

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

**TUESDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2012 AT 10.00 AM
COMMITTEE ROOM 4, WOODHILL HOUSE**

Present

Belinda Miller	LAG Chairperson
Charlie Adam	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Shona Anderson	Visit Scotland
Jamie Bell	Scottish Enterprise
Moira Beverley	Aberdeenshire Council – Finance
Reid Hutchison	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Economic Development
Bob Leonard	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Learning & Development
Brian Martin	Aberdeenshire Rural Partnership Federation
Keith Newton	Aberdeenshire Council - Community Planning
Ruth Sim	Aberdeenshire Community Councils
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Businesses

Officers in Attendance

Vicky Thomson	Aberdeenshire Council
Alasdair Cunningham	Aberdeenshire Council
Anne MacLennan	Aberdeenshire Council

Apologies

Gavin Clark	Scottish Natural Heritage
Ian Cowe	Forestry Commission Scotland
Moira Gordon	SWRI
Jennifer Kinnaird	Scottish Government Rural Payments Inspection Division
Alexander Macleod	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Planning
Lorna Paterson	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Scott Petrie	Scottish Land & Estates
Maureen Stephen	Aberdeenshire Councils for Voluntary Services
Dawn Tuckwood	NHS Grampian

1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES

- 1.1 Belinda welcomed those present and apologies were noted as above.

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETINGS

- 2.1 The draft minute of the LAG meeting on 18 September 2012 approved and will be uploaded on the LEADER website.

- 2.2 The draft minute of the PAC meeting on 20 November 2012 was approved.

3. COMMUNICATION

- 3.1 A side letter was received from Alistair Prior, Rural Communities Team,

regarding proposed amendments to the Service Level Agreement (SLA). The changes relate to ensuring that a competent individual within the Lead Partner Organisation carries out a skilled financial assessment of capital projects ensuring a reasonableness of cost/value for money appraisal.

LAG was concerned about cost and workload implications involved in setting up procedures. It has been confirmed by Scottish Government that this new procedure will come into effect for future projects only. LAG also questioned whether the Council's building department would have capacity to carry out the assessment within the timescale. If not, then the process may have to go out to an external consultant. It was agreed that this additional cost will have to be taken into consideration when forecasting administration spend for the next programme.

All new applicants are being asked to ensure they provide additional detail on value for money and reasonableness of cost when making application. LAG expressed concerns that this will make the application process even more cumbersome for applicants.

- 3.2 Vicky received an invitation to attend an event on 7 December to hear about the completion of the Moray Firth Gansey project which was a joint project with Moray, Highland and Aberdeenshire LAGs. Unfortunately, Vicky will be unable to attend the event. However, a roving project exhibition will be due to visit Aberdeenshire sometime in the future.

4. CHAIRPERSON'S UPDATE

- 4.1 Belinda thanked Vicky and Anne for all their hard work during the very busy period leading up to Alasdair starting in post.
- 4.2 Two communities were put forward by Aberdeenshire Council for the Scottish Government Rural Broadband pilot scheme. These were Birse & Ballogie and Corgarff & Glenbuchat. The Corgarff & Glenbuchat communities were also nominated by Cairngorms LAG and had been selected to take part in the pilot.
- 4.3 Belinda attended the latest LEADER Monitoring & Evaluation Group meeting by video conference on Tuesday, 27 November.
- 4.4 The mid-term review of the current Aberdeenshire LEADER programme is still to be undertaken.

5. EU RURAL & FISHERIES TEAM LEADER UPDATE

- 5.1 The Team Leader's update is summarised below:
- If all Round 16 projects were considered for approval there would be a slight budget shortfall which could be funded by ongoing savings on current projects. However to provide reassurance for the LAG discussion would be held with SG to ensure any shortfall in funding would be covered.
 - Aberdeenshire LEADER has undergone rigorous audits in the last 6 months. The annual confirmation certificate was prepared and

- signed off by the deadline of 31 October. The executive summary from the internal audit report was circulated for information.
- Audit Scotland requested two further project files for inspection, Sustaining Huntly and Strategic Mink Control. No feedback as yet.
 - Alasdair Cunningham, Project Officer, joined the team on 19 November 2012.
 - The second Future Funds meeting was held at the MacRobert Hall in Tarland on 12 October 2012. Members from Cairngorms, Moray and Tayside LAGs attended the meeting along with Alistair Prior and Lorna Gregson-MacLeod from Scottish Government. Mike Powell, Tarland Welfare Trust and Donald Boyd, Huntly Development Trust gave interesting project presentations. Meeting note to follow for both future funds meetings.
 - Vicky attended the SRUC Conference in Edinburgh on 1 November. George Lyon MEP gave a presentation on CAP negotiation. Bryan McGrath presented thoughts on the LEADER working group report.

