

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

**MONDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 2011 AT 10.30 AM  
THE LODGE, STRICHEN COMMUNITY PARK**

**Present**

Belinda Miller	LAG Chairperson
Alistair Prior	Rural Communities & Rural Policy Team Leader
Moira Beverley	Aberdeenshire Council – Finance
Gavin Clark	Scottish Natural Heritage
Reid Hutchison	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Economic Development
Jennifer Kinnaird	Scottish Government Rural Payments Inspection Directorate
Bob Leonard	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Learning & Development
Alexander Macleod	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Planning Accompanied by Work Placement Student Claire Hall
Robert Phimister	Member of Scottish Youth Parliament
Keith Newton	Aberdeenshire Council - Community Planning
Ruth Sim	Aberdeenshire Community Councils
Matt Young	Forestry Commission Scotland

**Officers in Attendance**

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

**Apologies**

Charlie Adam	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Shona Anderson	Visit Scotland
Jamie Bell	Scottish Enterprise
Caroline Clark	NHS
Moira Gordon	SWRI
Lorna Paterson	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Scott Petrie	Scottish Land & Estates
Maureen Stephen	Aberdeenshire Councils for Voluntary Services
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Businesses

**1. WELCOME & APOLOGIES**

Belinda Miller welcomed Alistair Prior from Scottish Government and introductions were made round the table. Apologies were noted as above.

**2. DEVERON, BOGIE AND ISLA RIVERS TRUST PRESENTATION**

Belinda welcomed Alastair Fenn from Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Trust. Alastair gave an informative presentation on the work of the trust and the part he plays in his post as District Bio-Security and Fisheries Development Officer.

**3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETINGS**

3.1 Draft LAG minute of 7 June 2011 was approved. PAC minute of 30 August 2011

was approved with one amendment noted – LEADER funding recommended for approval figure should read £70,691 for project 133. Both minutes will be uploaded on the LEADER website.

#### **4. COMMUNICATION**

- 4.1 Vicky has nominated the Udney Wind Turbine group for the Scottish Power Best Green Community Awards. The group has been shortlisted and the ceremony will be held on 29 September 2011 at the Glasgow Science Centre. The LAG wished the group good luck for the awards ceremony.
- 4.2 Vicky provided an update on Newmacher Community Hall which secured £200k LEADER funding in Round 11. The applicants are continuing their phased, professional approach to raising the funds. Aberdeenshire Council Community Learning & Development supported the group with their bid for Lottery funding. The Sports Scotland application is still to be submitted. A condition of the award was that an update on the level of match funding secured by 31 March 2012 would be required.

#### **5. CHAIRPERSON'S UPDATE**

- 5.1 Aberdeenshire's bid for EFF Axis 4 funding was submitted to Marine Scotland. Outcome should be known by late Autumn.

Scottish Government has agreed that it will be possible to use the experience of the LEADER Co-ordinator provided that time spent on EFF is budgeted to EFF. A new post of Aberdeenshire European Fisheries Fund (AEFF) Co-ordinator will be created.

The FLAG will have the advantage of having the experience of some of the existing LAG members in the new partnership.

- 5.2 The next meeting of the LEADER Strategic Board is due to take place in November 2011.

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

##### **6.1 Financial Update**

Financial tables were discussed. These were updated from those circulated in advance of the meeting. Totals have been adjusted to take account of the two Udney Wind Turbine projects being de-committed.

##### **6.2 Project Update**

There are currently 111 active projects following the de-commitment of the two Udney Wind Turbine projects.

##### **6.3 Scottish Government Claims**

To date, £1.69 million has been drawn down from Scottish Government. This equates to 37% of the budget.

Total number of grant claims processed is 273 with a value of £1.72 million. This represents 44% of commitment to date.

It is anticipated that the next claim to Scottish Government in October will be in the region of £290-£300k.

