SCOTLAND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

LEADER 2007 – 2013

RURAL ABERDEENSHIRE

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

12 November 2007

SECTION B: LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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Acronyms

CS	Communities Scotland
CVS	Councils for Voluntary Services
EC	European Commission
ESEC	East of Scotland European Consortium
FCS	Forestry Commission Scotland
LAG	Local Action Group
GROS	General Register of Scotland
LDS	Local Development Strategy
LRP	Local Rural Partnership
NESER	North East Scotland Economic Research
RDCs	Rural Development Contracts
RDR	Rural Development Regulation
RPAC	Regional Project Assessment Committee
SNH	Scottish Natural Heritage
SRDP	Scotland Rural Development Programme
UDAT	Upper Deeside Access Trust
VS	Visit Scotland

1.   Introduction

1.1   The Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2007-2013 is a major programme of support for rural Scotland up to 2013. The SRDP is governed by the Rural Development Regulation (RDR) (1698/2005), which emphasises the need for a strategic approach to rural development. The RDR contains 42 measures across three main axes, plus a fourth LEADER axis which cross-cuts across the three main axes. LEADER is an innovative approach to local rural development, which aims to build capacity and stimulate economic activity in rural communities through actions supported by LEADER.

1.2   On 21 August 2007, the Rural Aberdeenshire Local Action Group (LAG) submitted its partnership details to the Scottish Government. Following this, a series of community consultations and surveys were undertaken, with the aim of identifying the key issues and priorities, which would help to shape the Local Development Strategy (LDS) to deliver LEADER in rural Aberdeenshire.

1.3   The LDS has been developed taking account of the European Commission's three priority themes within the RDR (1698/2005), namely:

- Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors
- Improving the environment and countryside through land management
- Improving quality of life through diversification of economic activity

and also the key priority outcomes identified by the Scottish Government in the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP), namely:

- Improved business viability
- Enhanced biodiversity and landscape
- Improved water quality
- Tackle climate change
- Support thriving rural communities

1.4   The overarching Community Planning Themes of Community Wellbeing, Jobs and the Economy, Lifelong Learning and Sustainable Environment are core to development of the LDS. The LDS will be delivered using the six guiding principles of the Aberdeenshire Community Plan 2006-2010, namely, Inclusion, Accountability, Partnership, Evidence-based, Sustainability and Efficiency.

1.5   Detailed analysis was also undertaken into the key strategic priorities and themes of the partners and agencies which comprise the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG, to ensure the LDS is complementary to, and will deliver towards, achieving key regional outcomes identified by the LAG partnership.

1.6   The two overarching LEADER themes for the RAL, from which actions and projects will flow, are: **Revitalising Communities** and **Progressive Rural Economy**. These themes have been chosen following community consultation and an analysis of the European, national and regional strategies that the LDS will complement.
Details of the strategic analysis are found in Section 7.

1.7   Following the community consultation and survey undertaken by the LAG Partnership, the priorities, linking to the overarching themes that the LDS will focus on, have been agreed as follows:

- Sustainable Communities
- Sustainable Energy
- Innovative Value Added Products and Markets
- Sustainable Tourism Development
- Innovative Micro Enterprise
- Versatile Rural Workforce
- Conservation of the Rural Environment

Analysis of how the priorities have been identified through community consultation is found in Section 2.6.

2   Evidence Base for Local Development Strategy

2.1   Coherent LAG Area

2.1.1   In establishing the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG, the aim is to create a LAG footprint that will encompass rural communities across the region, from the upland and rural hinterland areas in the west to the lowland and coastal areas in the north, east and south of Aberdeenshire.

The underpinning synergy of the areas across the region is the vision for vibrant, inclusive, rural communities, combined with sustainable environmental credentials, in terms of resource use, energy efficiency, landscape and biodiversity, against a backdrop of economically viable rural businesses and rural services.

2.1.2   The LAG area is estimated to be 4,819 sq km. The population density in the LAG area 31 is per sq km, reflecting the rural nature of the region. Population density varies across the LAG area, from 12 persons per square kilometre in Marr in the west of the LAG area, to 77 in the more populated areas, such as Garioch.

The LAG area includes around 50 settlements with populations ranging from 432 in Cuminestown to around 4,500 in Turriff and Huntly. Approximately 70,000, or 47% of the LAG population, live in rural areas outwith settlements.

2.1.3   Analysis of rural populations within local authorities in lowland Scotland, undertaken by the East of Scotland European Consortium (ESEC), indicates that Aberdeenshire has the highest percentage of rural population, at 53%, in relation to its total population, when compared to other local authorities in lowland Scotland.
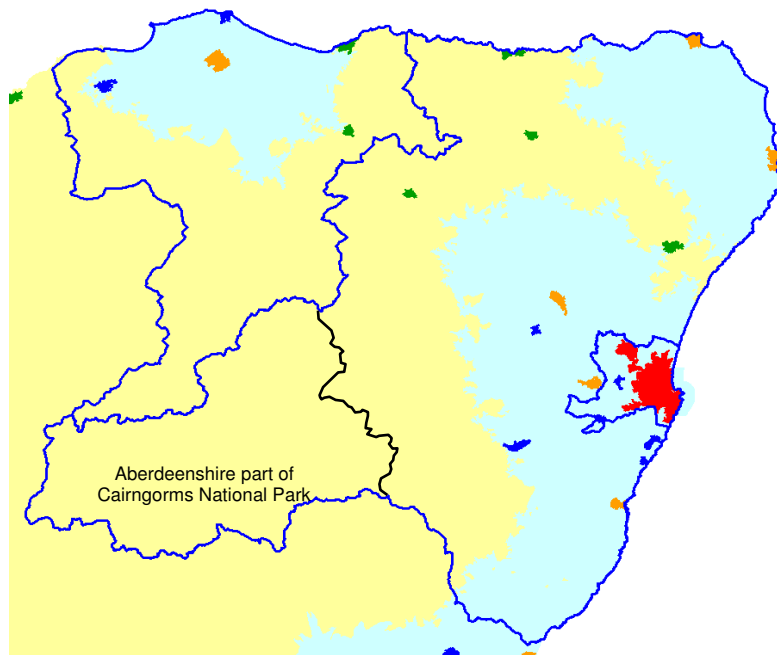
Under the Scottish Executive 6-Fold Urban Rural Classification, the percentage of Aberdeenshire population is classified as follows:

- Other Urban Areas: 26.8%
- Accessible Small Towns: 8.6%
- Remote Small Towns: 11.3%
- Accessible Rural: 37%
- Remote Rural 16.4%

This again emphasises the rural nature of the LAG area within Aberdeenshire.

Figure 1 details an extract of the Scottish Executive Urban Rural Classification 2005-2006 6 Fold Classifications map and demonstrates the rural nature of Aberdeenshire and the LAG area.

Figure 1: Scottish Executive Urban Rural Classification 2005-2006 6 Fold Classifications

Aberdeenshire part of
Cairngorms National Park

2.2   Population

2.2.1   The population of the LAG area is estimated at 147,725. Population forecasts data is available for Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. Key finding from analysis demonstrate the following:

- The population of the region is expected to rise slightly between 2003 and 2011, with an increase in population within Aberdeenshire and a fall in Aberdeen City.
- Between 2000 and 2003 the population in Aberdeen City fell by 3.2% and rose in Aberdeenshire by 1%[1]. This out migration is predominately as a result of new housing development in accessible settlements around the City.

1 Source: Strategic Forecasts for Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire 2003-2021

Within the LAG area, the greatest increase in local populations between 2001 and 2011 is expected in expanding accessible settlements such as Oldmeldrum, Blackburn and Kintore, where forecast increases are greater than 30%[2]. This will inevitably create increased demand for rural services and social infrastructure.

In the rural hinterland in the LAG area, population forecasts are expected to fall between 4.1% in Banff & Buchan to 3.4% in Kincardine & Mearns[3]. This

downward trend impacts on communities and the viability of existing services.

2.2.2   Population change will be unevenly spread across the various age groups. The number of primary school children (aged 5-11) in North East Scotland will fall from 35,703 to 29,983. By contrast, the number of people over the current statutory retirement age will increase by nearly 34,000, from 77,170 in 2003 to 110,930 in 2021, increasing the demand for appropriate healthcare and social facilities[4].

As natural change (births minus deaths) is expected to be quite low, for most of the period from 2003 to 2021, population change in Aberdeenshire will be a combination of decreasing net migration gain and decreasing natural change[4].

2.2.3   In relation to education, Aberdeenshire figures demonstrate higher than national average qualifications gained and school leavers entering further education. In 2001, 28% of people aged 16-74 in NE Scotland had no qualifications, significantly lower than the overall Scottish average of 33%. In 2005-2006, 26% of Aberdeenshire school leavers entered further education, compared to 23% of Scottish leavers. In NE Scotland, 22% of people held a first degree, higher degree or professional qualification, compared with the Scottish average of almost 20%[5].

With academic institutions based mainly in Aberdeen City within the region, accessibility to these centres can be difficult for young people resident in rural communities within the LAG area. This is perceived as a significant barrier to future employment prospects. Also, given the nature of rural employment, which shows lower income potential that in urban areas, actual academic attainment does not necessarily relate to the employment market in rural areas, which in many cases is more closely linked or dependent on vocational skills and training.

2.2.4   The level of unemployment in Aberdeenshire in 2007 is currently around 1%, which is lower than the Scottish average of around 2.5%. The positive figures relating to low unemployment in Aberdeenshire are due partly to strong construction and service sectors and seasonal fluctuations, for example, increase in the tourist service sector.

The locality with the highest unemployment in the LAG area, is the Banff area at 3.3%, which reflects the higher unemployment in the fishing dependent communities. Long term unemployment (claimants on benefit for more than 6 months) accounts for a smaller proportion of the total for North East Scotland at 28.1% compared to the Scottish average of 33.1%[6].

2.2.5   Employment in the primary industries (i.e.: agriculture, fishing and forestry) in the LAG area is a key source of employment. Between 2003 and 2021, employee jobs in primary industries in North East Scotland are expected to fall by 21% from 4,400 to 3,500[7]. Reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy and declining fish quotas have and will continue to place downward pressures on these traditional

industries. This presents a real challenge to retain and develop new industries and employment streams for the rural workforce in the LAG area.

