

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

**TUESDAY, 7 DECEMBER 2010 AT 2.00 PM
COMMITTEE ROOM 4, WOODHILL HOUSE**

Present

Shona Anderson	Visit Scotland
Jamie Bell	Scottish Enterprise
Caroline Clark	NHS
Reid Hutchison	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Economic Development
Jennifer Kinnaird	Scottish Government Rural Payments Inspection Directorate
James Knowles	LAG Chairman
Bob Leonard	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Learning & Development
John Lewis	Aberdeenshire Rural Partnership Federation
Alexander Macleod	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Planning
Paul Timms	Scottish Natural Heritage
Matt Young	Forestry Commission Scotland
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Businesses

Officers in Attendance

Vicky Thomson	Aberdeenshire Council
Anne MacLennan	Aberdeenshire Council

Apologies

Moira Gordon	SWRI
Gordon Henderson	Aberdeenshire Council - Finance
Keith Newton	Aberdeenshire Council - Community Planning
Lorna Paterson	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Scott Petrie	Scottish Rural Property and Business Association
Maureen Stephen	Aberdeenshire Councils for Voluntary Services

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

James Knowles welcomed Shona Anderson, Visit Scotland and Jamie Bell, Scottish Enterprise to the meeting and introductions were made round the table. Apologies were noted as above.

Gordon Henderson is leaving his post as Assistant Accountant with Aberdeenshire Council at the end of December. LAG valued his contribution to LEADER and a card will be sent to thank him for his support.

2. MINUTE OF LAST MEETING

2.1 The draft LAG Broadband minute of 19 October 2010 and the draft PAC minute of 23 November 2010 were approved and will be uploaded on the LEADER website.

3. COMMUNICATION

- 3.1 Following a meeting of the Management Team of Stakeholders for the Enchanted Castle event, it was decided, after careful deliberation, to cancel the event due to the adverse weather conditions.

A strategic meeting will be held in January 2011 to discuss re-scheduling the event. Some project expenditure will have been committed.

- 3.2 Letter received from Ewen Cameron, SNH, offering £10,000 partner contribution to LAG admin expenses for the 2010/11 financial year. LAG is delighted to accept this offer, welcoming the ongoing support through SNH.
- 3.3 Communication from Angela Wiseman, Rural Communities Empowerment Team confirming that the flexible grant rate of up to 90% is to be maintained until the end of the Programme.

4. CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

- 4.1 Aberdeenshire LEADER has gone through a strenuous internal audit by Aberdeenshire Council. Various issues have been highlighted in the audit report and implementation dates have been set for correcting these issues.
- 4.2 The Internal Audit report recommended the LAG should be made aware of risks in delegating too much to the Chair, specifically in relation to approving amendments to projects that had been approved by the LAG. Chair advised LAG that all project amendments approved to date related to items such as re-profiled match funding, extension for completion dates or virement from one budget head to another. Chair confirmed that on no occasion had the level of grant awarded been increased, but that project amendments were a necessary element of ongoing project management. LAG discussed this and as previously agreed, LAG agreed that approval of project amendments should continue to be delegated to the Chair. All future project amendments will be reported to LAG on a regular basis.
- 4.3 Following audit and Scottish Government guidance, scores for each project will from now be recorded in each project file which will demonstrate the transparency of the decision making process. A score sheet detailing project recommendations per LAG members, which was trialled at the LAG Broadband meeting held 19 October, will now be implemented. A show of hands will be noted following each project discussion.
- 4.4 The next meeting of the LEADER Strategic Board will be held in February 2011.
- 4.5 With regard to the 90% grant rate, there may be situations in the current economic climate where the LAG may have to consider awarding grant in excess of 50%. Some projects have still to finalise their funding profile and a higher rate may be considered appropriate in some cases.

Education, Learning and Leisure Capital Grant which LEADER has matched

for community halls, is facing pressure due to Council funding cuts. However, projects could still benefit from E,L &L Funding if there could be a degree of flexibility from LEADER.

If Aberdeenshire LAGs Rural Broadband Challenge Fund bid is unsuccessful, it will be possible for applicants to come back to LEADER through the normal application process as previously endorsed by the LAG in the Minute of 19/10/10. These specific projects may be considered at a higher grant rate.

There will be pressure on the budget next year and it was agreed that LEADER will be flexible where possible but each project will be looked at on a case by case basis.

5. LEADER CO-ORDINATOR UPDATE

5.1 Financial Update

Round 10 financial summary sheets were circulated. The average intervention rate on eligible costs is currently 31% across Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme, demonstrating excellent leverage to date.

5.2 Project Update

Application from Cornhill Hall was withheld as 90% LEADER grant requested. Applicants will re-visit match funding and may re-submit next round.

