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Aberdeenshire to benefit from more than £3million of rural development funding

The Rural Aberdeenshire Local Action Group (LAG) partnership is delighted to announce the successful outcome of a rural development funding bid.

The award of £3.24 million, under the LEADER programme, has been confirmed by the Scottish Government and the European Union.

It is part of the first tranche of money to be released under the £1.6 billion Scotland Rural Development Programme, designed to empower communities at the grass-roots level.

LEADER is an innovative rural development programme which aims to improve the quality of life and economic prosperity in rural communities through locally driven rural development initiatives and projects.

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.

Community groups, business partnerships and collaborations of individuals, groups and partnerships will be able to apply to the LEADER programme for funding towards a wide range of projects.

The programme is popular with many voluntary and community organisations, due to its bottom-up, community-driven and innovative approach to rural development.

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

Welcoming the announcement, head of economic development at Aberdeenshire Council and LAG Chairman, James Knowles, said: "The award of LEADER funds to us is a great accolade for the group, in which the partners have a strong ethos of joint actions and partnership.

"We view LEADER as a catalyst with great potential to deliver rural economic initiatives to the benefit of communities in Aberdeenshire."

Chairman of Aberdeenshire Council's Infrastructure Services Committee, Peter Argyle, said: "This council has pro-actively supported the progression of the new Scotland Rural Development Programme and the LEADER element within it.

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“We fully endorse the principle of the LAG structure, based on a public/private partnership of key stakeholders to add value and create capacity in our rural communities through LEADER initiatives.

“There are strong links in the objectives developed in the LAG Strategy and Business Plan which dovetail very well with community planning and the council’s objectives for sustainable development.

“We look forward to seeing projects come forward that will strengthen our communities and enhance rural facilities and services.”

The LEADER Programme is funded by the Scottish Government and the European Commission with matched funding from public bodies and the project groups.

In November 2007 the Rural Aberdeenshire LAG submitted its bid for LEADER funds to the Scottish Government in the first application round.

A total of 16 bids were received from across Scotland, each of which will receive a share of approximately £32 million. There will be a second funding round in 2008.

Speaking on behalf of the LAG partners, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) area manager for Grampian, David Bale, said: “We are pleased to support Aberdeenshire’s LEADER Partnership and its two overarching objectives of revitalising communities and encouraging a progressive rural economy.

“We have long recognised that local authorities and bodies like SNH cannot deliver everything that communities aspire to individually, but together we can provide advice and some financial support to enable people to bring their own ideas into reality.

“The natural heritage of the north-east plays a key part in both of the key objectives and we look forward to lots of imaginative and innovative ideas coming forward.”

-ENDS-

Notes to editors:

LEADER stands for Liason Entre Actions pour le Developpement de L'Economie Rurale (links between actions for the development of the rural economy).

LAGs contain representatives of the private, public and voluntary sectors in a given geographical area and are responsible for formulating strategies for, and mobilising local communities towards the planning and implementation of, innovative programmes and projects aimed at rural development and economic diversification.

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Details of awards to LEADER LAGs:

Round 1 LAG Partnerships	LEADER Award (£million)
Aberdeenshire	£3.24
Argyll & Islands	£2.33
Scottish Borders	£2.33
Cairngorms	£0.92
Dumfries & Galloway	£2.75
Fife	£1.33
Forth & Lomond	£2.63
Highland	£6.00
Kelvin Valley	£0.53
Orkney	£0.51
Outer Hebrides	£0.94
South Lanarkshire	£1.39
Shetland	£0.63
Tyne-Esk	£2.23
West Lothian	£0.98
Tayside	£2.00

Endsnotes