

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

**MONDAY, 14 MARCH 2011 AT 10.00 AM  
COMMITTEE ROOM 4, WOODHILL HOUSE**

**Present**

Belinda Miller	LAG Chairperson
Shona Anderson	Visit Scotland
Jamie Bell	Scottish Enterprise
Moira Beverley	Aberdeenshire Council - Finance
Moira Gordon	SWRI
Bob Leonard	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Learning & Development
Alexander Macleod	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Planning
Scott Petrie	Scottish Rural Property and Business Association
Ruth Sim	Aberdeenshire Community Councils
Paul Timms	Scottish Natural Heritage
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Businesses

**Officers in Attendance**

Vicky Thomson	Aberdeenshire Council
Jamie Wilkinson	Aberdeenshire Council
Anne MacLennan	Aberdeenshire Council

**Apologies**

Caroline Clark	NHS
Reid Hutchison	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Economic Development
Jennifer Kinnaird	Scottish Government Rural Payments Inspection Directorate
John Lewis	Aberdeenshire Rural Partnership Federation
Keith Newton	Aberdeenshire Council - Community Planning
Lorna Paterson	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Maureen Stephen	Aberdeenshire Councils for Voluntary Services
Matt Young	Forestry Commission Scotland

**1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES**

Belinda Miller, LAG Chairperson, Jamie Wilkinson, LEADER Project Officer and Ruth Sim, Aberdeenshire Community Councils Representative, were welcomed to the LAG meeting and introductions were made round the table. Apologies were noted as above.

**2. MINUTE OF LAST MEETING**

- 2.1 LAG Broadband Minute of 20 January 2011 and PAC Minute of 1 March 2011 were approved and will be uploaded on the LEADER Website.
- 2.2 Aberdeenshire LAG was first to support the re-submitted broadband applications which were originally unsuccessful in the Scottish Government's Rural Broadband Challenge Fund.

Andy Willox reported that the Federation of Small Businesses is heavily involved nationally with the issue of broadband. Andy will update the LAG on progress.

### **3. COMMUNICATION**

- 3.1 Advance notice of SNH contribution towards LAG admin costs for this financial year has been received. The ongoing support from SNH towards LAG administration was gratefully acknowledged.
- 3.2 The most recent LEADER Strategic Board (LSB) Minute has been issued by Scottish Government. A copy will be e-mailed to the LAG.

### **4. CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE**

- 4.1 Belinda expressed thanks to James Knowles, retiring Chairman.
- 4.2 Vicky and Belinda attended LSB meeting via video conferencing.
- LAGs highlighted the increased level of reporting required in comparison with previous LEADER programmes.
  - SG is closely monitoring commitment and spend across the programme. Spend is still slow and behind SG targets. The possibility of mentoring those LAG's with low level of spend was suggested.
  - The report following the mid-term evaluation of Scotland Rural Development Programme which was carried out by John Grieve was generally positive. John was impressed by the enthusiasm of Aberdeenshire LEADER Project Managers. The level of project monitoring and evaluation to date has been low. Up to now, staff time has been the main issue for Aberdeenshire. Jamie Wilkinson will begin project monitoring shortly.
  - The new LSB Chairman will be David Thomson who will take over from Bruce Beveridge.
  - The venue and date for the LEADER Annual Conference are still to be confirmed. The event may be hosted by Highland LAG.

### **5. LEADER CO-ORDINATOR UPDATE**

#### **5.1 Financial Update**

Round 11 financial summary sheets were circulated. The average intervention rate on eligible costs is currently 30% across Aberdeenshire LEADER programme. This demonstrates excellent leverage which is one of the key benefits of the programme.

SG is encouraging full commitment by the end of 2012. The programme will become increasingly competitive.

There is general unease about the possibility of viring of funds between LAGs, as had been discussed at the LSB meeting.

#### **5.2 Project Update**

Aberdeenshire LEADER currently has 102 active projects. Six projects have been de-committed post approval.

Seven applications were received for Round 11. One project, St Fergus Playpark, was withdrawn due to a requirement for expenditure to be incurred by the end of this financial year, and therefore unable to meet LEADER criteria.

### 5.3 **Scottish Government Claim**

The next Claim to Scottish Government covers the period to 31 March 2011.

A total of 37% of grant committed to date has been paid out to projects.

### 5.4 **LEADER Audits, Monitoring and Reporting**

A clean bill of health has been received from Audit Scotland following the inspection of two project files, Scottish Sculpture Workshop and Turriff Haughs.

Monthly reporting to SG continues, as does forecasting on projected commitment and spend.

### 5.5 **Rural Aberdeenshire Broadband Initiative**

A meeting was held between the Broadband Enabling Technology (BET) applicants and Scotnet, the service provider. Projects using the BET system are now underway (Ballogie, Boyndie and Arubthnott). A minimum of 15 subscribers is required before BT Openreach will activate the system.