5.3 Following audit recommendation that LAG be informed about all project amendments, a table detailing amendments approved to date was circulated. LAG happy to continue with the present arrangement of delegating responsibility to LAG Chair and LEADER Co-ordinator for the approval of project amendments as per approved LAG Terms of Reference as detailed below:

Delegated Authority

Authority is delegated to the LAG Chair and LEADER Co-ordinator in respect of amendments to approved applications, provided the amount of the original award is not exceeded. The following is a non-exhaustive list of example situations where this authority might be exercised:

- Where, during the course of an approved project, expenditure exceeds or is less than the indicative budget set, permission to switch budget between one category of expenditure and another (without affecting the overall approved project expenditure), referred to as virement, may be approved by the LAG Chair.
- Where a project requires an extension to the finish date the LAG Chair may approve a change to that date.
- Where alternative, but sufficient, match funding is proposed, relative to the original application, the LAG Chair may approve the necessary changes.
- Project Amendments approved by the Chairperson will be reported to the LAG.

5.4 Scottish Government Claims

Eight claims have now been submitted to Scottish Government with total drawdown of £988,394.

A total of 156 project claims have been processed to date, totalling £995,443. The next batch of claims processed will bring the total grant payments disbursed to over £1m.

5.5 **LEADER Audits, Monitoring and Reporting**

Awaiting feedback from the Scottish Government SLA Monitoring Visit in September.

A rigorous Aberdeenshire Council Audit was carried out in September/October. The Annual Confirmation Certificate was submitted to Scottish Government within the deadline.

Scottish Government RCET Audit visit in October included a site visit to Maud Village Trust. RCET very impressed with overall achievements of Maud Village Trust.

Mid-Term Evaluation on 12 November 2010 was carried out by John Grieve, Rural Development Company, who interviewed LEADER Co-ordinator, LAG Chairman, LAG representatives and four project managers.

Scottish Government, RPID Finance, has issued a forecasting spreadsheet to capture projected spend. This is in addition to the monthly reporting on actual commitment and spend.

Two project files, Scottish Sculpture Workshop and Turriff Haughs, are to be sent to Audit Scotland for inspection.

5.6 **Rural Broadband Challenge Fund**

RBCF Bid was submitted to Scottish Government on 29 October. The panel has met to discuss applications but no decision as yet.

5.7 **LEADER Events**

Anne attended a LEADER training event on State Aids and Financial Forecasting on 26 November.

The LEADER Co-ordinator's meeting scheduled for Friday, 3 December was cancelled due to adverse weather conditions.

5.8 **LEADER Promotion**

LEADER represented at the EU Co-operation Fair held in Edinburgh on 23-24 September.

Presentation at SAC Craibstone to group from Estonia on 21 October.

Presentation at Marr Area Forum at Lumsden on 10 November.

Project launch of Aberdeenshire Life Education Centre mobile classroom at Hill of Banchory Primary School on 11 November.

Turra Coo Sculpture unveiling ceremony at Turriff on 20 November.

5.9 **Staffing**

LEADER Project Officer post has been advertised on Aberdeenshire Council, LEADER and Rural Direct websites. A link will be circulated to LAG members to enable wider circulation of the vacancy. Closing date is 17 December.

Interviews scheduled for 14 January 2011.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (DOI)

DOI will be a permanent item on future Agendas.

Project 110 – DOI Paul Timms, SNH.

Project 116 – DOI Reid Hutchison, Bob Leonard and Ally Macleod, Aberdeenshire Council.

7. PROJECTS 110 to 118

7.1 110 – Strategic Mink Control in Northern Scotland

This joint project will fund Officers across the 5 LAG areas of Cairngorms, Highland, Moray, Tayside and Aberdeenshire to ensure that north mainland Scotland can be mink free through the implementation of a strategic programme of mink control. A network of informed volunteers will also be recruited.

Mink is an invasive, non-native species, creating an imbalance in the ecosystem and causing increasing problems for fishing, game and natural heritage industries. Mink are prolific breeders and numbers spread quickly across Scotland partly due to lax security on mink farms coupled with a number of deliberate releases by animal welfare groups.

The project is complementary to the Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Trust project which also received support from LEADER.

Rural Tayside LAG is the only other LEADER funding yet to be approved. Confirmation of SNH funding has now been received.

LAG considered the project to be important for the bio-diversity and economy of the area. It was felt that, although total eradication of the species will be very difficult, smaller numbers of mink would be more easily controlled.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £63,029 APPROVED.

7.2 112 – Revitalisation of Millbank Hall (Phase 1)

Millbank Hall is located between Sauchen and Tillyfourie. The project is to carry out restoration works make the Hall more accessible and user friendly for the expanding community. Proposed works include improved access, improved energy efficiency and internal refurbishment.

The Community Association has worked hard in fundraising over the years and is committing £20,000 towards the project. Planning Gain and Area Top-Up are also now confirmed.

Unfortunately, the application for Awards for All was unsuccessful. In order to make up the shortfall, the group will re-adjust their application to Education. Learning & Leisure Capital Grant.

The Hall is key to the local community and it is hoped that improvements will lead to increased use and enhanced sustainability.

It was noted that there is also a Community Centre in the area.

LAG considered the expanding community will mean increased demand for community facilities and approved the application on the basis that the two facilities work for mutual benefit.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £35,149 APPROVED.