#### 6.4 **Scottish Government Reports**

- A complicated back track exercise over the last 3 quarterly claims submitted to Scottish Government was carried out in order to show expenditure broken down by Measure Code.
- LEADER monitor visit by Rural Communities and Rural Policy Team took place on 20 July 2011. Project claims and administration costs were checked and 'green' status was awarded following inspection. Aberdeenshire is one of only two LAGs to achieve 'green' status. The visit also included site visits to local projects.
- The annual confirmation certificate is to be submitted to Scottish Government by 31 October 2011. Aberdeenshire Council Internal Audit will carry out an inspection in advance of this.
- Aberdeenshire LEADER has not been selected for the Scottish Government Service Level Agreement Audit this year.

#### 6.5 **Rural Aberdeenshire Broadband Initiative**

Three of the four projects approved under the Rural Aberdeenshire Broadband Initiative are underway. The remaining project is still trying to secure subscriber commitment. Projects are progressing and are currently at different stages.

#### 6.6 **LEADER Promotion**

- The LEADER Conference was held on 31 August at the Drumossie Hotel in Inverness. The keynote address was given by Richard Lochhead, Cabinet Secretary. Other presentations included LEADER project managers from English and Irish programmes. The LEADER publication was launched by Ros Halley from Dumfries & Galloway. Each of the 20 LAGs submitted 3 project case studies. A copy was distributed to LAG members and it was agreed that the document be circulated to elected members, local MPs, MSPs and MEPs. It will also be uploaded on the LEADER website. The afternoon session comprised of a series of workshops. Reid Hutchison informed the LAG that all presentations from the conference are available to download from the Scotland National Rural Network website.
- The Countryside Live event which was run by the Royal Northern Agricultural Society took place on 11/12 June 2011. It was an exceedingly well managed, highly successful event, attracting approximately 4,000 visitors.
- Alex Salmond, First Minister attended the opening ceremony of the Strichen Community Park Café on 8 July 2011.
- LEADER was again represented on a stand at the Turriff Show on 31 July and 1 August 2011. Alistair Prior expressed an interest in how Aberdeenshire LEADER is promoted at the Turriff Show with a view to potential ideas for Scottish Government promoting LEADER at the Royal Highland Show in the future.
- The launch of the Mearns Heritage project took place on 24 August 2011. The newly appointed Mearns Heritage Project Officer gave a presentation.

#### 6.7 **Programme Management & Administration**

Project monitoring to capture some of the social impacts of the programme, is now

underway on completed projects.

Internal Audit process has commenced.

## **7. ABERDEENSHIRE LEADER BUDGET COMMITMENT**

A summary of Aberdeenshire LEADER's budget commitment, prepared by Vicky following discussions with Aberdeenshire Council Finance, was circulated.

The total indicative LEADER Award which includes a second allocation of funding from Rural Priorities, stands at £4.52 million.

A forecast spend of £500,000 on administration costs over the length of the programme leaves a balance of £4.02 million for projects.

Three projects are heading for de-commitment and, taking these into account, the projected maximum balance available for Round 13 is £318,665.

Following discussions with Aberdeenshire Council Finance it was confirmed that the Council is not in a position to consider any over-commitment whatsoever. This option could only be considered if Scottish Government agreed to underwrite any overspend.

At the PAC meeting held on 30 August 2011, an attempt was made to forecast future project underspends but this was considered as speculative, albeit low-risk. Aberdeenshire Council adopts a no-risk strategy rather than the low-risk strategy which was considered by the PAC.

Discussion took place on how future funding rounds will be worked up as and when other projects de-commit or project underspends build up. It was agreed that the LEADER website be used to advertise the fact that the budget is currently fully committed until further notice. Demand for funding is certainly not diminishing and the LEADER office is regularly receiving new enquiries.

Scottish Government would like spend through the system by December 2014 with possible final draw down in March 2015. LAG considered this timescale would allow for future projects to come forward depending on the budget. LAG also hope for the possibility of potential additional funding from Scottish Government.