5.2 Capital Projects Update

Daviot Hall:

- Successful in receiving funding from the Aberdeenshire Council Priority Fund.
- Wind turbine outcome should be known on 11 December 2012.
- Project manager to make a presentation at the January Formartine Area Planning Committee.
- Invitation to tender issued to 6 companies.
- Once definitive costs are finalised, the applicant will know what the funding shortfall is.
- Funding profile is still exceedingly strong.

Newmachar Hall:

- Successful in receiving funding from the Aberdeenshire Council Priority Fund.
- Applicant in discussion with Area Manager and other services within Aberdeenshire Council regarding current budget shortfall.
- Applicant in discussion with benefactor regarding the wind turbine application.
- Work will go out to tender soon.

Kintore Bothie:

- Project has suffered a series of delays and setbacks.
- Quotes slow to come in.
- LEADER meeting arranged next week with the new project team.
- Still a small funding gap but degree of confidence from the Garioch Area Manager regarding bridging the gap.
- New Directors will bring their expertise to take the project forward.
- Project will require a project amendment to allow an extension for completion.

The above projects will continue to be monitored. It was agreed that a final

decision on the projects' progress will have to be made in early 2103.

6. REPORT FROM NATIONAL LEADER CONFERENCE, GLASGOW

The Scottish LEADER Conference was held in Glasgow on 22 November. Five representatives, Vicky Thomson, Alasdair Cunningham, Anne MacLennan, Alexander McLeod and Stuart Bews, attended on behalf of Aberdeenshire LAG.

The format for the day was:

- Update on the future of LEADER
- Video message from Petri Rinne, European LEADER Association for Rural Development
- Workshop Sessions which included:
 - Models of Delivery
 - Engaging with Communities
 - Integrating LEADER and Local Development Strategies
 - LEADER fit with Community Planning Partnerships & Single Outcome Agreements

The main focus of the event was the working group sessions.

Awareness is being raised about a move toward Community Led Local Development Strategies (CLLD).

The Local Development Strategy will have to show links to the Common Strategic Framework.

Need to establish key priorities. The next programme will have more of an economic focus. Scottish Government will find LAG mid-term evaluations useful with regard to planning the next strategy.

LEADER must retain the 'bottom up' approach.

LAG support has been strong in Aberdeenshire but other areas have been heavily weighted to the public sector. Current programme has worked well in Aberdeenshire and the LAG wants to strengthen and build in the new programme in order to be truly led by the community. We must showcase what has been achieved in Aberdeenshire.

It was agreed that a specific LAG meeting be arranged for further detailed discussion.

Alasdair Cunningham's detailed note of the event was circulated for information and SRUC are also to prepare a report summarising the day.

7. PAC/LAG REPRESENTATION

- 7.1 In advance of the next programme, LAG needs to think seriously if the current representation is a good working mix. LAG must consider if there is currently an organisation which is not being represented on the LAG.

Adoption of substitutes in relation to the PAC in particular was again discussed. It was acknowledged that members have exceedingly busy working schedules resulting in practical difficulties with representation at meetings.

This will be a key area of discussion when looking to the next programme and it will be important to allow the maximum amount of flexibility to enable substitutes to attend meetings.

8. 2013 TIMETABLE

- 8.1 Although LEADER funds are fully committed, it will be important for the LAG to continue with regular quarterly meetings. AEFF will be scheduled to meet four times in 2013 and it was agreed that LEADER meetings should be held on the same day to simplify arrangements for members sitting on both groups. The draft timetable will be circulated before the end of December.

9. PROJECT AMENDMENTS

- 9.1 There were no project amendments for consideration.

At this point, Bob Leonard left the meeting.

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Belinda Miller declared an interest in project 173, Aberdeenshire Whitespace Trial. An acting Chair will be appointed for the project discussion and Belinda will not be able to participate in the vote.

11. PROJECTS 165 to 173

11.1 165 – Baden Powell Centre New Build

The project is to construct a new multi-functional community hall adjacent to the Baden Powell building which is currently at capacity. The new facility will have a large hall, meeting rooms with internet access, kitchen, stores, toilets and showers. The large hall will be suitable for private hires and functions.

The applicants have thoroughly researched demand for a new facility. Community benefit is well demonstrated in the application. There are numerous letters of support on file.