The Kinmuck wireless solution is being trialled and the applicant is working towards roll out.

### 5.6 **European LEADER Association for Rural Development (ELARD)**

Registration to ELARD is complete. Vicky will forward copies of papers to those LAG members who express an interest.

### 5.7 **LEADER Promotion**

08/03/11: Jamie attended the Udney Community Wind Turbine Group PR Launch at the site of the wind turbine.

09/03/11: Jamie attended the Launch of the Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Trust's Fish Festival.

### 5.8 **LAG Administration Team**

The LEADER Team has relocated to a larger office in Gordon House.

### 5.9 **LEADER Project Interim Reports from Portsoy Salmon Bothy and The Town is the Venue**

The above two projects which run over a 3 year period, have submitted interim project reports detailing activities in years 1 and 2 in order to receive formal acknowledgement that the LAG is happy for year 3 of the projects to continue.

A formal letter will be issued to both projects indicating that the LAG approves year 3.

### 5.10 **LSB Financial Table**

A table detailing commitment and spend for the 20 LAGs was circulated. Rural Aberdeenshire is in the top quartile for percentage of LEADER grant committed to

date and amount of LEADER grant paid out to date.

#### 5.11 **European Fisheries Fund (EFF) Axis 4**

EFF Axis 4 aims to promote sustainable development of fisheries areas by providing funding to projects in disadvantaged fishing communities. With its long coastline from St Cyrus to Portsoy, Aberdeenshire will bid for a significant proportion of the budget for non-convergence areas.

No definitive paperwork has been received as yet. There are outstanding queries regarding the level of intervention and the level of match funding required.

Scottish Government proposes that the LAG stakeholders be involved along with fishing representation. The group will be known as a Fishing Local Action Group (FLAG). The FLAG will hold a separate budget with its own set of minutes, reporting and accounting systems. It is proposed that meetings take the form of the LAG element followed by a short break then the FLAG with fishing reps in attendance.

An expression of interest will be submitted followed by a strategy document to bid for funding.

LAG was delighted to hear of this exciting prospect for coastal communities in Aberdeenshire. Discussion took place and the following points were noted:

- The money cannot be used for fishing purposes, it is for fishing diversification, or adding value to fish products.
- Businesses can apply for funding.
- Colleges providing training in marine technology may have ideas.
- Other European Funding cannot be used.
- May include transnational projects.
- Harbour upgrades may be valid, depending on the end use of the proposal.
- Promotional conference/workshops will be required.
- Indicative match funding must be demonstrated in the Strategy document.
- In-kind can be included.
- As yet, timescales are still unconfirmed.

#### 5.12 **Project Amendments**

An updated list of project amendments was circulated.

The majority of amendments relate to extension of completion date, virement of funds between budget headings and advance grant payments.

### 6. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (DOI)**

Project 124 – DOI Paul Timms, SNH. SNH is co-funder of this project.

### 7. **PROJECTS 119 to 125**

#### 7.1 **119 – Newmachar Community Centre Project**

This is a large capital project to build a new multi-purpose Community Hall in the rapidly expanding community of Newmachar.

PAC requested further information on environmental aspects of the project and the following information was provided:

- Estimate building will be 80% more energy efficient
- Proposals will meet and exceed building regulations
- Local sourcing of timber and masonry
- Low energy lighting
- Rainwater harvesting
- Architect working with environmental consultant
- Potential for Department of Energy Renewable Heat Incentive

LAG considered the project to fit under Measure 321, Community Facilities. Newmachar is a growing community and there is an urgent need for facilities offering distinct wider community benefit. In terms of net beneficiaries, the project demonstrates value for money.

There is clear community support for the project and the applicant group has raised £87,000 from within the community. Planning Gain funding is also confirmed. As the funding profile is largely unconfirmed, LAG felt that LEADER commitment would encourage other funders to commit to the project.

Local needs assessment has been carried out through community consultation. There is evidence of support from potential user groups. LAG would welcome assurance that the group is working in partnership with the school and whether the school will be able to make additional use of the facility.

The group is working on developing their Business Plan. A forward cash flow has been prepared showing expected use and how the facility can be run at an operating margin to enable ongoing maintenance and repairs. Staff costs have also been budgeted for.

LAG discussed disability access. LAG recommended the group consult with their local Disability Access Panel as a specific condition of the grant offer.

**PROJECT FUNDING OF £200,000 APPROVED.**

## **7.2 120 – Skill Force Scotland**

The project is to create posts for instructors to work with three Aberdeenshire secondary schools to provide support for pupils who are identified as underachieving. Courses offered are mainly vocational to help participants gain lifeskills and build confidence.

The three secondary schools in Banff, Turriff and Huntly have confirmed funding for year 1 of the programme. Commitment for year 2 will be confirmed once year 1 is implemented.