It was agreed that all future project enquires be invited to complete an Expression of Interest form. This would enable a record to be compiled of the number and value of potential further applications.

Discussion took place on how to progress Round 13 projects. It was considered that an option to reduce the percentage of grant asked for across all Round 13 projects would be more harmful by placing applicants under pressure to find the balance of funding from elsewhere.

It was therefore agreed to consider projects up to the value of the projected maximum balance of funds available.

A scoring matrix was prepared so that each voting LAG member ranked each project in order of preference and that projects, if recommended for approval,

would be funded up to the limit of available budget.

## **8. PROJECT MID-TERM REPORT**

As part of the conditions of grant a mid-term report has to be completed for projects which run for 3 years. A formal mid-term report will be submitted by the Deveron, Bogie and Isla Rivers Trust. However, following Alastair Fenn's presentation, the LAG formally recorded their unanimous endorsement for funding of the project to continue for year 3.

## **9. APPROVED PROJECT AMENDMENTS**

A table showing project amendments approved by the Co-ordinator and LAG Chairperson since the last LAG meeting was circulated.

Project 118, Gartly Wildlife Garden requested approval for advance grant.

Project 057, Strichen Community Park Café requested project amendment for the café to be run as a commercial enterprise.

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

Keith Newton, Aberdeenshire Council - Project 133, Haddo Country Park Regeneration. LAG is happy to have technical input about the project from Keith but no involvement in the scoring process will be permitted. It was agreed that other Aberdeenshire Council employees with no direct involvement with the Haddo Project be allowed to take part in the scoring process.

## **11. PROJECTS 132 to 141**

### **11.1 135 – P.O.R.T. Scoping Study**

The scoping study will consider potential uses for a derelict former boat shed on the harbour side in Portsoy. The study will look at the structural state of the building and draw up plans for a training centre on the ground floor and bunk house accommodation on the first floor. Consultants will be appointed to consider planning requirements, determine costs and to draw up a business plan to demonstrate future sustainability of the complex being run as a social enterprise.

This small grant application was approved by the PAC at their meeting on 30/08/11.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £5,000 APPROVED BY PAC.

### **11.2 141 – Barnardo's Works**

LAG chose to consider project 141 first following PAC recommendation that funding be declined due to limited detail being provided in the application.

The proposal is for a 1 year pilot project in rural Aberdeenshire to help young people into the workplace through training and work experience. Costs relate to administration salaries for 1 year, training and work experience costs, travel and sundry costs.

Areas of concern:

- Significant level of funding requested to go towards existing staff costs. LEADER cannot fund ongoing core staff costs. New posts are however eligible.
- Limited information provided at the time of submission.
- Insufficient evidence of demand.
- No detail provided about sustainability of the 1 year pilot.
- Limited evidence of benefit or value for money of other pilot schemes run by the applicant.
- No written support from employers willing to offer placements.
- Limited information regarding complementarity with other employability schemes.
- Limited mention of partnership working.
- Business plan considered to be weak.
- European Social Fund secured in other areas – why has this funding avenue not been explored?

LAG was fully supportive of the concept of the project to provide training and employment opportunities to young people in rural Aberdeenshire, however, due to the above concerns, it was agreed that the application was not strong enough to proceed at this current time. Following voting procedures, Barnardos Works was placed 10<sup>th</sup> and therefore LEADER funding was declined.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £48,938 DECLINED.

11.3 The four community facility projects were considered next – Longside Hall, Gallows Hill Pavilion, New Daviot Hall and Ritchie Hall.

11.4 **132– Longside Community Hall Improvement Project**

The project is to upgrade and improve facilities at the Church of Scotland Community Hall in Longside, east of Mintlaw. The facility will provide more suitable meeting areas for various user groups. Work will include improvements to energy efficiency and accessibility.

No further update on the funding profile has been received since the PAC meeting.