Conversely, the number of self-employed businesses is expected to increase in North East Scotland from the current level of 11% to 13% by 2021, with the increase expected predominately within the service and construction sectors.

7 Source: NESER Primary Sector & Self Employment 2003-2021

2.2.6   The large majority of the housing in rural Aberdeenshire is classified as whole house or bungalow, accounting for 87% of Aberdeenshire's households, whereas flats and apartments account for 17%. Private ownership accounts for 71% of households, the remainder being social rented housing at 19%, and private rented housing at 10%[8]. The house occupancy patterns mirror those of other rural local authority areas such as South Ayrshire and Orkney.

8 Source: GROS Census Report, 2001

2.2.7   The total Aberdeenshire Housing Completions recorded in 2006 was 1356, of which 79% were in settlements and 21% in rural areas. One of the biggest issues facing residents in the LAG area is the sharp increase in house prices, which saw an increase of more than 24% between 2000 and 2003 and which continues to rise at a higher rate than the Scottish average. This is particularly important in rural areas, where income levels are less than in urban areas. There is also a tight supply of affordable rented accommodation in rural areas, making it difficult for young families to remain in rural communities.

2.3   Economy

2.3.1   The following information[9] is based on the whole of Aberdeenshire, including communities of over 10,000, as most of these figures are not available at a lower level.

In Aberdeenshire the GDP is estimated at £2.924 million (2006), representing 3.5% of the Scottish total. This strong GDP figure is due mainly to the commuting flows into the city of Aberdeen and influence of a strong service sector in both commerce and industry. A significant proportion of Aberdeenshire's working residents commute to Aberdeen City, varying from 11.5% in the Fraserburgh area to 50% in the Balmedie area. Only 6% of the population of Aberdeen City commute into Aberdeenshire.

It is estimated that in Aberdeenshire as a whole, the primary sectors contribute around 10% of the area's GDP, which again reflects the rural nature of the region.

The total employment in Aberdeenshire is estimated at 88,850. The service sector accounts for 54% of employment, growing faster than any other sector. The primary sectors, mainly fishing, agriculture and manufacturing, have seen a decline in the number of employees. In addition, oil employment is forecast to fall by over 30% over the next 15-20 years. This will result in a need to create new sources of employment to retain the population.

A total of 83.3% of the working age population are economically active, compared

to 79% for Scotland. Average gross weekly earnings for Aberdeenshire-based employees are £484.90, 25% less than the Scottish average of £503.70. Average part-time weekly earnings for Aberdeenshire-based employees are £142.90, 20% less than the Scottish average of £170.80, reflecting the low income derived from rural based employment.

The average female gross weekly earnings for Aberdeenshire are £401.80, which equates to 74% of the average male earnings. In Scotland, female earning average 80% of male earnings. The lower female earnings ratio in Aberdeenshire presents a challenge in raising female earnings in the rural sectors throughout the LAG area. The lower income levels also reflect the lack of employment and progression opportunities in rural areas.

9 Source: NESER Statistics and Aberdeen City & Shire Economic Review 2007

2.3.2   The main economic issues for rural Aberdeenshire are the reliance on primary industries of agriculture and fishing and the amount of commuting over long distances into Aberdeen City for work. Traditionally, the LAG area has been economically dependent upon the primary sector including agriculture, forestry and in the coastal communities, fishing. The statistics relative to the primary sector industries demonstrate a reduction in these industries, in terms of employment and numbers of active businesses. There is also economic activity generated through processing activities related to the primary sector. More recently, emphasis is being given to new opportunities through renewable energy and biomass developments, but the development of such initiatives is in its infancy.

2.3.3   Tourism is also important economically for communities throughout the LAG area. In 2005, it is estimated there were approximately 1.4 million tourists in Aberdeenshire, generating expenditure of around £203 million.[10]   The area's appeal is based on natural features such as forests, rivers, mountains, lochs and coast; and the scenery, heritage, culture and people. However, with increasing travel costs impacting on accessibility, there is a need for marketing the overall tourism product and up-skilling within the service sector workforce, to enhance employment opportunities. Some future opportunities exist through:

- Interest in good health leading to a demand for activity breaks
- Breaks which offer a form of renewal, restoration or wellbeing experience
- Extended education with more demand for cultural "learning" holidays or the acquisition of a new skill
- Environmental awareness becoming increasingly important with visitors being very conscious of their own impact on the destination and prepared to pay a premium for "green" accredited products
- Increased interest in natural heritage and wildlife – leading to increased demand for opportunities to watch wildlife and experience "wild" landscapes.

10: NESER Tourism Expenditure NE Scotland 2005

2.3.4   One of the most important indicators for rural communities in the LAG area is the Rural Facilities Monitor published by Aberdeenshire Council[11]. Over 2006, the number of rural facilities in Aberdeenshire has fallen across most areas. Since the monitor began in 1981, significant decline has occurred in the network of rural facilities, for example, banks have declined by -69%, petrol stations by -63%,

police stations -59% and post offices by -38%. Reduction in these services is seen as critical in terms of impact on quality of life and maintaining the viability of self-contained rural communities. The decline in rural shops is also evident, particularly noticeable in Banff & Buchan at -36%, Buchan -30% and Kincardine & Mearns -32%. The steep reduction in petrol stations in the more remote rural areas is causing accessibility and economic difficulties for such communities, many of which require travel of more than 20 miles to a filling station. Hotels and public houses have also declined by -26% since 1981, impacting on the social elements of rural community life.

11 Source: Aberdeenshire Statistics

2.3.5   A key factor in relation to stimulating rural community development in the LAG area is the network of Local Rural Partnerships (LRPs) and Councils for Voluntary Services (CVS) that service rural communities throughout the area. There are currently around 10 LRPs providing support to rural communities and working with the Aberdeenshire CVS and Community Planning Partnership.

2.3.6   The public sector agencies within the LAG partnership collectively contribute to rural economic and community development. For example, initiatives such as support towards Rural Partnerships, economic and community development in the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership, initiated by Aberdeenshire Council and Scottish Enterprise Grampian and social enterprise and support to community groups through Communities Scotland have worked towards strengthening communities, in particular, those in some of the larger settlements.

2.4   Land Use, Natural and Cultural Heritage

2.4.1   The main land use in the LAG area is agriculture. In Aberdeenshire as a whole, there are more than 510,000 hectares of agricultural land, equivalent to 8% of the Scottish agricultural land area. The agricultural land use in Aberdeenshire comprises 33% arable crops, 23% grass for grazing, 9% grass for mowing, 30% rough grazing and 5% other land.[12] The scale of employment creation and economic activity within the agricultural sector makes a significant contribution to the sustainability of the rural communities in the LAG area

12 Source: Agriculture & its Future in Rural NE Scotland, SAC 2003

2.4.2   Aberdeenshire has a rich diversity of woodlands and forests, which are important not only in economic terms, but environmentally, socially and culturally. Forestry is an important part of the rural economy, providing employment directly in timber management and production and indirectly in associated business including tourism. Woodland areas composed predominantly of native species are particularly important for biodiversity and landscape.

2.4.3   The natural heritage in the LAG area is significant and contains a number of sites of national and international importance. There are two Ramsar Sites, at Loch of Skene and Loch of Strathbeg, 12 SACs designated under the EC Habitats Directive and 7 SPAs classified under the EC Birds Directive. A number of these can be found on the 208km of Aberdeenshire's coastline.

National Nature Reserves include Sands of Forvie, St Cyrus and part of Glen

Tanar. Of local importance are two Local Nature Reserves (LNR) Philorth, at Fraserburgh and Arnhall Moss, on the edge of the expanding settlement of Elrick. There are also locally designated sites of regional importance, Sites of Interest to Natural Science (SINS) throughout the LAG area.

2.4.4 The LAG area is covered by the North East Scotland Local Biodiversity Action Plan (NELBAP). The area supports a number of UK and local Priority Species and Habitats for which Action Plans have been prepared. These include actions that encourage community involvement in protecting, raising awareness of and enhancing habitats and species.

2.4.5 The natural heritage is a crucial asset throughout much of Scotland and the landscape, wildlife and outdoor recreational opportunities underpin a significant proportion of our tourist industry. Scotland's natural heritage also sits very comfortably alongside other aspects of tourism such as the promotion of local produce through promotions like the *Taste of Scotland* and the ever-growing interest in genealogy and Scotland's cultural heritage. A strong thread running through all these is the concept of sustainability, in terms of the exploitation of the natural resources in our rural environment. A further, significant material consideration is that many of the facilities and infrastructure, such as footpaths, information and interpretation, guiding etc., developed to support tourism, are also assets that can be used by the resident population.

The current Corporate Strategy of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) includes the following 3 themes:

- **Caring for the Natural World** – in which our goal is to have all people caring more effectively for the whole of Scotland's natural heritage.
- **Enriching People's Lives** - in which our goal is to have the natural heritage add to the quality of people's lives, making the environment close to where people live more attractive, and creating opportunities for people to enjoy, learn about, and get involved with the natural heritage.
- **Promoting Sustainable Use** - in which our goal is to make sure people can benefit from the natural heritage tomorrow, because everyone has looked after it today.

Within these themes SNH has many objectives, such as supporting wider opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors and the development of sustainable tourism, in which the industry plays a full part in protecting and managing the resource on which it depends.

The success of projects related to sea eagle and whale and dolphin watching on Mull are well known. Examples, which SNH has supported in Aberdeenshire, include the FCS Peregrine Watch at Huntly, the developing Aberdeen Red Kite Project and the work of the Clachnaben Footpath Trust. Although it's area of operation lies predominately within the Cairngorms National Park and therefore outwith the rural Aberdeenshire LAG, for almost 10 years now the Upper Deeside Access Trust (UDAT) has achieved considerable success in expanding both walking routes and guides, which benefits both local people and local businesses.

Less obvious local examples would be SNH's support for the community management of local assets in Aboyne, Birse, Windyhills, Turriff and Strichen,

which not only provides outdoor opportunities for local residents, but also adds to the recreational assets, which can be enjoyed by visitors.

