NOTE OF MEETING OF
RURAL ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL ACTION GROUP PARTNERSHIP
THURSDAY 29 MAY 2008
COMMITTEE ROOM 2, WOODHILL HOUSE, ABERDEEN

Present

Dr Eleanor Anderson	Aberdeenshire Rural Partnership Federation
Robin Blyth	Aberdeenshire Community Councils
Ewen Cameron	Scottish Natural Heritage
Liz Gordon	Aberdeenshire Council
Moira Gordon	Scottish Women's Rural Institute
Morna Harper	Aberdeenshire Council
Reid Hutchison	Aberdeenshire Council
Stewart Johnston	Scottish Executive
James Knowles	Aberdeenshire Council
Bob Leonard	Aberdeenshire Council
Colin McKenzie	Aberdeenshire Council
Alexander MacLeod	Aberdeenshire Council
Malcolm Nicol	Scottish Rural Property and Business Association
George Noble	Scottish Enterprise
Susan Smith	Scottish Association of Young Farmers' Clubs
Maureen Stephen	Aberdeenshire Councils for Voluntary Service
Vicky Thomson	Aberdeenshire Council
Chris White	Aberdeenshire Council
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Businesses

Apologies

Anne Simpson, Tom Buchan, Clair Wright, John Risby, David Bale, Lorna
Paterson, Keith Newton, Martin Brebner, Fiona Malcolm, Dennis McFarlane,
Roger White, Erin Wood

1   WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

1.1   James Knowles welcomed those present and asked everyone to
        introduce themselves.

1.2   He confirmed that £3.24 million has been allocated to Aberdeenshire.
        The LEADER monies awarded to projects would require to be matched
        through public and private contributions, with the LAG partners playing a
        key role. It was therefore important the LAG comprised a broad range of
        rural interests including the public sector organisations that could
        contribute to the delivery of the LAG Strategy.

1.3   He also explained that due to the re-focus of priorities within Scottish
        Enterprise (SE) core costs or match funding was now less certain.
        Aberdeenshire Council have written to Richard Lochhead on this issue.

2 MINUTES OF LAST MEETINGS – 20 MARCH 2008

2.1 The minutes of both the LAG Partnership and the Strategy Group meetings with the Scottish Government were approved. Most items were covered in the agenda for this meeting. Approved minutes will be posted on the new LEADER website.

3 PROGRAMME UPDATE

3.1 **Staffing**
Moira Gordon, Ewen Cameron and James Knowles interviewed candidates for the LEADER Co-ordinator post and Vicky Thomson has been appointed and will take up the post on 16 June 2008. Eleanor Anderson congratulated Vicky on her appointment.

3.2 Interviews for the LEADER Administrator post were also undertaken and Anne MacLennan will take up the role on 23 June 2008. Both posts will be based in Gordon House, Inverurie.

3.3 **Website**
Morna Harper had drawn up a brief that was sent out for tender. Ewen Cameron was involved in the selection process along with Morna Harper and Vicky Thomson. Fresh Ideas based in Aberdeen were appointed and are currently working on developing the website. The web address will be www.aberdeenshireleader.org. The remit is for the website to be straightforward and clear with information on the programme, applications forms and links to SRDP and other LAG partners. The draft will go live by the end of June. Most logos have been received from partners.

3.4 **Guidance**
Morna Harper spoke about the Guidance Document that the Scottish Government had issued in April for LAG Co-ordinators and staff to refer to, explaining it is a working document which can be accessed from the Scottish Government website. Morna had attended a meeting in Edinburgh on 12 May to consider the guidance.

3.5 Match Funding – there is a change to match funding in so far as there is no longer a requirement for match funding being in place prior to approval, but that approval can be given for a project subject to match funding being in place before any grant payment is made.

3.6 Iain Matheson, Scottish Government (at the meeting 12 May) said that there would be a link between SRDP Case Officers and the LEADER Co-ordinators. At present if a project is unsuccessful through SRDP Rural Priorities, Rural Development Contracts (RDCs) the identical project is not eligible for LEADER. If a revised project meets eligibility criteria and fits with the key LEADER priorities then it may be considered by the LAG.

3.7 A question was raised about village halls and the types of assistance available. Bob Leonard asked what was considered major work as it was unlikely LEADER would cover major renovation or building work, but could contribute to upgrades of facilities.

3.8 There was a query regarding in kind contributions. Morna said that like Europe this was very clear in the guidelines and that in kind contributions had to provide evidence related to the project, eg: through staff timesheets etc.

3.9 It was agreed that the LEADER Co-ordinators were to be given insight into what the Auditors would be looking for so that all information could be provided up front and output collected. Targets and indicators or profiles of spend were not yet available.

3.10 Malcolm Nicol asked whether the LEADER LAG would run on an annual basis and this was confirmed as financial year not calendar year. The SRDP RPAC is run annually on a calendar year basis. Vicky Thomson stated that LEADER would cover expenditure incurred within two years from the approval start date issued by the LAG.

3.11 Malcolm Nicol asked how a village hall goes about getting a BRN (Business Ref Number). Stewart Johnston said that they simply applied to RPAC.