Points in favour:

- Applicants are confident that the Church of Scotland loan will be approved.
- Applicant is making a significant contribution of £47k from own funds.
- Evidence of demand from a large number of potential user groups outwith the Church.
- Well used community café already in operation in the Hall.

Areas of concern:

- SITA outcome not known till end November 2011.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £63,641 APPROVED BY LAG.

11.5 **138 – Gallows Hill Community Pavilion, Newburgh**

The project is to construct a community changing room facility between the football

pitch and existing multi-purpose sports courts. The new facility will serve both and will be linked by a tarred car park. As well as the changing rooms there will be toilet facilities, new kitchen and 2 meeting rooms.

Points in favour:

- There is evidence of support from a large number of local user groups.
- Applicant has secured £51k from Planning Gain.
- Applicant has confirmed £10k cash and £50k in-kind contribution. Work will be done on a self-build basis by a number of qualified volunteers.

Areas of concern:

- Lease under negotiation with Aberdeenshire Council.

LAG discussed the possibility of solar panels and the potential for Renewable Heat Incentive Scheme (RHIS). If solar panels are adopted, confirmation would be required regarding eligibility of grant if claiming RHIS.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £70,845 APPROVED BY LAG.

#### 11.6 **139 – New Daviot Village Hall**

The project is to build a new Hall in the car park of the existing run down Daviot Village Hall. The old building will be demolished and a new car park laid on the site.

Points in favour:

- Very enthusiastic fundraising campaign. At a recent event, the first £5k of the 'buy a brick' campaign was raised.
- Confirmation that £86k may be available from a local business.
- £75k confirmed from Planning Gain.
- Community awareness event very well attended and there is evidence of wide community support for the proposals.

Areas of concern:

- Funding applications submitted to numerous small trusts - some still unconfirmed.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £97,700 APPROVED BY LAG.

#### 11.7 **140 – Ritchie Hall 2012**

The project is to develop and upgrade the Ritchie Hall by extending and improving the changing rooms, installing a new kitchen, upgrading the toilet facilities and installing new disabled toilets.

Points in favour:

- Innovative community group being the first in Aberdeenshire to install solar panels and a biomass heating system in the Hall.
- Evidence of community support for the proposed improvements.

Areas of concern:

- No match funding confirmed apart from own contribution.
- Application submitted to ELL Capital Grant. However, this scheme is now

fully subscribed.

#### PROJECT FUNDING OF £78,000 DECLINED.

- 11.8 Of the four projects it was agreed that Ritchie Hall was the weakest application due to the large balance of match funding yet to be confirmed. Following voting procedures, Richie Hall was placed 9<sup>th</sup> and therefore LEADER funding was declined.

LAG recommended that the three successful community facility projects be awarded indicative approval, with the target of securing a significant proportion of their outstanding match funding by 31 March 2011.

It was agreed that a further condition be added to the approval documents regarding compliance with British Standard BS8300.

#### 11.9 **133 – Haddo Country Park Regeneration Project**

The project is to develop Haddo as a major visitor attraction in Aberdeenshire. The development programme will run over 5 years but the LEADER elements will be a 2 year stand alone programme of community focused works to the interpretation centre. Improvements will be made to the visitor arrival area, creation of an interpretation centre and new access paths.

The application is submitted by Aberdeenshire Council on behalf of a range of stakeholders which form the Haddo Country Park Forum.

The match funding profile is relatively strong. Aberdeenshire Council has confirmed funding of £410k from the capital grant budget and maintenance funding has also been confirmed through Landscape Services department.

LAG were supportive of the proposals and considered Haddo to be a major visitor attraction in Aberdeenshire. There is currently a lack of visitor awareness of what is on offer at Haddo. A new entrance feature will provide a focus and will encourage repeat visits. Marketing will be a key element of the project, creating the potential for economic benefit in the surrounding area.