The sorts of projects which could come forward and which SNH would be able to support could include:

- Projects/businesses, which build on the existing infrastructure supporting informal countryside recreation, be they walkers, cyclists, horse riders, cross-country skiers, paddlers etc. These projects could encompass route development, information, interpretation, guides etc.
- Community projects/businesses to take a direct role in the management of the local environment (especially designated areas) and the sustainable use/marketing of local resources.
- The promotion of natural heritage tourism in Aberdeenshire beyond the better known "hotspots" like Royal Deeside. These could include Aberdeenshire's dramatic coast, winter bird migrations and autumn colour.

SNH considers it essential that projects which come forward are sustainable, in terms of their environmental impacts, and that they have reasonable prospects of viability without significant, long term funding from public bodies. This has been the principle of support to rural community initiatives in the past towards projects such as access for recreation and improvement to local biodiversity.

2.4.6   Similarly, Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) has in the past contributed to recreation and community projects with an emphasis on sustainability, which would sit well within the LEADER themes and priorities identified by the LAG partnership.

2.5   Key Socio-Economic Indicators for the LAG Area

2.5.1   Challenges facing the rural economy and rural communities include:

- Low population density and subsequent lack of social cohesion in more remote rural areas.
- Remoteness and accessibility for residents outwith settlements, which account for 47% of the LAG population.
- Rapid increase of accessible settlements, creating demand for community and social facilities.
- Forecast population decline in rural hinterland, impacting on social cohesion and viability of rural businesses and services.
- Forecast increase in ageing population across the LAG area, increasing demand for health and social services.
- Accessibility issues for rural residents to urban based further education and training facilities.
- High unemployment clusters, predominately in coastal and fishing dependent communities.
- Forecast sharp decline in employment within the primary industries of agriculture and fishing.
- Significant increase in house prices, combined with the tight supply of rented accommodation in rural areas, resulting in lack of affordable housing, particularly for young people.

- The level and cost of commuting over long distances into Aberdeen City for work.
- Forecast reduction in the oil industry in next 10-15 years, with subsequent impact on offshore employment within the oil service sector, which will affect communities in the LAG area.
- Low earnings in the rural sectors, particularly women, whose wages fall below the national average in relation to the ratio with male earnings.
- Sharp decline in essential rural services such as shops, post offices, petrol stations and rural transport.
- ICT connectivity.
- Ageing community assets.
- Lack of affordable business accommodation.
- Impact of inward/outward migration.

2.5.2   Opportunities facing the rural economy and rural communities include:

- Diversification and broadening of income base within rural industries.
- ICT technology & infrastructure enabling rural business development.
- Emerging industries, such as local renewable energy supply.
- A developing tourism sector with increased target markets.
- Strong cultural and natural heritage asset base.
- Encouragement of more local processing of primary products to serve local communities.
- Capacity building and increased community self-dependence through support from LRPs and CVS.
- Strengthening communities through support of Community Planning Partnership.
- A strong ethos of agency partnership working towards sustainable community and economic development, promoting both the cultural and natural heritage.

2.6   Analysis of Community Consultation and Workshops

2.6.1   With the aim of reaching a broad range of rural interests and communities across the area, the LAG Partnership undertook two types of consultation in September and October 2007. The first was a survey questionnaire, issued to Community Councils and rural interest groups by e-mail and also by post. The second was a series of open public meetings at different venues in rural communities in the LAG area. Analysis of the questionnaire is detailed in Appendix 1 and the outcomes from the community consultations are detailed in Appendix 2.

2.6.2   The **Questionnaire** was sent to 71 Community Council representatives and 49 others from organisations such as Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Enterprise Grampian, Communities Scotland and Aberdeenshire rural partnerships. Out of a possible 120 responses, 78 were received (65%).

The questionnaire asked respondents about the priorities and challenges in their area and what issues they would like to see the LEADER programme tackle. The respondents also rated various 'priority projects' according to their relevance to that particular organisation or area. Finally, respondents were asked whether their

group or organisation would be likely to apply for support from the LEADER programme.

When asked about the challenges facing their area/community, more than a quarter (20) mentioned transport links that are hard to access, too expensive or non-existent and the resulting isolation that can be faced by many residents. Just under a quarter cited the lack of affordable housing (16) and over one fifth gave the lack of employment opportunities in the local area (15) as their main concerns. The lack of local services or facilities, be it medical, educational, sporting, tourism or IT, also featured in several responses. Many were also worried about the lack of opportunities for and the resultant exodus of young people. A number mentioned lack of funding and support for projects as a problem.

As well as resolutions for the issues mentioned above, many respondents said they would like to see the LEADER programme address the issue of small businesses in rural areas by, for example, providing funding for start-ups. There was also mention of several environmental issues, such as energy efficiency, biodiversity, wind farm development quotas, sustainable new housing and recycling.

When rating priorities by their level of importance or relevance to different areas (1 being lowest, 5 highest), 'community facilities' ranked very highly, with almost half of respondents (36) giving it a priority level of 5. 'Rural transport' and 'promotion and marketing of local products' also scored highly – more than 30 respondents gave these the highest rating.

More than two thirds of respondents (47) did not feel there was anything to add to the list of priority projects given, but others felt that emphasis should be put on inclusive communities and retaining local services such as shops and schools. Services for the elderly, the disabled and those with learning difficulties were also mentioned.

Almost 70% of respondents (54) stated that it was likely they would apply to the LEADER programme for support, but more than one fifth (17) said they would not.

Most responses came from Community Councils (25), followed by community groups (16) and individuals (11). All categories of respondent were represented in the analysis.

2.6.3   At the **Community Consultation** meetings, a presentation was provided by the LAG Partnership, followed by workshops, which focused on the challenges facing rural communities. Groups were asked to consider actions to address the challenges they had identified. Comments collated from eight focus groups are detailed in Appendix 2. The following summarises the main outcomes from the workshops.

1. Challenges

All seven groups mentioned **public transport** in rural areas and the challenges faced in terms of accessibility, infrastructure, price and sustainability. *Employment* also featured in many responses, with communities facing problems such as lack of jobs in rural areas and low wages (compared to those in the city),

which in turn leads to residents, especially younger ones, being unable to afford **housing** in their local area and having to move away.

Another concern was the sustainability of **rural services**, such as post offices, schools, sports facilities and health services – six groups cited this as a challenge faced in their community.

Many people mentioned the lack or inaccessibility of **training** in their area and the need to improve the **skill base** and education opportunities for local people in order to retain them in the area and prevent outward **migration**.

Four groups included concerns about **environmental issues**, such as the lack of recycling facilities, the number of cars on the roads and the pros and cons of renewable energy solutions.

Several also mentioned the need to encourage younger people into the **agriculture sector** and to ensure that the necessary training was accessible in order to build skills.

2. Actions

Many groups suggested solving some of the challenges and problems they face by building more affordable housing, improving local facilities (especially for younger people) and public transport. Also using existing services in a '**smarter**' way, for example **multi-use of community facilities** and locally based **information and communication technology (ICT)** infrastructure, which should be available in all rural communities.

Links to schools and education should be **enhanced** to help school leavers into planned **locally based training programmes** which link to local employment.

The local economy featured in many lists and it was deemed important to support this by encouraging producers to **promote, market and brand** their products and residents to **buy local produce.** Better **communication and cooperation** between companies was felt important with a view to sharing core costs and making the businesses more **competitive** in the market place.

There was also a strong emphasis on **local business development and employment opportunities** again, with a real need for office and workshop facilities to be available in communities for locals to **access** without having to travel to urban centres.

To **encourage tourism** in each area, it was suggested by three groups that **local access** could be improved and communities should work together on **cooperative marketing and branding schemes**.

Looking at emerging industries, it was felt there were opportunities for local businesses and communities to develop **locally based renewable developments**, incorporating energy and waste solutions and also scope to develop new initiatives relating to **eco-tourism** and wildlife observation.

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3   Local Development Strategy

3.1   Strategic Objective

Having assessed the outcomes from community consultation, combined with a full appraisal of national and regional strategies and priorities, the LAG Partnership has identified the objective for the Local Development Strategy as:

A vibrant, sustainable rural economy, which supports and builds upon current business and community infrastructure and enhances the existing cultural and natural heritage.

The objective wholly reflects the Scottish Government's strategic objectives for sustainable rural economies and empowered rural communities to be:

• Wealthier and fairer
• Greener
• Healthier
• Stronger and safer
• Smarter

3.2   Key Strategic Issues

In looking at the issues to be tackled, the LAG Partnership took into account the five key priorities of the Aberdeenshire Community Plan 2006-2010, which are: Community Wellbeing, Jobs and the Economy, Lifelong Learning, Sustainable Environment and Developing our Partnership. These overarching Community Planning themes and six guiding principles of Inclusion, Accountability, Partnership, Evidence-based, Sustainability and Efficiency are central to the Strategy.

In the Scottish Enterprise Rural Economic Development 2007-2010 Plan the following circumstances particular to rural areas were highlighted:

• Sparsity of population
• Out-migration and faster ageing in some areas
• Limited range of job opportunities
• Traditional rural industries under stress/change
• Limited number of high-growth start-ups
• Limited number of international businesses
• Lack of development sites
• Limited range of services
• Lack of critical mass, e.g. an insufficient concentration of entrepreneurs
• Business and individual access problems through lack of infrastructure

In drawing up the Economic Strategy for Aberdeenshire Council, the following issues were highlighted for the rural areas:

• Lack of marketable employment land
• Peripherality
• Farm gate prices

- White fish prices
- Ageing population
- Climate change
- Expanding communities without appropriate infrastructure
- Skills shortages

3.3   Key Issues and specific needs identified in the Local Development Strategy

Key issues have been identified through the consultation that the LAG Local Development Strategy aims to address through LEADER as summarised below:

- Rural transport issues
- Access to training and improving skills in the rural workforce
- Sustaining essential rural services
- Opportunity for co-operative marketing
- Local housing issues
- Improving business performance and competitiveness
- The challenge of retaining young people in the area
- Renewable energy solutions for business and communities
- How to encourage younger people into the agriculture sector
- Recognising and enhancing the cultural and natural environment
- Improving access to social, recreational and commercial facilities

In terms of specific target groups that the LDS aims to address through LEADER actions, three key groups have been identified, based on the consultation outcomes and economic appraisal:

- Women
- Young People
- The Under-employed

3.3.1   Statistics demonstrate the lower earnings ratio in rural Aberdeenshire for **Women**, compared to male employees. This may reflect the nature of low-skilled rural employment, but also the disparity facing women in the rural sectors. Distance from childcare facilities can and does impact on employability of women in rural areas.