The group is already working with secondary schools in Moray and feedback on the work undertaken is very positive.

PAC requested assurance from the applicant that the work proposed is not considered to be statutory provision. Letters were received from Heads of Service, Heather Hamilton and Wilf Weir confirming that the work of Skill Force is

complimentary to statutory provision within schools.

PAC also requested confirmation of qualifications of the instructors and whether project participants will achieve a recognised qualification on successful completion of the programme. It was confirmed that the instructors are mainly ex-service personnel and the team instructor job description has been provided. Courses offered are part of the Awards Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). Additional skills achieved will enable participants to progress to secure employment or, in some instances, go on to further education.

Bob Leonard suggested that the group consider working with Community Learning Development staff.

LAG was supportive of the proposal and would like to see other Aberdeenshire areas benefitting from this innovative pilot. LAG would like to know if Skill Force plan to roll out the programme to other secondary schools.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £69,900 APPROVED.

### 7.3 **121 – Stirling Hill Access Network**

The project is to create, restore and upgrade a network of paths at Stirling Hill in Boddam.

The Community Association has worked closely with Aberdeenshire Council Access Officers and is now working with a consultant to work up tenders.

PAC requested further information on maintenance and repair costs, how inappropriate use of the paths will be dealt with and how they anticipate attracting tourism to the area. The following information was provided by the applicant:

- Capital repairs are not anticipated over the next 10 years.
- Aberdeen Air Cadets have volunteered for minor upkeep.
- Path is adjacent to a quarry therefore materials will be easily accessed if required.
- There will be strategically placed boulders along the path to discourage 4x4 drivers.
- Any reports of misuse will be reported to the police.
- Promotional materials will be distributed to local hotels, businesses and tourist offices. Paths will also be promoted on the website.

Paths have to be accessible to all user groups and LAG suggested that it be a specific condition of grant offer that the applicant contact the North Access Panel regarding access legislation. Being located on a hill, terrain is the limiting factor but paths will be suitable for walkers, cyclists and horses.

Proposals align closely with LEADER and LAG considered the project to be complimentary to other initiatives which will help increase tourism numbers in the area.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £10,202 APPROVED.

7.4 **122 – Royal Northern Countryside Live**

The project is to deliver a two day event at Dunecht Estates in June 2011 to promote rural activities including land management, forestry, food production and conservation. Local Farmers Market stalls will be in attendance.

Footfall of 4,000 is expected over the two days, reflecting other public events held at Craibstone Estate which were very popular.

PAC requested further information on administration and advertising costs and the following information was provided by the applicant:

- Royal Northern Agricultural Society (RNAS) has agreed to cover admin costs for the event. These costs are now classed as ineligible along with stewarding in-kind costs.
- Amount of LEADER grant requested is therefore reduced to £18,042.
- There will be an entry fee for adults but children are free of charge. Costs are based on similar events held previously.
- Applicant is investigating the cost of cancellation insurance.

RNAS is working with FE Colleges, FCS and possibly SNH. Royal Northern Countryside Initiative (RNCI) is involved to encourage schools to attend day two of the event. LAG considered the proposals to have potential to attract large numbers of young people. Confirmation sought that primary age pupils will be attending.

LAG requested that RNAS ensures Grampian Food Forum is made aware of the event.

LAG supportive of the project which will showcase rural industries.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £18,042 APPROVED.

7.5 **124 – Cairngorms and Mid-Deeside Communities Access Network Project 2100-13**

This is an Action 2 joint project with Cairngorms LEADER which relates to path creation/upgrade and the expansion of the popular Health Walks in both LAG areas. This application is similar to an earlier application submitted by Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust.

LAG felt the information provided in the application was insufficient for LEADER requirements. Some associated fees will be eligible but LAG considered it inappropriate for LEADER to fund ongoing core costs and office costs.

Cairngorms LAG may not wish to support this application in its entirety, preferring to focus on specific elements.

LAG is keen to consider health walks and path work and supports the concept of the application but would like to invite the applicant to come back at the next funding round with an application specific to Aberdeenshire and with core costs removed. The LAG would also like to see the proposed area defined on a map.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £56,000 DEFERRED.

7.6 **125 – Duff House Vinery Project**

The small project application for the development phase of a three phase project to restore the category B-listed Duff House Vinery in Banff was approved by the PAC at their meeting on 1 March 2011.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £2,342 APPROVED BY PAC.

**8. AOCB**

8.1 This is the last LAG meeting for Paul Timms, who will be retiring from SNH. Paul was thanked for his valuable contribution to LEADER and the LAG expressed their best wishes for future ventures.

**9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

9.1 PAC meeting – Tuesday, 24 May 2011, Conference Room D, Woodhill House, 10.00 am.

9.2 LAG meeting – Tuesday, 7 June 2011, Committee Room 1, Woodhill House, 10.00 am.