7.3 **113 – Inverbervie Community Caravan Park Improvements**

The community group has taken over the running of the Inverbervie Caravan Park from Aberdeenshire Council and the project is to improve facilities through the construction of a new shower and toilet block, laundry and office.

The project funding profile has improved since the PAC meeting on 23 November and although the outcome of Planning Gain and Area Top Up is still unconfirmed, the project scored highly under the Kincardine & Mearns Priority Regeneration Scheme. The applicant group is in discussion with local Council for Voluntary Service representatives to identify other funding streams towards the project.

Support for Aberdeenshire Business low interest loan of £10k and grant of £5k towards solar panels may be available.

A concern was expressed that the applicant's contribution towards the project might reduce their own resources. However, it was considered that improved facilities will allow the group to review charges and increase visitor numbers at the caravan park.

LAG welcomed the fact that increased turnover and profit generated from improvements made will be re-invested in the caravan site and approved the project subject to a letter of comfort being provided regarding the Aberdeenshire Council lease being of sufficient time to satisfy LEADER.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £83,195 APPROVED SUBJECT TO LEASE AGREEMENT.

7.4 **114 – Turriff Motorfest 2011**

The proposal is to organise a one-day Motorfest event in Turriff which will offer a range of displays of vintage and modern vehicles as well as focusing on community road safety with demonstrations of driving skills. A series of local workshops focusing on road safety for young people will be held prior to the event.

PAC considered the target numbers to be a little ambitious, but the wide support for the project will ensure community involvement in bringing this new and innovative event forward.

LAG raised the question of follow-up to the event. There will be a post event

analysis and there are proposals to undertake follow-up sessions to ensure that concerns about the number of accidents in the Turriff area continue to be addressed.

Information requested by the PAC regarding confirmation of involvement with Fire, Police and Community Safety units was provided by the applicant.

LAG considered the proposals to be worthwhile and hoped that the event could be rolled out to other areas. It was recommended that Aberdeenshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership is included in the project steering group.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £16,232 APPROVED.

7.5 **115 – Monymusk Village Hall Development**

The applicant has employed a staged approach and already received LEADER funding to carry out a feasibility study to identify necessary improvements to Monymusk Hall.

A detailed specification was identified by W Lippe Architects and the community was consulted to prioritise the list of suggested improvements. LAG considered this approach to be well planned and well thought out.

Information requested by the PAC regarding the £3,000 energy grant was provided by the applicant. £2,500 has been awarded towards insulation and energy conservation work in accordance with the independent energy audit undertaken. However, this grant must be spent by 31 March 2011 and as the group will not incur spend until summer 2011, the grant offer will be turned down and re-applied for in 2011.

The group's own contribution of £45,000 from local fundraising has been partly made up of profit generated from an annual week long thrift shop which was held in the Hall. Following on from these events, a successful weekly thrift and coffee shop is run in the local post office which is raising funds for the project.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £97,511 APPROVED.

7.6 **116 – A Mearns Heritage: 1980-2013 (Forest View Centre)**

A project officer will be employed over 2 years to engage adults with learning disabilities in a series of initiatives to increase skills development and confidence building. This will include working with schools, libraries, businesses and linking with other communities, and will result in a series of events such as a fee'in market, car boot sales and fashion shows.

The project will be based within the primary school complex at Fettercairn.

PAC sought further clarification on whether the disadvantaged people will be involved with research and although this project is not a replica of the Father of the Bard project, it will adopt a similar approach to set research targets which the people with disabilities are tasked to achieve with the support of the Project Officer. The applicant forwarded a copy of an action plan which details what is happening and at what time.

Stage 1 Heritage Lottery application has been approved and stage 2 has now been submitted.

LAG supportive of project.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £20,961 APPROVED.

7.7 117 – STBF Bothy & Shore Street Development Feasibility Study

A proposal for a feasibility study to be carried out to determine the potential for future projects to consolidate and expand the activities of the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival was approved by PAC at their meeting on 23 November 2011.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £5,000 APPROVED BY PAC.

7.8 118 – Gartly School Wildlife Garden

A project to create a wildlife garden for the benefit of pupils attending Gartly primary and the wider community was approved by PAC at their meeting on 23 November 2011.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £4,500 APPROVED BY PAC.

8. AOCB

Andy Willox emphasised the importance of broadband accessibility to rural business across Aberdeenshire. Without reasonable broadband access, rural businesses are disadvantaged.

Ally Macleod confirmed that a new Community Councillor will shortly take up a seat on the Community Planning Board. Once appointed, the new member will be invited to represent Community Councils on the LAG.

Aberdeenshire Youth Council are also applying to be represented on the Community Planning Board. New representative will also be invited to be part of the LAG.

9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

PAC meeting – Tuesday, 1 March 2011, Conference Room D, Woodhill House, 10.00 am.

LAG meeting – Tuesday, 15 March 2011, Committee Room 3, Woodhill House, 10.00 am.