3.3.2   A range of issues affecting **Young People** was evidenced through consultation. Outward migration, lack of employment opportunities and lack of facilities for young people were commonly cited during the consultations.

3.3.3   In addressing issues facing the **Under-employed,** employment creation is not the only target. There is a need to upskill and also develop employment opportunities in the rural sector that match that of urban based employment, which can enable career progression and attainment of comparable standards.

3.4   Rural Aberdeenshire Key Priorities

Linked to the overarching themes of **Revitalising Communities** and **Progressive Rural Economy**, the LEADER actions the LDS will deliver, focussing on the key

issues identified above, will be based on the following priorities:
- Sustainable Communities
- Sustainable Energy
- Innovative Value Added Products and Markets
- Sustainable Tourism Development
- Innovative Micro Enterprise
- Versatile Rural Workforce
- Conservation of the Rural Environment

In the strategic analysis, detailed in Section 7, the Rural Aberdeenshire Key Priorities are fully complementary to the European, National and Regional strategies for sustainable rural development. There is, therefore, a justifiable, evidence-based strategy to deliver LEADER actions in Rural Aberdeenshire.

3.5   Actions

It is anticipated that a range of actions will be undertaken to help fulfil the principle objective and key priorities identified in the LAG Strategy, to address the key issues and specific needs of communities in the LAG area. Examples of actions and how they relate to the overarching themes of **Revitalising Communities** and **Progressive Rural Economy.**:

	RC	PRE
Strengthen communities – improving facilities and accessibility e.g.: ICT and new technology	✓	✓
Targeted and flexible local transport networks	✓	✓
Skills development and flexible work patterns	✓	✓
Support uptake of local products and encourage more value added actions	✓	✓
Strengthen the supply chain and encourage co-operation, marketing and branding		✓
Improve and increase innovative, sustainable rural services	✓	
Encourage/stimulate uptake of local solutions for renewable energy supply	✓	✓
Training, interpretation and capacity building, targeting specific needs	✓	
Recreational activities and facilities for the young people	✓	
Marketing of the area and its assets	✓	✓
Building of the social economy	✓	✓
Childcare initiatives	✓	✓
Assisting micro business growth and diversification	✓	✓
Networking of community and business initiatives over more than one LAG area	✓	✓
Raise awareness, enhance and improve accessibility to inland and coastal environments	✓	✓
Promote a co-operative approach through community and business initiatives	✓	
Promote community and business waste reduction and recycling	✓	✓

4   Outcomes

4.1   The main priority under Axis 4 (LEADER) of the RDR (1698/2005) is to increase

the capacity of local community and business networks, to build human capital, innovate and co-operate in order to tackle local development objectives. The LEADER outcome is perceived as "Innovative Governance and Rural Capacity Building".

The expected outcomes from the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG Strategy are:

- Improved access to training and employment for the underemployed
- Targeted solutions to enable young people to enter the rural workforce
- Creation and enhancement of essential rural services and access to ICT
- Improved co-operative marketing between rural businesses
- Identify innovative local housing solutions
- Sustainable local transport networks
- Improved business performance and competitiveness
- Employment and social facilities to retain young people in the area
- Renewable energy solutions for business and communities
- Improved access to cultural and natural environment facilities for both communities and tourists
- Improved access to social, recreational and commercial facilities
- Development of sustainable tourism initiatives
- New recreational activities for local people and tourists
- More effective, empowered communities
- Enhancement of cultural, natural and architectural features
- Development of the economic potential of culture, traditions and language
- Increased childcare provision
- Value added to local products and new product development
- Increase in businesses benefiting from collaborative activities
- Community and business waste minimisation

It is envisaged that there would be a number of inter- LAG and inter-regional projects resulting in an increase in co-operation, knowledge transfer and the establishment of a working relationship with other LAGs.

5.   **Innovation**

The strategy for the Aberdeenshire LAG is innovative as the LAG includes a high proportion of community agencies, such as Local Rural Partnerships and the voluntary sector. This will ensure that the programme engenders a strong endorsement of community involvement and participation.

The innovation is also demonstrated by the strong partnership ethos that the agencies represented on the LAG have adopted, combined with co-operation and commitment from the LAG partners to ensure the LAG Strategy delivers.

Delivering rural economic and community development in the LAG area is also a step on from Objective 5b and Objective 2 programmes, which grant aided the development of many rural groups and partnerships. Now, many of these groups who were assisted with development through previous programmes, are shaping the new LEADER programme for rural Aberdeenshire through the Strategy and will contribute to delivery of the Strategy through community engagement.

Projects will be assessed on innovation at approval stage. Innovation will be judged by the degree to which the project is a pilot for further activity, is of an experimental nature or if the process or subject matter is new to the programme area.

Having undertaken the community consultation, it is clear that communities genuinely seek new ways of making their communities more sustainable, by challenging the status quo and seeking new solutions through new approaches to rural development.

6. Cooperation

Co-operation is one of the key tenets of the LAG Strategy. The LAG partners all have a legacy of co-operative working through inter-agency and agency-community activities. This is one of the key strengths of the LAG, which through delivery of the strategy, will help to stimulate the local economies and communities from the actions undertaken.

The LAG has also developed good links with neighbouring LAGs, i.e.: Cairngorms, Moray and Tayside and with these LAGs focusing on the same overarching themes as the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG, it is considered there will be opportunity for joint projects and cross border co-operation.

It is proposed to develop links with neighbouring LAGs through joint meetings or a web based system. Communication is the key, sharing information on delivering joint projects between the LAGs to add value, create capacity and scale through joint projects.

The Rural Aberdeenshire LAG has also strong links with the Grampian & Moray Regional Project Assessment Committee (RPAC) that will oversee the delivery of Rural Development Contracts (RDCs) through the SRDP. The RPAC is also represented within the LAG partnership.

There are a number of initiatives and projects that could deliver enhanced output or provision of service across LAG areas. Examples of this could include projects to link up tourist service provision, making best use of networks for transport, access and recreation facilities, also links to local food & produce trails, or local renewable energy supply chains and processing.

7. Complementarity

The LAG Strategy has been borne out of priorities identified by the communities across rural Aberdeenshire. These priorities complement a wide range of EU, National, regional and local strategies and priorities.

7.1   How does LEADER strategy complement the SRDP

The Scottish Rural Development Programme recognises the diversity of rural Scotland, and as such has wide-ranging objectives for rural development in Scotland. These objectives are supported under three strategic themes:

- Theme 1: Underpinning performance and quality in the agriculture, food processing and forestry sectors.
- Theme 2: Enhancing rural landscapes and the natural heritage.
- Theme 3: Promoting a more diverse rural economy and thriving rural communities.

Many of the objectives in the 2007-13 SRDP are crosscutting and require an integrated approach across all axes. A major element of the SRDP is to bring economic, social and environmental measures together under a single programme of support. LEADER will provide a mechanism, at community level, for bringing these three axes together, through the 4th LEADER axis.

The LAG strategy has identified a number of priorities and potential projects that support, at a community level, and to some degree, all 3 axes. For example, Axis 1 is supported by the *Innovative value-added products and marketing* priority, Axis 2 is supported by the *sustainable tourism priority* and Axis 3 is supported by all of the priorities identified by the LAG.

7.2   How does LEADER strategy complement Structural Funds Programmes

The LAG area is not eligible for all priorities of the structural funds programme, nevertheless the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG strategy does complement particular priorities within the two programmes of the European Structural Fund 2007-2013 for Lowlands and Uplands Scotland.

7.2.1   **The European Social Fund (ESF)**

All three priorities of the ESF are complemented by the strategy of the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG (RAL) through the *Revitalising Communities* theme as well as the *Sustainable Communities* and *versatile rural workforce* priorities, where projects through LEADER will encourage rural communities to gain skills and knowledge that will enable them to progress into rural-based work or enhance the skills needed to successfully manage a rural-based business, such as ICT skills. It should be noted, however, that the LAG area is not eligible under priority 1 of the ESF, but the needs and interventions identified under this priority have also been identified during the community consultations within rural Aberdeenshire, and as a result the LAG felt that it was important to encourage applications that encourage young people and women into employment within the rural area.

7.2.2 **The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**

The Priority 2 - *Enterprise Growth* - is complemented through the LAG strategy theme of *Progressive Rural Economy* and through the *Innovative and Value-added Products and Markets* as well as the *Innovative Micro Enterprise* priorities, where it is expected that projects will come forward under LEADER that will help to foster e-business and green businesses, which will boost productivity levels and the local economy. Priority 4 – *Rural development* – has strong links to the LAG strategy, and to all of the identified priorities where diversification to allow the sustainability of the rural economy is a strong focus with projects expected to incorporate renewable energy, adding value to local products, and developing the tourism of the area in a sustainable manner. LEADER projects may be the catalyst to developing sustainable rural development projects of greater scale. Focus for LEADER projects, in the Rural Aberdeenshire Area, will also include the development or enhancement of community services including sustainable rural services, transport initiatives and skills training.

7.3 How does LEADER strategy complement Scottish Government policies

7.3.1 **The Framework for Economic Development in Scotland (FEDS)**

This framework sets out a vision of a Scotland where the quality of life of people is raised through increasing the economic opportunities for all on a socially and environmentally sustainable basis.

The principal objectives of FEDS include:

- Economic growth: with growth accelerated and sustained through greater competitiveness in the global economy;
- Regional development: with economic growth a pre-requisite for all regions to enjoy the same economic opportunities, and with regional development itself contributing to national economic prosperity;
- Closing the opportunity gap: with economic growth a pre-requisite for all in society to enjoy enhanced economic opportunities, and with social development in turn contributing to national economic prosperity; and
- Sustainable development: in economic, social and environmental terms.

Central to these four outcomes is a long-term strategy to improve the productivity of the Scottish economy. One of the key factors in this is the generation and full economic use of knowledge, where Scotland needs to adapt to knowledge-intensive global markets. In addition, FEDS recognises the importance of lifelong learning as an underpinning factor in achieving this.