3.12 **Criteria**
A paper was issued by Morna Harper laying out the scoring criteria.

3.13 Items 1 – 3 were the most important. This would eliminate projects that only benefited the applicant, but if the benefit was more widespread for the community it would be acceptable.

3.14 Item 5 – the project has to comply with funding restrictions under LEADER this refers to records and proof of payment being produced.

3.15 Item 6 – The requirement that the project is designed to be inclusive to all individuals and social groups was taken to mean disabled access. The point was raised regarding this and that it might be seen as a barrier for projects that included Adventure Playgrounds and Climbing Walls as these would be of limited benefit to those with a disability. Further clarification may be required in this respect.

3.16 Andy Willox asked about the provision of funding for the upkeep and maintenance of continuous projects once they were up and running. Morna Harper said that this should be covered in the sustainability criteria and that provision should be made for someone ie local Council to take over the upkeep after the project was complete.

3.17 George Noble asked about the possible cross over between the

European Fisheries Fund and LEADER. It was confirmed that a project cannot have two European sources of funding and that the project should approach the best source of funding.

3.18   James Knowles asked those present to take the criteria sheet away with them to consider and to come back with any questions within two weeks. Eleanor Anderson asked if there was an electronic version of the sheet, and it was confirmed that this could be sent out.

3.19   <u>LAG Membership</u>
James Knowles said that there had been correspondence from the NHS and that they were keen to join the LAG he felt that they would be of great benefit both in knowledge and funding. Vicky Thomson read the response from NHS. There was general support for the inclusion of NHS from those present.

4   OPERATIONAL ISSUES

PAC and LAG

4.1   As stated in the Business Plan submitted in December any request for funding less than £5,000 could be decided by the PAC alone and that any over £5,000 would be looked at first by the PAC and then recommendations passed to the full LAG for a decision.

4.2   Malcolm Nicol asked if all applications would initially be passed to the LEADER Co-ordinator who would check accuracy. If there was a issue, the Co-ordinator would then go back and ask for clarification. It was suggested if the Co-ordinator was content with an application for smaller projects the approval could be gained by emailing the PAC rather than waiting for a meeting to take place.

4.3   James Knowles said that to begin with initial projects should be considered at a PAC meeting but once things were fully up and running then the email system may work for small projects.

4.4   Eleanor Anderson had reservations about a project being dismissed by one person, it was then clarified that the Co-ordinator would not dismiss a project but would go back and ask for clarification on points before submitting for LAG/PAC approval.

4.4   **Timetable**
Vicky Thomson proposed two assessment rounds to be completed by the end of the year (December), and in future four assessments rounds per annum to be held for larger projects. Stewart Johnson agreed that this was a realistic target. If this was agreed by partners then dates would be posted onto the website, and advised to members.

4.5   **SRDP**
Stewart Johnston mentioned how SRDP RDCs would interact with LEADER and where applicants should go for assistance.

4.6   **Rural Priorities – Rural Development Contracts (RDCs)**
        Now up and running and of the 83 Statements of Intents received in
        Grampian only one has been community based. Stewart confirmed that
        a Case Officer will be assigned to deal with Community Projects and they
        will liaise with the LEADER Co-ordinator.

4.7   **RDC Applications/Proposals**
        These opened on 27 May, with an interim system in place until 27 July.
        The first committee is to sit in August with a second by end of the year.

5   PROGRAMME LAUNCH

5.1   James Knowles suggested a date for the launch of 27 June 2008 and
        that it should be launched at Lochter, Oldmeldrum which was an
        accessible rural venue.

5.2   Ewen Cameron suggested PR coverage for the launch.

5.3   Robin Blyth asked for confirmation that the website would be live by the
        launch and this was given.

5.4   Unanimous agreement was given for the launch to take place in Lochter
        and the press are to be notified.

6   PROGRAMME PROMOTION

6.1   Promotional Events – it was suggested that the school holidays were
        avoided for evening launches. The Aberdeenshire LEADER to work
        closely with Tayside and Cairngorms LAGs. The Cairngorms LAG is up
        and running as they had LEADER+ funding in the past. Vicky Thomson
        asked for group approval to attend two of the meetings being held by the
        Cairngorms LAG on 15 and 17 July and asked if anyone else wished to
        attend.

        Tayside LAG have also arranged two meetings in early July one at Edzell
        and one at the Grassic Gibbon centre.   Nb: Following discussion with
        Tayside, joint events with Tayside will be undertaken later in the year,
        once staff are in post

        Stewart Johnston offered space for LEADER on his stand at the Turriff
        Show. Ewen Cameron suggested that LEADER piggy-backed on LAG
        partners who were already due to attend local events and ask them to
        hand out LEADER flyers etc. Ewen also offered to publicise LEADER at
        SNH open days.

        Malcolm Nicol asked about Councillor involvement as many were
        members of local groups and could help promote the scheme.

7   AOB

Ewen Cameron spoke to the group and stated that SNH had £50,000 earmarked for contribution to projects, and that they already had 8 – 10 applications for projects that would fit into the LEADER scheme. He suggested that possibly applicants could apply to SNH in the first instance and then SNH could suggest they then apply to LEADER for additional amounts.