#### PROJECT FUNDING OF £70,845 APPROVED BY LAG.

#### 11.10 **134 – Short Breaks for Carers**

The project is a 2 year pilot to recruit volunteer befrienders to support carers by offering respite. A new part-time co-ordinator will be employed to manage the project. Eligible costs include staff and recruitment costs. Sixty per cent of costs are eligible for the rural element of the project.

Points in favour:

- Innovative proposals
- Aberdeenshire Council Social Work Department complimentary about the work carried out by the applicant group.

Areas of concern:

- 90% of match funding still to be confirmed. A funding application has been

submitted to the Scottish Government Short Breaks Fund - outcome should be known by October.

LAG was generally supportive, valuing the work of care in the community. However, following the voting procedure, Short Breaks for Carers was placed 6<sup>th</sup> and therefore LEADER funding was declined.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £20,000 DECLINED.

#### 11.11 **136 – Crathes Public Hall Feasibility & Development Study**

The project is to carry out a feasibility study to look at restoration and development of the Hall and the development of a supporting business plan to ensure future sustainability of the Hall.

Further information was requested from the applicant following the PAC meeting regarding how the budget of £24k for the study will be utilised.

Areas of concern:

- Limited updates received in response to requests made.
- No invitation to tender documents supplied to enable LAG to consider if proposals represent value for money.
- Study dependent on the outcome of Awards for All funding.

Following voting procedures, Crathes Hall Feasibility Study was placed 8<sup>th</sup> and therefore LEADER funding was declined.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £8,400 DECLINED.

#### 11.12 **137 – Mill of Benholm Feasibility Study**

The project is to carry out a feasibility study to look at the strategic direction and future sustainability of the facility. Mill of Benholm is run as a social enterprise offering work placement and training opportunities for people with learning disabilities.

Unfortunately, since the PAC meeting, LEADER has been informed that the outcome of Benholm Mill's funding application to Kincardine & Mearns Regeneration Fund for £10,000 was unsuccessful.

Points in favour:

- Detailed breakdown of costs provided by applicant.

Areas of concern:

- Regeneration funding application - unsuccessful.
- Lease still to be formalised.

LAG was generally supportive of the strategic approach and considered a social audit to be a valuable method of identifying employment opportunities. However, following the voting procedure, Benholm Mill was placed 7<sup>th</sup> and therefore LEADER funding was declined.

PROJECT FUNDING OF £10,000 DECLINED.

- 11.13 Following voting procedures which are detailed on the attached spreadsheet, the Chairperson recommended that LAG proceed according to the majority vote.

Projects are ranked in order as follows:

- 1<sup>st</sup> P.O.R.T. Scoping Study (small project approved by PAC)
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Longside Community Hall Improvement Project
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Haddo Country Park Regeneration Project
- 4<sup>th</sup> Gallows Hill Community Pavilion, Newburgh
- 5<sup>th</sup> New Daviot Village Hall
- 6<sup>th</sup> Short Breaks for Carers
- 7<sup>th</sup> Mill of Benholm Feasibility Study
- 8<sup>th</sup> Crathes Public Hall Feasibility & Development Study
- 9<sup>th</sup> Ritchie Hall 2012
- 10<sup>th</sup> Barnardo's Works

Please see attached scoring sheet.

Aberdeenshire LEADER's current indicative budget is now fully committed. This will be advertised on the LEADER Website and although no funds are available meantime, expressions of interested will be accepted and noted on a database.

## **12. AOCB**

The application for a potential trans-national project with Finland was not submitted in Round 13. Unfortunately, due to continuing dialogue with the Finns and ongoing refining of project costs, the applicant could not meet the deadline for this funding round.

This project will be noted on the Expression of Interest database.

## **13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

- 13.1 PAC meeting – Wednesday, 23 November 2011, Committee Room 4, Woodhill House, 10.00 am.
- 13.2 LAG meeting – Tuesday, 6 December 2011, Committee Room 1, Woodhill House, 10.00 am.