Displacement is not an issue as there is an identified lack of community facilities in the area. This is also evidenced by the current long waiting list for youngsters to join the Guides and Scouts in the area.

HMRC have confirmed that the new build will be zero VAT rated. Match funding has been secured from Planning Gain and Aberdeenshire Towns & Villages Regeneration fund. There is a good skill set within the management team and a significant in-kind contribution will be provided in terms of labour and materials.

Projected cash flow shows the new facility to be economically viable with any net revenue being retained for on-going maintenance.

Building warrant and planning approval have been granted.

Applicants are confident they can complete within the timescale.

The design of the building will ensure that it is open to all abilities. A condition of grant will be that the new build must adhere strictly to disabled and health and safety regulations.

LAG considered there to be a distinct lack of similar facilities in the Turriff area. The new build represents good value for money and will be economically sustainable, providing long-term benefit to the community.

Summary of Responses	In favour	9
	Not in favour	0
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £160,000 APPROVED.

11.2 **166 – Balmedie Leisure Centre Café & Provision of New Entrance**

The project is to expand the Balmedie Leisure Centre by creating a new café and constructing a new entrance area, making the centre more welcoming and accessible. The café will be a social facility which will also open in the evenings as a youth café. The proposal for the creation of the café was a direct result of a community planning exercise.

The initial application included new sports equipment. However, with limited financial resources, the applicants were advised to apply to Sport Scotland specifically for the sports equipment element. The LEADER application was amended by the applicant and will focus on the café and new entrance only.

Wide community consultation has been carried out and there is considerable demand and support for creating a social focus. Facilities for young people in the area are exceedingly limited.

PAC had raised concerns regarding the figures presented for spend per visit being optimistic and the group were tasked to re-assess the operational capacity of the cafe. Following a survey of a range of low/medium/high end outlets, the forecast sheet was re-worked and now shows more realistic figures which still project the facility being economically viable.

Balmedie Beach is a popular visitor attraction and there are limited facilities for visitors to have a coffee/snack. It was agreed that there were no displacement issues.

PAC had raised questions with regard to the operation of the café. Applicant has confirmed that a pool of volunteers will assist centre staff to operate the facility. LAG would welcome assurance that volunteers will be properly trained and hold up-to-date hygiene/health & safety certification.

LAG was supportive of the proposals and welcomed the additional information provided by the applicant regarding projected operating costs. The café will be a valuable meeting venue to be used by locals and visitors alike.

Summary of Responses	In favour	9
	Not in favour	0
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £119,600 APPROVED.

11.3 167 – Phase 2 – Revival of Methlick Play Park

The project is to install new equipment at the play park in Methlick. This is phase 2 of a three phase capital works programme. Phase 1 related to the football pitch and plans for phase 3 include an all-weather pitch. The play park is designed to reflect the community with equipment taking the form of replica features relating to the village. The equipment will target young children but the inclusion of a seating area will make the park open to all.

Methlick is a rapidly expanding community and the applicant is looking to create an all-inclusive community facility for all ages and abilities.

The applicants are a young, vibrant group of individuals who want to make something positive happen for the community. Wide community consultation has been carried out and there has been a large amount of fundraising undertaken.

Match funding has been secured from Planning Gain and Aberdeenshire Towns & Villages Regeneration fund.

LAG welcomed the progressive, phased approach of the application and liked the innovative use of equipment which replicates key features in the village.

Summary of Responses	In favour	9
	Not in favour	0
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £22,200 APPROVED.

11.4 168 – Loons ‘n’ Quines Loos Project

The project is to remove the existing toilets in the Milne Hall and install new, more space efficient toilet facilities in the building in order to free up wasted space. The new toilet facilities will enable another meeting room of approximately 20m² to be available for community use.

The increased floor space will create a more usable space, thus making the busy facility more user friendly and cost effective.

The applicant group lease the hall from the Council and are in the process of formalising a 10 year lease. LAG questioned the possibility of

Community Asset Transfer but the applicant group do not want to take on that level of responsibility at this stage.

PAC questioned whether any Planning Gain funding would be applicable to this project. The applicant group has been in contact with the Planning Gain Officer and should funding be forthcoming, the LEADER award would be reduced pro-rata.

LAG questioned the innovation of proposals to install new toilets, but it was agreed that there will be increased demand for use of the Hall with the addition of the new meeting room. There is wide evidence of support for the project within the community.

Summary of Responses	In favour	8
	Not in favour	0
	Abstain	1
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £21,900 APPROVED.