The key challenges faced, and identified by the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG Partnership all fall within this broad framework of the Scottish economic development challenges set out by FEDS. Within this Framework, specific issues are covered by the respective strategies discussed below. In addition, the partnership approach supported by the Framework in terms of policy delivery closely mirrors the approach in the LAG Strategy.

7.3.2 **Workforce Plus – An Employability Framework for Scotland**

The Employability Framework aims to promote economic growth and sustainable development, reduce disadvantage and inequality and to end child poverty. The Framework sets a target of assisting 66,000 individuals in seven local government areas of particular deprivation to move off benefits and into employment. Aberdeenshire is not one of the seven local government areas that have been identified for intervention. Nevertheless the LAG strategy does complement some of the Framework's themes, and in particular:

• Interventions at an early stage;
• Support towards sustaining as well as progressing employment;
• A focus on better outcomes.

From the consultations conducted during the formulation of the LAG Strategy, it emerged that there was a need to develop traditional rural skills training which is particular to the needs of particular sectors such as tourism, agriculture and others. It also emerged that there would then be a need to inform those people in search of work, and in particular young people, at an early stage about the opportunities for training and skills development as a means to help them into work, and to sustain the local rural economy of Aberdeenshire. It also emerged that job seekers need to be aware of the potential to progress in work through skills enhancement, and it is due to these identified needs that the LAG felt it was necessary to develop the *Versatile Rural Workforce* priority. It is expected that projects will emerge that develop skills training programmes, intervention programmes and projects with local businesses to develop relevant training and progression opportunities particularly for young people, women and the under-employed in the LAG area.

7.3.3 **Closing the Opportunity Gap**

Closing the Opportunity Gap is the Scottish Government's strategy aiming to prevent individuals and families from falling into and to provide routes out of poverty. It sets out six objectives:

1. To increase the chances of sustained employment for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups – in order to lift them permanently out of poverty;
2. To improve the confidence and skills of the most disadvantaged children and young people – in order to provide them with the greatest chance of avoiding poverty when they leave school;
3. To reduce the vulnerability of low income families to financial exclusion and multiple debts – in order to prevent them becoming over-indebted and/or to lift them out of poverty;
4. To regenerate the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods – in order that people living there can take advantage of job opportunities and improve their quality of life;
5. To increase the rate of improvement of the health status of people living in the most deprived communities – in order to improve their quality of life, including their employability prospects; and
6. To improve access to high quality services for the most disadvantaged groups and individuals in rural communities – in order to improve their quality of life and enhance their access to opportunity.

The LAG Strategy embodies – directly as well as indirectly – these Closing the Opportunity Gap objectives. The strongest links are through the first, second and sixth of these objectives. The LAG strategy priorities of *Sustainable Communities* and *Versatile Rural Workforce* will encourage projects that develop skills and training, ICT access and the development of sustainable rural services, to improve the quality of life for the rural communities of Aberdeenshire.

7.3.4 Regeneration Policy Statement

In 2006, Closing the Opportunity Gap was supplemented by the Scottish Government's People and Place: Regeneration Policy Statement, which states that regeneration is central to achieving the main goal of sustainable economic development. The Regeneration Policy Statement integrates public, private, voluntary and community sector activities to sustainable regeneration. It defines the regeneration challenge for Scotland:
Regeneration is a crucial part of growing the economy and improving the fabric of Scotland… Our aim is to turn disadvantaged neighbourhoods into places where people are proud to live. To turn places that have been left behind into places connected with the opportunities around them. To create areas of choice and areas of connection, rather than inward-looking places excluded from the wider successful Scotland around them. To build mixed and vibrant communities that sustain themselves.

LEADER can be an important instrument for integrating funding in support of the social inclusion and employability aspects of the regeneration agenda, particularly with respect to the LAG strategy priorities of: *Sustainable Communities, and Versatile Rural Workforce*, the LEADER monies role as a match-funder as well as the partnership-based approach underlying its delivery.

7.3.5 Smart Successful Scotland

Scottish Government policy for developing the enterprise sector has been set out in Smart Successful Scotland (SSS). The strategy not only lays out goals, but acts as a framework for coordinating enterprise development policy more widely. It has a vision consisting of three outcomes, and a number of priorities for each outcome:

- growing businesses: a fast learning, high earning Scotland
  - a culture of enterprise and more businesses of scale
  - Increased innovation and commercialisation of research
  - Use of e:business to create business advantage
- global connections;
  - Increased involvement in global markets
  - Scotland to be a globally attractive location
  - Connecting to the rest of the world
  - More people choosing to live, study and work in Scotland
- learning and skills
  - Improve the operation of the Scottish labour market
  - The best start for all young people
  - Developing people who are in work
  - Narrowing the gap in unemployment;

SSS outcomes and priorities link strongly with all six of the LAG strategy priorities. It is expected that projects emanating from the priorities will enhance local communities, and will help target groups such as women, the under-employed and young people to access training and develop their skills, so that they are better able to contribute the local rural economy. Projects are also expected that will enhance the provision of ICT helping businesses to showcase their products to a much wider audience,; and also projects that will strengthen supply chains and build on the natural and cultural heritage of the area thus making Rural Aberdeenshire an attractive place to live, work and visit.

The LAG strategy also mirrors the sentiments of SSS in realising the potential of all our places as well as the strengthening of our communities. It also complements the crosscutting themes in SSS, namely closing the gap in economic opportunities and promoting equal opportunities by engaging with all rural communities through encouraging applications from target groups.

7.3.6   A Green Jobs Strategy for Scotland

The Green Jobs Strategy complements and adds to Smart, Successful Scotland (SSS), and is also complemented by the priorities and themes that have been identified by the RAL. Projects coming forward under the priorities in Table 1 are expected to be projects that make better use of resources, minimise the reliance on fossil fuels, enhance the supply and demand of renewable energies, and ultimately make communities more sustainable by making businesses more competitive.

Table 1: A Green Jobs Strategy for Scotland

A Green Jobs Strategy For Scotland		*LEADER Themes*	*LEADER Priorities*
Priority 1	**Resource Efficiency** Improving productivity through smarter use of resources - whether water, energy, solid waste or raw materials	Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable Energy Innovative Micro-enterprise Innovative value-added products and markets
Priority 2	**New Business Opportunities:** Renewable Energy Waste Management and Recycling Others	Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable Energy Innovative Micro-enterprise Innovative value-added products and markets
Priority 3	**Making it Happen:** Information and awareness Delivery of specialist advice and support Access to finance to exploit opportunities Government's role in creating a market Skills	Revitalising Communities and Progressive Rural Economy	Versatile Rural Workforce Sustainable Communities Sustainable Energy

7.3.7 **Lifelong Learning Strategy**

Life Through Learning, Learning Through Life sets out the Government's strategy for Lifelong Learning to 2008. It is concerned with post-compulsory education, training and learning and recognises the need to address the:

- Opportunity gap between those who achieve their potential and those who do not;
- Skills gap between those in work and those who are not; and
- Productivity gap between Scotland and the world's leading economies.

To achieve these strategic aims, there is a need to promote work based learning as part of the overall lifelong learning agenda through a two-pronged approach that both encourages individual learners to participate in lifelong learning and employers to support lifelong learning both in and beyond the workplace. The strategy has five goals, creating:

- A Scotland where people have the confidence, enterprise, knowledge, creativity and skills they need to participate in economic, social and civic life;
- A Scotland where a high quality learning experience is delivered;
- A Scotland where people's knowledge and skills are recognised, used and developed to best effect in their workplace;
- A Scotland where people are given the information, guidance and support they need to make effective learning decisions and transitions; and
- A Scotland where people have the chance to learn, irrespective of their background or current personal circumstances.

The LAG strategy underpins the approach needed in supporting access to lifelong learning in the *Versatile Rural Workforce* priority, which identifies needs in the access and quality of training provision in the region. In addition, there are specific

learning needs that have been identified for part of the workforce. In this context it is anticipated that industry specific training programmes may come forward as projects under the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER LAG Programme 2007-13.

7.3.8   **Choosing our future: Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy**

Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy is well complemented by the LAG strategy. It can be seen from Table 2 that both themes and all seven priorities of the strategy set out in Section 3 help to complement the aims and objectives of Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy.

Table 2: Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy

Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy		LEADER Themes	LEADER Priorities
Priority 1	Building a strong, sustainable economy	Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable Communities Sustainable Energy Innovative value-added products and markets Sustainable Tourism Development Innovative Micro-enterprise Versatile Rural Workforce
Priority 2	The well-being of Scotland's people Economic opportunities for all Environment that provides the conditions for health and well-being	Revitalising Communities	Sustainable Communities
Priority 3	Supporting thriving communities Well-connected places Regeneration of local environments People at the heart of change.	Revitalising Communities and Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable Communities Versatile Rural Workforce Innovative value-added products and markets
Priority 4	Protecting Scotland's natural heritage and resources Biodiversity loss halted. Natural resources managed sustainably. The environment is protected effectively.	Revitalising Communities and Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable Communities Sustainable Energy Sustainable Tourism Development
Priority 5	Scotland's global contribution Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions Reduction in ecological impact contributing to the Millennium Development Goals	Revitalising Communities and Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable Communities Sustainable Energy Sustainable Tourism Development
Priority 6	Learning to make Scotland sustainable Learning for sustainable development is a core function of the formal education system. There are lifelong opportunities to learn. The sustainable development message is clear and easily understood.	Revitalising Communities and Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable Communities Versatile Rural Workforce

7.3.9 Scotland's National Transport Strategy

Table 3 sets out the priorities for Scotland's National Transport strategy. During the consultation phase of the LAG Strategy it emerged that rural communities felt that there was insufficient public transport provision, or some sustainable alternative. It is anticipated that projects involving community transport initiatives may come forward under the Revitalising Communities theme and the Sustainable Communities priority, which will complement the priorities laid out in Scotland's National Transport Strategy.

Table 3: Scotland's National Transport Strategy

Scotland's National Transport Strategy	
Priority 1	**Improve journey times and connections** between our cities and towns and our global markets to tackle congestion and provide access to key markets
Priority 2	**Reduce emissions** to tackle climate change
Priority 3	**Improve quality, accessibility and affordability** of transport, to give people the choice of public transport and real alternatives to the car.

