LEADER stands for Liason Entre Actions pour le Developement de L'Economie Rurale (links between actions for the development of the rural economy).

LEADER is an innovative rural development programme which aims to improve the quality of life and economic prosperity in rural communities through locally driven rural development initiatives and projects.

LEADER is funded by the Scottish Government and the European Commission with match funding from public bodies and the project groups.

The Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme was launched in June 2008.

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The Local Action Group (LAG) was awarded LEADER funds of £3.36 million to deliver its strategy in Aberdeenshire rural areas and communities with populations of less than 5,000.

The LAG has a membership of 14 partner organisations, 50% from the public sector and 50% from the private sector. More than 50% of the organisations represented on the LAG are also members of Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership.

To date a total of 54 projects have been approved with total costs of around £6.5 million and LEADER grant of £1,675,508.

There will be one further funding round in 2009 followed by a quarterly cycle in 2010. The timetable is accessible on the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER website:

www.aberdeenshireleader.org

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