11.5 169 – ISDS Scottish National Trials 2013

The Aberdeenshire branch of the International Sheepdog Society aims to deliver a three day national sheepdog trials event in August 2013 on farmland near Kintore.

The event, which will demonstrate rural skills, will be promoted to the wider general public.

There will be a maximum of 150 trailists plus judges who will stay in the area over 4 nights thus providing potential economic benefit for local accommodation providers.

It is anticipated that an average of 500 members of the general public will attend per day. Proposals include grandstand seating and running a shuttle bus service from Kingswells/Inverurie/Kintore. Local food and produce may be showcased and farmers market stallholders will be invited to attend.

LAG considered the event to be of great public interest and agreed that it will have the potential to stimulate economic impact through increased accommodation bookings in the area.

After considering the admission charge to be slightly high for this event, PAC suggested the applicant consider the possibility of a family ticket deal. The applicant group have been in discussion about this and are happy to offer a family rate.

Grant application of £3,000 was made to Aberdeenshire Council's SAB grant scheme. A sum of £1,500 was awarded however the ISDS parent body will underwrite the outstanding balance.

LAG considered the event to have the potential to attract a large number of

visitors to the area and agreed that publicity and marketing will be key to the success of the event. The applicant group is very open minded but don't want to be over ambitious. LAG welcomed Visit Scotland's offer of help to increase marketing for the event and Shona Anderson's contact details will be passed on to the applicant.

LAG also suggested the group talk Derek McDonald, Industry Support Executive, about the potential to make the event bigger in the future and to enlist the help of the Aberdeenshire Council Tourism Officer for further assistance with this year's event.

LAG agreed that the event has the potential for positive economic impact in the local area and, with the World Sheepdog Trials event being held in Tain in 2014, these sheepdog trials may help to attract the world event back to the Aberdeenshire area in the future.

LAG valued the opportunities such an event will offer to encourage urban youngsters to learn more about traditional rural skills.

Summary of Responses	In favour	9
	Not in favour	0
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £7,765 APPROVED.

11.6 173 – Aberdeenshire Whitespace Trial

As time had over-run, it agreed that project 173 be considered next.

As Belinda Miller declared an interest in this project, Jamie Bell took over to chair discussions.

At the request of the PAC, Roddy Matheson, project manager, was welcomed to the meeting to explain in more detail about the technology involved in this project.

It is vital for the whole of rural Scotland to be able to identify the best fit solution. Aberdeenshire Council's priority is to address the inferior broadband service in the North East and to reduce the digital divide.

Seventeen percent of homes in Aberdeenshire have no broadband service whatsoever. Residents with no broadband or less than 2mb per second must be the priority.

The Council did not have the knowledge in-house to undertake the necessary research in terms of infrastructure and services. Mott Macdonald was commissioned and recommendations included:

- Satellite as a possible solution for hard to reach rural areas – Aberdeenshire Council is currently working with the CNPA on a number of satellite trials for which no funding was required.
- Using existing copper wires – addresses must be connected to an

- exchange making this option expensive.
- Fibre optic cable – very expensive.
 - Microwave radio links – line of sight. The weakness here is purely the fact that the signal can't go round or through objects. The undulating terrain in Aberdeenshire would make line of sight expensive.
 - TV whitespace - using old analogue frequencies which were freed up by the move to digital to provide signal between the base station and subscribers within a 10k radius.

The application to LEADER will undertake a pilot study to upgrade broadband infrastructure using whitespace technology in the community of Kinmuck. Kinmuck has an existing high-speed wireless backhaul link to Aberdeen and consent has already been given for Aberdeenshire Council to use this link to evaluate the potential of TV whitespace technology.

LAG agreed that a whitespace technology pilot study would be the ideal project to prove or disprove the viability of this technology.

LAG considered the unique proposals to be innovative and transferrable and, if proven to be successful, will have the potential to be rolled out in other areas of Aberdeenshire and Scotland where broadband service is poor. Broadband is a necessity and the divide between households with good broadband speed and those with poor broadband speed requires to be reduced.

The earlier Kinmuck Brodband project funded by LEADER which has already transformed the lives of Kinmuck residents, was considered to be one of the LAGs most innovative projects.

LAG agreed that the amount of LEADER grant requested represents money well spent to find out if this whitespace technology will work.

Summary of Responses	In favour	7
	Not in favour	0
	Abstain	1
	DOI	1

PROJECT FUNDING OF £11,938 RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL.

At this point Keith Newton and Andy Willox left the meeting.