7.3.10 **Rural Scotland: Better Still, Naturally**

Table 4 lays out key priorities of *Rural Scotland: Better Still, Naturally*. These priorities are complemented well by the themes and priorities of the LAG Strategy. The LEADER priorities and those of *Rural Scotland: Better Still, Naturally* focus on growing the rural economy, supporting thriving rural communities as well as enhancing the natural and cultural heritage of rural areas.

Table 4: Rural Scotland: Better Still, Naturally

Rural Scotland: Better Still, Naturally		LEADER Themes	LEADER Priorities
Priority 1	Growing the rural economy through broadening and diversifying the employment base	Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable Energy Innovative value-added products and markets Sustainable Tourism Development Innovative Micro-enterprise Versatile Rural Workforce
Priority 3	Promoting sustainable, resilient rural communities and local empowerment	Revitalising Communities and Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable Communities Versatile Rural Workforce Sustainable Tourism Development Innovative Micro-enterprise
Priority 3	Sustaining and making the most of its natural and cultural heritage.	Revitalising Communities and Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable Communities Sustainable Energy Sustainable Tourism Development

7.3.11 **Scottish Tourism: The Next Decade - A Tourism Framework for Change**

Scottish Tourism: The Next Decade - A Tourism Framework for Change complements and builds on a "New Strategy for Scottish Tourism (2000) and "Tourism Framework for Action 2002 - 2005". The framework has been developed in collaboration with the private sector and recognises the global importance of tourism with a predicted growth rate of 4%-5% annually[13].

13 Source: World Trade Organisation.

It articulates an ambition to keep pace with the global tourism growth trends over the next 10 years to 2015, by targeting 50% revenue growth in real terms for Scottish tourism. It identifies, also, that growth must not be at the expense of our environment, our culture or our communities and recognises that the key to doing that is by growing value faster than volume. It states that volume growth of around 2% annually should not produce sudden capacity problems, especially if focused

on extending the tourism season and by ensuring that the tourism industry is as green as possible. However, the framework recognises that key changes are required across the industry:

- Better knowledge of the tourism market, its trends and the delivery of new and improved products and services
- Consistently exceeding our visitors' expectations
- Culture of enterprise, innovation and investment in new products and services
- Improved access to and around Scotland, but balanced by environmental considerations
- Integrated marketing effort and effective use of the Internet
- Approach based on sustainable tourism - economically, socially and environmentally

The framework is underpinned by an ambition to succeed and prosper in on of the world's most competitive business sectors and to make Scotland one of the world's foremost visitor destinations by 2015. Central to this are business entrepreneurship and innovation, business leadership and a focus on the customer.

LEADER has the potential to support the delivery of the framework by stimulating a developing tourism sector with increased target markets and supporting the process of change outlined.

7.4   How does LEADER strategy complement Local Government policies

7.4.1   Aberdeenshire Council's Strategic Plan

Aberdeenshire Council's Strategic Plan (2003 – 2007) is complemented well by the LAG Strategy. The Strategic Plan's priorities are set out in Table 5, where it can be seen that all themes and priorities of the LAG Strategy complement all five priorities.

Table 5: Aberdeenshire Council's Strategic Plan

Strategic Plan (2003-2007)		LEADER Themes	LEADER Priorities
Priority 1	**Community Wellbeing** – Aberdeenshire Council will work to create an economy in which sustainable economic activity, steady growth, low unemployment and a broadening and strengthening of the economic base are established.	Revitalising communities	Sustainable communities
Priority 2	**Jobs and the Economy** – Aberdeenshire Council will work to implement a vision of Aberdeenshire as a place where citizens participate in lifelong learning and where everyone is included.	Progressive Rural Economy	Innovative micro enterprise Innovative value-added products and markets Sustainable tourism development
Priority 3	**Learning** – Aberdeenshire Council will work to implement a vision of Aberdeenshire as a place where citizens participate in lifelong learning and where everyone is included.	Revitalising communities	Versatile rural workforce Sustainable communities
Priority 4	**Sustainable Environment** – Aberdeenshire Council will work to ensure that all our actions are as sustainable as possible and meet the needs of the current generation of Aberdeenshire's people without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.	Revitalising communities and Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable energy Sustainable Tourism development Sustainable communities
Priority 5	**Quality Services** – Aberdeenshire Council will work to maintain and improve the quality of life for everyone in Aberdeenshire by delivering first class public services.	Revitalising communities	Sustainable communities

7.4.1 **Core Paths Planning (CPP) for Aberdeenshire**

The CPP's aim is: to ensure that there is at least one path for the settlements (over 100 population) identified in the Aberdeenshire Local Plan. There are also a number of objectives to:

- Improve people's health and wellbeing by providing better opportunities for access.
- Assist in the integration of access, land management and the natural heritage.
- Have a wider functional benefit than just for recreation e.g. safe routes to school or community links
- Encourage people to consider alternatives to car use

The CPP's aim and objectives link with the *Sustainable Communities* and *Sustainable Tourism Development* priorities. The LAG are expecting projects that will complement CPP to come forward under LEADER as tourism activities development and recreational activities were both cited as priorities in the online consultation questionnaire that was circulated.

7.4.2 **Forest and Woodland strategy for Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City 2005**

The Forest and Woodland Strategy for Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City has a number of priorities that are complemented by the LAG Strategy. Table 6 outlines the relevant priories that are complemented by both LEADER themes and LAG Strategy priorities.

Table 6: Forest and Woodland strategy for Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City 2005

Forest and Woodland strategy for Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City 2005		LEADER Themes	LEADER Priorities
Priority 4	**Nature Conservation, Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity –** Encouraging appropriate planting and management to enhance biodiversity – bringing tourism benefits.	Revitalising Communities and Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable Communities Sustainable Tourism
Priority 8	**Supporting the Local Economy -** Support the development of local value added processing. Promote small-scale woodland co-op type initiatives. Development of woodfuel projects.	Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable Energy Innovative Value Added Products and markets
Priority 9	**Supporting Community Woodlands -** Establishment of new and management of existing community woodland/woodland around settlements - the forestry strategy lists settlements that are a particular priority for new accessible woodlands.	Revitalising Communities	Sustainable Communities Sustainable Tourism
Priority 10	**Supporting education, Recreation and Tourism -** Encourage enhancement for access and recreation - bringing tourism benefits.	Revitalising Communities and Progressive Rural Economy	Versatile Rural Workforce Sustainable Tourism Sustainable Communities

7.5   How does LEADER strategy complement LEC policies

7.5.1   Scottish Enterprise has set out four main priorities in the *Scottish Enterprise and rural economic development – 2007-2010 Plan*:
1. Stimulate the diversification of the rural economy
2. Enable the development of competitive, sustainable businesses in rural areas.
3. Contribute to the economic sustainability of rural communities
4. Enhance the operation of the rural labour market, raise standards of working practices and boost productivity levels.

All of these priorities are echoed in the themes and priorities chosen by the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG.

7.5.2   The Scottish Enterprise also has key priorities in relation to the key industries of:

- Energy
- Tourism
- Food and drink

Again, all of which have been identified as key industries in the Rural Aberdeenshire Area during the consultation phase of the LEADER strategy as being important and able to add to the sustainability of the area.

7.6   How does LEADER strategy complement Local Community Plans

7.6.1   Community planning is a way of working, in which major providers of public and voluntary services in an area, work together with their communities to deliver better services. The Aberdeenshire Community Partnership was formed in 1999 and the first Community Plan was published in 2000. The LAG area includes six Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnerships. These partnerships will be key to the delivery of LEADER through community engagement.

The LAG strategy complements the guiding principles set out in the Aberdeenshire community plan of:

- **Inclusion** – the LAG will encourage equal opportunities and has identified target groups of young people and women.
- **Sustainability** – the LAG will work to ensure that the projects funded through LEADER are sustainable and meet the needs of the current generation of Aberdeenshire's people without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- **Efficiency** – the LAG will aim to be as efficient as possible with resources and to support effective projects.
- **Accountability** – the LAG will be answerable to the communities and people of Aberdeenshire and keep them informed of, and seek their views on, what the LAG is doing.
- **Partnership** – The LAG will work together with partners and the people of Aberdeenshire to achieve the vision and will encourage communities to recognise their important role in sharing in community planning work.
- **Evidence**-**based –** the LAG will ensure that actions are based on clear evidence and information and are derived from what the community wants.

Table 7 sets out how the five priorities of the Aberdeenshire Community Plan are complemented by the priorities identified by the RAL.

Table 7: Aberdeenshire Community Plan 2006-2010

Aberdeenshire Community Plan		LEADER Themes	LEADER Priorities
Priority 1	**Community Wellbeing** - working together to enhance the quality of everyday life by improving health and social care, housing and community safety.	Revitalising communities	Sustainable communities
Priority 2	**Jobs and the Economy** - working together to improve the economy of Aberdeenshire and the employment prospects of its people.	Progressive Rural Economy	Innovative micro enterprise Innovative value-added products and markets Sustainable tourism development
Priority 3	**Lifelong Learning** - working and learning together to develop opportunities and build stronger communities.	Revitalising communities	Versatile rural workforce Sustainable communities
Priority 4	**Sustainable Environment** - working together to achieve sustainability by reducing resource use, protecting our environment, combating climate change and conserving and enhancing biodiversity.	Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable energy Sustainable Tourism development Sustainable communities
Priority 5	**Developing our Partnership** – working together to make our partnership as efficient and effective as possible.	Revitalising communities and Progressive Rural Economy	Sustainable communities

7.7   How does LEADER strategy reflect EU priorities

7.7.1   The Lisbon Agenda

The Lisbon European Council in March 2000 agreed a new strategic goal for the EU in order to strengthen employment, economic reform and social cohesion as part of a knowledge-based economy. The Lisbon Agenda has three key elements to increase competitiveness of the European Union:

- An economic pillar preparing ground for transition to a competitive, dynamic, knowledge-based economy. Emphasis is placed on the need to adapt constantly to changes in the information society and to boost research and development
- A social pillar designed to modernise the European social model by investing in Human Resources and combating social exclusion. Member States are expected to invest in education and training and to conduct an active policy for employment, making it easier to move to a knowledge economy
- An environmental pillar, added at the Gothenburg European Council in June 2001, draws attention to the fact that economic growth must be decoupled from the use of natural resources

The Lisbon Agenda invited the European Commission and the Member States to further integrate aspects of equal opportunities in employment policies, including reducing occupational segregation and helping to reconcile working and family life.

