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Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme Community Seminars a resounding success

Residents from South Aberdeenshire recently attended two community seminars to learn more about European and Scottish Government funding available to rural communities.

Seminars promoting the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme were held in Johnshaven on Wednesday, February 25 and Auchenblae on Friday, March 6.

Organisers of the events were delighted with the strong turnout from community group representatives who had an interest in progressing ideas for rural community projects in their areas.

Seminars attendees listened to presentations on LEADER, Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) funding as well as Rural Direct support services available to community groups.

A number of case studies were also presented by participants in the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme such as the Udney Community Wind Turbine Group, the Rothienorman Community Bowling Club, Deveron Arts and the Banchory and District Initiative Ltd.

Speaking after the Johnshaven event, Aberdeenshire Provost Bill Howatson praised those who had organised and attended the seminars for their work to support community groups in the area.

He said: "I have found this event most worthwhile and informative and I hope that community groups and organisations in Aberdeenshire take advantage of the opportunities now available to them through LEADER funding."

LEADER is funded by the Scottish Government and the European Commission, and is delivered by the Rural Aberdeenshire Local Action Group (LAG) to rural areas and communities with populations of less than 5,000.

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

Maureen Watt MSP for north-east Scotland has been closely involved with the LEADER programme and is happy that groups in the area are benefiting through their involvement.

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"I was delighted to attend the event to hear about the LEADER Programme," she said. "It is encouraging to hear how rural community groups across Aberdeenshire have really benefited from LEADER funding."

James Knowles, LAG Chairman, also attended the seminars and is delighted with the progress that has been made since the programme launched last year.

"We have come a long way with the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme since its launch in June 2008," he said. "More than 20 projects have now been approved, with LEADER funding of over £575,000 committed.

"It has been excellent to hear directly from participants in the programme how their projects were developed and how their respective communities will benefit from LEADER once the projects are fully implemented."

Projects receiving LEADER funding in the past have included improvements to local paths and tourist centres as well as the provision of play areas and community drop-in centres.

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Notes for Editors

Picture caption: Left to right: Provost Bill Howatson; James Knowles, LAG Chairman; Vicky Thomson, LEADER Co-ordinator; Barbara Love, SCVO Rural Direct; John Reid, SRDP Scottish Government; Brian McDougall, Udney Community Wind Turbine Group; Garth Entwistle, Udney Community Wind Turbine Group; Ian Lonsdale, Rothienorman Community Bowling Club

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

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.

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

The Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER Programme was launched on 29 June 2008 at Lochter Activity Centre, Oldmeldrum.

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The Rural Aberdeenshire Local Action Group (LAG) has been awarded LEADER funds of £3.36 million to deliver its strategy.

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

The LAG has a membership of 14 partner organisations, 50% from the public sector and 50% from the private sector. More than 50% of the organisations represented on the LAG are also members of Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership.

LEADER funds are aimed at stimulating the rural economy and building capacity in communities and business networks through innovative approaches to rural development.

To date a total of 24 projects have been approved with total costs of £2.1 million and LEADER grant of £575,390.

There will be four funding rounds in 2009, the timetable of which is accessible on the Rural Aberdeenshire LEADER website: www.aberdeenshireleader.org

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