11.7 170 – Imbewu Scotland – Growing Natural Leaders Phase 1

The Wilderness Foundation, working in partnership with Scottish Land & Estates, will run a series of developmental training for young people across Scotland. This project, relating to activities in Aberdeenshire, will form part of the wider initiative.

Proposed activities will target young people from rural & urban backgrounds, encouraging them to connect with nature and develop an

interest in the countryside whilst being guided to consider the ecological heritage and be more caring about the rural community. Youngsters will gain work experience and will have the opportunity to make connections with employers and rural stakeholders, enabling employment opportunities.

The applicant provided further clarification which was requested by the PAC regarding the number of youngsters taking part and the length of placements offered. There will be twenty four Aberdeenshire youngsters involved in the project. The Aberdeenshire element is time limited and will be delivered in 2013. A total of forty eight youngsters will benefit over the life of the whole project. More accurate costs were also provided by the applicant.

It is hoped that pupils taking part will achieve the “John Muir” award.

Proposals are supported by SNH.

LAG considered the additionality of proposals and agreed that the nature of the training is specific to the land based sector covering environment, heritage and cultural aspects.

LAG agreed that proposals relate strongly to LEADER themes and priorities.

Summary of Responses	In favour	6
	Not in favour	1
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £27,995 APPROVED.

11.8 171 – YesCommAct – Team Huntly

Links were established with Finnish LAGs in the early stages of the LEADER programme and this transnational project has been in the planning stage for a considerable time. Proposals will involve a range of Huntly based organisations working with organisations in Finland and Italy on a series of initiatives and events.

Huntly Development Trust will co-ordinate the project on behalf of the Huntly Mental Health Group, the Nordic Ski Club, Huntly Youth Forum and Huntly Community Learning & Development.

PAC requested that the applicant provide a clearer summary of proposed events by matching the budget to particular activities.

A detailed breakdown of activities and costs was provided by the applicant, with clearer presentation of what the project aims to deliver.

The main transnational events of the project are:

1. Parkano Arts Festival
2. Nilsia Music and Dance Summer Camp
3. Huntly Music, Sticks and Stones 1

4. Huntly Sticks and Stones 2

The local initiatives in Huntly will be:

1. Drystane walling skills led by Huntly Mental Health Ltd
2. Shelter building skills development led by Huntly Nordic Ski Club
3. Music and media skills development led by Huntly Youth Forum
4. Placing the project in context led by Huntly Development Trust.

A transnational project was included in the original Business Plan for Aberdeenshire LEADER.

Finnish and Italian LAGs are already signed up to the partnership agreement.

LAG welcomed the definitive list of activities and the improved funding profile which includes in-kind contribution towards materials and labour. Transnational projects are eligible for funding of up to 70%. However, in this project, the intervention rate on Aberdeenshire area project costs of £69,700 is 53.2%.

Although this is a complex project, LAG welcomed the variety of elements included within the proposals.

Summary of Responses	In favour	7
	Not in favour	0
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £37,100 APPROVED.

11.9 172 – St Combs Hall “A New Start”

The project is to rebuild St Combs Hall which was destroyed by fire in 2009. The rebuild will include a function suite, community meeting rooms, office space, storage facilities, new kitchen and sports unit with shower facilities and changing rooms

There are numerous letters of support from potential user groups.

Invitation to tender was issued but only one estimate was returned. In the meantime the applicant has enlisted the help of a Quantity Surveyor to comment on indicative costs and secure additional quotes.

PAC requested clarification from the applicant about what the insurance money will replace and what the LEADER enhancement will include.

The new build will provide an increased storage area with access directly to the playing fields. A separate sports area with shower facilities will be created. The new building will also include renewable energy elements in the form of a ground source heat pump and solar panels. However, as these renewable energy elements will be registered for Feed in Tariff, this part of the project will be outwith the LEADER application.

The funding profile is strong and includes Aberdeenshire Council Towns & Villages Priority funding. The bequest to the project by a local resident from the proceeds of the sale of a house is currently being dealt with by solicitors. The applicant group has undertaken significant fundraising.

LAG agreed that the new shower area would help to increase sustainable tourism as the sports facility could be used by the increasing number of surfers visiting the area.

LAG considered the proposals to modernise the facility to be worthwhile for users in an area lacking in community facilities and agreed that the 18% intervention rate represents good value for money.

Summary of Responses	In favour	7
	Not in favour	0
	DOI	0

PROJECT FUNDING OF £124,500 APPROVED.

12. AOCB

There was no other business.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The 2013 timetable is still to be confirmed. This will be circulated to LAG members as soon as it is available.