The Lisbon Council set quantitative targets for achieving gender equality in economic life, such as that of raising women's employment rate in the EU. They stress the importance of fostering and mainstreaming ways of giving women equal access to the knowledge-based economy.

The Rural Aberdeenshire LAG Strategy complements the main elements of the Lisbon Agenda through actively encouraging projects involving women, home working and child-care, training and skills development, as well as projects that enhance the environment or seek to combat the effects of climate change such as encouraging renewable energy projects. The strategy also seeks to encourage projects that will provide access to ICT so as to help sustain local communities, provide training and learning opportunities and allow home working to be viable option.

7.7.2 The Gothenburg Strategy

The environmental dimension of the Lisbon Agenda was added at an EU-level European Summit held in Gothenburg in June 2001. This placed a new emphasis on the protection of the environment and the achievement of a more sustainable pattern of development. The aim is to decouple environmental degradation and resource consumption from economic and social development by 2010.

The main priorities of the Gothenburg Strategy are:

- Combating climate change;
- Ensuring sustainable transport options;
- Addressing threats to public health; and
- Managing natural resources in a more responsible manner

Three of the four main priorities of the Gothenburg strategy are complemented by the LAG strategy whereby climate change, transport and the management of the natural resources are all integral to the projects that the LAG are seeking to encourage through the *Sustainable Energy*, *Sustainable Tourism Development*, and *Sustainable Communities* priorities that have been identified with projects likely to include renewable technologies, management of natural resources so as to encourage sustainable tourism in rural Aberdeenshire, as well as community transport initiatives.

7.8 How does LEADER strategy reflect local and Regional priorities

7.8.1 Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Manifesto

Aberdeen City and Shire Economic Forum's (ACSEF) Economic Manifesto has eight strategic priorities; two of which are complemented by the LAG Strategy. *The Quality of life priority* is complemented well by the LAG *Sustainable Communities* priority. The *Attract and Develop Skilled People* priority identified in the economic manifesto is complemented by LAG *Versatile Rural Workforce* priority. Projects emerging under these themes are likely to be those that improve community services in rural areas and provide targeted training and skills development for Rural Aberdeenshire.

7.8.2 **NESTRANS**

The North East of Scotland Transport Partnership has produced a regional transport strategy the priorities of which can be seen in Table 8. As previously mentioned the consultation phase of the LAG Strategy revealed that rural communities felt that there wasn't sufficient public transport provision or some sustainable alternative. It is thus expected that projects involving community transport initiatives may come forward under the Revitalising communities theme and the Sustainable Communities priority, which will complement the priorities laid out in the Regional Transport Strategy and in particular priorities 1 and 2.

Table 8: NESTRANS Regional Transport Strategy

NESTRANS – Regional Transport Strategy	
Priority 1	**Economy** - To enhance and exploit the north east's competitive economic advantages, and reduce the impacts of peripherality.
Priority 2	**Accessibility, Safety and Social Inclusion** - To enhance choice, accessibility and safety of transport, particularly for disadvantaged and vulnerable members of society and those living in areas where transport options are limited.
Priority 3	**Environment** - To conserve and enhance the north east's natural and built environment and heritage and reduce the effects of transport on climate and air quality.
Priority 4	**Spatial Planning** - To support transport integration and a strong, vibrant and dynamic city centre and town centres across the north east.

7.8.3 **Scottish Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan 2007-2008 - Grampian**

The priorities of LEADER particularly complement Theme 5 of the Scottish Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan for the Grampian region. The aim of *Theme 5: Access and Health* is to help improve the nation's health by implementing a programme to set up a network of health walks and walking groups based on target communities in order to increase and diversify local community and visitor use. This theme links well with the priorities of the LAG strategy to develop sustainable communities, as well as sustainable tourism development. The consultations undertaken to formulate the LAG strategy also highlighted the need to improve the access to and quality of the natural environment as well as improve the heath of rural communities.

7.8.4 **North East Scotland Tourism Partnership A Strategy and Action Plan For Growth**

The aims of the North East Scotland Tourism Partnership Strategy (NESTPS) are:

- Successfully promote the North East of Scotland to target audiences.
- Deliver a consistently high-quality visitor experience, with high standards of facilities, customer service, career opportunities and income levels.
- Further develop a competitive industry that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable and that supports and builds on the history, culture, environment and hospitality of its people and communities.
- Ensure that everyone living and working in the area understands the value of tourism to the local economy and actively get involved in growing tourism.

The LAG Strategy priority of *Sustainable Tourism Development* complements the aims of the NESTPS by encouraging projects that will enhance visitor

experiences, help to build sustainable tourism businesses, and build on the natural and cultural heritage of the area. *Tourism activities development* and *Tourism marketing development* were both cited as potential projects in the online consultation questionnaire that was distributed, and as such it is expected that project under LEADER will enhance and build on the aims of the NESTPS.

7.9   How does the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG strategy contribute to sustainability?

7.9.1   The guiding principles of sustainable development are the economy, the environment and communities. The LAG strategy aims to improve the economic competitiveness, deliver prosperity and a high quality of life for the communities of rural Aberdeenshire within a secure and well-managed environment. As such the LAG strategy has taken three principles of sustainable development seriously and is confident that the themes and priorities chosen, and thus the projects likely to result from the LEADER funding are going to enhance the local environment, boost the rural economy and help to foster sustainable communities, and actively encourage equal opportunities and social inclusion.

7.9.2   The fact that the LAG strategy is community focused with priorities that have been identified by the community make it more likely to encourage projects that will address the needs of local communities and thus contribute to the sustainable development of rural Aberdeenshire. All of the identified themes and eligible projects will contribute to at least one or more of the principles of Sustainable Development, but all projects will have to take into consideration all three of the principles, so as to ensure that a project does not have a detrimental effect on local communities, the economy of the area (i.e. existing businesses) or the environment.
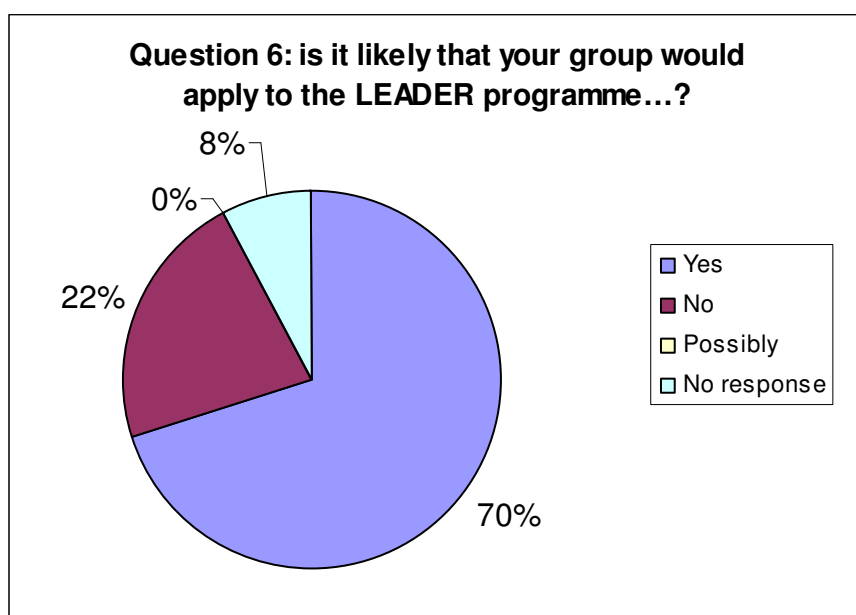
Analysis from Questionnaire

Question 4
What types of projects do you think would be beneficial to your local area from the examples detailed below?
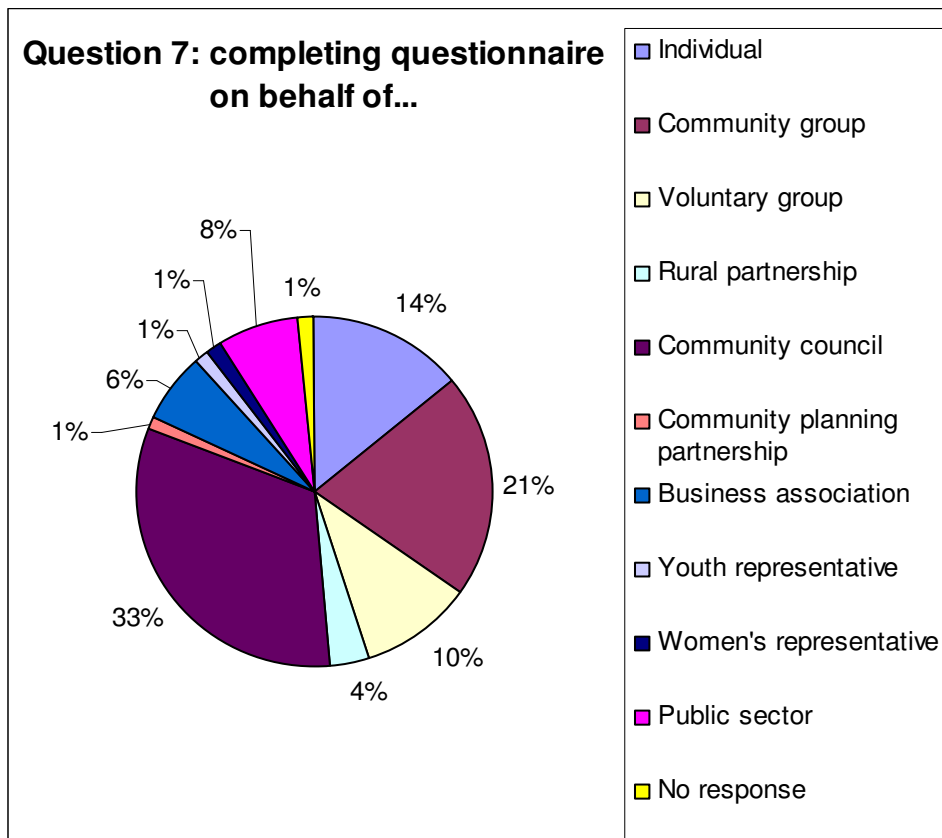1 = low priority, 5 = high priority

	1	2	3	4	5	no response	Total
Rural transport	5	8	15	16	33	1	78
Community facilities	5	5	12	16	36	4	78
Childcare provision	5	18	21	15	15	4	78
Skills development & training	2	1	24	23	23	5	78
Young entrepreneurship	4	6	21	24	19	4	78
ICT access & provision	3	9	26	20	14	6	78
High environmental amenity access	2	11	20	19	19	7	78
Innovative approach to provision of rural services	1	7	16	21	27	6	78
Home & flexible working	3	9	24	24	14	4	78
New production processes	6	13	23	18	8	10	78
Joint marketing initiatives	5	7	18	22	16	10	78
Cultural & heritage activities	4	5	24	19	21	5	78
Small-scale renewable energy projects	2	9	18	18	26	5	78
Development of value-added products	3	8	15	31	13	8	78
Promotion & marketing of local products	2	5	7	26	34	4	78
Tourism activities development	2	7	9	27	27	6	78
Tourism marketing development	2	4	14	24	26	8	78
Micro-business development	1	7	24	25	14	7	78
Recreational activities	4	6	21	20	24	3	78
Cross-community & business cooperation	1	5	23	21	24	4	78
Total	**62**	**150**	**375**	**429**	**433**	**111**	

Question 6: Is it likely your Group would apply to LEADER?

