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Rural development programme to be launched

An innovative rural development programme, which aims to improve the quality of life and economic prosperity in rural communities in Aberdeenshire, is to be launched on Friday, June 27.

Taking place at the Lochter Activity Centre, near Oldmeldrum, from 12pm-1.30pm, the launch of the Rural Aberdeenshire Local Action Group (LAG) LEADER programme will feature a number of presentations from various officials.

This includes Aberdeenshire Council's Infrastructure Service Committee chairman, Peter Argyle, and the council's Head of Economic Development and LAG Chairman, James Knowles.

The programme was made possible due to the recent securing of £3.24million from the European LEADER fund.

LEADER is an integral element within the Scotland Rural Development Programme 2007-2013.

It is funded by the Scottish Government and the European Commission, with matched funding from public bodies and the project groups.

In Aberdeenshire, LEADER will be delivered by the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG to rural areas and communities with populations of less than 5,000.

The funds are aimed at stimulating the rural economy and building capacity in communities and business networks.

The two overarching LEADER themes chosen by the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG are 'Revitalising Communities' and 'Progressive Rural Economy'.

Following community consultation undertaken by the LAG in autumn 2007, the priorities linking to the overarching themes were agreed as follows:

- Sustainable Communities
- Sustainable Energy
- Innovative Value Added Products and Markets
- Sustainable Tourism Development
- Innovative Micro Enterprise
- Versatile Rural Workforce

Aberdeenshire Council's Head of Economic Development and LAG Chairman, James Knowles said: "We believe there is real opportunity for rural communities and

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groups to develop projects that can have a positive impact on the economy, rural workforce and also the environment.

“Take for example, initiatives such as the development of the biomass sector in Aberdeenshire. This could result in locally based LEADER projects where groups perhaps install renewable heating systems in their premises, or create businesses which stimulate local employment through small scale processing of timber products.

“However, one of the most appealing aspects of LEADER is its capacity to consider new innovative solutions, be it through provision of rural community services, flexible training and development programmes or environmental enhancement, I feel this presents a great opportunity for participants to develop initiatives that are relevant and specific to their community’s needs and aspirations.”

Cllr Peter Argyle added: “Development of rural communities is core to the council’s Strategic Priorities which have been developed around the five Community Planning themes of Community Wellbeing, Jobs and the Economy, Lifelong Learning, Sustainable Environment and Developing Our Partnerships.

“The progression of the Scotland Rural Development Programme 2007-2013, including LEADER, from its earliest proposals to fruition, was keenly observed and discussed through the council’s Infrastructure Services Committee during the development and consultation process.

“We are delighted to have contributed to the process of the LAG being established and being so successful in securing LEADER funds for Rural Aberdeenshire.

“I hope the LEADER initiative is the catalyst to stimulating new innovative projects that will benefit the rural communities across Aberdeenshire in the years ahead.”

Aberdeenshire Council is the lead partner in the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG, which is a partnership of public sector organisations and local groups.

For further information, please contact Rural Development Officer Vicky Thomson on (01467) 628383 or at vicky.thomson@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

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Notes for Editors

Members of the media are invited to attend the launch, with photo opportunities available.

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Members of the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG include:

- Aberdeenshire Council
- Scottish Enterprise
- Forestry Commission Scotland
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- VisitScotland
- Aberdeenshire Community Councils
- Aberdeenshire Councils for Voluntary Service
- Aberdeenshire Local Rural Partnerships
- Scottish Women's Rural Institute
- Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs
- National Farmers Union Scotland
- Scottish Rural Property & Business Association
- Federation of Small Businesses
- (Plus new member NHS)