Question 6: is it likely that your group would apply to the LEADER programme…?

8%
0%
22%
70%

- Yes
- No
- Possibly
- No response

Question 7: Completing Questionnaire on behalf of:

Question 7: completing questionnaire on behalf of...

Legend:
- Individual
- Community group
- Voluntary group
- Rural partnership
- Community council
- Community planning partnership
- Business association
- Youth representative
- Women's representative
- Public sector
- No response

Pie chart values: 14%, 21%, 10%, 4%, 33%, 1%, 6%, 1%, 1%, 8%, 1%

LEADER COMMUNITY CONSULTATION MEETING, ALFORD
9 OCTOBER 2007

Group 1:

Challenges

- Transport
- Lone working
- Quality of life
- Ageing population
- Keeping the young busy
- Law and order
- Access for wheelchair users/disabled
- Infrastructure
- Geography/topography
- Perception/Government policy
- Housing/demand – low-cost/affordable
- Employment
- Skill base/education
- Decline in rural services and amenities

Actions

- Education/training
- Technology in rural areas
- Transport
- Smart use of existing services
- Youth facilities
- Develop/purchase community assets
- Priorities - national
            Local Government
            LOCAL

Group 2:

Challenges

- Skills
- Employment
- Communication
- Sustaining rural services
- Property pricing
- Lack of social housing
- Growth = high carbon footprint
- Land management
- Small settlements need to be attractive
- Renewable energy – for and against
- Access to lifelong learning

- Migration of young people
- More opportunities to work and play
- Transport – access and infrastructure
- Marketing local produce
- Loss of culture
- Inward migration
- Population
- Ageing
- Falling birthrates
- Training
- Red meat prices
- Agri sector restructure

Actions

- Affordable housing
- Lack of micro-business development through planning
- Community energy
- Short supply chains
- Rural incubators
- Improved public transport
- Integrated transport
- Outreach learning
- Link business and schools (education)
- Value traditional skills/trades
- "Train your own"
- Shop/buy local
- Use local products
- Cooperation within food sector
- Multi-use of community facilities
- Support existing structure/facilities
- Local access – tourism development

Group 3:

Challenges

- Sustainable transport
- Skills – tourism/forestry
- Young people into farming
- Global markets
- Jobs and affordable housing
- Planning – settlements
- Global warming and fuel poverty
- H_2O management and bad planning
- Smaller farmers to diversify
- Competing with larger organisations – wages. Drain of Aberdeen and oil
- Information dissemination
- Health and ageing population

Actions

- Non-fossil fuel transport system – old railways
- Education department – practice skills and identify them
- Entitlements linked to land. Diversification and skills.
- Cooperatives and local branding
- Keep housing affordable – local work for local housing
- Renewable and green
- Better planning
- Value added jobs and promoting food sector
- Vibrant communities and opportunities. Promoting accessible activities and ICT/home working

**LEADER COMMUNITY CONSULTATION MEETING, LAURENCEKIRK
10 OCTOBER 2007**

Group 1:

Challenges

- Lack of critical mass
- Lack of affordable housing
- City employment/city wages
- Rural wages lower than cost of housing
- Lack of opportunities for young people
- Rural transport system – inflexible
- Lack of full-time community facilities
- Lack of rural services
- Maintaining a sustainable rural economy – agriculture, trades, etc.
- Decline in rural infrastructure
- Pubs closing – change in social attitude
- Lack of facilities for young people
- Power of larger retailers

Actions

- New opportunities/technologies – use of IT
- Taking training out to rural communities (target >30 y.o.) to stimulate knowledge/ability and employment opportunities. Peer to peer learning
- Encourage younger workforce in agriculture – training and transport. Target school leavers
- Promoting rural communities as 'quality of life'
- Improve village halls
- Business management training
- Allocate a % LEADER for training
- Video conferencing
- Cooperative marketing and branding scheme
- Enhance local environment – built and natural
- Improve cultural development opportunities

Group 2:

Challenges

- Remoteness from markets
- Ageing population
- Lack of integrated rural transport
- Lack of rural employment
- Lack of affordable housing (for purchase and rental purposes) NB both commercial and personal housing
- Post offices/shops/rural retail services
- Shared promotion of rural businesses
- Lack of networking opportunities for small local rural businesses
- Employment opportunities for youth; lack of training opportunities
- Lack of leisure, sporting and social activities
- Minimising carbon footprint
- Improve community spirit

Actions

- Promotional marketing and cooperation; new media (training may have to be administered)
- Make housing, employment, leisure facilities available and affordable
- Further investment into community transport to link surrounding villages directly to the rail station in Laurencekirk
- Build rural business units near housing
- Utilise redundant rural buildings; create housing for mixed age groups and integrate all generations
- Funding to allow farmers to supply communities with fresh produce; locally-run community shop; method of transferring 'best practices' and implementing these here; funding for a mobile fresh produce van facility to provide for rural communities
- Linking rural businesses for mutual benefit and promotion; branding opportunities for locally-produced farm produce (e.g. South Aberdeenshire Fresh Foods); also potential to deliver by local co-ops
- Investment and support in community facilities and networks
- Identification of highest priority sectors requiring training; local training group to be consulted here (Mearns and Angus services)
- Investment in development of cultural and heritage groups (e.g. sports organisations have funds); lack of halls and meeting places; lack of financial support
- Maximise renewable energy opportunities – biomass
- Plan and development an outdoor play area for young children (up to approx. 12 years) – this facility would be accessible by disabled kids/parents, etc.; engage the youngsters to help with design for projects – ownership
- Please note: we see the interaction and help from the planning division as being paramount in achieving many of the above challenges.

**LEADER COMMUNITY CONSULTATION MEETING, MINTLAW
11 OCTOBER 2007**

Group 1:

Challenges

- Lack of jobs in countryside with living wage. Difficult to have profitable business in countryside – access/transport
- Lack of affordable housing
- Public transport
- Rural services
- Retention of shops, hospitals, care homes
- Energy
- Footpaths
- Leisure facilities
- Community halls/facilities
- Crime – shortage of policing
- Recycling/litter
- Pollution
- Tourism
- Access to European markets
- Sustainability
- Get rural voice across

Actions

- Precision Engineering – make use of skill base. Easier tendering process
- Encourage support; help develop community build. Homes for older people
- Needs to be looked at as a whole. Smaller minibus – link with subsidised taxi service. DAB system open to all community. Fare structure.
- People living in community – retained services. Farmers selling locally. Support for local shops.
- Look at alternative renewable energy. Sources, e.g. Fetterangus wind turbine. Waste incineration – green tourism/eco-tourism incorporating wildlife. Partnerships
- Lack of funding/disabled access/access to insurance. Costs too high.
- Application process for LEADER must be quick and simple

Group 2:

Challenges

- Transport
- Access to health services
- Affordable
- Number of cars on roads
- Training
- Wider involvement
- Information
- Communication
- Support for business start-ups

- Planning – supportive
- Social enterprise
- Agriculture/farming workforce
- Expansive tourism product
- Quality
- Lack of promotion

Actions

- Subsidised business park – less travel
- Support growth of transport structure – organisation/infrastructure
- Marketing of services
- Community facilities – access/fit for purpose
- Engage the community in planning
- Education – value local employment
- Traditional skills
- Apprenticeships – skills – not college

Group 3:

Challenges

- Transport
- Affordable rural housing
- Retaining rural schools
- Retaining and sustaining rural facilities, e.g. halls, sports facilities
- Tourism – attracting more tourists and improving facilities; lack of accommodation and information on existing places; lack of activities especially after 4.30pm
- Access to training, especially for young people
- Addressing needs of those who are rurally isolated
- Roads – congestion, upkeep
- Delivery of healthcare
- Retention of local post offices
- Environment – recycling, renewables
- Supporting local community groups
- Planning restrictions in rural areas
- Attracting and nurturing businesses in rural areas

Actions

- Wheels to work; A-B bus services, car-sharing (longer hours), public transport
- Houses for young buyers in rural areas; utilise old buildings, e.g. redundant schools, including common room for local meetings; sheltered housing for elderly in rural areas; look at design of houses – four houses in one single unit
- Village halls fund; village handyman scheme (care and repair scheme); new builds should not be done on the cheap; quality facilities will last; make smaller rural schools – community centres
- Improve toilets; better marketing – 'selling ourselves'; encourage B&B start-ups; better rural web awareness; no parking meters at country parks
- Apprenticeship schemes – help with red tape; health and safety; training outreach programmes in rural areas

- Centres for addressing rurally isolated – use schools
- Car-sharing; dual carriageway to Aberdeen
- Health services delivered locally, e.g. in community centres; money invested in local doctors' surgeries; personal approach
- Lobby to retain facilities; publicise what post offices can offer
- Improve existing recycling facilities – often full
- Halls subsidies; support to build skills for running groups; sharing knowledge (website)
- Remove unworkable restrictions – use common sense approach
- Support, especially in first year, e.g. hands on business planning; removing red tape